A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTING THE NET PROMOTER SCORE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The Net Promoter Score (NPS) has emerged as a well-known measure for assessing customer satisfaction and loyalty across different sectors, including higher education. This study examines how NPS is applied in higher education institutions to assess student satisfaction, loyalty, and overall institutional effectiveness. This study explores how adapting NPS, typically used in business environment, to the specific dynamics of higher education can function as an essential instrument for evaluating student experiences, pinpointing areas needing enhancements, and promoting greater student involvement. This research seeks to offer higher education leaders practical insights to improve student satisfaction, loyalty, and institutional results via NPS. The net promoter score's importance for higher education was investigated using systematic and phenomenological approaches.

Introduction

In business, key objectives such as profitability, growth, and sustainability are principal. These goals serve as the driving forces behind prosperity and success for companies. Businesses that focus on these priorities grow, while those that overlook any one of them risk failure.

The growth path involves not only attracting new customers but also retaining existing ones and encouraging increased spending. It is well understood that customers and their engagement are essential drivers of profitable growth. While acknowledging this may be straightforward, effectively measuring and managing customer relationships is a more complex endeavour. So, businesses must monitor customer relations and identify unmet customer needs. Businesses must assess how customers genuinely feel and what actions they can take, as well as understand the business impact of these insights. One of the most effective methods for assessing this is through the use of various customer satisfaction metrics, among which the Net Promoter Score stands out for its simplicity. Customer satisfaction and loyalty have thus become critical concepts in modern management. In this context, Frederick Reichheld introduced the "Net Promoter Score" (NPS) in 2003 in the esteemed Harvard Business Review. He argued that this single index derived from customer surveys provides a sufficient foundation for measuring and managing customer loyalty profitably.

Consequently, the Net Promoter Score has become a widely adopted metric for measuring customer loyalty and satisfaction across various industries, including higher education. As the digital era continues to transform consumer behaviour, universities and colleges need to closely

monitor student satisfaction and their propensity to recommend the institution to others. NPS provides a straightforward approach to capturing this information, asking students a single question: "How likely are you to recommend our university to a friend or family member?" However, the implementation of NPS in higher education institutions is not without its challenges and criticisms. Furthermore, like other businesses, universities are also aiming to improve their performance in a highly competitive higher education environment. Driven by rapidly declining enrolments, higher education institutions are increasingly concentrating on attracting and retaining students, as education cannot take place without students enrolling in courses. Measurement of this metric is vital to comprehend and boost student satisfaction and loyalty. NPS provides a simple way to assess student opinions by measuring how likely they are to recommend the university to others. This feedback delivers important insights into the strengths and weaknesses of academic programs, support services, and the overall student experience.

As, with rising competition, students like other customers have many options, making it challenging for universities to identify what fosters loyalty. It is evident that a customer's willingness to recommend a company or brand to their social circle is one of the best indicators of loyalty. Thus, a loyal customer serves as an ideal sales representative. Loyal customers also make repeat purchases and influence others, helping the company reduce customer acquisition costs. From this perspective, the use of NPS in higher education can assist universities in identifying strategies that will both drive revenue and attract new customers, namely "students."

This research paper seeks to explore the potential benefits and drawbacks of incorporating NPS into the student experience assessment and quality enhancement strategies of higher education providers.

Understanding the net promoter score: a measure of customer loyalty and satisfaction

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a widely used metric in the fields of customer satisfaction and loyalty. There is a growing body of research supporting the effectiveness and relevance of NPS as a measure for assessing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Developed in 2003 by Frederick Reichheld and Bain & Company, this metric aims to gauge the likelihood of customers recommending a product or service to others. It is based on a single question: "How likely are you to recommend our company/product/service to a friend or colleague?"

Reichheld asserts that it is unnecessary to conduct extensive surveys or perform detailed statistical analyses. The single question, "How likely are you to recommend our company to a friend or colleague?" can determine customer loyalty and company profitability (Reichheld, 2003). According to Reichheld, a company's growth will be proportional to the number of "promoters" based on the above question. He suggests that the willingness to promote is a strong indicator of loyalty and, consequently, company growth, as customers put their reputation at stake when recommending a company, which they would only do if they were genuinely loyal. The question is answered by customers on a scale where ten means "extremely likely" to recommend, five means neutral, and zero means "not at all likely." There is no "don't know" category in the NPS, although that would be the standard recommendation in most business research textbooks (McDaniel and Gates, 2007).

The application of NPS is not limited to traditional business contexts; it has found relevance in sectors such as healthcare, where it is used to evaluate patient satisfaction and experience (Adams et al., 2022; Hamilton et al., 2014). The NPS serves as a valuable tool for healthcare providers to assess the likelihood of patients recommending their services, thereby offering insights into the quality of care delivered (Krol et al., 2014; Wilberforce et al., 2018). Moreover, the NPS has been adapted for various contexts, including internal customer satisfaction within organizations, demonstrating its versatility as a measurement tool (Yusmansyah, 2023; Rhamdani, 2021).

