

## Marketing Practices in Higher Education: Case of the Cadi Ayyad University of Marrakech in Morocco

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## **Marketing Practices in Higher Education: Case of the Cadi Ayyad University of Marrakech in Morocco**

### **Abstract:**

Today, we have a new revolutionary vision of implementing a relationship marketing strategy. Increasing competition in education has forced universities to retain students, which, according to Ryals (2002), has had a good impact on the university's ability to retain them (Elliot & Healy, 2001). The objective of this article is to present a review of the literature on the antecedents of student loyalty, and more precisely in higher education by proposing an explanatory model of different variables such as perceived quality of service, satisfaction, engagement and student loyalty to examine the set of relationships

The methodology was based on a survey methodology on a sample of 84 students using a questionnaire distributed via social networks, on the likert 7-point scale using the PLS approach to analyze the results, to the value of relationship marketing and the history of student loyalty in the Moroccan context. A sample of students from the Cadi Ayyad University of Marrakech was used to conduct an exploratory study and a confirmatory study to validate all hypotheses.

The results show that engagement is the most influencing factor, primarily because of its direct and powerful relationship with loyalty. The rest of the factors have only an indirect effect on loyalty and direct relationships in the following: QSP to satisfaction, satisfaction to engagement, as assumed and confirmed.

**Keywords:** relationship marketing, student loyalty, Higher education

**JEL Classification:** M30

**Paper Type:** Empirical Research

## 1. Introduction

Clearly, in light of the literature review, the relational loyalty approach is important for establishing, developing, and maintaining good relationships (Berry, 1983; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Marketing thinking has focused on the relational approach since the 1990s, with many companies adopting loyalty as a defensive marketing strategy. The main interest for these companies was to identify sources of improvement in loyalty effectiveness.

In the marketing literature, loyalty is approached according to the behavioural dimension. In order to understand the process of building loyalty, it is necessary to know the different explanatory theories of this concept according to each school of thought.

In marketing, several theories have explained the construction of loyalty, starting with satisfaction (Oliver, 1980 and 1993), and commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), followed by attachment (Lacoeuilhe, 2000), in order to explain the formation of loyalty according to a process that forms a relational chain (Aurier et al., 2001; Aurier and N'Goala, 2010). Finally, the key variables that form the basis of the relationship constitute one of the strongest theories explaining the concept of fidelity (Palmatier et al., 2007).

Although the concept of relationship marketing has been influencing marketing practices and academic research in several fields and industries, it is largely ignored by higher education institutions (Henning-Thurau, Langer, & Hansen, 2001).

Always a concern of service firms, many universities use the relational approach to loyalty to increase their competitiveness, a consequence of the increasingly fierce competition. For that reason, universities should seek the satisfaction of their students as by improving the quality of their services to their main customers and think of them as main customers are their students (Nguyen T. 2012).

Like the higher education sector in Morocco, competition is intensifying and students are constantly seeing a wider range of providers. This competitiveness is due to an uncontrolled and unbalanced quantitative growth in enrollments. The fragmentation of supply into a multitude of small institutions [Word Express (2005)] followed by an increase in demand means that students can choose to stay or leave their institutions at the end of each year or academic cycle.

Since no university excluded from this, it is appropriate to investigate the expectations of the clientele in order to improve its competitiveness and the quality of its services. It is therefore necessary to know the determinants and results of customer satisfaction, which remains a major challenge and a critical management problem (Bloemer and Schroöder O. 2002).

Although student performance is not investigated as a fundamental product of consumer behaviour, student behaviour can certainly be studied from the perspective of consumer performance. A student is also a consumer - despite the special nature of this description due to the nature of education. He consumes educational services like any other and can therefore be studied as a consumer of educational services.

According to Oliver (1999), fidelity is a process that combines cognition, conation, affect, and client behaviour. According to Henning-Thurau, Langer and Hansen, (2001), loyalty requires the development of a strong relationship with students that provides the financial basis for future academic activities.

As such, student loyalty represents a competitive advantage for universities for a dual purpose:

- Retaining current students is cheaper than attracting new students.
- Student loyalty can lead to positive results after graduation because these students will contribute to improving the image of their academic institution either through electronic word of mouth (social networks) or through their financial contributions and by offering job offers to new graduates.

