*Review Article*

Adoption of Marketing Strategies in Online Tutoring: A Systematic Literature Review

Abstract

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| --- |
| **Aims:** This study aims to investigate the adoption of service marketing strategies in online tutoring.  **Study Design:** The study employs a systematic review methodology to synthesize global research on the adoption of marketing approaches in freelance online education.  **Place and Duration of Study:** The review encompasses studies conducted across various global regions and was completed over two months from March to April 2025.  **Methodology:** This systematic literature review examined how independent online tutors employ service marketing techniques, particularly digital marketing, referral programs, and testimonials, across various educational contexts. It examined 40 peer-reviewed publications from six academic databases, chosen using precise inclusion and exclusion criteria that adhered to the PRISMA 2020 requirements. To identify trends in marketing strategies across different types of teachers, geographical locations, and academic topics, the evaluation employed thematic and comparative analysis. Since all of the data came from publicly accessible sources, academic integrity was guaranteed, and ethical procedures involving human subjects were no longer necessary.  **Results:** Three major themes emerged from the analysis: referral programs, testimonials and reviews, and digital marketing. Each strategy was examined across four service types: subject-based tutoring, coaching, language tutoring, and homework assistance.  **Conclusion:** This research examined the use of service marketing strategies in online tutoring within digital economies. The lack of resources and inadequate marketing knowledge is considered a hindrance, resulting in operational inconsistencies, even when using practical tools such as testimonials, referral programs, and digital marketing. Nonetheless, the study highlights the significance of implementing a more service-oriented marketing approach. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating marketing strategies for independent tutors to enhance visibility, credibility, and continuing revenue. This study highlights the significance of incorporating traditional service marketing elements, including product, pricing, place, promotion, people, process, and visible cues, that help build trust and trustworthiness between students and freelance online tutors. |

*Keywords: Freelance Online Tutors, Marketing Strategies, Referral Programs, Digital Marketing*

1. INTRODUCTION

The international online tutoring market has experienced significant growth, driven by technological advancements, increased internet penetration, and a growing demand for flexible and personalized learning. Hanham, Lee, and Teo (2021) argue that the growth has provided opportunities for freelance tutors to teach learners worldwide while presenting challenges related to technology adoption, academic self-efficacy, and gender equity. In the Philippines, a study by Gallespen (2021) found that when schools shifted online during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers, including those offering supplemental tutoring, adapted rapidly to digital platforms, employing self-regulated learning strategies and scaffolding techniques to maintain student engagement despite connectivity and resource challenges.

Unlike institutional teachers, independent online tutors must manage their teaching and business independently, handling instructional delivery, marketing, billing, and scheduling without organizational support, making it challenging to attract and retain clients. A sociological study by Money et al. (2021) confirmed that freelance platform workers, including tutors, face income instability, heightened marketplace competition, and the need to rapidly adapt to shifting student demands. In addition, building and sustaining trust has been recognized as a key success factor for freelancers on digital labor platforms. Digital labor platforms suffer from information asymmetry; freelancers know their skills better than clients, leading to potential “lemons” problems. However, trust‑building through repeated transactions and clear reputation signals can significantly improve outcomes (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2022). Moreover, digital skill sets empower freelancers to effectively leverage platform tools, creatively navigate system limitations, and maintain resilience in volatile gig environments, enabling them to showcase professionalism and secure client trust (Fiers, 2024).

Within this context, service marketing emerges as a pivotal competency for freelance tutors. Unlike product marketing, which centers on tangible goods, service marketing emphasizes the intangible, relational, and experiential dimensions of service delivery. Strategies such as referral programs, client testimonials, and digital engagement tools are critical in fostering trust, managing reputations, and facilitating sustained client relationships essential for service success. Globally, tutors and educational providers employ social media promotions, content marketing, and targeted digital advertising to broaden reach, enhance visibility, and drive engagement (Athawale & Dhoke, 2023). Paid advertising, including Facebook Ads, significantly increases enrollment and engagement (Cordero-Gutiérrez & Lahuerta-Otero, 2020), and plays a vital role in influencing learner decision-making (Jan et al., 2016).

Despite the growing prominence of freelance online tutoring, empirical research remains limited regarding how freelance tutors market their services specifically, the strategies and tools they employ, and how these efforts affect income generation and client acquisition. Saif and Aimin (2016) underscore the need for studies investigating the implementation and impact of marketing strategies on organizational performance. Addressing this gap is essential for equipping freelance tutors with evidence-based insights to navigate a competitive digital education marketplace.

