

Conceptual Model of Student Satisfaction in Syrian Universities

Hayan Dib

*Marketing and International Trade Department
Higher Institute of Business Administration, Syria –Damascus*

Mokhles Alnazer

*Corresponding Author, Marketing and International Trade Department
Higher Institute of Business Administration, Syria –Damascus*

Tel: +963933323411

E-mail: M.alnazer.phd.hiba@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the influence of Perceived service quality, perceived value, Image on student satisfaction, and determine the consequences of student satisfaction in Syrian universities, In order to accomplish the objectives proposed, a model reflecting the influence of Perceived service quality, perceived value, Image on student satisfaction, and reflecting the relationship between satisfaction and behavioral consequences, the model is tested by structural equations and the final sample is 280 students, the findings Show that image has a positive effect on student satisfaction, and the satisfaction has a positive effect on student loyalty, and negative effect on student complaint, if higher education institutions have to compete through student satisfaction, It is proven by this paper that the construct which most influences student satisfaction in higher education is the image construct, also it is proven that if the student satisfaction rises, the loyalty will increase and complaint will decrease. Several studies have shown that, in general, students satisfaction is important to attract and retain customers, also the concept of student satisfaction is relativity new concept in Syrian universities Therefore, the research findings can be used by universities in enhancing the level of student satisfaction.

Keywords: Service quality, value, Image, satisfaction, loyalty, complaint

Paper type: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Education is one of the most important industries and playing a vital role in national development. In relation to the importance of education, there is a correlation between education and economic growth (Husain.et al,2009), also the education sector provides the society by human resource.

In the last ten years the sector of Higher Education in Syria has suffered quite profound changes, an increase occurred in the number of institutions operating in this sector and consequently an increase in the number of students, also the Private education sector is growing rapidly over the past few year, Whereas the number of private universities rises from three universities in 2004 to seventeen universities in 2013,

The aim of the private Higher education industry is to give an alternative road map for tertiary education for those who failed to get admission into local universities and for those who intend to go for higher education locally.

This way, the sector of Higher Education in Syrian faces more competitive market Structures, therefore it becomes fundamental to analyze and study student's satisfaction in higher education, as institutions of higher education could greatly benefit from being able to increase the level of students satisfaction, satisfaction can provide an institution with a type of competitive advantage, particularly at a positive word of mouth (File & Prince, 1992), new customers (Bolton & Drew, 1991: Mittal et al, 1999), Lowering customer defection rates (Mittal & Kamakula, 2001), financial benefits (Anderson & Mittal, 2000).

2. Previous Research

2.1. Consumer Satisfaction

Since the introduction of the concept of customer satisfaction by Cardozo (1965), it has become a topic of considerable importance, in the fields of both academic research and institution and corporate management. Oliver (1980) sees customer satisfaction as a comparative judgment between expectancy and received service, according to (Williams, 1982). After using the brand, the consumer compares perceived actual performance with expected performance. Confirmation results when the two performances match. A mismatch will cause a positive (perceived performance exceeds expectations) or a negative (perceived performance falls below expectations) disconfirmation. In turn, confirmation/disconfirmation leads to an emotional reaction called satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

(Parasurnan et al, 1988) show that satisfaction is a summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the consumer's prior feelings about the consumption experience,, (Woodside, 1989) shows that Customer satisfaction is a post-purchase evaluation of a service offering,, (Gilbert, 1992) gave a more current approach. He defined customer satisfaction as a state of mind in which the customer's needs, wants, and expectations throughout the product of service life have been met or exceeded, resulting in future repurchase and loyalty.

In general the consumer satisfaction is the result of interaction between the consumer's pre-purchase expectations and post purchase evaluation.

2.2. Determinants of Customer Satisfaction

2.2.1. Service Quality

In today's world of intense competition, the key to sustainable competitive advantage lies in delivering high quality services that will in turn result in satisfied customers, therefore, there is not even an iota of doubt concerning the importance of service quality as the ultimate goal of service providers throughout the world.

Many studies talked about the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, (Fornell et al, 1996) concluded that service quality is one of the most important determinants of the American Customer Satisfaction, (Parasurman et al, 1988) show that service quality is the discrepancy between the expected service (ES) and perceived service (PS):

- a) When $ES > PS$, perceived quality is less than satisfactory and will tend toward totally unacceptable quality, with increased discrepancy between ES and PS.
- b) When $ES = PS$, perceived quality is satisfactory
- c) When $ES < PS$, perceived quality is more than satisfactory and will tend toward ideal quality, with increased discrepancy between ES and PS.

