

Journal of

Entrepreneurship and Project Management


(JEPM)

Strategy for Positioning and Differentiation in Marketing Consulting V-
FLOW Chain Model: From Value Proposition to Revenue Model



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Strategy for Positioning and Differentiation in Marketing Consulting V-FLOW Chain Model: From Value Proposition to Revenue Model

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Accepted: 10th April, 2026, Received in Revised Form: 24th April, 2026, Published: 6th May, 2026

Abstract

Purpose: This article aims to develop an integrative understanding of how marketing consulting firms can align strategic positioning, differentiation, value proposition design, and revenue model selection in a highly competitive and intangible professional service market. It argues that sustainable advantage in marketing consulting depends not on isolated promotional claims or price-based competition, but on the coherent flow of value from market identity to value capture.

Methodology: The study is based on a secondary analysis of fifteen peer-reviewed publications related to professional service firms, consulting fees, value propositions, business models, and alternative revenue models. These studies were recoded according to comparable analytical variables, including differentiation locus, value proposition emphasis, pricing basis, and revenue logic. The synthesis was used to identify recurring strategic configurations and to formalize the original V-FLOW Chain Model, or Value Flow Alignment in Marketing Consulting Strategy.

Findings: The analysis identifies several recurrent configurations linking strategic positioning with appropriate revenue models, including niche expert retainers, method-based productized subscriptions, transformation-focused hybrid fees, and sustainability-oriented compliance services. The findings show that marketing consulting firms achieve more stable revenue when their differentiation is expressed as a concrete mechanism of client value, translated into an outcome-oriented value proposition, and supported by a revenue model whose billing unit matches the client's perceived value unit.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy (Recommendations): The article contributes to theory by conceptualizing marketing consulting strategy as a continuous value flow rather than a set of separate strategic decisions. Its original V-FLOW Chain Model connects positioning, differentiation, value proposition, operational delivery, and revenue model into one integrated system. For practice, the study recommends that consultants design service portfolios and pricing architectures around clearly defined value mechanisms and client-perceived outcomes. For policy and professional standards, it suggests encouraging greater transparency in consulting value claims, fee structures, and performance expectations to reduce perceived client risk and improve trust in the consulting market.

Keywords: *Marketing Consulting; Positioning; Differentiation; Value Proposition; Business Model; Revenue Model; Consulting Fees; Professional Service Firms*

Introduction

Marketing consulting has become an important part of how contemporary firms design markets, build brands, and manage customer relationships. This role is especially significant because knowledge-intensive business services are closely connected with innovation, problem solving, and the interpretation of complex market and technological signals (Freel, 2006). Organisations that face complex and data-intensive environments often rely on external specialists to interpret market signals, configure campaigns, and translate insights into concrete actions. At the same time, the consulting market itself is fragmented. Many providers describe their offers with similar terms, while clients frequently report that proposals look alike and that fee levels are difficult to compare. This problem is typical for professional service firms, where reputation, branding, service marks, and perceived quality become important signals in competitive positioning (Semadeni, 2006; Kärreman & Rylander, 2008; Castaldi & Giarratana, 2018). The result is a field in which decision makers must choose under uncertainty, and in which consulting firms compete not only on technical expertise but also on trust, perceived reliability, and the clarity of their commercial logic. Previous studies on consulting fees show that perceived service quality and different combinations of firm characteristics can influence the level of consulting fees, which confirms that clients do not evaluate such services only through direct cost comparison (Mompalmer et al., 2015; Lassala et al., 2016).

In such a context, strategy for a marketing consulting firm cannot be reduced to a logo refresh or a one-off pricing decision. It should be understood as a coordinated configuration of positioning, differentiation, value creation, and value capture. This view corresponds to business model research, where the business model is treated as a system that explains how an organisation creates, delivers, and captures value (Osterwalder et al., 2005; Teece, 2010; Zott et al., 2011; Wirtz et al., 2016). It also resembles the design of a logistics chain. In logistics, value is created when goods or information move through a sequence of activities in a coordinated way; bottlenecks at any point can destroy service quality and raise costs. For consulting, the flow is intangible but comparable. Positioning sets the entry point, differentiation explains why a particular route is chosen, the value proposition describes how value moves from the firm to the client, and the revenue model defines how part of that value flows back to the firm. The importance of this alignment is supported by value proposition research, which emphasises that firms must clearly articulate how their offerings create superior value for customers and connect this promise with the customer's actual value experience (Payne & Frow, 2014; Payne et al., 2017). If any of these elements is designed in isolation, misalignment appears as lost opportunities, eroded margins, or projects that meet client expectations but fail to cover their own cost. Recent research on digital transformation and alternative revenue models in consulting also confirms that consulting firms increasingly need to revise their business models, pricing logic, and revenue structures in response to changing client expectations and digital service delivery (Tavoletti et al., 2022; Tafti et al., 2024).

