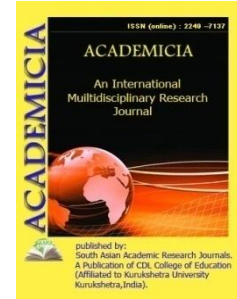




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## AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF STUDENTS SATISFACTION IN WORD OF MOUTH

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The intent of this study is to comprehend the relation between student satisfaction and internal marketing. The study was conducted to explain those determinants which are crucial for positive word of mouth. **Methodology/sample:** A cross-sectional research on business schools through questionnaire is conducted. Population of study is NAAC accredited institutes in Bangalore. Responses are analyzed using factor analyses and regression analyses. **Findings:** Result reveal that non administrative aspect and program issue have a very significant impact on student satisfaction which have an indirect effect on word of mouth through satisfaction. **Practical implications:** Findings of this research are likely to help the educational institutes to target assets to those regions which assumes a prevailing part to their engaging quality and aggressiveness. **Originality/Value:** Impact of HEdPERF dimensions on student satisfaction is found rare in literature.

**KEYWORDS:** Student Satisfaction, Business School, Higher Education, Word Of Mouth And Hedperf

### INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a pivotal role in the growth and development of any nation. It helps bring about economic growth, national development and provision of human resources to the country (Husain et al., 2009; Dib and Alnazer, 2013). Higher education has transformed because of globalization in the world market, which has result in commercialisation of higher education and integrated customer centric approach as a mission. Labelled as the sector that has experienced the highest number of changes over the last two decades (Key Note, 2011), the higher education sector has been at the forefront of intense changes. There is complex increment in number of

higher education establishments in India in recent decades however no achievement in fulfilling the request of rivalry and worldwide intensity. According to Indian Education Review, News “No Indian University in World’s Top 200 (QS Rankings 2012, 12 Sep 2012.) Calling for an ‘overriding emphasis on quality’, Singh admitted that “the unprecedented growth in higher education could be happening without any commensurate improvement in quality”. The general situation of higher education in India does not coordinate with the worldwide quality measures. Therefore, quality is one of the most crucial parameter for socio economic development. It has likewise turns into a focused weapon for the institutions to draw in and serve the students primary customer. Students are the consumers for institutions of higher education, therefore, identify the satisfaction level of students is a significant factor to survive in the environment of competitive market, while the increased level of student’s dissatisfaction will lead to drop-out of the institution (Kerlin, 2000).

Students are the basic component for accomplishment of any college. A population of satisfied student will bring nonstop favorable circumstances for the universities through positive verbal correspondence and furthermore give a superior position to them in managing different contenders Customer satisfaction is a very important element in the formation of customer’s desires for future purchase (Lai et al., 2011; Syed et al., 2011; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001. The main aim of this study is to identify and evaluate the drivers that influence student satisfaction in the higher educational environment. Specifically, this study seeks to measure the influence that each driver has on student satisfaction and word of mouth mediated by student satisfaction.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The main aim of this study is to identify and evaluate the factors that influence student satisfaction in higher educational environment. The research objectives are:

- To investigate the HEdPERF scale in Indian higher education sector.
- To evaluate the influence of dimension of HEdPERF on student satisfaction.
- To examine the effect of student satisfaction on word of mouth.

### **BACKGROUND**

**Indian Higher Education Sector:** Indian advanced education framework is third biggest in world. There were 3 University in British creations the Universities of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay however now in 2015, there are more than 700 colleges and 35,000 schools taking into account more than 30 million students spread over each state and union domain. The primary representing body at the tertiary level is the University Grants Commission, which authorizes its models, prompts the legislature, and arranges between the centre and the state. The is enormous increment number of Universities from 20 in 1950 to 677 in 2014. The sector boasts of 45 Central Universities of which 40 are under the purview of Ministry of Human Resource Development, 318 State Universities, 185 State Private Universities, 129 Deemed to be Universities, 51 Institutions of National Importance (established under Acts of Parliament) under MHRD (IITs - 16, NITs – 30 and IISERs – 5) and four Institutions (established under various State legislations).