This study is motivated by the rapid increase in freelance tutoring and the lack of institutional marketing support for freelancers. Given that freelance tutors must independently develop skills to sustain their practices, this research aims to contribute to academic knowledge and offer practical guidance to freelancers aspiring to succeed in the evolving education sector.

Given that online tutoring is fundamentally a service, this study focuses on service marketing strategies that emphasize relationship building, trust enhancement, and client retention. Unlike product marketing, service marketing prioritizes intangible aspects such as personalized communication, reputation, and quality of interaction, which are essential for freelance tutors managing independent businesses. The marketing strategies explored for referral programs, testimonials, and digital marketing are examined within this service marketing framework to understand better their effectiveness in attracting and retaining clients in the freelance online tutoring context.

1. Methodology

This global systematic literature review examined the adoption of service marketing techniques, specifically referral programs, testimonials and reviews, and digital marketing by freelance online tutors across various educational and digital contexts. The review included peer-reviewed articles from both international and local sources, encompassing diverse service delivery models such as independent tutors, tutoring platforms, and student-run tutoring services. This approach enabled an in-depth investigation of how these marketing techniques are adopted and utilized by online tutors to enhance visibility, build trust, and increase income generation. The studies were analyzed according to thematic focus, marketing strategy, and their effectiveness across different tutoring contexts. While initial searches considered geographic regions and tutor professionalism levels, the analysis and presentation of findings are primarily organized by marketing technique and service delivery model. This review framework draws from prior organizational strategy and retention literature (Montaño, 2025).

* 1. **Research Design**

This study utilized a systematic literature review (SLR) design to explore the adoption of service marketing strategies in freelance online tutoring. The review emphasized three core promotional techniques relevant to service marketing: referral programs, testimonials and reviews, and digital marketing. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021), the study systematically identified, screened, and synthesized peer-reviewed articles to analyze how these strategies enhance visibility, client trust, and income generation among freelance tutors.

* 1. **Research Questions**

This review addressed the following research questions:

1. What service marketing strategies are adopted by freelance online tutors?
2. How are these strategies applied across various service categories (e.g., subject- based tutoring, coaching, language instruction, and homework assistance)?
3. Which strategies and tools are most effective in improving client acquisition, retention, and income generation?
   1. **Research Locale and Data Sources**

The study did not involve human participants but instead focused on existing academic literature. Peer-reviewed articles were retrieved from reputable databases, including Google Scholar, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, Philippine E-Journals, and ResearchGate. Literature was included if it addressed freelance or platform-based online tutoring and examined at least one aspect of service marketing, such as relationship-building, customer acquisition, or brand positioning through digital platforms.

* 1. **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

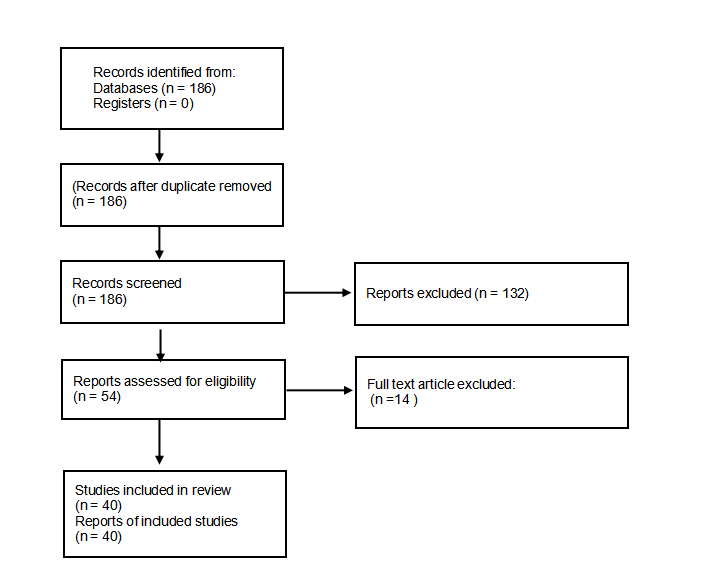
Articles were selected using the following inclusion criteria:

* Peer-reviewed status
* Published between 2015 and 2025, to include both foundational and recent developments
* Availability of full-text
* Focus on freelance or platform-based online tutoring
* Discussion of at least one marketing strategy or promotional tool

Exclusion criteria included:

* Non-peer-reviewed sources (such as blogs, opinion pieces and Reddit)
* Studies unrelated to education, marketing, or tutoring
* Articles that did not provide sufficient discussion of marketing efforts
  1. **Search and Screening Procedure**

The literature search followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) to ensure methodological transparency. Boolean search strings such as ("online tutoring" or "freelance education") AND ("digital marketing" or “service marketing” or "referral programs" or "client acquisition") were used to search six academic databases: Google Scholar, ProQuest, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, Philippine E-Journals, and Scientific Research. A total of 186 records were initially retrieved and remained for title and abstract screening. From these, 132 articles were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria (e.g., relevance, peer-review status, or educational focus). The remaining 54 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Of those 54, 14 studies were excluded during full-text review Ultimately, 40 peer-reviewed articles met all inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the final thematic and comparative analysis. The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) below visualizes each step of this multi-phase screening process.



***Figure 1.*** PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Literature Selection Process

* 1. **Data Analysis**

The extracted data underwent a two-phase analysis. First, a thematic analysis identified recurring themes related to service marketing strategy adoption. A structured coding scheme was applied to classify findings under key categories such as referral programs, testimonials and reviews, digital marketing, SEO, and social media engagement. Second, a comparative analysis examined how marketing strategies varied across tutor types (freelance vs. platform-based), regions (local vs. global), and subject areas (e.g., STEM vs. language tutoring). This analysis assessed both the frequency and reported effectiveness of strategies. Challenges like digital illiteracy, limited reach, or inconsistent branding were also mapped. Qualitative findings were synthesized to generate cross-category insights, supported by comparative frameworks often used in systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Baik & Kim, 2025).

* 1. **Data Gathering Procedure**

Database searches were conducted from March to April 2025. Advanced search tools and Boolean operators ensured precision and depth. Only articles with Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) or permanent links were retained for consistency and reproducibility. Manual screening was done to verify article quality and relevance to the service marketing lens.

* 1. **Ethical Considerations**

All data came from publicly available, peer-reviewed academic publications. No human participants were involved, eliminating the need for informed consent or confidentiality measures. Proper citation practices were strictly followed to uphold academic integrity.

The review strictly followed the PRISMA 2020 framework, which promotes methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility in systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021).

3. results and discussion

This section presents the findings of the systematic literature review, emphasizing the adoption and effectiveness of various marketing strategies among freelance online tutors and their influence on income generation across service types. The discussion is structured by service marketing strategies: Referral Programs, Testimonials and Reviews, and Digital Marketing, analyzed across four tutoring service categories: Subject-Based Tutoring, Coaching, Language Tutoring, and Homework Assistance.