Research on professional service firms highlights several building blocks of this flow. Work on service marks and competitive distance shows how consulting firms use symbolic devices to position themselves relative to rivals and to balance distinctiveness with category legitimacy (Semadeni, 2006; Semadeni & Anderson, 2010). Studies of branding and diversification in knowledge-intensive firms show how brands help to manage meaning, coordinate employees, and support expansion into adjacent service areas (Kärreman & Rylander, 2008; Castaldi & Giarratana, 2018). Other authors focus on the economic side and examine how perceived quality and reputational signals translate into higher consulting fees (Momparler et al., 2015; Lassala et al., 2016). Still others develop the ideas of value propositions and business models as tools that link value creation with value capture in a systematic way (Osterwalder et al., 2005; Teece, 2010; Zott et al., 2011; Wirtz et al., 2016).

In parallel, the environment in which consulting operates is changing. Digital transformation pushes firms to develop analytics-driven tools, platforms, and repeatable modules, which in turn encourages new ways of packaging and pricing services (Tavoletti et al., 2022). Sustainability concerns and regulatory pressure trigger demand for consulting support around compliance, reporting, and low-carbon strategies, and they open space for alternative revenue models that link fees to performance and shared value (Tafti et al., 2024). These developments suggest that marketing consulting firms must now design positioning, differentiation, value proposition, and revenue model as a coherent whole rather than as a sequence of disconnected decisions.

The purpose of this article is to develop an integrative account of that design challenge. The central question guiding the analysis is how a marketing consulting firm can move from a clear positioning and differentiation logic to a value proposition and a revenue model that are both defensible and economically sustainable. The approach combines conceptual synthesis with a small empirical illustration based on existing empirical research. Instead of collecting new survey or interview data, the study recodes findings from fifteen peer-reviewed articles on professional service firms, consulting fees, value propositions, business models, and revenue models. This empirical component is intentionally modest; it functions as a practical example of how the proposed framework can be used to read and connect prior research. The broader contribution is a strategy logic that marketing consultants and researchers can apply when assessing whether a given service portfolio and pricing architecture form a coherent whole.

Literature review

The literature on professional service firms offers a rich but fragmented view of how consulting organisations position themselves and compete. One stream examines how management consulting firms use service marks and related symbols as strategic tools. Semadeni (2006) shows that service marks help firms to occupy specific positions in the cognitive map of the market, allowing them to create distance from competitors without abandoning the legitimacy that comes from belonging to a recognised category. In a later contribution, Semadeni

and Anderson (2010) describe the follower's dilemma in professional services: firms that imitate the innovations of leaders may benefit from reduced uncertainty, but they also risk sliding into undifferentiated competition. Together, these studies highlight positioning as a problem of distance management rather than a simple choice of target segment.

A second stream focuses on branding and diversification in knowledge-intensive and consulting contexts. Kärreman and Rylander (2008) analyse how a consulting firm uses branding to manage meaning, coordinate employees, and shape client expectations. They emphasise that brands in consulting are not mere surface artefacts; they operate as internal control mechanisms and identity resources. Castaldi and Giarratana (2018) investigate diversification, branding, and performance among professional service firms and show that performance outcomes depend on the fit between brand strategy and the scope of services offered. When the brand promises a coherent system of capabilities, diversification can reinforce positioning; when it sends confusing signals, diversification can dilute perceived expertise. For marketing consulting, these insights imply that positioning and differentiation must be read alongside brand architecture and portfolio choices.

The dynamics of innovation in knowledge-intensive business services add another dimension. Freel (2006) compares patterns of technological innovation in such services with those in manufacturing and finds that innovation in services relies heavily on networking, learning-by-doing, and the recombination of tacit knowledge. In consulting, this means that differentiation often rests on evolving methodologies and experience-based heuristics rather than on fixed products. From a logistics perspective, one might say that the consulting firm manages a moving inventory of ideas and practices rather than a static stock of standard items. Under these conditions, value propositions and revenue models must remain flexible enough to reflect ongoing learning while still offering clients a clear and reliable deal.

The concept of the value proposition has been developed most explicitly in service and relationship marketing. Payne and Frow (2014) argue that developing superior value propositions is a strategic imperative because it forces firms to specify not only what is offered but also how and for whom. Their framework distinguishes between value creation processes inside the firm and value outcomes perceived by customers. In subsequent work, Payne, Frow, and Eggert (2017) trace the evolution of the customer value proposition concept and clarify its components, from target segments and benefits through evidence and differentiation. They emphasise that value propositions are design devices linking strategy, operations, and metrics. Applied to marketing consulting, this view suggests that a value proposition should specify the client problems addressed, the mechanisms through which marketing interventions generate outcomes, and the indicators used to evaluate success.

