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### **EVALUATING THE INFLUENCE OF SERVICE MARKETING MIX ON STUDENT SATISFACTION: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

*Marketing is crucial in reaching the consumer market, and service marketing is a fundamental mechanism for this. Integrating more marketing elements into plans can improve results. This article examines the relationship between the service marketing mix and student satisfaction at Bodoland University. The study used a quantitative approach with questionnaires to collect data from 300 third and fourth semester students. Analysis showed that physical evidence was the most positive factor for satisfaction, while price had a negative impact. The research provided insights into the strengths and weaknesses of Bodoland University's marketing process and recommendations for improvement.*

*Keywords: Service marketing mix, 7Ps, student's satisfaction.*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The world is witnessing many advancements and changes in its economic, social, political, and cultural systems. The continued growth in various fields has resulted in new inventions that benefit people across the globe. With the service industry playing a vital role in overall development, the provision of services has become a focus of interest for those interested in improvement and growth.

As different countries seek to establish stronger connections between universities and the various sectors of society, universities are working to promote their services and maintain high levels of student satisfaction. According to Salinas and Martinez (2007), student satisfaction with universities has become a crucial aspect for educational institutions, as their survival and success is largely dependent on the satisfaction of their students.

In response to the growing importance of student satisfaction for the success of universities, it is crucial to find ways to quantify it. This will enable the institutions to understand how they compare to their competitors and track their performance over time. The relationship between quality and satisfaction is intertwined, as satisfaction is determined by comparing the expectations of a service with what is actually delivered. Quality can be evaluated by examining the success of the service in meeting its goals. The success of any program or organization is largely dependent on maximizing satisfaction levels. (Lago, López, Municio, Ospina and Vergara 2013, p. 37).

As the number of public and private universities continues to grow, it is imperative for higher education institutions to stand out and gain a competitive edge. This requires ensuring student satisfaction, which has become the focus of marketing efforts. Organizations understand the significance of satisfied customers, as they are likely to hold positive opinions of the brand, spread positive word of mouth, make repeat purchases, and show loyalty. (Spreng, MacKenzie, & Olshavsky, 1996).

The focus of this paper is the examination of Bodoland University through a case study. The problem of Bodoland University with the significant decline of the number of students enrolled in the university between the period from 2018 to 2020, based on the statistics and official data obtained from the annual report of University.

The data were as follows: in 2018-19 academic year the number of new students enrolled in the University is 934; in the year 2019-2020 the number of new students indicated a decline to reach 816.

The data indicates that there is 12.63% decrease in the enrollment rate. The fluctuation motivated the researcher to carry out this study to explore the reasons behind the fluctuations in the numbers during this particular period.

## *Stochastic Modelling and Computational Sciences*

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The researcher wanted to find out how the university advertised its services to students and what marketing techniques it used. The study was based on the marketing mix and was conducted at Bodoland University. This was done because the university was in a state of either instability or success.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Service Marketing Mix (SMM)**

Marketing tools can be utilized by individuals to achieve promotional objectives for products and effectively reach the target market to generate desired responses. (Kotler, 2000). The use of the service marketing mix has become crucial in creating educational programs due to the shift of higher education being perceived as a service and students as consumers. This change is evident in academic literature such as Bringle & Hatcher (2000), Marine & Gibbs (2008), Ng & Forbes (2009), Kotler (1972), and Clayson et al. (2005).

Young (2005) emphasizes the significance of timely development of an effective service marketing mix as a crucial factor in targeting the expected market and satisfying the needs of students for a successful marketing plan. In marketing, the physical product, which comprises of the four elements of product, price, place and promotion, is identified as the product marketing mix (Blythe, 2008). In 1960, McCarthy proposed a more simplified and comprehensive version of the 4Ps model, known as the 7Ps model, which includes the additional elements of people, physical evidence, and processes.