In order to understand the construction of fidelity, we will focus on the variables of the relational chain. To this end, we will deepen each of the key concepts of the chain, which are the determinants of the customer relationship, namely: satisfaction, commitment, service quality.

## **2. Literature Review**

Since the 1980s, relationship marketing has been in vogue. Levitt (1983) described relationship marketing by referring to marriage to say that "one-night stands are over" and "marriage is necessary".

Anderson (1995) pointed out that when the relationship between buyer and seller is good, the focus on relationship marketing is mainly based on the principle that a business is more successful, thus expanding the concept of traditional marketing and creating relationships to build customer loyalty.

Grönroos (1996) has emphasized the importance of relationship marketing in the business that major changes in business philosophy may be required unless relationship marketing is adopted, otherwise the business cannot survive with increasing competition in this new business reality. In this perspective, several authors have confirmed the importance of customer loyalty as an indispensable concept in this approach (Payne, Christopher, Ballantyne, 1994; Payne & Frow, 2000).

Jamal (2004) has considered client loyalty as the ability of the firm to keep its customers. Thus Buttle and Ahmad (2001) point out that client loyalty has been defined as a mirror image of client attrition, if client attrition is low for the firm it means that the level of loyalty is high.

It was in 1983 that Berry introduced "relationship marketing" in the academic world by analyzing the relationship between buyers and sellers. According to Hansen and Thureau (2000), relationship marketing will soon be mature, Proença and Fernandes (2005) found that relationship marketing in higher education has been dominating discussions and debates in marketing literature.

Today the education sector deserves the most attention, with increased competition and mature markets, yet it is easy to understand the education sector acting as an economic market.

Genell and Czarniawska (2002) found that increased competition has forced educational institutions to move from government-funded focus groups to self-funded organizations.

In general, commodification has transformed the nature of the education sector, a sector that has accepted commercial practices, so the evolution of the education sector has changed people's minds in such a way that they have begun to perceive the sector as a market.

This commodification and the emergence of competition revealed the reality of marketing in educational institutions and their relational approach.

It seems that common sense dictates that understanding the customer and maintaining a special relationship with them is vitally important in this new world economy.

The concept of relational marketing finds the most fertile ground in organizations that offer a service to grow, which has led to a very important concept which is consumer loyalty.

Loyalty research has been contributing to relationship marketing for decades, encompassing different markets, customer loyalty is similar to a student's loyalty by higher education organizations when it comes to a student's loyalty program.

As a result, several theories have sought to find an intersection between approaches to marketing and education, Tinto (1975) found that the concept of a student-customer evolves from the classical work in the institution. The work of Hennig-Thureau, Langer and Hansen (2001), proposed a model of a quality-based student loyalty relationship.

Service providers have noticed increased competition in their sector. Among these sectors, education deserves the most attention. From mature markets such as Europe and America to emerging markets in Morocco, it is easy to see the education sector acting as a niche economy.

Genell and Czarniawska (2002) have pointed out that educational institutions have moved from government-funded think tanks to self-funded institutions due to increased competition. This shift entered people's minds in such a way that they naturally began to consider education as a market.

Merchandising is transforming the nature of the sector as it begins to accept business ethics and business practices. This commodification and increasing levels of competition, as well as the social and economic aspects associated with low enrollment and drop-out rates, have revealed the reality of marketing in educational institutions and their relational approach.

It seems that common sense dictates that understanding the customer and maintaining a close relationship with them is extremely important in this new global economy. And it is in service delivery companies that this approach to the marketing relationship finds the most fertile ground for development, because in these organizations, there is a higher level of personal contact with emotional commitment, and the difficulty, from the client's point of view, of evaluating a large number of service providers.

The greatest result of full-fledged relationship marketing is the concept of consumer loyalty. The pursuit of customer loyalty is very similar to what is sought by educational institutions when it comes to a student's loyalty program. Loyalty studies have been part of marketing literature for centuries, embracing many different topics and markets. Similarly, the theories about what keeps a student client in the institution have evolved since Tinto's classic work (1975).