Table 1 presents a detailed synthesis of the 28 studies included in this systematic literature review. The table organizes the studies according to tutoring type and service marketing strategy, summarizing their study design, methodology, and key findings related to the adoption of marketing strategies by freelance online tutors. This overview provides transparency regarding the literature base and guides the thematic analysis presented in the following sections.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ref No.** | **Author(s) & Year** | **Service Marketing Strategy** | **Tutoring Category** | **Key Focus/Findings Summary** |
| [1] | Boros & Papasava (2020) | Referral Programs | Subject-Based Tutoring | Referral incentives improve enrollment and engagement |
| [2] | Yuan & Peluso (2021) | Referral Programs | Subject-Based Tutoring | Word-of-mouth referrals on WeChat increase purchase intentions |
| [3] | Huang et al (2025) | Referral Programs | Coaching | Peer impact improves client engagement and encourages long-term coaching relationships |
| [4] | Brevik Saethern et al. (2022) | Referral Programs | Coaching | Improved motivation and academic self-confidence |
| [5] | Villa et al. (2024) | Referral Programs | Coaching | Trust-building practices boost coaching effectiveness |
| [6] | Li, Hampson, Thurston & O’Keeffe (2025) | Referral Programs | Language Tutoring | Peer tutoring improves second-language writing |
| [7] | Parker, Tariq & Smith (2023) | Referral Programs | Language Tutoring | Peer tutoring enhances proficiency and motivation |
| [8] | Xia et al. (2022) | Referral Programs | Language Tutoring | Consistency with one tutor improves progress |
| [9] | Du, Zhao & Chen (2024) | Referral Programs | Homework Assistance | Urgent support leads to recommendations, but low loyalty |
| [10] | White, Groom‑Thomas & Loeb (2023) | Testimonials & Reviews | Subject-Based Tutoring | Positive testimonials linked to long-term engagement |
| [11] | Burton & Nagler et al. (2024) | Testimonials & Reviews | Subject-Based Tutoring | High satisfaction ratings increase demand |
| [12] | Kang, Lee & Joung (2021) | Testimonials & Reviews | Coaching | Peer tutoring improves motivation and persistence |
| [13] | Maré & Mutezo (2020) | Testimonials & Reviews | Coaching | Structured e-tutoring improves student satisfaction |
| [14] | Arhin & Laryea (2020) | Testimonials & Reviews | Coaching | Tutoring support predicts retention |
| [15] | Hardt, Nagler & Rincke (2023) | Testimonials & Reviews | Coaching | Online tutoring boosts academic performance |
| [16] | Máñez, Serrano-Mendizábal, Descals et al. (2025) | Testimonials & Reviews | Language Tutoring | Video feedback fosters engagement |
| [17] | Guill, Lüdtke & Köller (2020) | Testimonials & Reviews | Language Tutoring | High instructional quality improves satisfaction |
| [18] | Peters et al. (2017) | Testimonials & Reviews | Homework Assistance | Timely feedback valued by students and educators |
| [19] | Zhou & Suntrayuth (2025) | Testimonials & Reviews | Homework Assistance | Positive reviews impact client acquisition |
| [20] | Greenhow & Lewin (2016) | Digital Marketing | Subject-Based Tutoring | Educational posts enhance learner engagement |
| [21] | Ramírez & Gillig (2018) | Digital Marketing | Subject-Based Tutoring | Content sharing increases social capital |
| [22] | Persada et al. (2022) | Digital Marketing | Subject-Based Tutoring | Digital strategies generate leads and credibility |
| [23] | López-Carril (2023) | Digital Marketing | Coaching | LinkedIn boosts professional engagement |
| [24] | Pasuhuk & Mandagi (2023) | Digital Marketing | Coaching | Social media personal branding attracts learners |
| [25] | Teng, Heydarnejad, Hasan, Omar & Sarabani (2022) | Digital Marketing | Language Tutoring | Instagram tasks improve grammar and attitudes |
| [26] | Basim (2024) | Digital Marketing | Language Tutoring | Omnichannel marketing enhances visibility |
| [27] | Guo, Kim & Rubin (2016) | Digital Marketing | Homework Assistance | Urgency-based ads increase engagement |
| [28] | Anita, A. S., Atjo, N., Awaluddin, M., & Mashithoh, H. (2019) | Digital Marketing | Homework Assistance | Balance promptness with quality to maintain credibility |

***Table 1.*** Summary of Included Studies Based on Tutoring Type, Marketing Strategy, and Key Findings Aligned with Research Questions

The synthesized studies in Table 1 indicate diverse applications of marketing strategies across different types of tutoring services. As shown in Table 1, the included studies reflect varying emphases on marketing strategies across different tutoring categories, which are explored further in the subsequent subsections. In the following sections, an in-depth thematic analysis is provided on the application of referral programs, testimonials and reviews, and digital marketing, examining their implementation and impact across subject -based tutoring, coaching, language instruction, and homework assistance.

**3.1 Referral Programs**

* + 1. **Results**
       1. ***Subject-Based Tutoring***

Referral programs have proven effective in subject-based tutoring, especially when tutors incentivize students or parents with discounts or free sessions. Boros and Papasava (2020) [1] demonstrated that referral marketing strategies significantly enhance enrollment and engagement in online education settings [1]. Supporting this, Yuan and Peluso (2021) found that word-of-mouth referrals, especially on platforms like WeChat, positively influence consumer purchase intentions, emphasizing the power of social connections in decision-making [2]. This approach increases trust and visibility, especially in competitive academic niches where formal advertising is limited.

