

Higher education (HE) service pollution: attempting against its sustainability

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Purpose - The rapidly changing and increasingly competitive environment of higher education (HE) service, has attracted the attention of several scholars in the search for best management practices. As higher education institutions (HEIs) seek to increase their market share and positioning, they have opted to apply marketing concepts to generate more effective student recruitment, retention and graduation strategies (Seeman and O'Hara, 2006; Koris and Nokelainen, 2015; Dollinger, Lodge and Coates, 2018). However, worldwide, a trend has been generated among HEIs towards the "Marketization of higher education" same that has led to "pollution in the (HE) service ecosystem" causing alterations in its healthy functioning and in the achievement of its academic objectives (Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2010; Judson and Taylor, 2014; Díaz-Méndez, Saren and Gummesson, 2017).

In this paper we focus on a specific item of HE service pollution: faculty performance evaluation surveys (FPES). It is essential to understand the implications of this traditional evaluation practice and its impact on the functioning of the service ecosystem, due to the consequences that it has over HE long term objectives. In particular, we intend to frame the study of the current FPES as a contaminant of the HE service, under the SD logic theory (Vargo and Lusch, 2017; Díaz-Méndez, Paredes and Saren, 2019) in order to bring new perspectives to HEIs, facilitating the improvement in the management of this complex service, without compromise its sustainability.

Design/methodology/approach - This study comprises an in-depth literature review and critical analysis complemented with a quantitative research through surveys. Data are collected from a homogenous university students' group from a specific area of Mexico to evaluate the impact that current FPES have on long-term academic objectives, pointing out this HE service ecosystem pollution and the risk over its sustainability. The study is conducted under the SD logic approach and the service ecosystem perspective.

Findings - HE service has been suffering marketization by focusing its management on the "student-customer" metaphor indiscriminately. The literature review shows that the current strategies for recruitment, retention and graduation, pursue mainly the "student satisfaction as customer", but leave aside the service complexity and long-term academic objectives, endangering HE sustainability. We present a critical analysis to the traditional FPES evaluation practice, since their results are based on the students' perception, assuming the professor as responsible for transmitting value (value delivery) and not under the value co-creation framework. We argue that the concept of SD-logic and the service ecosystem perspective, are suitable for the study of HE service ecosystem pollutants, an approach that has been little studied and argued so far.

Practical implications - This paper identifies FPES as a specific pollutant in the service ecosystem, hence, we alert HEIs to the pollution generated by this current practice in the fulfillment of the long-term objectives of HE as a pillar of human development. Universities are alerted not to assume themselves as a company exclusively focused on "customer satisfaction". With the above, HEIs may improve their strategies for attracting,

retaining and graduating students under the perspective of the SD-logic and service ecosystem perspective to guarantee their permanence.

Originality/value - Hitherto not enough research has been developed to point out the risk of FPES as a contaminant of HE service, under the SD-logic theory and service ecosystems perspective, considering therefore, the co-creation of value and the active student participation in the fulfillment of the academic objectives. The contribution is framed on the FP9/Axiom 3 and FP10/axiom 4 of service-dominant logic, that highlights HEI services as holistic experiences that have to zoom out from dyadic interactions to adopt the ecosystem perspective (Vargo and Lusch, 2017).

Keyword - Higher education marketization, service ecosystem pollution, faculty performance evaluation surveys, Service Dominant Logic.

Paper type - Research paper