

Conference Paper

Student Consumerism Attitudes towards Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary society contends that consumption is the backbone of our way of life. It is not solely an indicator of an individual or group's social standing, but also functions as a means of addressing issues, creating significance in our surroundings, and even developing personal identities. The ubiquitous influence of consumerism has broadened the definition of commodities to include non-tangible services. When services become commodities, providers tend to prioritize consumer service-oriented activities to attract and retain clients driven by market ideology. This model has been adopted by higher education institutions, such as universities, resulting in consumerist behavior by students seeking educational products and services. Therefore, this study aims to examine student consumerist behavior. A quantitative methodology was employed, and the sample consisted of 500 respondents. The survey revealed that students exhibit consumerist tendencies regarding the educational services offered by universities. Consumerism is linked to lecturer expectations, job readiness, and grades, but not student accountability.

Keywords: Student consumerism, consumer value, higher education

Introduction

According to contemporary society, consumption plays a crucial role in our way of life. It serves not only as an indicator of an individual or group's social status, as described by Dubois and Ordabayeva (2015), but also as a means of problem-solving, constructing meaning in our surroundings, and even forming personal identities, as noted by Kotler et al. (2020). The widespread influence of consumerism has broadened the definition of commodities to include non-tangible services. When services are treated as commodities, providers tend to prioritize consumer service-related activities to attract and retain customers influenced by market ideology.

Higher education institutions or universities are not resistant to market ideology, this is due to the high market demand for education and science, where someone must enter and develop an industry, it creates competition in providing the latest science and research, which is appropriate with industrial needs, in other words, university operations and development are strongly influenced by market mechanisms (Weisbrod et al., 2008). In its journey to meet market demands, universities need huge funds to provide quality educators, support infrastructure, and continuously conduct research in developing the latest knowledge, so universities need external funding, which shows the product of market power (McClure, 2014). Where the proportion of university funding sources is more than high school students who hope to continue to college, and the high rate of privatization of universities that were initially non- As McClure (2017) posits, the education system has evolved to become more profit-oriented, competitive, and directly influenced by capitalist forces. This shift has prompted questions about the consumerist behavior of students, particularly in public education. Education, which used to prioritize the development of democratic citizens and prepare them for various employment roles, is now viewed more as a

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means of advancing the business industry. Consequently, schools and their policies increasingly emphasize education as a credential.

According to Fairchild and Crage (2014), credentials serve as a representation of the skills and knowledge needed by workers, as well as a symbol of social status. They are valuable tools for social and industrial organizations. However, when they are required for social mobility in a competitive context, they become constructs of competency that may not always correspond to social class dynamics. This emphasis on credentials raises concerns about the increasing use of consumerism metaphors in higher education. It prompts questions about students' perceptions of the purpose of their educational experiences, and whether they view their relationship with universities in economic terms.

As Goldrick-Rab (2006) suggests, in today's diverse higher education market, students are "shopping" for the schools and courses that appeal to them, and schools must respond to these pressures. Documentaries have highlighted a competition for existing facilities within universities, which are used as a visible "weapon" to attract new students (McClure, 2017). Consequently, some argue that elements of the college experience that are visible to prospective students, such as student centers, become more critical than less visible characteristics such as academic rigor and distinguished faculty in making decisions about which school to attend (Fairchild & Crage, 2014). Universities also engage in behavior aimed at providing educational credentials that attract prospective students and phasing out unattractive education programs, thus determining the number of students they can teach (McClure, 2017). This behavioral model suggests that universities are perceived more as educational businesses than as public education models, with students being viewed as their consumers.

The university or higher education's organizational model has had a significant impact on student relationships with the campus and the educational process itself. Snare's (1997) study revealed that paying students tend to adopt a passive educational model, expecting high grades and academic credentials. When viewed as economic transactions, students may be more inclined to see themselves as customers with consumer identities, rather than learning identities (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). Consequently, they may view themselves as mere recipients of services rather than co-creators of teaching and learning communities (Newson, 2004). As a result, they may expect to be entertained (Edmunson, 1997), and there is evidence that they are averse to discomfort or trying too hard (Howard et al., 2002).

The application of a consumerism model to students by universities is evident in research conducted by Delucchi and Korgen (2002), which surveyed 195 undergraduate students enrolled in a sociology course. The study revealed that the majority of students (73%) in the state university sample desired high grades even if they had not studied anything, while nearly a quarter (24%) expected faculty to consider non-academic criteria, such as financial aid or graduation when awarding grades. Moreover, over half of the respondents (53%) agreed that it was the instructor's responsibility to keep students' attention in class, while only a third (36%) disagreed with the statement "If I pay for my college education, I'm entitled to a degree" (Greenberger et al., 2008). To address this phenomenon, Bossick (2009) developed a more nuanced definition of consumerism that considers various dimensions, including academic enthusiasm, academic behavior, the desire for goods and services, and demands for job training. Several indexes of student consumerism, based on theoretical justification, are a step in the right direction. Such studies provide preliminary evidence that student attitudes towards education warrant scientific attention as a unique phenomenon, distinct from egotistical psychological constructs such as narcissism and general self-possession.