***3.1.1.2 Coaching***

In academic and performance-based coaching, referrals and testimonials serve as powerful social validation tools. The peer impact is similar to word-of-mouth advertising and referral-based marketing, which is especially important for coaching or tutoring services that depend on client trust.They increase trust, improve client engagement, and encourage long-term coaching relationships, Huang et al. (2025) [3]. Complementing this, Brevik et al. (2022) showed that students in a Norwegian academic coaching program experienced improved motivation, study strategies, and academic self-confidence [4]. Furthermore, a recent literature review by Villa et al. (2024) confirms that coaching methods emphasizing feedback, mentoring, and goal tracking are most effective when combined with trust-building practices, often initiated through testimonials and referrals from past students [5].

***3.1.1.3 Language Tutoring***

In online language tutoring, continuity and peer recommendations, especially within culturally connected communities, play a crucial role in sustaining long-term student engagement. A meta-analysis by Li, Hampson, Thurston, and O’Keeffe (2025) found a large effect size (g = 0.84) for peer tutoring in second-language writing, confirming the effectiveness of guided support in improving learner outcomes [6]. Similarly, Parker, Tariq, and Smith (2023) found that peer tutoring significantly enhanced both language proficiency and learner motivation among young English language learners, especially when tutor–tutee rapport was strong [7]. Additionally, platform-based research by Xia et al. (2022) revealed that only about 16% of learners stick with one tutor, but those who do achieve faster progress, highlighting the importance of consistency [8]. These findings underscore how referrals and testimonials, particularly those based on sustained, culturally attuned tutor–student relationships, can foster trust, improve learning outcomes, and encourage peer-based tutor referrals within diaspora communities.

***3.1.1.4 Homework Assistance***

Referral programs in homework assistance platforms offer potential for recurring business. Clients who receive high-quality, timely support are more likely to recommend the services to their peers. However, due to the transactional nature of the service, loyalty remains low (Du, Zhao, & Chen, 2024; [9]).

**3.1.2 Discussion**

The application of referral programs differs considerably across tutoring categories, reflecting variations in service models and client expectations. In subject-based tutoring and coaching, referrals are used as deliberate marketing tools to establish long-term relationships and trust. These services often involve recurring sessions, making referral incentives more effective and sustainable (Boros & Papasava, 2020; Villa et al., 2024). In contrast, language tutoring relies more on community-driven referrals, especially within cultural or diaspora groups, where trust and sustained rapport matter more than formal incentives (Xia et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, homework assistance demonstrates limited effectiveness in building loyalty through referrals due to its urgent and short-term nature. The low retention rates and transactional client behavior make it harder to establish a referral loop (Du et al., 2024). This contrast highlights how the type of service delivery impacts the relevance of marketing strategy with more personalized, long-term services benefiting more from referrals.

These findings align with broader digital education marketing literature, which emphasizes that trust, consistency, and perceived value are key drivers of successful referral strategies (Bakshy et al., 2012; Yuan & Peluso, 2021). It also suggests that freelancers in short-term tutoring services may need to combine referrals with other strategies like urgency-based advertising to remain competitive.

Following the discussion on referral programs, this section explores the use of testimonials and reviews as tools for credibility enhancement and learner engagement. The analysis focuses on how these elements function across various tutoring modalities and contribute to income generation and client retention.

**3.2 Testimonials and Reviews**

**3.2.1 Results**

***3.2.1.1 Subject-Based Tutoring***

Testimonials in subject-focused tutoring are invaluable for signaling student improvement, academic confidence, and exam success. A comprehensive systematic review by White, Groom‑Thomas, and Loeb (2023) found that high-quality tutoring thrives when strong tutor-student relationships are established; these relationships, often reflected in positive testimonials, are key to long-term engagement and allow tutors to ask for higher rates based on consistent improvement [10]. Additionally, Burton and Nagler et al. (2024) demonstrated through an experimental study that remote online tutoring significantly boosted exam scores and student confidence, particularly when tutors received high satisfaction ratings from parents and students, suggesting that visible positive feedback correlated with increased demand and premium clients [11].

***3.2.1.2 Coaching***

In online academic coaching and tutoring, client testimonials serve as powerful tools for social proof, highlighting the transformative outcomes learners experience, such as increased academic focus, improved confidence, and stronger retention. These personal narratives help tutors and coaches build credibility, reinforce perceived value, and justify premium pricing. A qualitative study by Kang, Lee, and Joung (2021) revealed that online peer tutoring based on the GROW model significantly enhanced nursing students’ motivation, accountability, and academic persistence [12]. In a distance learning context, Maré and Mutezo (2020) found that structured e‑tutoring programs led to marked improvements in student performance and satisfaction [13]. Supporting this, Arhin and Laryea (2020) identified tutoring support as a significant predictor of student retention in Ghanaian universities offering distance learning [14]. Additionally, a recent field experiment by Hardt, Nagler, and Rincke (2023) demonstrated that structured online tutoring in higher education significantly improved academic performance, validating the effectiveness of coaching-style interventions [15].