## **2.1. Perceived Service Quality**

Quality of service is considered a key competitive factor for companies, competition is becoming more intense, and today's customers demand the best quality which dominates economic profitability. Therefore, it is a question of understanding customer perceptions and expectations in order to please them. According to Langer, Henning-Thurau, and Hansen (2001), in which the perception of service quality, and commitment are the main elements taken into account when studying the relationship between educational institutions and the students loyalty to their academic institutions.

As a result, Henning-Thurau, Langer and Hansen believe that fidelity after graduation is the main goal of educational institutions. However, their study does not include either the long-term processes by which students generate loyalty to their educational institution; or the concept of satisfaction which is a significant factor in other studies of long-term relationships.

In higher education the quality of services in educational relations is defined on the basis of people rather than equipment (Thomas, 1978), several authors have found that university staff members are more autonomous than employees in other service sectors because of greater autonomy in interacting with and assisting students (Tang et Zairi 1998).

In order to assess the quality of services in higher education, it is necessary to rely on human interaction within the faculty.

Perceived service quality is well-defined as a judgment and attitude about the superiority of service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1988). Perceived service quality is definite as the customer expects from the company, and satisfaction is the result of a comparison between expected and actual performance.

According to Zeithaml (2000), perceived value is seen as the assessment of perceptions of what is received or given by a product or service and its usefulness. In higher education this assessment of the value of the service by the student is based on the benefits of the service provided by the university over and above the costs for the acquisition and use of the service provided by the university.

Several authors have empirically confirmed that the overall perception of the value of the service by the student is related to the satisfaction of the student using the service (Hellier and

et al., 2003; Peterson and Yang, 2004; Wen and et al. 2005; Parvez and Akbar, 2009 Kunanusorn, A., & Puttawong, D. 2015)The value perceived by students thus affects student satisfaction directly.

## **2.2. Student satisfaction**

The analysis of the individual satisfaction (transactional or relational) of the consumer, in the study of his behaviour, has become an essential research pole (Moutte J. 2007).

Customer satisfaction results from this fact; from the confrontation between expectations and perceptions for each aspect of the service. For its management, it is important to understand where satisfaction and dissatisfaction come from. For this reason, it is a major concern for effective organizations (Gauthier B. 2001). Customer satisfaction is therefore achieved when the level of service quality is greater than or equal to the customer's expectations.

According to Oliver and swan, 1989, the definition of satisfaction has used the emotional and affective aspect of the customer, which has evolved with a customer's experience of using goods or services. According to Churchill and Ruckert (1984), the concept of satisfaction is of paramount importance in understanding the relationship between channels. However, Geyskens (1999) confirms that there is no trade-off regarding the measurement of customer satisfaction and the conceptualization of customer satisfaction, satisfaction is a foundation of commitment (Michell, Reast and Lynch 1998).

Several authors have studied the degree of satisfaction. When the level of satisfaction is really high, the effect of outcomes is positive, allowing them to enjoy learning and living a comfortable life, and to show attitude and attitude. Treat universities well, particularly in terms of student loyalty (Puttawong and Kunanusorn, 2015; Mohamad and Awang, 2009; Zaini, Mansor, Yusof and Sarkawi, 2019).

However, improving student loyalty and satisfaction is vital to the success of higher education organizations. Student loyalty has become a priority issue for universities, Annamdevula, 2016; Yusof, Zaini and Mansor, (2020) loyalty varies among students due to their background, age, and those taking different courses.

Student satisfaction is very important in retaining students even in for-profit institutions, sometimes student dissatisfaction leads to students' full university bounty which in turn leads to their intention to stay or leave the institution, According to Thomas (2011) student satisfaction has a very important antecedent of student engagement because student satisfaction or dissatisfaction can lead to student commitment or attrition (De Shields & Kara, 2004).

According to Douglas et al. (2008) in higher education, there is a strong relationship between student satisfaction and loyalty. When a student has a choice, the link between satisfaction and commitment is strong.

## **2.3. Student Commitment**

Several studies have shown that the inclusion of engagement in relationship marketing is very important for costumer loyalty (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Gundlach, Achhrol, & Mentzer, 1995; Hunt &, Morgan, 1994). According to Tinto (1993,1975), student engagement is determined by a student's degree of integration, both academic and social. Thus, engagement refers to the match between the student's skills, abilities and value system and the expectations, requirements and values of the university.

