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Student Satisfaction with Learning Experience and Its Impact on Likelihood Recommending University: Net Promoter Score Approach

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

As a dramatic shift has occurred in higher education, it has become imperative for administrators to understand the underlying factors affecting it. Also, recent trends in college enrollment suggest that a better understanding of student college experience--academic and non-academic--and satisfaction is required if universities are to restore growth to their institutions and keep their doors open. Customer satisfaction is considered essential for the long-term success of businesses (Al-Adwan & Al-Horani, 2019). This is because satisfied customers build trust and develop positive intentions that lead to purchasing again more from the same firm and/or more of the same brand, as well as product recommendations and positive WOM (Anderson & Mittal, 2000). Universities, like all organizations, have realized the importance and relevance of student satisfaction for their long-term survival. The research also shows that getting recommended by current customers (graduates of the universities) is an important source for growing any business, and universities are no exception.

Recently, Net Promoter Score (NPS) has gained popularity and has been adopted by many firms to measure customer satisfaction and loyalty based on their experience and the likelihood that customers recommend the product, service, or the firm's brand to friends and relatives. This study examines university students' satisfaction with various aspects of their college learning experience, recommending a university as measured by Net Promoter Score (NPS), and the influence of factors related to student satisfaction on the likelihood of recommending the university. The specific research objectives are to determine: 1) students' satisfaction with their educational experience in meeting their expectations at the university, 2) students' likelihood of recommending the university to high school students promoting the university and increasing its *NPS*, and whether the likelihood of recommending and *NPS* are impacted by students' gender, class level, and college, and 3) the relationship between student satisfaction and *NPS* to identify the relevant satisfaction factors that influence the overall *NPS*.

A survey was designed to examine the research objectives (ROs), for which questions were

compiled from focus groups and in-depth interviews with current students, and the relevant literature. The survey included the most relevant nine factors to students' learning experience and cultural experience that would influence students' satisfaction with their college education. To measure the likelihood to recommend the NPS, the respondents were asked, "how likely is it that you will recommend the university to high school students", which is measured with an 11-point scale, ranging from 0=not at all likely to 10=extremely likely. The survey also included demographic questions. The survey was administered to undergraduate students to a sample of randomly selected 633 students, accounting for roughly 25% of current undergraduate students at a private university in the mid-section of the United States. The survey link was sent to all 633 students via email and a \$20 Starbucks gift card as an incentive. This method produced a total of 219 usable responses, at a 34.6% response rate.

The results show that students were satisfied with the factors included in the study, where students had the highest satisfaction with feeling supported by faculty and staff. The study also found that NPS is -.40, indicating that students are not likely to recommend this university to HS students. The comparisons by demographics found that female students have a positive NPS, but male students have a negative NPS. The study also found significant variations for NPS by class level within the university. In addition, the NPSs are much below the desired industry benchmarks (NPS Benchmark, 2021), requiring attention to improve them. The regression analysis identified five significant factors that predict the likelihood of recommending this university to high school students, four from educational experiences and one from cultural experience.

These findings offer some insights for university administrators for designing strategies to improve student satisfaction and receiving recommendations. Our findings suggest that the NPS is a useful lens to view the relationship between a student's experience and the likelihood that they would recommend the institution to others. We believe this type of research is extremely important and timely given that, as most industry insiders expect, the number of college students could decline by 15 percent over the next three to five years (e.g., Kline, 2019; Berrett, 2020), placing an even greater emphasis on effective student satisfaction for recruitment practices.

Keywords: *Student satisfaction, Net Promoter Score, Getting recommended, University experience*

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