### **TABLE 1: NUMBER OF UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA**

S. No	Types	Number
1	Central Universities	45
2	State Universities	318
3	State Private Universities	185
4	Deemed Universities	129
5	Institutions of National Importance	51
6	Institutions (established under various State legislations)	4

Source: AISHE Portal ([www.aishe.gov.in](http://www.aishe.gov.in))

Regardless of having thrice biggest advanced education framework, still Indian is inadequate as far as quality and magnificence because of which Indian industry and administration areas are reeling under the lack of gifted people.

Cheng and Tam (1997) found that there are seven models for quality education, namely

- Satisfaction
- Goal,
- Absence of Problems
- Resource-Input
- Organizational Learning
- Legitimacy
- Process.

Instruction establishments consider understudy fulfillment to be one of the real components in deciding the nature of open projects in today's business sectors (Kuo, Walker, Belland, and Schroder, 2013). Particularly colleges are growing new methodologies to gauge quality with reference to understudy fulfillment (Mark,2013). The requests and needs of understudies are basic for higher instructive organizations on the off chance that they need to be focused (Khosravi, Poushaneh, Roozegar, and Sohrabifard, 2013).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Service Quality:** The definition of higher education quality is dependent on various stakeholders who experience the different services provided by higher education institutions. As students are the main stakeholders of any higher education institution, their experiences in engaging with the different services provided during their student years comprise service quality (Jancey and Burns, 2013). Lewis and Booms (1983, p. 100) were perhaps the first to define service quality as a “measure of how well the service level delivered matches the customer’s expectations”. Some suggest that it stems from a comparison of performance perceptions with expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988), while others argue that it is derived from a comparison of performance with ideal standards (Teas, 1993a, b) or from perceptions of performance alone (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). According to Dyson et al., 1996 the service quality is so called the better and standardized output delivered by a service. ). Several studies have attempted to develop and examine service quality models in the context of higher education. For example, Abdullah (2005) proposed HEDPERF, a scale to measure perceived service quality in the

Malaysian higher education sector using five dimensions, that is, academic aspects, non-academic aspects, program issues, reputation and access. The initial scale was developed and validated using a sample of 409 students from 6 Malaysian universities in July-August 2003. The results of this study showed that students perceived only 'access' to be a significant determinant of service quality. Therefore, perceived service quality could be the product of the evaluations of a number of service encounters and in this case, of a student, these could range from encounters with office staff, to encounters with tutors, lecturers, the head of departments, etc (Hill, 1995).

**Student Satisfaction** : Within the context of higher education, satisfaction is perceived as “a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of a student’s educational experience” (Elliott & Healy, 2001, p.2). Student satisfaction is an important part of the effort to market higher education successfully (Hermans, Haytko, & Mott-Stenerson, 2009. According to Sapri et al. (2009), student satisfaction plays an important role in determining the accuracy and authenticity of the services being provided. This is further supported by Barnett (2011) who states that satisfaction of students is important as it is the only performance indicator of service quality for service providers of higher education. There are many ways to explain the facets of student satisfaction. As an example, Kaldenberg et al., (1998) looked at factors such as coursework quality, non-curriculum events and other university-related factors as determinants of student satisfaction. Grossman (1999) also pointed out that students are customers or clients and education providers are expected to prioritise and meet the expectations of their students.