Business model research provides a complementary macro-level perspective on value creation and capture. Osterwalder, Pigneur, and Tucci (2005) define business models as conceptual tools that describe the logic of how an organisation creates, delivers, and captures

value. Teece (2010) emphasises that business models mediate between technological possibilities and market needs, arguing that competitive advantage often depends on innovating the business model rather than the underlying technology. Zott, Amit, and Massa (2011) review the literature and argue that business models can be understood as activity systems that span firm boundaries, while Wirtz, Pistoia, Ullrich, and Göttel (2016) synthesise developmental trajectories and highlight the need for coherence and adaptability. Across these contributions, revenue models are not treated as mere accounting details but as integral components of the overall logic of value capture.

Within consulting specifically, empirical studies on fees provide an important bridge between strategy and economics. Momparler, Carmona, and Lassala (2015) examine how perceived quality and reputation affect consulting fees and find that both factors are associated with higher fee levels. Lassala, Carmona, and Momparler (2016) adopt a fuzzy-set approach to identify alternative configurations that lead to high consulting fees, showing that no single factor is sufficient on its own. Instead, different combinations of quality indicators, relational attributes, and structural features can underpin premium fees. For marketing consulting, these findings suggest that revenue outcomes reflect complex configurations of positioning, differentiation, and relationship management rather than isolated price decisions.

Recent studies link these questions more directly to digitalisation and sustainability. Tavoletti, Kazemargi, Cerruti, Grieco, and Appolloni (2022) analyse business model innovation in global management consulting firms under digital transformation. They show how firms experiment with analytics-driven tools, platforms, and modularised service components and how these innovations encourage shifts from purely project-based fees to hybrid revenue models. Tafti, Sandberg, and Andersson (2024) examine alternative revenue models for construction consulting firms in a digital context and evaluate freemium, subscription, outcome-based, and performance-based models using a case study. Their results indicate that different models suit different client segments and that a portfolio of revenue models may be necessary to align value capture with value creation. Although their empirical setting lies outside marketing consulting, the underlying mechanisms are highly relevant for consultants who productise parts of their offer or build digital tools for campaign design and analytics.

Taken together, these streams of literature depict a multi-layered system. Positioning and branding define how a consulting firm appears in the market. Differentiation emerges from expertise, methodology, innovation, and relational capabilities. Value propositions articulate the promise to clients, while business models and revenue models determine how that promise is turned into cash flow. The present article builds on this foundation and treats the link between these elements as a flow that can be mapped, diagnosed, and improved, much like a logistics chain in which each interface between activities is a potential source of waste or delay.

Methodology

The empirical component of this article takes the form of a structured secondary analysis. Instead of designing and executing a primary survey or interview programme, the study treats existing empirical publications as a data set and recodes them through the lens of the proposed framework. This approach is appropriate for two reasons. First, the literature on professional services already contains rich empirical material on positioning, differentiation, fees, value propositions, and business models, although these findings have rarely been interpreted together. Second, the main aim of the article is conceptual and integrative. The empirical illustration is therefore intended to show how the framework can be applied in practice rather than to provide a definitive measurement of effect sizes.