***3.2.1.3 Language Tutoring***

Language tutors benefit from testimonials that show fluency progression or passing language exams. Real-time video feedback fosters learner engagement and authenticity by providing personalized communication and enhancing students’ perceptions of feedback quality (Máñez, Serrano-Mendizábal, Descals, et al., 2025) [16]. Moreover, positive tutoring experiences marked by high instructional quality and supportive feedback significantly influence student satisfaction and ongoing engagement, making it more likely for tutors to secure long-term learning relationships with international students (Guill, Lüdtke, & Köller, 2020) [17].

***3.2.1.4 Homework Assistance***

Feedback in homework assistance often emphasizes the importance of speed, clarity, and academic accuracy, which are critical to enhancing student learning outcomes. Peters et al. (2017) found that timely and clear feedback practices, such as checking homework completion and providing constructive responses, are widely valued by educators and students alike [18]. In addition to educational quality, tutors who actively showcase positive client reviews build trust and credibility among prospective clients. Zhou and Suntrayuth (2025) demonstrated that social proof through peer word-of-mouth significantly influences parents’ purchase intentions for tutoring services, highlighting how positive testimonials can impact client acquisition and business growth [19].

**3.2.2 Discussion**

The application of testimonials and reviews varies significantly across tutoring services, depending on the depth of tutor-student interaction and the perceived value of long-term engagement. In subject-based tutoring and coaching, testimonials serve as evidence of sustained academic progress, allowing tutors to position themselves as premium service providers. These services benefit from long-term student relationships, which offer more opportunities for visible growth and narrative-based feedback (White et al., 2023; Hardt et al., 2023).

In language tutoring, testimonials are equally impactful but are often framed around immediate learning gains, such as fluency or certification. These reviews often come with detailed, personalized feedback and sometimes include multimedia elements like video, which enhances authenticity and tutor credibility (Máñez et al., 2025).

Conversely, homework assistance relies less on emotional or developmental testimonials and more on performance-based reviews. Here, speed and clarity drive satisfaction and referral potential (Peters et al., 2017). This difference reflects the service model: short-term, one-time help does not lend itself to testimonials about growth or rapport, but can still build trust through client satisfaction metrics.

Comparing across all tutoring types, the depth and emotional value of testimonials increase in services involving longer tutor-student interactions. This suggests that freelancers in tutoring fields that rely on relationship-building actively request and highlight client testimonials to demonstrate their value. In contrast, those in transactional fields should focus on consistently showcasing performance reliability and client satisfaction indicators.

The final thematic area addresses the application of digital marketing strategies by freelance online tutors. This section analyzes how tutors across all service categories utilize digital platforms to promote their services, expand reach, and maintain visibility in an increasingly competitive virtual marketplace.

**3.3 Digital Marketing**

**3.3.1 Results**

***3.3.1.1 Subject-Based Tutoring***

Subject-based tutors often leverage social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook to share problem-solving tutorials and educational content. Research by Greenhow and Lewin (2016) indicates that regular, high-quality educational posts on social media can enhance learner engagement and visibility for tutors [20]. Moreover, a study by Ramírez & Gillig (2018) found that consistent educational content shared on platforms such as Twitter increases social capital, which can translate into higher client inquiries and trust [21]. These digital strategies effectively generate leads and build credibility in the competitive online tutoring market, Persada et al. (2022) [22].

***3.3.1.2 Coaching***

Academic coaches utilize platforms like Instagram and LinkedIn to build personal brands, share testimonials, and engage in live sessions. López-Carril (2023) found that LinkedIn enhances students’ professional profiles and engagement, highlighting the value of an active digital presence for academic coaches aiming to build credibility [23]. Additionally, Pasuhuk and Mandagi (2023) emphasized the role of social media marketing and personal branding on platforms such as LinkedIn in educational settings, supporting coaches’ efforts to attract learners and maintain income consistency [24].