**Word of Mouth:** Word-of-mouth (WOM), therefore, has been a frequent catchphrase in the marketing literature for many years (Garnefeld, Helm & Eggert, 2011; Söderlund & Rosengren, 2007). WOM is more effective in influencing customers’ behaviour than marketer-initiated communications (Buttle, 1998). Accordingly, marketers rediscover positive WOM as a powerful marketing instrument to attract new customers (Ahrens, Coyle & Strahilevitz, 2013; Gremler, Gwinner & Brown, 2001; Sweeney, Soutar & Mazzarol, 2012). It is widely documented that satisfied customers engage in positive WOM. Anderson (1998, p. 6) even asserts that the “individual degree of satisfaction with consumption experience is generally regarded as the key antecedent of product-related word of mouth”. In line with this proposition, copious studies confirmed the positive influence of satisfaction on WOM (e.g. Athanassopoulos, Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2001; Bone, 1992; Bowman & Narayandas, 2001; Eggert & Helm, 2000; File, Cermak & Prince, 1994; Gremler, Gwinner & Brown, 2001; Heitmann, Lehmann & Herrmann, 2007; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner & Gremler, 2002; Jones & Reynolds, 2006; Lee & Jaafar, 2011; Macintosh, 2007; Mangold, Miller & Brockway, 1999; Mittal, Kumar & Tsiros, 1999; Price & Arnould, 1999; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003; Söderlund, 2006; Swan & Oliver, 1989; Verhoef, Franses & Hoekstra, 2002; Wangenheim & Bayón, 2007; Wirtz & Chew, 2002). Within the context of this study, WOM communication behavior is concerned with the extent to which students talk to their friends about their university subsequent to their enrollment.

- **H1: Service quality of higher education impact on student satisfaction significantly.**
- **H2: Service quality of higher education impact WOM behavioral intention significantly.**
- **H4: Student satisfaction impact WOM behavioral intention significantly.**

- **H4: Student satisfaction mediates the relation between service quality and WOM behavioral intention significantly.**

## METHODOLOGY

**Sample design and data collection:** The target population for this study was limited to NAAC accredited management institutes, as accredited institutions would have better educational standards in comparison to non-accredited institutes, thus it would present a clear picture of student satisfaction on service quality of institutes. The survey was conducted through self-administered questionnaires. Bangalore is an instructive centre point of India and higher number of students enrolled themselves for higher studies in Bangalore. A convenience sample was drawn for the survey. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed and 240 were returned (68% response rate). All the responses with missing data were also excluded and ultimately, 226 responses were deemed fit for further analyses (65% response rate). Of these valid responses, 57% were from male whereas 43% were from female.

**TABLE 2: NUMBER OF INSTITUTES HAVING NAAC ACCREDITATION**

Institutes	Accreditation	Number	Percentage
3.76 – 4.00	A++	-	
3.51 – 3.75	A+	1	2.38
3.01 – 3.50	A	20	47.61
2.76 – 3.00	B++	-	
2.51 – 2.75	B+	-	
2.01 – 2.50	B	17	40.47
1.51 – 2.00	C++	-	
	C+		
	C	2	4.76
<b>Total</b>		42	

Source: [www.naac.gov.in](http://www.naac.gov.in)

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The constructs in this study were measured using seven -point Likert-type scale and multiple items. All measurement items validated in previous studies were adopted for this study. HEDPERF (Higher Education Performance) instrument developed and tested by Abdullah (2005, 2006a, 2006b) was used to measure the service quality in higher education context. The archetype of HEDPERF consists of 41 items categorized under six dimensions, namely, non-academic aspects, academic aspects, reputation, access, program issues and understanding (Abdullah, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). In later work (Firdaus, 2006b) dimension understanding was excluded, and dimension access proved to be the most relevant dimension of quality service in higher education. Hence the HEDPERF model adapted in this study consisted of 5 dimensions. Satisfaction is assessed with four emotion-laden items derived from Westbrook and Oliver (1991), where respondents are asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the education service provider. Example item-statements that respondents are asked to rank are 'I feel that my experience with institute has been enjoyable' and 'My choice coming to institute was a wise one'. WOM behavioural intention is measured using eight items adapted from Harrison (2001) and Goyette et al. (2010). Respondents are asked to rate item statements such as 'I have

mentioned this service organization to others quite frequently 'and 'I seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about this service organization.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