Furthermore, the abbreviation NPS can have two meanings: Net Promoter Score and Net Promoter System. In line with this new development, relying solely on a single question and its numerical response may not yield complete benefits; asking the follow-up "why" question after receiving a response, as well as planning subsequent actions based on these responses, forms a system-based approach. (Reichheld, Fred, and Rob Markey. 2011.)

On the other hand, NPS has been criticized as an insufficient metric for evaluating customer satisfaction and loyalty (Fisher and Kordupleski, 2019). Fisher and Kordupleski emphasized that a more comprehensive understanding of loyalty requires assessing various dimensions of customer experience—such as satisfaction with product quality, customer service, pricing, and company reputation. These factors collectively influence overall customer loyalty, and reducing them to a single number could obscure important differences in customer attitudes and behaviour. Their research warned that using oversimplified metrics such as NPS could lead organizations to misinterpret customer loyalty, leading to misguided strategies. For example, an organization may see a high NPS and assume that customers are loyal, when in fact, these customers may not make repeat purchases or could be easily swayed by competitors.

Nevertheless, despite such criticism, NPS continues to be widely accepted and used by Fortune 1000 companies as a measure of customer satisfaction and loyalty. Geoff Colvin (2020) noted in *Fortune* magazine that at least two-thirds of the companies on the *Fortune 1000* list were using Net Promoter Scores.

Originally designed to measure customer loyalty, NPS has since been widely adopted across various industries to assess stakeholder satisfaction and predict financial performance. Additionally, NPS not only measures customer satisfaction and loyalty but also provides valuable insights into the overall health and quality of companies, products, or service environments.

It is also important to note that the relationship between NPS and customer loyalty, as well as its predictive power for company growth, can be evaluated. Many researchers have concluded that focusing on customer loyalty and confidence can yield higher profitability and loyalty for companies.

Methodology for calculating the net promoter score: a framework for assessment

Initially, customers are asked the question, "How likely are you to recommend our company (product, service) to a friend or family member?" and are requested to provide a rating on a scale from 0 to 10. Based on this scale, customers are categorized as follows: those who rate between 0 and 6 are labelled as "Detractors," those who give a rating of 7 or 8 are considered "Passives" or

"Neutrals," and those who rate 9 or 10 are classified as "Promoters." The Net Promoter Score is then calculated by subtracting the proportion of Detractors (those who gave a rating of 0 to 6) from the proportion of Promoters (those who gave a rating of 9 or 10) among the total respondents. The result is expressed as a percentage (Reichheld, 2003).

$$\%NPS = \left[\frac{P}{T}x100\right] - \left[\frac{D}{T}x100\right] \tag{1}$$

P – Promoters

D – Detractors

T – Total number of respondents

This simple calculation yields a score that can range from -100 to +100, providing a clear indication of customer sentiment towards a brand or service (Adams et al., 2022; Hardianto, 2023). The NPS is widely recognized for its ease of use and interpretability, making it a favoured choice among organizations seeking to gauge customer loyalty and predict future growth (Korneta, 2018).

Based on this approach, those who answer with a score of 9-10, known as "promoters," are customers who have had positive experiences with the business, can easily recommend it to others, and may even act as advocates for the company. Customers who rate the product 7-8, referred to as "Passives," are satisfied with the product, but they are not particularly motivated to promote it and may switch to a competitor. Lastly, those who score between 0 and 6, i.e., "detractors," are customers who have had negative experiences with the business. These customers are unlikely to make repeat purchases and may even discourage others from using your product, potentially harming the brand with their dissatisfaction.

The NPS's utility extends beyond mere customer satisfaction; it is posited to correlate with business performance metrics such as revenue growth and customer retention. Research indicates that companies with higher NPS scores tend to experience better financial outcomes, as loyal customers are more likely to make repeat purchases and recommend the brand to others (Hardianto, 2023; Baehre et al., 2021; Mecredy et al., 2018). However, the relationship between NPS and actual business performance is complex and has been the subject of scrutiny. Some studies argue that while NPS can serve as a useful indicator of customer loyalty, its predictive validity regarding financial success is not universally accepted (Lewis & Mehmet, 2019; Dawes, 2023). Critics point out methodological issues and caution against over-reliance on NPS as a standalone metric for assessing customer sentiment or predicting growth (Lewis & Mehmet, 2019; Dawes, 2023).