Improving student engagement with the university has become a top priority for higher education institutions, and several authors have stated that engagement with the university is the foundation of a good relationship and an essential factor in the concept of loyalty (Garbarino and Johnson 1999; Pritchard, Havits and Howard 1998 and Fullerton 2003).

## 2.4. Student loyalty

Duffy (2003) indicated that customer loyalty is the behaviour of consumers who have relationships with institutions and who use their products and services. Customer loyalty is reflected in the fact that they recommend others to purchase products and services (Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1996).

Nonetheless, Cronin and Taylor (1992) pointed out that customer satisfaction has a greater impact on customer loyalty than service quality. Zeithaml et al. (1996) found that a good perception of service quality has an impact on student behaviour.

According to Henning-Thurau, Langer and Hansen (2001), What improves student loyalty is the quality of teaching and students' sense of commitment to the institution Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, (2016) concluded that loyal students help the institution's staff determine good promotion, development and long-term success.

According to Schwartzman (2003) the problem of university dropout has become a concern influencing the university. In addition, there are a number of problems in universities such as vacancies and a decrease in the number of lower-class students as well as criminal behaviour. Berger and Lyon (2005) pointed out that loyalty is considered a behavioural factor for student loyalty as is the capability of an educational organization to effectively graduate students who are currently studying there.

For example, Kotler and Fox (1994) stated that loyalty of enrolled students is critical to attracting and recruiting new students.

"Theoretically and institutionally, student loyalty has become a very difficult task," says Herzog (2005).

As a result, the loyalty of students by universities is vital, as universities reconsider their relationships with students as valuable. This is leading to a transformation of the structural beliefs of the university.

Student loyalty is the relative strength relationship between individual attitudes and use of the service that continues until graduation, influenced by student commitment. According to Wahyuningsih (2007), Loyalty in higher education, particularly in universities, is a positive commitment by the student to the university's services that he or she received during the course.

## 3. Conceptual Model of Student loyalty

In this article, and based on the literature review on relational marketing, a model has been developed that integrates the essential constructs to explain student loyalty, namely student engagement, student satisfaction and perceived quality (see figure 1).

Perceived quality is considered to be the variable that represents a key factor in the effectiveness of relational marketing to differentiate it from concepts (Hougaard and Bjerre 2003). In our case, perceived quality represents the relationship between student expectations and university performance.

This is how we can formulate our first research hypothesis:

H1 : Perceived quality has a strong influence on student satisfaction.

Several authors find that satisfaction is a key variable in understanding loyalty, a variable that allows customers to make a deep assessment of the company's performance against its expectations. According to Tse & Wilton (1998) student satisfaction is closely related to service quality, satisfaction is the customer's response to the service provided. Oliver (1989) indicated that client satisfaction is fair because it yields value.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) point out that consumers will feel satisfied and dissatisfied because of the services provided and the money paid.

When the service provided is more than the price paid, the client will feel satisfied; when the service provided is less than the price paid, the client will feel dissatisfied. Furthermore, customer satisfaction is not always related to complaints, which means that consumers who never complain are not necessarily satisfied (Kitapci & Taylan, 2009).

In higher education, there are few studies on student satisfaction due to its complexity (Marzo Navarro, Pedraja Iglesias and Rivera Torres, 2005). In our article, satisfaction is seen as a predecessor of student commitment, which exerts considerable influence.

This is how we can formulate our first research hypothesis:

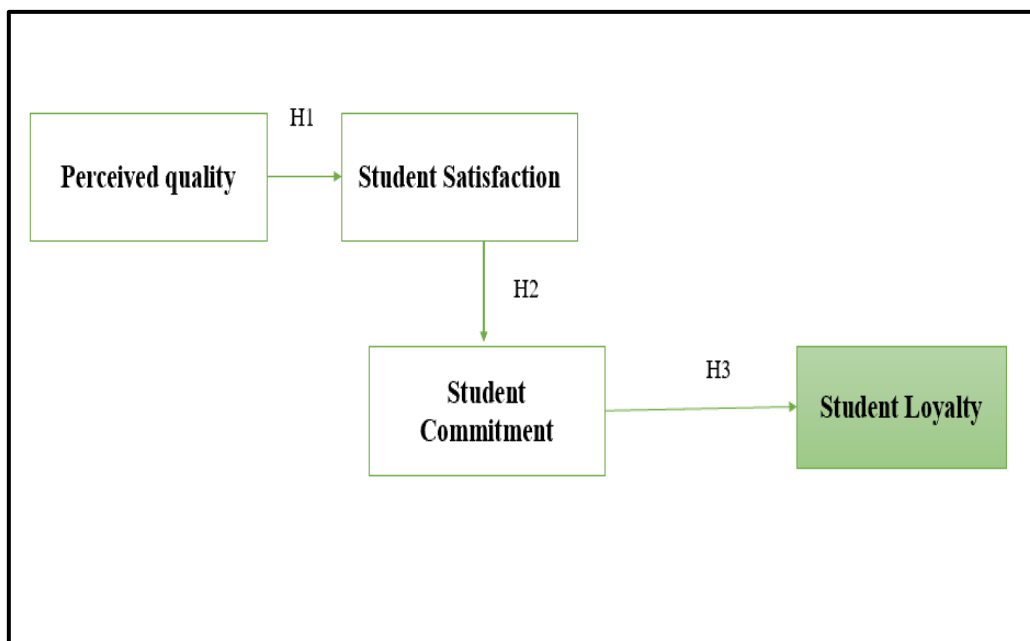
H2 : Satisfaction has a strong influence on student commitment.

According to Fullerton (2003) commitment is defined as a basic construction of a quality relationship. According to Pritchard, Havitz & Howard (1999), commitment represents a direct effect in the formation of loyalty, in our article loyalty is only realized with the commitment of the student.

This is how we can formulate our first research hypothesis:

H 3: Commitment has a strong influence on student loyalty.

*Figure 1: Proposed model*



*Source: Authors*

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The development of this study required the use of a quantitative research method. Data were provided through a survey questionnaire. This questionnaire contained 14 closed-ended questions with pre-set responses according to the 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). All of this was done in an attempt to highlight the level of consistency of respondents by, thus making the analysis and measurement of the data easier. Non-probability convenience sampling was constructed over a 5-day period.

Our quantitative study was collected through a self-administered questionnaire via social networks, in total we had 84 responses from students belonging to different Moroccan higher education institutions.

The study was developed in stages, first the confirmatory factor analysis to test the measurement module and then we performed the structural model test by adopting the systematic analysis by (HAIR, 2019).



The choice of the PLS approach as the analysis method allowed us to focus on the object of their research, while freeing us from technical constraints. According to Wong (2013), the advantage of its application is that it is more flexible to be used in cases where the sample size is small (Fernandes, 2012) (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004), so applications have little theory available and predictive accuracy is paramount.

## 5. Findings

The distribution of this questionnaire was only done online, mostly on social networks and messaging applications. In addition, it remained available for 5 days. The questionnaire was completed by 57 people, 59% of whom were female and 41% male. Most of these people (64%) were between 17 and 20 years old, 28% were between 21 and 24 years old, 10% were between 25 and 28 years old. None of these individuals were under 17 years old or over 29 years old. Finally, it should be remembered that all students belong to the Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakech, Morocco.

*Tableau 1 : The Measurement model*

Variables	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Perceived quality service	0.936	0.909	0.787
Student Satisfaction	0.874	0.786	0.698
Student Commitment	0.904	0.840	0.759
Student Loyalty	0.920	0.884	0,741

*Source: Authors analysis*

For the criterion of composite reliability, the values of all the latent variables respect the threshold of 0.7 and are considered as excellent, concerning the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Malhotra, 1999) the values of all the variables are between 0.7 and 0.9 which suggests a very satisfactory reliability. Thus, convergent validity was ensured, as all the AVEs show values higher than the 0.5 level, indicating that the variables explain more than 50% of the variance of their corresponding items.