Booms and Bitner (1981) proposed the 7Ps model as a comprehensive framework for service marketing, including the marketing process in education. This model added elements such as process, people, and physical evidence to the original 4Ps. Blythe (2008) acknowledges the 7Ps model as especially pertinent to service marketing. Ng and Forbes (2009) also recognized the model's relevance to education marketing.

#### **Program (Producer)**

In the context of service marketing, the "product" element is characterized by its intangible nature. When referring to education, it is called the "program" that is given to students. Holensen (2010, p. 393) states that in the process of exchange, the product is the primary point of focus, which denotes what the supplier offers to potential customers in return for something that the supplier perceives as being of equivalent or greater value.

Based on its tangible durability, products are classified into non-durable goods, durable goods, and services by marketers (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Within the educational context, curricula and students are the products. The academic programs that are offered represent the primary focus of the marketing campaign in these institutions, with the program itself being the key decision to be made by higher education institutions.

Educational service institutions place great importance on developing education programs that align with the preferences of their consumers, who are primarily students (Hoyer and McInnis, 2001). Within higher education, there are three primary service activities: teaching, research, and community service. These educational programs should be designed in a manner that complements the marketing efforts of the educational institutions.

#### **PRICE**

Within the marketing mix, price plays a crucial role in both attracting consumers and generating revenue for enterprises. Price is defined as the value or monetary amount that a buyer pays in exchange for a product or service that is offered by the organization.

As defined by Lamp et al. (2004), "price" refers to the value that is paid in exchange for a good or service. Within the context of educational services, the "price" component relates to the amount that is paid to cover the cost of tuition fees and other daily expenses that are incurred by the students. This price is determined based on the perceived benefits of the educational service being provided.

Agarwal (2006) suggests that pricing strategies have a limited impact on addressing the supply and demand gap in the higher education services market, given the financial constraints faced by educational institutions. On the

## *Stochastic Modelling and Computational Sciences*

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other hand, Kotler (1999) argues that some students may be willing to pay a premium price for receiving high-quality educational services.

Helmsley-Brown and Foskett (2001) observe that some educational institutions charge a high price for a good educational service, while others offer a poor educational service at a high cost.

### **PLACE**

The term "place" pertains to the provision of access to clients via service networks, as well as guaranteeing that educational services are delivered physically and geographically at the appropriate time and location, as noted by Kotler and Fox (1995) and Hannagan (1992), respectively. Additionally, Brassington and Pettitt (2006) suggest that place is about creating access to customers through service networks.

Placing is a marketing mix element that involves all the organization's activities or strategies to make the product accessible to the intended customers, as stated by Kotler in 2004.

An area that has good transportation connections, recreational and medical facilities, and a safe and cultured climate will be attractive to potential students. Additionally, place includes the availability and proximity of on-campus facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, amenities, and housing (Maringe, 2006).

### **PROMOTION**

To communicate the value, educational activities, and benefits of their programs to the target market, educational institutions need to use promotion. Marketing strategies must be employed by educational institutions to deliver their services to the target market. According to Lambs et al (2004), a promotional strategy is a plan that uses promotion elements like advertising, sales promotion, and personal selling.

Promotional tools utilized by universities are guided by the needs and expectations of the student market, as well as other factors of the institution's marketing strategy. Promotion is an important aspect of marketing higher education and can increase awareness and offer advantages for universities. Push and pull strategies can both be employed in the promotion of services by a higher education institution. (Rudd & Mills, 2008; Soedijati, 2006).

Higher education institutions use both direct marketing and promotion through channels such as magazines, websites, and modern access channels to promote their services (Rudd & Mills, 2008). It is crucial for these institutions to have a deep understanding of the student market as the primary consumers in order to develop an effective promotion strategy.

### **PEOPLE**

The success of any service, trade, or business is dependent on its people. Services are created and consumed simultaneously, and the customer experience is customized to meet their needs. According to Goldsmith (1999), the individuals involved in service delivery are crucial. Soedijati and Pratminingsih (2011) contend that the teacher's abilities, skills, and characteristics are fundamental, and having suitable and highly trained personnel is critical to gaining a competitive advantage. Employees must possess personal skills, competency, and knowledge of the proper way to provide the service that customers pay for.