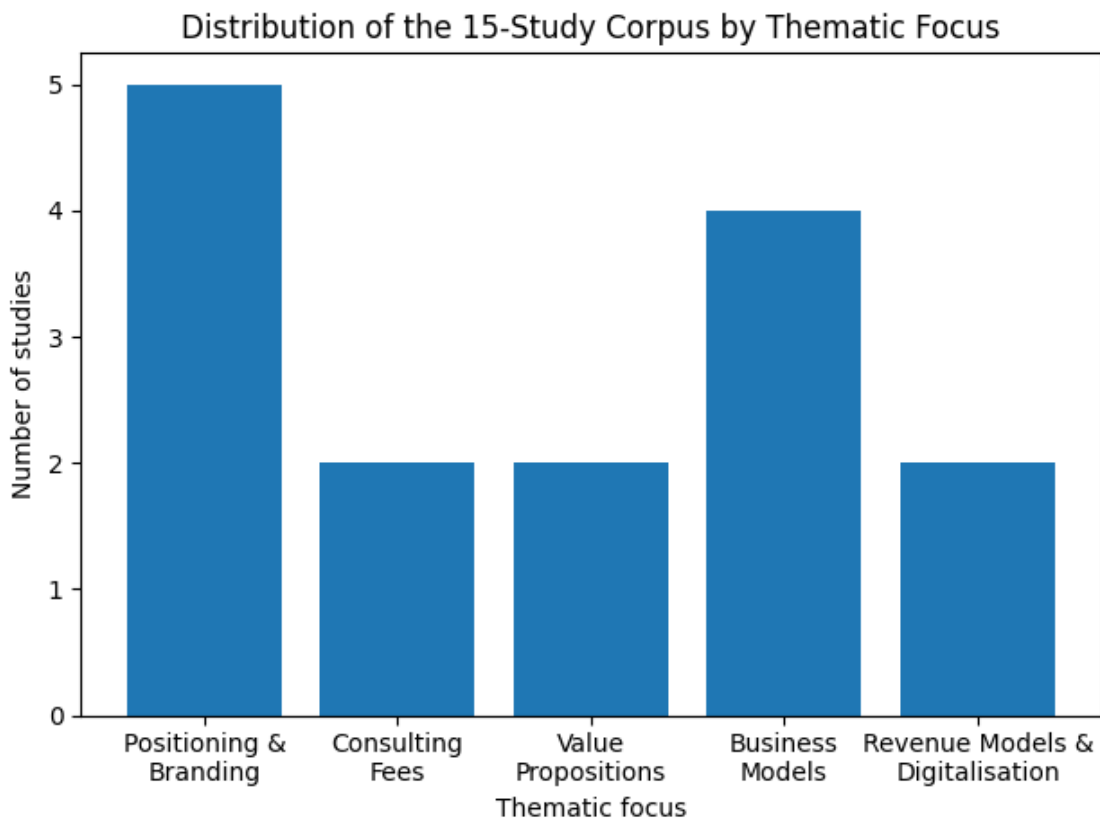


Figure 1. Distribution of the 15-study corpus by thematic focus

The corpus consists of fifteen peer-reviewed journal articles that meet three basic criteria. Each article focuses on professional service firms or knowledge-intensive business services; each reports empirical data rather than being purely conceptual; and each contains information relevant to at least one of the following elements: positioning or branding, differentiation mechanisms, consulting fees, value proposition design, or business and revenue models (Castaldi & Giarratana, 2018; Freel, 2006; Kärreman & Rylander, 2008; Lassala et al., 2016; Momparler

et al., 2015; Osterwalder et al., 2005; Payne & Frow, 2014; Payne et al., 2017; Semadeni, 2006; Semadeni & Anderson, 2010; Tafti et al., 2024; Tavoletti et al., 2022; Teece, 2010; Wirtz et al., 2016; Zott et al., 2011). Although the studies vary in scope and method, treating them as a set allows for a systematic comparison of how different configurations of strategy and revenue logic appear in empirical work.

Each article was read in full and then coded along several dimensions that mirror the logistics-style flow from strategic intent to revenue capture. The first dimension captured positioning focus, such as industry or functional specialisation, client segment, and claimed role in the client's decision process. The second dimension recorded the main differentiation mechanisms discussed by the authors, including proprietary methods, depth of expertise, branding strategies, innovation patterns, and relationship behaviours. The third dimension summarised how the value proposition was articulated, concentrating on whether it emphasised outcomes, risk reduction, efficiency, compliance, or some combination thereof. The fourth dimension concerned pricing bases and revenue models, including whether fees were tied to inputs, outputs, or outcomes and whether revenue came from one-off projects, retainers, subscriptions, performance components, or hybrid arrangements. Where the original studies reported performance indicators such as fees, profitability, client satisfaction, or growth, these were noted as suggestive outcomes.

Because the corpus is intentionally small, the analysis relies on careful qualitative comparison rather than on formal statistical models. After coding, the material was reviewed iteratively to identify configurations in which particular combinations of positioning, differentiation, value proposition, and revenue model appeared together. This step resembles tracing flows in a logistics network. Instead of goods or containers, the objects moving through the system are strategic choices and contractual arrangements. The question is whether they form coherent paths from a firm's declared role in the market to the way it earns its income. Three broad patterns and several more specific configurations emerged from this comparative reading.

The limitations of this methodology are evident and must be acknowledged. The analysis depends on what the original authors chose to report, which means that some relevant details about pricing or internal decision processes may be absent. The small number of studies prevents any claim to statistical representativeness. Nevertheless, the method has two strengths that are valuable for the purposes of this article. It preserves an empirical anchor by working with observed practices rather than hypothetical examples, and it shows how a marketing consulting strategy framework can be operationalised as a coding scheme that could be extended to larger samples in future research.