**Objective 1:** To Study the HEDPERF Scale in Indian higher education sector.

To achieve this objective factor analysis, correlation analysis and reliability analysis are used. To establish the internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha value for reliability is calculated. All values are above 0.60, which may be considered as reliable. Construct validity (convergent and discrimination) is checked through factor analysis. In order to check the appropriateness of factor analysis Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test were used. The results are shown in table 3. The KMO value is greater than 0.5 and the significance level for Bartlett's test value is 0.000 which shows that the value is significant at 1 per cent level of significance, therefore it is appropriate to apply factor analysis. Exploratory factor analysis was performed on 41 items scale of HEDPERF. The principle component method was used to extract factors with an initial setting for Eigen values greater than 1.0(Field, 2005). Orthogonal rotation (Varimax) was applied to reduce potential multi co linearity among the items. Table 3b shows results of exploratory factor analysis. It resulted in five orthogonal distinct factors, i.e. academic aspect, non-academic aspect, access, programme issue and reputation. These factors confirmed the original scale and together they explained 64.58 percent of variance. The first factor 'academic aspect' comprised nine items and explained 13.34 per cent of the total variance. This factor had an Eigen value of 2.01. The items, AI, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7 and A9 loaded on this factor. The second factor 'non-academic aspect' comprised ten items and explained 14.01 per cent of the total variance. This factor had an Eigen value of 2.97. The items NA1, NA3, NA4, NA5, NA6, NA8, NA9 and loaded on this factor. The third factor 'access' comprised four items and explained 9.20 per cent of the total variance. This factor had an Eigen value of 1.72. The items, AS2, AS3 and AS4, loaded on this factor. The fourth factor 'programme' issue comprised four items and explained 16.59 per cent of the total variance. This factor had an Eigen value of 2.36. The items P1,P2,P3 and P4 loaded on this factor. The fifth factor 'reputation' comprised four items and explained 11.44 per cent of the total variance. This factor had an Eigen value of 2.44. The items R2, R3 and R4, loaded on this factor.

**TABLE 3A: KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST RESULT**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.801
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2810.391**
	df	66
	Sig.	.000
** Significant at the 0.01 level		

Source: Author's Processed

**TABLE 3B: FACTOR LOADINGS AND RELIABILITY FOR HEDPERF SCALE**

Items	Factor Loading	No of Items	Cronbach's alpha	%of Variance
AA1	.667	9	0.877	13.34
AA2	.704			
AA3	.693			
AA4	.735			

AA5	.719			
AA6	.721			
AA7	.664			
AA8	.658			
AA9	.710			
NA1	.689	10	0.891	14.01
NA2	.685			
NA3	.678			
NA4	.719			
NA5	.625			
NA6	.633			
NA7	.757			
NA8	.733			
NA9	.697			
NA10	.657			
AS1	.694	4	0.745	9.20.
AS2	.636			
AS3	.675			
AS4	.767			
P1	.811	4	0.779	16.59
P2	.861			
P3	.864			
P4	.773			
R1	.693	4	0.8444	11.44
R2	.795			
R3	.778			
R4	.801			
<b>Total Variance explained</b>			<b>64.58</b>	

Source: Author's Processed

**Objective 2:** To evaluate the influence of dimension of HEdPERF on student satisfaction

**Objective 3:** To evaluate the influence of student satisfaction on behavioural intention of word of mouth of students.

To address above both objective, step wise regression analysis is used.

**TABLE 4A: CORRELATIONS MATRIX FOR THE STUDY**

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Academic aspect	1						
Non Academic aspect	.568**	1					
Access	.432**	.673**	1				
Programme Issues	.324**	.601**	.619**	1			
Reputation	.588**	.625**	.646**	.672**	1		

Student Satisfaction	.564**	.641**	.571**	.596**	.510**	1	
Word of Mouth	.212**	.303**	.316**	.209**	.282**	.676**	1
** Significant at 0.01 level							

Source: Author's Processed

### REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Multiple regressions were used to study the effect of the independent variables to dependent variable. In the first step multiple regression analysis is performed for HEDPERF dimensions (academic aspects, non-academic aspects, access, program issue and reputation) as predictor (independent) variables and satisfaction as criterion (dependent variable). Results indicate that R<sup>2</sup> is equal to .451 and indicates that 45.1 percent of variance in student satisfaction can be explained by independent variables. F Statistics is 385.502 which is significant at 1% level of significance level. In addition to the significance of overall regression equation significance of individual regression coefficient is examined to identify which individual variable variables significantly relate to the dependent variable. It was found that all the dimensions, i.e. non-academic aspect has the largest Beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), followed by program issue ( $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), academic aspect ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), reputation ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), and access ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) have a significant impact on satisfaction of the students.