The university's workforce, including employees who engage with potential and current students, is part of this aspect. At the graduate level, the university's reputation is often judged by students based on their perception of the faculty (Cubillo et al., 2006; Ivy, 2001), which could affect their decision to choose the university. Some students may be influenced by the number of faculty members with PhDs, while others may be influenced by the faculty's general academic profile, such as experts in media interviews or other advertisements.

Deem plays a significant role in the provision of higher education services by providing administrative and academic support, which affects the quality of service perceived by students, both directly and indirectly. According to Lin (1999), the goal is to assign the right people to jobs in educational institutions. For instance, the way an employee handles student inquiries over the phone can have a more significant impact on a student's

## *Stochastic Modelling and Computational Sciences*

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decision to enroll in a particular university than comparing the institution's faculty research history, publications, or accolades.

### **PROCESS**

Kotler et al. (2002) suggest that the administrative system through which services are provided by employees to customers is closely associated with service quality. Kaplinsky and Morris (2000) indicate that such a system encompasses a range of activities, including but not limited to record-keeping, teaching, and learning, as well as extracurricular activities.

Effective academic and practical teaching processes, as well as support activities, have a significant impact on student engagement, both in and out of the classroom, and contribute to the overall success of an organization (Harper and Quaye, 2009). The procedures involved in these processes are crucial to maintain the necessary momentum to accomplish both academic and non-academic objectives of both students and institutions. The effective implementation of these procedures is what results in the provision of superior quality services to students.

Encouraging student participation in community learning and group research with faculty creates a mentally engaging service process that fosters students' awareness of their responsibility towards these activities, as opposed to just physical involvement (Koh, 2009). This type of service has a direct impact on student retention, engagement, performance, satisfaction, and trust in the institution, all of which contribute to overall institutional performance (Yorke and Longden, 2004).

### **PHYSICAL EVIDENCE**

In the context of service delivery, physical evidence pertains to the tangible surroundings that enhance service quality and performance (Palmer, 2001). Physical evidence encompasses the institution's location, external appearance, and internal details such as the building's design, study rooms, and academic staff offices, all of which are considered tangible evidence.

According to Kotler and Fox (1995), the initial impression of a student is influenced by physical evidence. Ivy (2004) suggests that tools such as video lectures can also be categorized as physical evidence.

According to Rodney Arambiola and John Hall (2009), the library, computer lab, and chemistry lab are essential components that can elevate students' satisfaction level with the educational institution. To boost reputation and establish a positive image, many institutions advertise their physical infrastructure and facilities through brochures, advertising media, and social networks (Lovelock and Wright, 1999).

The physical environment's distinctive features that affect the quality of service and customer satisfaction are recognized by various service models (Kotler and Keller, 2006; Jain et al., 2013; Teeroovengadum et al., 2016).

### **STUDENT SATISFACTION**

Higher education institutions consider students as a significant source of income. Most educational institutions prioritize achieving student satisfaction as a strategic objective, considering higher education as an essential service and students as customers. (Brown & Mazzarol, 2008; Lee & Anantharaman, 2013). Educational institutions have recognized the significance of customer satisfaction and adopted it as a competitive strategy (Lee & Anantharaman, 2013).

The level of satisfaction that students have with their universities has an impact on their academic performance and the ability of the university to attract more students, making it more competitive (Lee et al., 2000; Sojkin et al., 2012; Tinto, 1993). Measuring student satisfaction is important because it provides insight into the factors that influence their decision-making (Lin & Sun, 2009). Long-term assessment of the educational institution is implied by student satisfaction, as it reflects their overall evaluation of their experiences. (Athiyaman, 1997; Szymanski & Henard, 2001).