*Tableau 2: Results of hypothesis test analysis*

	$\beta$	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/S TDEV )	P Values	R <sup>2</sup>	Decision
Perceived Quality-> Student satisfaction	0.732	0.097	7.563	0.000	0.536	Acceptée
Student satisfaction -> student commitment	0.819	0.060	13.681	0.000	0.670	Acceptée
Student commitment-> student loyalty	0.835	0.066	12.574	0.000	0.697	Acceptée

*Source: Authors analysis*

Table 2 shows the results of the path coefficients, t-values and hypothesis test. Our model contains four latent variables, namely perceived service quality, student loyalty, student satisfaction, and student engagement.

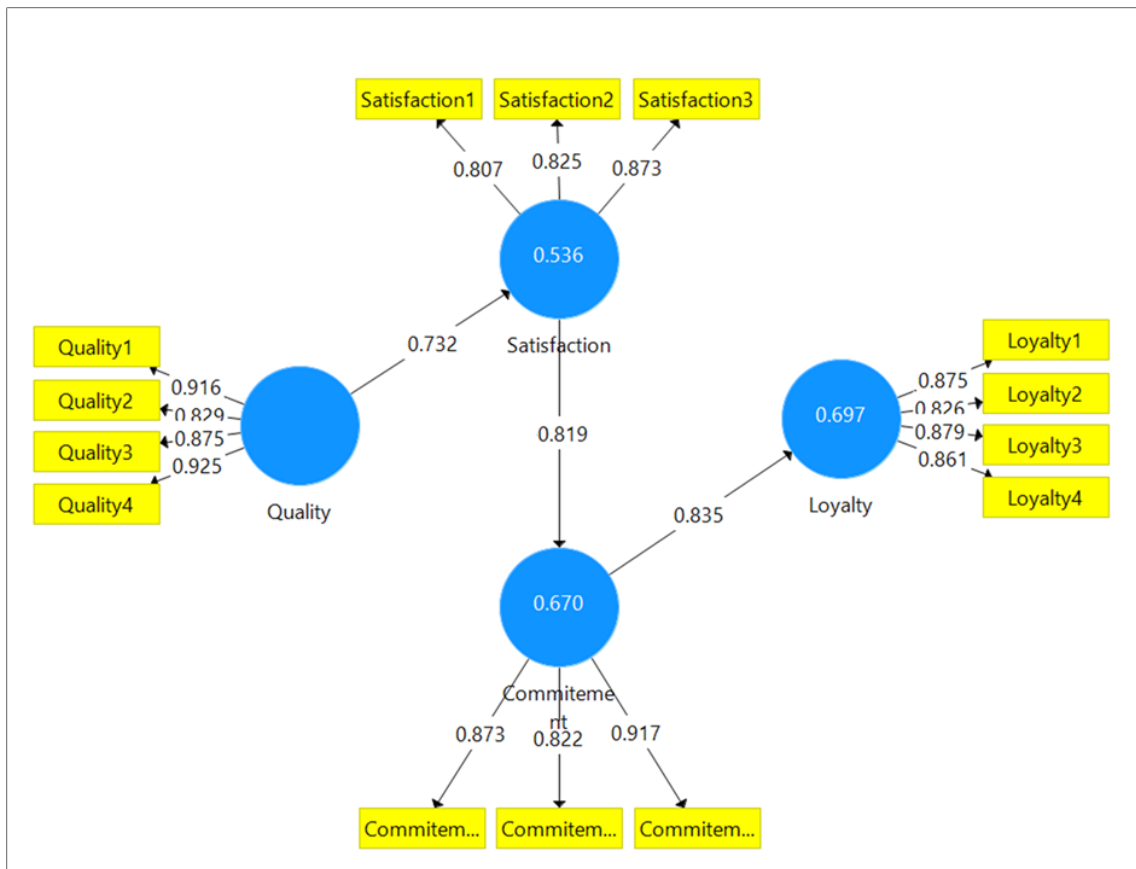
The results of the bootstrapping revealed a significant impact of the perceived quality of service on student satisfaction ( $\beta=0.732$ ;  $T=0.000$ ) therefore the H1 hypothesis is accepted.

Regarding the relationship between student satisfaction and engagement, the results confirm the strong and significant effect of the relationship ( $\beta=0.819$ ;  $T=0.000$ ), therefore we accept the hypothesis H2.