Despite its widespread adoption, the NPS is not without its limitations. Some researchers argue that it oversimplifies customer sentiment by reducing it to a single question, which may not capture the nuances of customer experiences (Lewis & Mehmet, 2019; Bettencourt, 2023). Fisher & Kordupleski (2019) criticize the NPS logic of defining passives, classifying them as customers who do not recommend the brand. Seal & Moody (2008) indicate that the classification, in general, loses the "shades of difference in the strength of perception," as both 0 and 6 mean the same, whereas they do not necessarily show the same level of customer loyalty and respondent's perceived likelihood to recommend the company or product. Additionally, the interpretation of NPS scores can vary significantly across different customer segments, leading to potential misinterpretations if not contextualized properly (Raassens & Haans, 2017; Haan et al.,

2015). As such, while NPS can provide valuable insights into customer loyalty, it should ideally be used in conjunction with other metrics to form a comprehensive view of customer sentiment and business performance (Haan et al., 2015). Additional complexity is added by Stahlkopf (2019), who show that a person could be a promoter and detractor simultaneously - recommending the company to one friend but not another. Customers who have experienced this may struggle to find the "right" answer.

The importance of student loyalty and satisfaction for higher education institutions

Understanding student loyalty and satisfaction is a key focus in higher education research, as it influences student retention, academic performance, and the reputation of educational institutions. It is evident that university success now heavily depends on student loyalty and happiness. Satisfied students are more likely to suggest the school to others, return for more classes, and enhance the institution's reputation. Loyalty, closely linked to satisfaction, refers to the extent of students' attachment to their university, which in turn promotes both retention and advocacy.

Student satisfaction refers to the degree to which students feel their expectations are met during their academic experience. Key determinants include teaching quality, administrative support, campus facilities, and social environment (Alves & Raposo, 2007). Student loyalty and satisfaction have become crucial metrics for universities, as they are strongly linked to positive word-of-mouth, retention, and repeat business (Thomas, 2011). Service quality is a key driver of student satisfaction, and institutions must strive to deliver superior value to their students to maintain a competitive advantage. (Teeroovengadum et al., 2019).

As we see loyalty is defined as students' dedication to their educational institution, typically assessed by their willingness to re-enrol or recommend the institution to others. This loyalty develops as an emotional connection over time, fostered by positive educational experiences.

The potential benefits and drawbacks of adopting NPS for higher education.

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) has emerged as a pivotal metric in various sectors, including education, to gauge satisfaction and loyalty among students and educators. Originally developed as a tool for measuring customer loyalty in business contexts, the NPS has been adapted for educational environments to assess the quality of learning experiences and institutional effectiveness. This adaptation is particularly relevant in the context of higher education, where understanding student satisfaction is crucial for institutional improvement and retention strategies.

In the realm of medical education, studies have demonstrated that NPS can serve as an effective indicator of student satisfaction. Moschovis et al. reported an exceptional NPS of 92 for a remote global health education course, which significantly surpassed scores from renowned consumer brands, indicating a high level of student loyalty and satisfaction with the educational experience (Moschovis et al., 2022). This finding aligns with the broader trend observed in educational settings where NPS is utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of various teaching methodologies and learning tools. For example, Sanseau et al. utilized NPS to assess the

perceived effectiveness of a tele-simulation tool among medical students, further verifying the utility of NPS in measuring educational outcomes (Sanseau et al., 2021).

Moreover, the application of NPS in educational contexts is not limited to medical training. Lucero's exploration of NPS in continuing medical education highlights its role in evaluating educational programs, suggesting that NPS can provide valuable insights into the perceived quality and effectiveness of educational interventions (Lucero, 2022). This is echoed by Jastania et al., who employed NPS as a primary metric to assess student satisfaction, identifying key areas for improvement in the learning environment (Jastania et al., 2017). Such studies underscore the versatility of NPS as a tool for enhancing educational quality across various disciplines.

The methodology behind NPS involves a straightforward question: "How likely are you to recommend this course or institution to a friend or colleague?" Responses are categorized into promoters, passives, and detractors, allowing institutions to calculate a score that reflects overall student sentiment (Adams et al., 2022). This simplicity is one of the reasons for NPS's widespread adoption in educational settings, as it provides a clear and actionable metric for stakeholders. For instance, in a study focused on mobile learning integration, an NPS of 22.4 indicated moderate acceptance among teachers, highlighting areas for further development (Rebollo, 2023).

In addition to measuring satisfaction, NPS can also serve as a diagnostic tool for identifying specific issues within educational programs. For example, the findings from Jastania et al. revealed several areas of dissatisfaction among students, including inadequate support services and poor physical environments, which were critical for developing targeted improvement plans (Jastania et al., 2017). This diagnostic capability is essential for educational institutions aiming to enhance student experiences and outcomes.