(Liwei mai, 2005) examined the differences in the perception of education quality, and the main factor affecting that perception, between students in the USA and the UK, he found that there are significant differences between British and American education perceived by students. Although students in both countries are satisfied with the education, students in the US expressed higher levels of

satisfaction compared with those in the UK, while (Alves&Raposo,2007) concluded the influence of quality perceived in satisfaction is higher on the part of functional quality, These results could be related to the fact of the educational service being too important to the life of a student, causing them to base their evaluations not only on the way the service is provided.

(Husain.et al, 2009) show that physical environment, interaction and support, feedback and assessment, and administration, are strong factors which result in students satisfaction, the service quality and perceived value have positive effect on student satisfaction according to (Ismail &Parasurman,2009),this leads to H1.

H1: service quality has a positive effect on student satisfaction.

2.2.2. Image

The influence of corporate image has been studied by many researchers, (Helegsen&Nesset,2009) argue that an image is overall impression made on the minds of the public about a firm, while(Arphan.etal,2003) argue that corporate image is related to the physical and behavioral attributes of the firm, such as business name, architecture, variety of products/services, and to the impression of quality communicated by each person interacting with the firm's clients, (Torpor,1983) said that universities have to compete through image need to know several things:

1. the university's image compared to competition universities
2. the internal and external public perception to the university's image

While (palacio .et al,2002) concluded that image has a significant effect on student satisfaction and loyalty, also an image is one of the most important determinants of customer satisfaction and loyalty according to (Alves&Raposo,2010),This leads to H2.

H2: University image has a positive effect in student satisfaction.

2.2.3. Perceived Value

Perceived value is the customer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given (Zithaml,1988), while (bolton&drew,1991) show that A customer's assessment of value depends on sacrifice (i.e., the monetary and nonmonetary costs associated with utilizing the service), Customer characteristics, customer intention, while (Helgsen&Nesset,2007) concluded that perceived value has a significant effect on student satisfaction, this leads to H3.

H3: Perceived value has a positive effect on student satisfaction.

2.3. Consequences of Consumer Satisfaction

2.3.1. Consumer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is the behavior of customers to maintain a relation with an institute through purchase of its products and services(Duffy,2003), Four characteristics of loyalty, as identified by (Macllory&Barnett,2000) consist of (1) consistent pattern of repurchase activities; (2) purchase of various products and services from the institute; (3) voluntarily promoting the institute; and (4) a general resistance to the promotional activities of alternative institutes, (Zeithaml .et al,1996) show that Loyalty may be manifested in multiple ways; for example, by expressing a preference for a company over others, by continuing to purchase from it, or by increasing business with it in the future, while (oliver,1999) argue that loyalty a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior, Loyal customers build businesses by buying more, paying premium prices, and providing new referrals through positive word of mouth over time(Mowen,2001).

Many previous studies examined tee relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty, (woodside,1989) concluded that there is correlation between satisfaction and intent to choose the hospital again in the health services sector, according to(Johnson.et al,2001) There is a strong correlation between customer satisfaction and repeat purchase., (Fornell.et al,1996) concluded that satisfaction is one of the most important determinants of the American consumer loyalty, also

satisfaction is one of the most important determinants of student loyalty in higher education sector according to (Alves&Raposo,2006:Liwemai,2005:Helegsen&Nesset,2007),This leads to H4.

H4: satisfaction has a positive effect on student satisfaction.

2.3.2. Consumer Complaint

The marketing literature emphasizes strategies designed to obtain additional customers, encourage brand switching, and increase purchase frequency. These are offensive, as opposed to defensive, measures. In the face of increasing competition and/or maturing industries or shrinking markets, offensive objectives become increasingly difficult to meet. The cost of generating a new customer can substantially exceed the cost of retaining a present customer. Because low growth and highly competitive markets are increasingly common characteristics of many industries, defensive marketing strategy is becoming more important.

Instead of attempting to obtain new customers or encourage brand switching, defensive marketing is concerned with reducing customer exit and brand switching.

That is, the objective of defensive marketing strategy is to minimize customer turnover (or, equivalently, to maximize customer retention) by protecting products and markets from competitive inroads, the concept of complaint a part of this strategy.

Complaining behavior itself is conceptualized as multifaceted, According to (Day,1984) dissatisfaction leads to consumer-complaining behavior (CCB). While(singh,1988) argue that consumer complaint manifested in voice responses (such as seeking redress from the seller), private responses (negative word-of-mouth communication), or third-party responses (taking legal action).

(Warren.et al,1993) concluded that Services is more likely to complaint than products, While (East,1997) concluded that there in negative relationship between levels of customer satisfaction and complaint, this leads to H5.