***3.3.1.3 Language Tutoring***

Language tutors use SEO, blog articles, and social media content such as language learning reels to attract foreign learners. Research shows that incorporating Instagram feed–based tasks can improve grammar skills and positively influence attitudes among English as a foreign language learners (Teng, Heydarnejad, Hasan, Omar, & Sarabani, 2022) [25]. Similarly, task-supported language learning via Instagram has been found to enhance learners’ self-esteem, academic buoyancy, engagement, and overall language achievement (Basim, 2024) [26]. This omnichannel approach enhances tutor visibility and trust, making them more discoverable internationally.

***3.3.1.4 Homework Assistance***

Tutors providing homework assistance frequently utilize social media platforms such as Facebook groups and targeted online ads to reach learners with urgent academic needs. According to Guo, Kim, and Rubin (2016), urgency-based messaging in digital ads significantly increases click-through rates and engagement among students seeking immediate academic help [27]. However, tutors need to balance promptness with service quality to maintain credibility and avoid client dissatisfaction, Anita et al., (2019) [28].

**3.3.2 Discussion**

The implementation of digital marketing strategies also varies across tutoring types, shaped by the duration of service, client urgency, and platform suitability. Subject-based tutors emphasize content creation and educational posts to build trust and authority over time (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016), aligning with the longer-term relationships in this tutoring type. Coaches focus more on personal branding and professional networking through platforms like LinkedIn and Instagram, which suit their role in mentoring and career development (López-Carril, 2023; Pasuhuk & Mandagi, 2023).

For language tutors, the integration of SEO, blogging, and social media tasks represents a comprehensive marketing approach aimed at reaching a diverse, international clientele (Teng et al., 2022; Basim, 2024). This omnichannel strategy enhances visibility and fosters learner engagement across cultural boundaries.

In contrast, homework assistance providers prioritize urgent and targeted advertising through social media and digital ads to capture immediate client needs (Guo et al., 2016). While effective for rapid client acquisition, this strategy requires careful quality management to sustain client trust, (Anita et al., 2019).

Comparatively, tutors in longer-term and relationship-driven services (subject-based tutoring and coaching) invest more in content-rich and brand-building digital marketing, while those in short-term, transactional services (homework assistance) leverage urgency-based advertising to meet immediate demand. This differentiation underscores the importance of tailoring digital marketing strategies to the nature of the tutoring service.

**3.4 Summary of Key Findings**

The thematic analysis reveals that the adoption and effectiveness of marketing strategies among freelance online tutors vary significantly depending on the nature of the tutoring service. Referral programs and testimonials are particularly influential in relationship-based tutoring services such as subject-based instruction and coaching, while digital marketing strategies demonstrate versatility across all service types. Homework assistance, characterized by short-term interactions, benefits more from urgency-driven digital approaches than from relational strategies. These findings underscore the need for freelancers to align their marketing practices with the service model they offer in order to enhance income generation, build trust, and remain competitive in the growing online education landscape.

4. Conclusion

This systematic literature review explored the adoption and effectiveness of service marketing strategies, specifically referral programs, testimonials and reviews, and digital marketing among freelance online tutors across various educational contexts. The review revealed that while tutors increasingly recognize the importance of marketing, the implementation of these strategies remains inconsistent. Factors such as limited marketing literacy, lack of training, and restricted access to digital tools continue to hinder the full integration of service marketing practices.

The analysis showed that these strategies are applied differently across tutoring categories. Subject-based tutoring and language instruction commonly utilize digital platforms for referrals and advertising due to their broader audiences and structured content. Coaching services rely more on testimonials and relational marketing to build trust and rapport with clients. In contrast, homework assistance tends to lack formal marketing efforts, though studies suggest it can benefit significantly from client reviews and word-of-mouth promotions when utilized effectively.

Among the strategies examined, those that enhanced trust and visibility, such as digital testimonials and active social media engagement, proved most effective in boosting client acquisition and income generation. Tutors who implemented combined approaches, such as offering referral incentives while also promoting their services online, achieved greater success in terms of bookings and financial returns.

In summary, marketing strategies in freelance online tutoring are not merely optional tools but essential service components that determine a tutor’s success in attracting and retaining clients. This review emphasizes the need for freelance educators to adopt a more intentional and professional approach to service marketing. Building competency in promotional practices, enhancing digital presence, and strategically managing client relationships are critical for ensuring sustainability and competitiveness in the evolving online tutoring landscape.