Results

The secondary analysis reveals three robust patterns that cut across the fifteen studies. The first concerns the limited but powerful set of differentiation levers that professional service

firms actually use. Despite the variety of sectors and contexts, differentiation strategies tend to cluster around expertise depth, branded methodologies, relationship quality, and the ability to manage complex change. The studies on service marks, branding, and innovation in consulting and related services show that firms continuously calibrate their distance from competitors by combining these levers in different proportions (Castaldi & Giarratana, 2018; Freel, 2006; Kärreman & Rylander, 2008; Semadeni, 2006; Semadeni & Anderson, 2010). From a logistics viewpoint, they are adjusting the configuration of routes and hubs in their network, seeking both visibility and resilience.

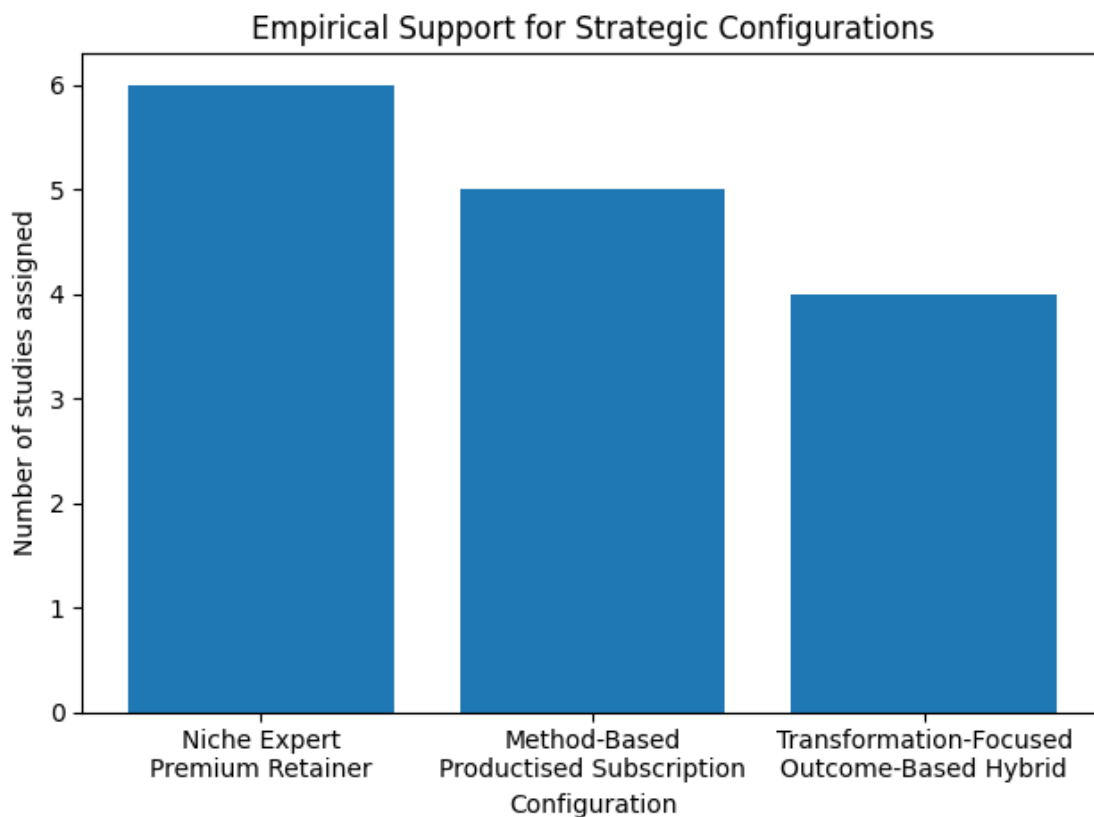


Figure 2. Empirical support for strategic configurations in the 15-study corpus

The second pattern concerns the translation role of the value proposition. In studies that pay attention to how firms articulate value, there is a clear distinction between generic claims and specific, outcome-oriented propositions. Payne and Frow (2014) and Payne et al. (2017) show that well-designed value propositions specify target customers, benefits, and evidence and that they align internal processes with external promises. Across the corpus, whenever firms described value in concrete terms that linked activities to measurable outcomes or reduced risks, their pricing practices and revenue models also appeared more structured. By contrast, where value propositions were vague or purely rhetorical, fee arrangements tended to rely more on ad

hoc negotiation. This observation supports the claim that the value proposition acts as a critical interface between strategic differentiation and monetisation.