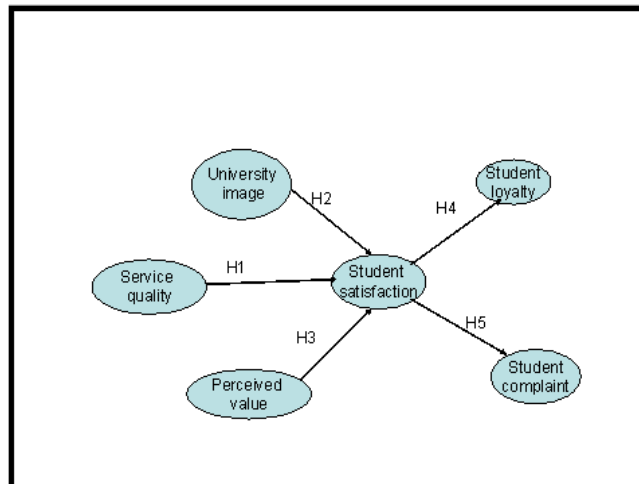
H5: satisfaction. has a negative effect on student complaint.

3. Methodology

3.1. The Model

The model to be tested (Figure 1) results from the hypotheses previously established and illustrate the main antecedents of satisfaction, Service quality, the university's image, perceived value, The model illustrates loyalty and complaint as the main consequences of satisfaction.

Figure 1: Conceptual model to be tested



3.2. Sample's Definition

Having defined the student as the most important customer of the education service, in order to test the proposed model it was necessary to select a sample of students in higher education. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed to bachelor, and master students in the Higher institute of business administration, From the total number of 280 questionnaires distributed 170 were returned the response rate was about 61%, profile of respondents shown in Table (1).

3.3. Method of Data Obtainment

Given the intended objectives expected to be reached with this research, a survey using questionnaires was the chosen way for gathering data, thus, a questionnaire subdivided in 7 parts was drawn up: Sample Characterization, Service quality, perceived Value, Image satisfaction, Loyalty and complaint.

All measures used a seven-point Likert-type response format, with “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree” as the anchors, perceived quality was measured using a multiple-item measurement scale by eighteen items adapted from (Ford,1993), university’s image was measured by twelve items developed by(stevens.et al,2008),satisfaction was assessed by three items adapted from Mendez, et al,2009), perceived value measured by three item used in the study of (Alves&Raposo,2007), to measure the consequences of student satisfaction used the scale of (zeithaml. et al,1996).

Table1: Profile of respondents

| | | N | % |
|------------------------|----------------|------------|--------------|
| Gender | Male | 91 | 53.5 |
| | Female | 79 | 46.4 |
| | Total | 170 | 100.0 |
| Marital status | Single | 161 | 94.7 |
| | Married | 9 | 5.3 |
| | Total | 170 | 100.0 |
| Age | <20 | 46 | 12.4 |
| | 20-25 | 103 | 60.6 |
| | >25 | 21 | 12.4 |
| | Total | 170 | 100.0 |
| per capita income (SP) | None | 56 | 32.9 |
| | <10000 | 43 | 25.3 |
| | 10000-20000 | 39 | 18.8 |
| | >40000 | 39 | 22.9 |
| | Total | 170 | 100.0 |
| Education level | Under graduate | 126 | 126 |
| | Post graduate | 44 | 44 |
| | Total | 170 | 100.0 |

3.4. Analysis of Result

Following the two stage modeling strategy and after confirming the acceptability of the measurement model, there then proceeded an estimation of the structural model.

The estimated model is that shown in Figure2. This figure details the standardized regression weights.