## *Stochastic Modelling and Computational Sciences*

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Assessing schools from a student's perspective involves various factors, including all the 7Ps of marketing mix. As a result, this study characterizes student satisfaction as a positive perception that mirrors their complete experience in higher education. Brown and Mazzarol (2008) introduced a two-part satisfaction scale that gauges post-assessment and post-emotion. The researcher in this study modified the scale to address measurement challenges and factor in student expectations.

### **RESEARCH GAP**

Previous literature has conceptualized the traditional service marketing mix, but it lacks sufficient empirical research to validate it. According to Martin (2009), the conventional approach to the marketing mix has limitations, as it has a narrow focus on a uniform model. The conventional 7Ps model may not be appropriate for attaining marketing success in the undergraduate education sector. Therefore, more research is necessary to explore their practical application (Ivy, 2008) and to integrate the concepts and context (Lim et al., 2018).

Previous research on service marketing mix has mainly focused on verifying marketing performance in the commercial sector, with less emphasis on the role of service marketing mix in customer satisfaction and service performance in the higher education sector. Hence, it is crucial to evaluate the students' performance in terms of the knowledge and skills they acquire during their education. It is also vital to consider their satisfaction with the services provided and their likelihood of recommending the institution to others.

Past research on the service marketing mix has highlighted its importance as an input in the service industry. However, the traditional service marketing mix has been criticized for prioritizing the service providers' internal factors over their customers. As a manager, the aim of the service marketing mix should be to fulfill the customers' needs and desires (Kushwaha and Agrawal, 2015). However, various aspects of the service marketing mix that relate to customer-centric behavior arising from the service delivery experience (i.e., service product) remain unexplored.

It is necessary to unify the service marketing mix as both an input and output of customer-oriented service. Therefore, it is crucial to measure both the inputs that the service provider provides and the outputs that the customer receives to reformulate the inputs if necessary. Additionally, the Ps in the service marketing mix cannot be customer-oriented unless they are presented as a product of the service system, as per Kotler (2003).

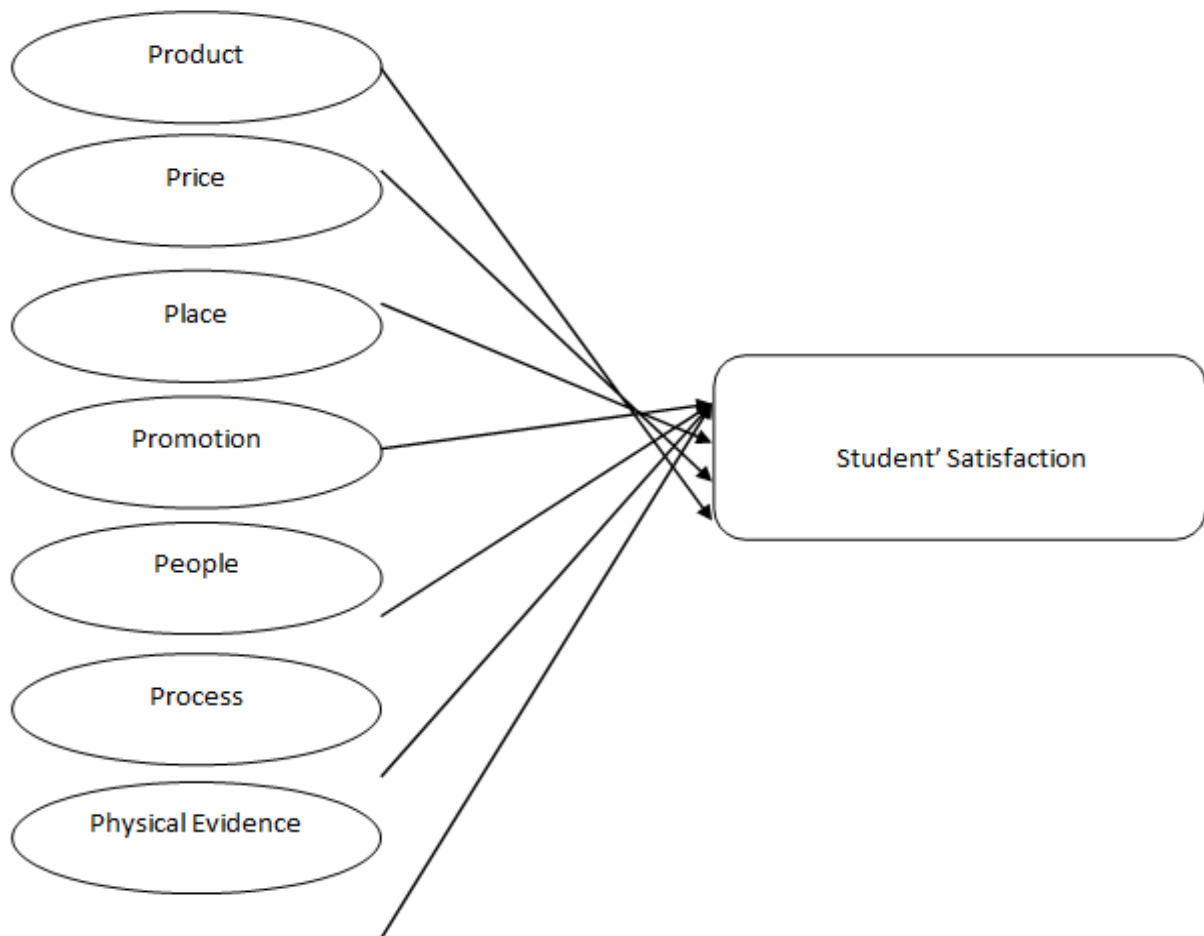
### **OBJECTIVES, FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS**