The third pattern concerns the evolution of revenue models under digitalisation and sustainability pressures. Tavoletti et al. (2022) document how global management consulting firms experiment with analytics-enabled tools, platform components, and modularised services, which in turn support subscriptions, licence fees, and other forms of recurring revenue. Tafti et al. (2024) evaluate freemium, subscription, outcome-based, and performance-based revenue models for a digital tool developed by a construction consulting firm and conclude that a portfolio of models is necessary to address different segments and use cases. When these findings are considered alongside business model frameworks that emphasise coherence and adaptability (Osterwalder et al., 2005; Teece, 2010; Wirtz et al., 2016; Zott et al., 2011), a picture emerges of consulting firms as organisations that must continually redesign their revenue architectures to match their evolving modes of value creation.

Within these broad patterns, the comparative coding yields three configurations that are particularly relevant for marketing consulting. The first configuration can be described as the niche expert premium retainer. Firms in this configuration position themselves in narrow segments, such as a specific industry or a distinct functional problem. They differentiate primarily through deep expertise and experience, often supported by long-term client relationships and strong reputational capital. Their value propositions emphasise continuity, strategic insight, and the ability to integrate marketing decisions with broader business choices. Empirical studies indicate that such firms often command above-average fees and rely on retainers or long-term framework agreements that provide predictable revenue streams (Momparler et al., 2015; Lassala et al., 2016).

The second configuration may be called the method-based productised subscription. Here, firms position themselves as owners of proprietary frameworks, algorithms, or platforms that promise faster or more reliable solutions to recurring marketing problems. Differentiation rests on the perceived superiority and codification of these methods, which are often branded and embedded in software tools or structured programmes (Kärreman & Rylander, 2008; Tavoletti et al., 2022). The associated value propositions highlight repeatability, scalability, and ease of implementation. Revenue models in this configuration frequently combine fixed fees for implementation with subscriptions or licences for ongoing use, creating recurring income that is decoupled from purely hourly input. The empirical material suggests that such configurations can be effective where problems are standardisable and where clients value speed and consistency.

The third configuration can be described as the transformation-focused outcome-based hybrid. Firms that fit this profile position themselves as partners for larger, more uncertain change processes, such as entering new markets, reconfiguring customer journeys, or building new digital marketing capabilities. Differentiation stems from the ability to orchestrate complex

projects and to work across organisational boundaries, echoing the business model literature's emphasis on activity systems and complementarities (Teece, 2010; Zott et al., 2011; Wirtz et al., 2016). Their value propositions centre on measurable business outcomes and often include explicit performance indicators. Revenue models in this configuration tend to be hybrid, combining fixed fees for baseline work with bonuses or variable components linked to results. Studies on alternative revenue models show that such arrangements can align incentives but require careful measurement and risk sharing (Tafti et al., 2024).