Furthermore, the relevance of NPS extends beyond traditional educational settings. In higher education, Kara et al. emphasized the importance of NPS in understanding student loyalty and its implications for institutional marketing strategies (Kara et al., 2022). The ability to quantify student sentiment through NPS can inform decision-making processes, helping institutions to align their offerings with student expectations and preferences.

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is gaining traction as a valuable tool for measuring student satisfaction and loyalty in higher education. Studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in identifying promoters, passives, and detractors among undergraduate business students (Kara et al., 2022). In the context of online education, NPS offers insights into perceived market value and quality, which is crucial as students have more options and can easily share their experiences through social media (Sandok, 2023).

There are several studies which applied NPS and tested a model aimed at identifying the factors that influence student experiences, which in turn affect NPS. This approach aligns with previous research, such as McKnight et al. (2019), who used NPS to explore ways universities can optimize their marketing return on investment (ROI). Similarly, Al-Zamil (2017) utilized NPS to assess advocacy levels among graduate students in Saudi Arabia, concluding that NPS provided valuable insights for college administrators.

It seems that NPS, being a measure of student satisfaction with the university, can provide an overview of their perceptions regarding its offerings. As Schmatz et al. (2015) suggest, these perceptions are shaped by factors like quality teaching, research, student services, and positive

interactions between current students and potential recruits.

In the context of higher education, student satisfaction refers to the positive assessments a student makes regarding various outcomes and experiences. Schmatz et al. (2015) reported a significant correlation between students' satisfaction and their willingness to recommend the university. University selection is a complex decision and requires extensive problem-solving processes for most prospective students. In the decision-making process, information and/or recommendations obtained from someone trusted by potential students could play an important role.

As stated in his initial article, Reichheld (2003) suggested monitoring NPS scores and comparing them to industry benchmarks. He also advised that companies should aim for a net promoter score of at least 75%-80%. This target would help managers enhance customer experience by identifying the underlying causes of differences between promoters and detractors. In 2022, CustomerGauge reported that the education and training industry had a calculated NPS of 69% (https://customergauge.com/benchmarks/industry/education), which is less than previous years. Training industry had a calculated NPS of 71% in 2020 (Kara et al., 2022).

On the other hand, when applying the Net Promoter Score (NPS) to higher education, some challenges can arise. For instance, universities do not focus on growth and profit like businesses do, and students are not traditional customers, as most do not make repeated purchasing decisions. Actually, their choice to attend a university is usually a one-time decision. But still, it can be an effective tool for gauging student satisfaction, and surely it can be improved by adding alternative questions to enhance students answers.

Nevertheless, these studies highlight the potential of NPS as a simple yet powerful metric for higher education institutions to measure and track student satisfaction, make data-driven decisions, and ultimately enhance their educational offerings and services.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Net Promoter Score is a widely utilized metric for measuring customer loyalty and satisfaction, characterized by its straightforward calculation and broad applicability across industries. While it offers valuable insights into customer sentiment and potential business outcomes, its limitations necessitate a cautious approach to its interpretation and application. Future research should continue to explore the relationship between NPS and various performance indicators, as well as the potential for integrating NPS with other customer feedback metrics to enhance its predictive capabilities. Its application across various educational contexts demonstrates its versatility and relevance. As institutions continue to seek ways to enhance learning experiences and outcomes, the integration of NPS into evaluation frameworks will likely play a crucial role in shaping future educational strategies.

Thus, the implementation of NPS in higher education institutions can provide several benefits, including:
- An easy and effective method for assessing student satisfaction and loyalty.
- Recognizing areas that need enhancement through student input.
- Benchmarking against other institutions and industry standards.

- Primarily an investment in student satisfaction and long-term loyalty (e.g., a bachelor's graduate choosing to pursue a master's degree at the same university can be seen as a decision to return).
- Highly satisfied students are likely to maintain contact after graduation, potentially showing loyalty by becoming advocates and supporters.
- Alumni who give the institution a high rating might promote it within their professional circles.
- To increase their NPS, college administrators could begin by creating strategies to turn detractors and passives into promoters.
- This feedback allows administrators to refine the interactions among students, faculty, and staff.
- By consistently monitoring NPS, universities can recognize possible problems before they worsen.
- Involving students in the NPS process allows them to influence the academic atmosphere.
- Consistent application of NPS can establish a feedback cycle that promotes a culture of ongoing enhancement within higher education institutions.

Given the importance of customer orientation for commercial enterprises, it makes sense to leverage their expertise and consider applying it within higher education. This has led to interest in the concept of the Net Promoter Score (NPS), a widely recognized metric for assessing customer satisfaction and loyalty in management, though it has rarely been utilized in higher education to date.

Overall, adopting NPS in higher education enables institutions to concentrate on the student experience, address issues efficiently, and improve their educational services.

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