**Recommendations:**

To this end, actionable recommendations can be drawn for all key stakeholders:

For freelance tutors, there is a compelling need to invest in continuous up-skilling, not just in instructional quality but also in digital marketing, brand management, and client communication.

For educational institutions and training centers, marketing literacy should be embedded into professional development programs, especially those supporting digital freelancers.

For platform providers and freelance marketplaces, there is a unique opportunity to offer built-in marketing support services such as analytics dashboards, promotional tools, and reputation systems to help tutors expand their reach.

For policymakers and industry advocates, providing access to affordable digital tools, mentorship networks, and localized marketing training programs can significantly enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the freelance tutoring economy.

**Disclaimer (Artificial Intelligence)**

The author(s) hereby declare that generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (LLMs) have been used during the writing and editing of this manuscript. The following section provides the name, version, model, and source of each AI tool used, as well as the input prompts provided.

**Details of AI Usage:**

**AI Technology Used:** ChatGPT

**Version/Model:** GPT-4

**Source:** OpenAI (https://chat.openai.com/)

**Purpose of Use:** Grammar correction, sentence restructuring, simplification of academic concepts, and improving logical coherence.

**Example Prompts Used:**

• Please check this text for grammar and spelling.

 • Rewrite this sentence to be more formal.

 • Improve the phrasing in this paragraph.

 • Does this argument make logical sense?

**2. AI Technology Used:** Google Gemini

**Version/Model:** Gemini 2.5

**Source:** Google (https://gemini.google.com/)

**Purpose of Use:** Grammar and syntax editing, improving clarity and flow, and enhancing conciseness.

**Example Prompts Used:**

• Check grammar and punctuation in this paragraph.

 • Rephrase this sentence for clarity.

 • Suggest improvements to flow and coherence.

**3. AI Technology Used:** Cici AI

**Version/Model:** Cici AI 2024

**Source:** Cici AI (https://cici.ai/)

**Purpose of Use:** Proofreading, paraphrasing, formatting assistance, and improving sentence impact.

**Example Prompts Used:**

**•** Paraphrase this section in an academic tone.

 • Help rewrite this idea to be more impactful.

 • Organize these bullet points into a coherent paragraph.

 • Suggest better transitions between paragraphs.

Definitions, Acronyms, Abbreviations

To facilitate a better understanding of the study, the following terms are defined conceptually and operationally:

**Digital Marketing.** Conceptually, digital marketing refers to using digital channels and technologies such as social media, email, websites, and online advertising to promote services, engage customers, and drive conversions in a measurable way (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022).

Operationally, digital marketing in this study refers to freelancers’ use of Facebook and other online platforms to promote their tutoring services, connect with clients, and manage their business presence.

**Freelancers.** Conceptually, freelancers offer services to clients without long-term employment contracts. They work flexibly, often using digital platforms to promote and deliver services (Spreitzer et al., 2021).

Operationally, this refers to individuals globally who provide tutoring services independently, either registered or operating informally online.

**Online Tutors.** Conceptually, online tutors provide academic or skills-based instruction through digital platforms. Their services range from basic homework help to professional coaching (Santiago & Ray, 2022).

Operationally, this term refers to tutors globally who deliver lessons, guidance, or coaching via online tools or platforms.

**Referral Programs.** Conceptually, referral programs are marketing strategies that encourage existing clients to refer new customers by offering incentives such as discounts or free services. These programs leverage customer networks to expand market reach (Kotler & Keller, 2021).

Operationally, this refers to freelancers using rewards-based referrals or word-of-mouth promotions to gain new clients.

**Testimonials and Reviews.** Conceptually, testimonials and reviews are user-generated feedback that provide social proof of the quality or effectiveness of a service. They influence trust and purchasing decisions (Moe & Trusov, 2021).

Operationally, this term refers to how freelancers display client feedback on social media, websites, or platforms to attract potential customers.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Option 2:

Author(s) hereby declare that generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models, etc. have been used during the writing or editing of manuscripts. This explanation will include the name, version, model, and source of the generative AI technology and as well as all input prompts provided to the generative AI technology.

Details of the AI usage are given below:

1. ChatGPT

2. Google Gemini

3.Cici AI

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