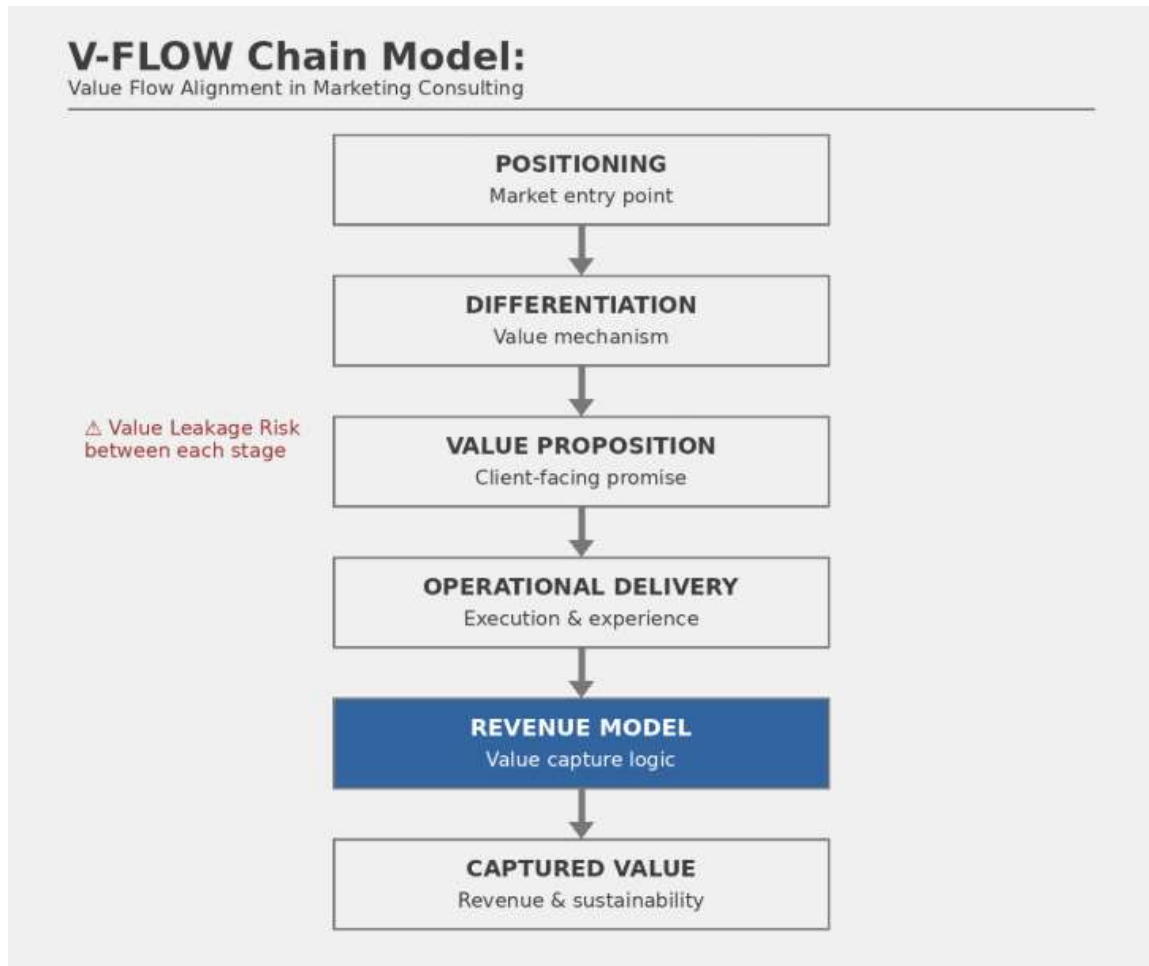


Figure 3. V-FLOW Chain Model: value flow alignment in marketing consulting strategy

Across all three configurations, the logic of the logistics metaphor becomes clear. When positioning, differentiation, value proposition, and revenue model are aligned, value flows smoothly from the consultant's capabilities to the client's outcomes and back to the firm's income statement. When they are misaligned, value "leaks" at the interfaces. For example, a firm may claim outcome-based differentiation but still bill only by time, or it may invest in branded methods without adjusting its revenue model to reflect the new, more scalable cost structure. The

secondary analysis therefore supports the central proposition that coherent end-to-end design matters for marketing consulting strategy just as coherent network design matters for logistics.

The results of the secondary analysis enabled the formalization of an original strategic model termed the V-FLOW Chain Model (Value Flow Alignment in Marketing Consulting Strategy). The model conceptualizes marketing consulting not as a set of isolated strategic elements, but as a continuous flow of value that connects positioning, differentiation, value proposition, operational delivery, and revenue model into a single integrated system.

Unlike traditional approaches that treat pricing or positioning decisions independently, the V-FLOW model emphasizes alignment across all stages of the value chain. Each element performs a specific function: positioning defines the entry point of value, differentiation establishes the mechanism through which value is created, the value proposition translates that mechanism into client-relevant outcomes, operationalization delivers the promised value, and the revenue model captures part of that value in financial form.

A key contribution of the model is the identification of “value leakage points,” which occur when adjacent elements of the chain are misaligned. The analysis shows that even strong expertise or well-developed methodologies may fail to generate stable revenue if they are not properly translated into value propositions or matched with appropriate revenue models. This finding reinforces the article’s central argument that consulting strategy should be designed as a coherent flow, similar to a logistics system in which disruptions at any node reduce overall efficiency

Discussion

The findings of the secondary analysis can be interpreted as an empirical reinforcement of the idea that revenue models are strategic design variables rather than afterthoughts. In marketing consulting, it is tempting to treat fees as the outcome of market conditions or as a matter of negotiation skill. The empirical configurations summarised above suggest a different view. They indicate that fee levels, pricing bases, and revenue stability are closely connected to how firms position themselves, how they differentiate their offers, and how clearly they articulate and evidence their value propositions. This interpretation resonates with the business model perspective in which value creation, delivery, and capture must be conceived together (Osterwalder et al., 2005; Teece, 2010; Wirtz et al., 2016; Zott et al., 2011).

From the vantage point of a logistics-oriented practitioner, this integrated view is intuitive. A logistics manager would rarely redesign transport routes without considering warehouse capacity, inventory policies, and service level agreements. In the same way, a marketing consulting firm that revises its positioning or invests in a new proprietary method should also revisit its value propositions and revenue models. If a firm moves towards more standardised, tool-enabled offerings, for instance, it may be inefficient and confusing to continue billing purely by the hour. The studies on business model innovation in consulting under digital

transformation show that leading firms recognise this and experiment with subscriptions, licences, and other recurring revenue mechanisms that better reflect their new cost structures and sources of value (Tavoletti et al., 2022; Tafti et al., 2024).