Figure 2: Final Model

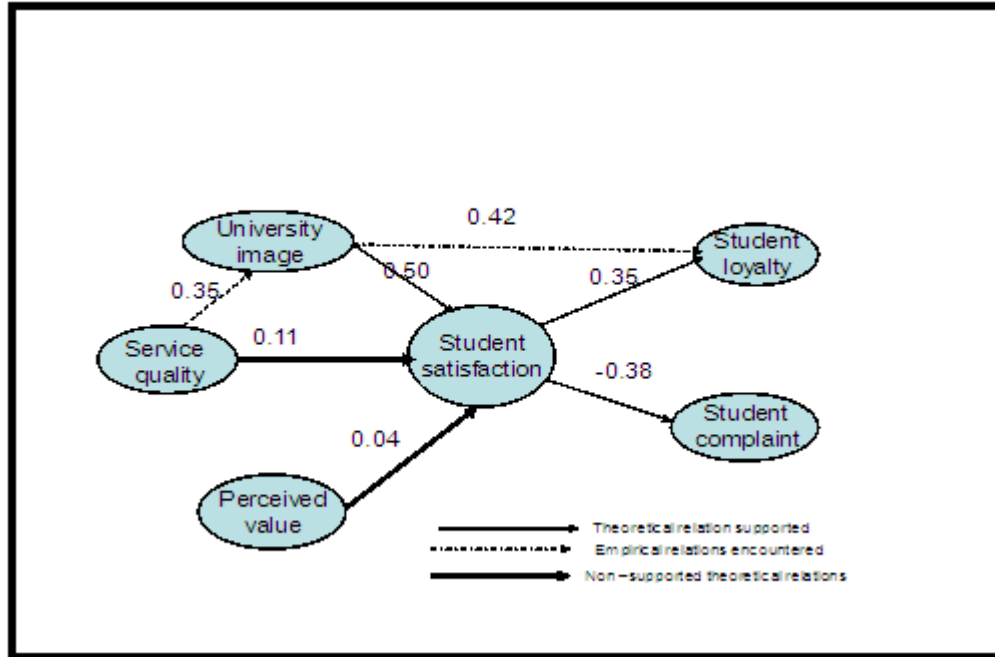


Table II presents the composed reliability of each of these constructs, that is the level of internal consistency for each construct, As can be observed, all constructs exceed the minimum reliability level of (0.6) recommended by (Mallhotra&Bricks,2010).

Table II: Construct reliability

| Construct | Item number | Reliability |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Service quality | 19 | 0.90 |
| Satisfaction | 3 | 0.72 |
| Perceived value | 3 | 0.70 |
| Image | 12 | 0.87 |
| Loyalty | 4 | 0.65 |
| Complaint | 3 | 0.62 |

In turn, Table III presents the various structural equations, as well as the determination coefficient (R²) for each equation. From analysis of the determination coefficients of the various structural equations present in Table III, it was found that image has a positive direct effect on satisfaction (0.50), also the image has positive direct effect on loyalty(0.42), table III shows that satisfaction has a positive direct effect on loyalty(0.35) and negative direct effect on complaint(-0.38),while did not show a direct effect to service quality and perceived value on satisfaction.

Table III: Model structural equation

| Structural equations | R ² | T | Sig | Result |
|---------------------------------|----------------|-------|-------|---------------|
| Service quality → Satisfaction | 0.11 | 1.521 | 0.13 | Not supported |
| Perceived value → Satisfaction | 0,036 | 4.739 | 0.589 | Not supported |
| University Image → Satisfaction | 0.50 | 7.089 | 0,005 | Supported |
| Satisfaction → Loyalty | 0.35 | 4.737 | 0,004 | Supported |
| Satisfaction → Complaint | -0.38 | 4.802 | 0,004 | Supported |

4. Conclusions and Implications

This study demonstrated that the construct that most influences student satisfaction in higher education is that of image as this has a direct effect of 0.50, In other words if the image of the institution rises or falls by a unit, satisfaction increases or decreases in a proportion of 0.50.

This investigation sheds light on the higher education student satisfaction formation process, showing that image can influence student satisfaction and loyalty, the results encountered by(Alves&Raposo,2010: Helgesen&Nesset,2007).

It is possible to say that to measure and understand university image is very important because of its influence over the student satisfaction and loyalty formation process. If Syrian higher education institutions have to compete through image, the first step to take is to measure the university image held by students, The second step should be to ascertain how the constructed image is formed and how it can be modified in order to better reflect the intended image.

The results also showed that customer satisfaction has a positive impact on customer satisfaction and a negative effect on customer complaint, This means that customer satisfaction plays an important role in keeping the customers and reduce the rates of Switching, so the Syrian universities wishing to achieve competitive advantage through customer satisfaction must be focus on the determinants of student satisfaction such as service quality by narrowing the gap between the expectations of the student and perception, And promote the concept of perceived value of the service through seminars, workshops, show samples of university students who excelled in the labor market and higher studies.

In this way, this research contributes towards deepening the knowledge about Student satisfaction and its importance for higher education institutions in retaining current students and attracting new students.

5. Research limitation and Future Research

In this paper, the effect of price has not been studied as determine of student satisfaction, so a future area must search in the role of price and other determinants such as expectation and past experience, and should extend this work to include the comparison between the level of student satisfaction at several universities, the reliability level of complaint and loyalty measure was lower than other measures, Hence, a future area of research is to repeat this study, trying to find alternative indicators to measure the constructs.

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