Thus the results indicate that student engagement has a positive and significant impact on student loyalty ( $\beta=0.835$ ;  $T=0.000$ ), therefore the H3 hypothesis will be retained.

The coefficient of determination R<sup>2</sup> was examined, The model explains 53.6% of the variance in satisfaction, 67% of the variance in engagement, and 69.7% of the variance in student loyalty.

**Figure 2: The structural model of student Loyalty**



*Source: Authors analysis*

Figure 2 represents the final model with statistically very high path loading coefficients greater than 0.7. The model presents the relationships between perceived service quality and student satisfaction, satisfaction and engagement and engagement and loyalty.

## 6. Discussion

The main objective of the study was to measure student loyalty in higher education institutions by examining the main factors that influence loyalty. QPS, satisfaction, and engagement were examined in a model that was assumed to be sufficiently comprehensive to explain loyalty.

A sample of students from the Cadi Ayyad University of Marrakech was used to conduct an exploratory study and a confirmatory study to validate all hypotheses.

The results show that engagement is the most influential factor, mainly because of its direct and strong relationship with loyalty. The other factors have only indirect effects on loyalty and direct relationships in the following order: QSP to satisfaction, satisfaction to engagement, as assumed and confirmed. This variable is the key determinant of student satisfaction under certain conditions (participation motivations, implications). Our research also confirms that the perceived value of the reward contributes in a positive and very significant way to the construction of student satisfaction.

Student satisfaction helps to develop a certain preference and a favorable attitude towards higher education institutions.

Satisfaction is the key determinant of student engagement, regardless of the research context, the sector of activity, the student's profile or the time. This variable positively and significantly influences engagement.

It should be noted that we are beginning to integrate in addition to the concept of commitment: "loyalty can be defined as a deep commitment to purchase again the product or service he prefers, consistently in the future, despite the situational influences and marketing effects that can induce brand changes" (Oliver, 1997), in our context of higher education, the commitment of students depends mainly on the satisfaction of the students, The academic loyalty thus depends directly on the commitment he shows in the academic context.

In many respects, these results are similar to those of Henning-Thurau, Langer and Hansen (2001) and Rojas-Méndez et al. (2009), but differ significantly from those of Raposo and Alves (2007), Nettet and Helgesen (2007) who, conflicting to our assertion, found that the influence of satisfaction is straight reflected in the creation of loyalty. Like the SERVQUAL scale, where items dealing with interactions between people are central, in our study most of the constructions reflect the various communications between students and academic staff, thus underlining the importance of contact in service relationships in higher education institutions. The study found that the main factor influencing student loyalty is engagement. Rojas-Méndez et al (2009) findings confirm our results that perceived service quality is the antecedent of student satisfaction, and also is the antecedent of engagement, and the result of student loyalty.

## 7. Conclusion

This article brings together the synthesis of the literature review on the relationship between student satisfaction, engagement, perceived quality and student loyalty. By engaging with students, educational institutions have a significant positive relationship on student loyalty (Helen & Ho, 2011).

The study found that engagement plays an integral role in student loyalty. However, the study showed that satisfaction can have a direct effect on student engagement. Therefore, the study showed that there is an effect between the perceived quality of service and student satisfaction, particularly on student satisfaction.

The objective of this article was to propose a model in order to develop such literature and to strengthen the theoretical reference to the subject, new possibilities of study arise from the suggestions made concerning the limits of this research.

We suggest that the new research be conducted for other realities or in a vertical manner. As the importance of student Loyalty has been shown to play a key role in the development of loyalty issues such as perceived quality, satisfaction and commitment, we suggest a study on the perceptions of these individuals regarding their role in a strategic policy of relationship maintenance.

The study was conducted to examine the relationships between the concepts of the student loyalty model. The results of the study confirm the literature that service quality influences satisfaction which influences engagement, these variables are the antecedents of student loyalty

and the result of student loyalty. The study develops a conceptual model of student loyalty and shows that educational service quality, satisfaction and engagement are the main determinants of student loyalty, confirming all the hypotheses.

Researchers can continue this research by testing the model in context through quantitative research. In addition to the variables in this research, there are many other factors that affect student loyalty in private universities, such as communication, student complaints, image effect, reputation and other factors that remain to be further investigated.

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