The analysis also refines what is known about the relationship between quality, reputation, and fees. Momparler et al. (2015) and Lassala et al. (2016) show that high consulting fees are associated with perceived quality and with particular configurations of structural and relational factors. The present study adds that these patterns can be seen as manifestations of deeper strategic configurations. A niche expert retainer model, for example, converts accumulated reputation and relational capital into stable revenue by means of long-term contracts. A method-based subscription model converts codified expertise and digital tools into recurring fees. In both cases, what appears as a simple price level is in fact the outcome of a designed path from positioning to monetisation.

At the same time, the configurations carry risks if they are adopted uncritically. The follower's dilemma in professional services warns that copying the outward signs of successful firms may lead to imitation without true differentiation (Semadeni & Anderson, 2010). A marketing consulting firm might introduce a branded framework or a subscription plan because such elements are fashionable, without possessing the underlying capabilities to deliver consistent outcomes or maintain the digital infrastructure required. In logistics terms, this would correspond to opening a new hub without sufficient throughput or local expertise. The result could be higher fixed costs and damaged credibility rather than improved performance.

The findings therefore suggest several practical implications for marketing consulting firms. One implication is that differentiation should be formulated as a mechanism rather than as a slogan. Instead of claiming to be "innovative" or "data-driven," a firm should be able to describe how specific capabilities, processes, and tools combine to produce client outcomes. A second implication is that value propositions should be written as operational contracts that specify problems, interventions, and indicators in everyday language that clients can easily understand (Payne & Frow, 2014; Payne et al., 2017). A third implication is that revenue models should be chosen to reflect both the client's perception of value and the firm's cost structure. In some cases, this may point towards retainers; in others, towards subscriptions, project fees, or hybrid outcome-based arrangements. The crucial point is not that one model is superior in general but that each model fits the underlying strategic configuration.

The study has limitations that must be recognised. Because it relies on a small set of secondary sources, the patterns identified here should be treated as indicative rather than definitive. The original studies were not designed to answer the specific research question of this article, and their reporting of revenue models and value propositions is uneven. Furthermore, the empirical material covers professional services more broadly, not only marketing consulting. Some configurations may therefore need adjustment when applied to specific segments such as digital performance agencies, B2B branding consultancies, or specialist analytics boutiques.

Future research could extend the approach by coding larger samples of studies or by combining this framework with primary data from firms and clients.

Despite these limitations, the secondary analysis achieves its intended purpose. It shows that an end-to-end flow from positioning and differentiation through value proposition to revenue model can be observed in existing empirical work and that this flow is not arbitrary. Instead, it follows patterns that can be named, described, and used as reference points by both researchers and practitioners. In that sense, the article adds a logistics-inspired layer to the strategy and business model discussions around marketing consulting by treating the design of revenue models as part of a wider system of coordinated decisions.

Conclusions

This article has argued that strategy for marketing consulting firms should be understood as an integrated sequence that runs from positioning and differentiation to value proposition and revenue model. Drawing on a secondary analysis of fifteen empirical studies on professional services, consulting fees, value propositions, business models, and alternative revenue models, it has shown that certain configurations of these elements recur and that they have clear implications for how consulting firms earn their income. The niche expert premium retainer, the method-based productised subscription, and the transformation-focused outcome-based hybrid emerged as three particularly salient patterns that connect strategic intent with commercial logic.

The analysis supports a simple but demanding principle. For a marketing consulting firm, differentiation should not remain at the level of abstract labels. It should be expressed as a concrete mechanism of client value, embedded in a value proposition that specifies outcomes and evidence, and matched with a revenue model whose billing unit corresponds to the value unit perceived by clients. When these elements are aligned, revenue can become more predictable, negotiations more transparent, and long-term relationships more sustainable. When they are misaligned, even strong expertise and creative work can fail to translate into economic performance.

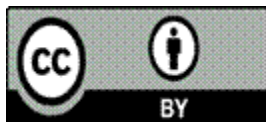
For researchers, the article illustrates how conceptual frameworks on business models and value propositions can be connected with empirical studies on consulting fees and professional service strategies through a common coding scheme. For practitioners, especially those with a logistics mindset, it offers a way of diagnosing the strategy-to-revenue chain in their own firms, tracing where value may be leaking between positioning, differentiation, client promises, and fee structures. Further empirical work is needed to test and refine the configurations identified here, but the overall message is clear: in marketing consulting, as in logistics, careful end-to-end design is not optional. It is a condition for creating value that moves smoothly in both directions along the client–consultant relationship.

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