The goal of the research is to determine the factors that impact student satisfaction, explore how the marketing mix is related to student satisfaction, and identify the specific components of the marketing mix that have either positive or negative effects on student satisfaction.

The author of the paper created a theoretical framework and hypotheses to investigate the link between variables. The study focuses on student satisfaction as the dependent variable and the marketing mix as the independent variable, specifically the 7Pc elements: product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence.

## *Stochastic Modelling and Computational Sciences*

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The researcher developed a set of hypotheses based on the established theoretical framework, which are as follows:

**H1:** The product variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction. **H2:** The price variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction.

**H3:** The place variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction.

**H4:** The promotion variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction. **H5:** The people variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction.

**H6:** The process variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction.

**H7:** The physical evidence variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The selection of the research method for this study, as recommended by Creswell (2012), was determined by both the literature review and the study's objective.

For this study, the researcher chose the quantitative research method because it enabled the formulation of testable hypotheses (Kotler et al., 2016), the analysis of large data sets using multivariate statistical techniques

(Hossler, 1999; Donald et al., 2010), and the testing of relationships between study variables in a specific and transparent way (Borrego et al., 2009).

## *Stochastic Modelling and Computational Sciences*

The survey was administered to students who served as participants and were required to respond to all the queries. The study was conducted at Bodoland University and aimed to sample 300 students enrolled in the third and fourth semesters.

### **TYPE OF ANALYSIS**

To analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire, two methods were used: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The Statistical Package for Social Science Data Editor (SPSS) version 23 was employed to analyze the data.

To fulfill the initial aim, the researchers utilized the Pearson correlation analysis approach to identify the significant association between the marketing mix elements and the level of satisfaction of students at Bodoland University.

The Pearson correlation is a statistical method used to measure the relationship between multiple variables based on their quantitative nature. The researchers utilized this technique because the data collected for the study was in the form of interval level data. This analysis was carried out to determine the impact of one variable on other variables and identify the strongest relationship among the variables related to student satisfaction. The researcher provides a table below to illustrate the analysis method.