In the second step word of mouth intention of student act as a dependent variable and dimensions of service quality as independent variables. It was found that R<sup>2</sup> is equal to .459 and indicates that 45.9 percent of variance in word of mouth intentions can be explained by independent variables. F Statistics is 438.316 which is significant at 1% level of significance level. In the third step word of mouth act as a dependent variable and student satisfaction together with dimensions of service quality as independent variables. Results indicate that R<sup>2</sup> is equal to .758 and indicates that 75.8 percent of variance in student satisfaction can be explained by independent variables. F Statistics is 671.316 which is significant at 1% level of significance level.

**TABLE 5: REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR THE STUDY**

Dependent variable	Customer Satisfaction	Word of Mouth	Word of Mouth
<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Standardized coefficients-<math>\beta</math></b>		
AA	0.21**	0.18	0.02
NAA	0.32**	0.14	0.17**
AS	0.13**	0.12**	-0.08
PI	0.26**	0.51**	0.11**
RP	0.18**	0.10	0.04**
Student Satisfaction			0.67**
R <sup>2</sup>	.451	.459	.758
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.447	.455	.754
Durbin Watson	2.16	1.56	1.91
F value	385.502***	438.316***	671.316***
** Significant at the 0.01 level			

Source: Author's Processed



The results from the data analysis reinforced that student satisfaction has a significant mediation role in the relationship between service quality and word of mouth.

The higher education institutions should offer a broadness of exceedingly regarded degree programs

- Equip students with a with a more extensive scope of abilities that enable them to conform to the solicitations of a rapidly advancing world.
- Tailor the programs to cater to students who have diverse dreams for their careers.
- Programs ought to be engaged about the specific requirement of the work environment or business needs of the economy
- The flexibility in structure and content adaptability of the degree program. Program that allow students the flexibility to investigate their intellectual and individual interests.
- Practical components in the degree programs.

Non-academic staff were reached oftentimes by students when they require any information or issue arises, this stress the significance of non-academic staff, keeping in mind the end goal to assemble long term relations with students. It is obligatory that non-academic staff must be great in interpersonal relations. To achieve this college /universities should organize a more skilled training/courses for non administrative department and focus more on problem solving skills with respect to student (customer) requirement.

## CONCLUSION

At last, it is clear from the past writing that the college needs to recognize the student as their primary customer and embrace a client driven approach that includes students in service design as much as possible. Customer service is an evolving concept for higher education sector. It is appropriate for higher education institutes to review the environment on a continuous basis to get better insight of their services and to understand which marketing efforts were successful and which ones fell short in order to improve in the future. Universities or academics institution need to develop and make extraordinary elements, advance constantly and dependably comprehend and address the needs of consumers will create customer satisfaction. Getting accreditation by higher official bodies does not satisfy the obligations of giving quality services by institutes. According to Janice Hadfield, "Except for the quality of our academic offerings, excellence in customer service is the single most important factor in determining the future success or failure of our programs for adult learners, now and for the foreseeable future". Students should be treated as the co-producers of various services which will lead to greater sense of belongingness and accountability towards institute. Individuals trust more in informal references rather than supplier sponsored promotional activities (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). The government should make fundamental move to figure such a strategy to create proficient limits of higher education organizations to meet worldwide measures. The main responsibility of higher education is to put their energy, assets and strive for accomplishing perfection which won't just fortify student's positive assessment of their fulfilment but also prompt student's great verbal behavioural intentions.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has taken into account only the students of NAAC accredited institutes in Bangalore. Thus, it limits generalization of results to other institutes. Second, this study focuses on regular students of B Schools students therefore, results cannot be generalized for part time and other field students.

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