**Table 1:** outlines the technique of analysis used by the researcher.

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Tools</b>
Profile of participants	Descriptive analysis
Relationship between variables	Pearson correlation analysis
Dominant factors	Regression analysis

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The researchers utilized regression analysis to determine the primary factor that affects student satisfaction in the Bodoland University. The results revealed that the physical evidence and process factors had significant impacts, with beta values of 0.340 and 0.204, respectively, and a p-value of 0.000.

The results indicate that the factors with the highest influence on student satisfaction at the Bodoland University are physical evidence and people.

Furthermore, this study found that all of the hypotheses were supported.

The findings of hypothesis analysis for individual variables are presented in Table 2.

<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>Results</b>
H1: The product variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction.	0.408
H2: The price variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction.	0.427
H3: The place variable directly and significantly	0.395

<b>Affects student satisfaction.</b>	
H4: The promotion variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction.	0.423
H5: The people variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction.	0.538
H6: The process variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction.	0.575
H7: The physical evidence variable directly and significantly affects student satisfaction.	0.601

The study's objectives were achieved through data analysis that answered the research questions. The analysis aimed to identify which marketing mix components influence student satisfaction at Bodoland University. Results indicate that the physical evidence factor has the most significant positive influence on satisfaction at Bodoland University, with the process factor following closely with positive results in the same direction.

## *Stochastic Modelling and Computational Sciences*

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The positive impact of physical evidence and process factors on the satisfaction level of students at Bodoland University indicates their crucial role in the effective marketing process of the university. This successful outcome can give Bodoland University an advantage over other competitive universities in attracting and retaining students. Physical evidence encompasses the university's location, buildings' internal and external structure, teaching rooms, equipment, and facilities available to students, while process factors include teaching methods, the interaction of staff, and the quality of services offered to students. All of these factors significantly contribute to students' satisfaction at Bodoland University.

The study found that the procedures and services provided by the university staff, such as registration, teaching, examination, evaluation, and student support services, had a significant positive impact on student satisfaction at Bodoland University. This was reflected in the positive result obtained for the process factor, which was found to be the second most influential factor in determining student satisfaction at Bodoland University.

To investigate how the elements of the marketing mix affect overall satisfaction of students at Bodoland University, the study conducted a Pearson's correlation analysis. The analysis revealed a positive relationship between the marketing mix variables and student satisfaction at the university, which supports the researcher's hypotheses and is based on data collected from respondents at Bodoland University.

Upon analyzing the hypotheses for all variables, it was found that all independent variables had a positive relationship with student satisfaction. The degree of positivity varied between variables, but two variables in particular stood out as having the greatest impact: physical evidence and process variables.

Finally, the aim of the study was to draw conclusions, provide suggestions, and make recommendations that could enhance the quality of university services and contribute to the advancement of marketing practices.

Upon analyzing the collected data, the researcher has identified suitable recommendations that can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the marketing process. These recommendations will be presented in the final semester of the study and can be summarized as follows:

- Expanding the range of choices in self-improvement and extracurricular activities that foster students' learning, abilities, passions, and personal growth.
- Establish pricing or fees that correspond with the quality of the marketing services offered.
- Indirect promotion can be achieved by providing excellent services to current students, which can lead to their satisfaction and subsequently encourage them to promote the Bodoland University by referring friends to join.
- Enhance the quality and competence of human resource management (including lecturers and staff) by providing relevant training in their respective fields.
- Maintain consistent behavior and approach towards students who have achieved a high level of satisfaction.

### **CONCLUSION**

The positive results from the study on the impact of marketing mix on student satisfaction demonstrate the effectiveness of marketing strategies in achieving goals. This study can help stakeholders identify and address existing issues, resulting in improved sales revenue and increased enrollment at the Bodoland University. This can also help raise awareness among prospective students, as satisfied students are more likely to recommend the college to their friends and family. Ultimately, the success of marketing operations in providing quality services that satisfy students' needs can influence their choice of college and create a sense of satisfaction.

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## *Stochastic Modelling and Computational Sciences*

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*Stochastic Modelling and Computational Sciences*

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