There appears to be a logical link between the customer-seller perspective of university education and the consumerist attitude exhibited by students. However, prior research has not definitively established the existence of this association. As a result, universities may have less input in policymaking and carrying out the educational process. In other words, the application of a market ideology may lead students to perceive their educational experience as the purchase of

products without holding any particular beliefs about the product, despite the consumerist attitude they exhibit.

The issue under discussion here is the complexity of the phenomenon. To advance the empirical agenda, we explore how the various attitudes associated with consumerism are interrelated, rather than just considering them in isolation. Our survey examines the components of the conceptualization of consumerism present in higher education, including specific issues and ideologies relating to customer-seller relationships. By employing comprehensive instruments, we examine how items cluster together and, more specifically, how students' attitudes about explicit market ideologies relate to attitudes about other issues raised in consumerism discussions.

We utilized a large and randomly selected campus sample of undergraduate students at Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jawa Timur to develop a "consumerism" scale that can be applied in various educational settings, as well as four additional scales that address other issues related to the debate. Our findings indicate that there is indeed a student-as-customer attitude, although it differs from many of the concerns raised by faculty members. These results offer insights into students' perceptions of their rights and responsibilities, as well as those of their professors and institutions. This information can serve as a basis for a productive discussion on how to achieve institutional goals more effectively in a culture increasingly influenced by market ideologies.

Literature Review

Consumerism is a social and economic phenomenon that promotes the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts. This trend emerged during the Industrial Revolution and became more prominent in the 20th century, when mass production led to overproduction, resulting in manufacturers using planned advertising to manipulate consumer spending (Czarnecka & Schivinski, 2019).

The term "consumerism" has various definitions, which may not be interrelated. One of these definitions refers to the efforts to advocate for consumer interests, and it gained acceptance as the standard definition during the 1970s (Swagler, 1994).

In addition to the definition of consumerism that pertains to advocating for consumer interests, there is another definition that has gained traction since the late 1970s. This definition characterizes consumerism as the excessive consumption of goods and services, also known as economic materialism, which is deemed selfish and reckless. In this sense, consumerism is viewed negatively and runs counter to the positive lifestyle promoted by the anti-consumerism and simple living movements. It is seen as a force of the market that erodes individuality and harms society. The adverse effects of consumerism are linked to globalization, and this has spurred protests against consumerism by anti-globalization groups.

The term "consumerism" was first introduced by John Bugas of the Ford Motor Company in 1955 as a replacement for the term "capitalism" to describe the American economy (Eriksson & Vogt, 2013). Bugas's definition corresponds with the concept of consumer sovereignty put forth by Austrian economist Carl Menger in his 1871 book, "Principles of Economics," which asserts that consumer preferences, judgments, and choices entirely control the economy (a concept that contradicts the Marxist notion of a capitalist economy as a system of exploitation). In the modern global economy of the 21st century, consumerism has become an integral part of the culture (James & Scerri, 2012).

Higher education is a form of education that comes after secondary education and includes programs such as diplomas, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, specialist degrees, and other education programs that are offered by universities (as defined by Law No. 20 concerning the National Education System, 2003). According to the government regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 30 of 1990 regarding tertiary institutions, higher education is considered to be education at a higher level than secondary education in the formal education pathway. This

includes all post-secondary education, training, and research conducted by educational institutions that have been recognized as institutions of higher education by the relevant government authorities (McClure, 2017). It encompasses all activities that a country considers to be higher education, not just those that take place in traditional universities and graduate schools, but also short-term educational and training courses (such as polytechnics, junior colleges, and specialized technical schools) that span 2-3 years, as well as distance learning courses that utilize information technology and cater to a broad student population. Higher education institutions, particularly universities, have three primary functions: education, research, and service to society (Roberts, 2009).

Theoretical and conceptual background

To create a more effective education system, higher education institutions have shifted towards a business-oriented model that emphasizes attracting and engaging students and developing policies based on market principles and mechanisms (Kotler et al., 2020). This approach has led to a capitalist ideology within higher education, where universities aim to generate profits by selling educational services as a source of external funding (McClure, 2017). As a result, universities tend to view students as consumers of their service products. However, consumerism is not just a market mechanism; it is also a social movement aimed at protecting consumer rights and strengthening their power over sellers. Smart marketers can use this opportunity to provide more information, education, and protection to consumers.

Material and Methods

The study utilized a survey method to collect data, with survey instruments adopted from Fairchild and Cragg (2014). The survey instrument measured consumerism based on five dimensions: consumerism attitudes, expectations, work preparation, coursework, and student responsibilities. The question items in the survey instrument were measured on a 1-5 scale. The instrument was tested initially on 40 respondents, and the research respondents were undergraduate students from all study programs of the Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur who had completed at least one semester. The sample selection was done randomly.

The research employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive design, with correlation analysis techniques used for data analysis. The data and information were collected through field surveys and structured questionnaires. Collect the data needed in this study through the following methods: Types and Sources of Data In this study using two data sources, namely primary data. Judging from the research data using primary data from consumer questionnaire reports selected as a sample where this study will use respondents' perceptions of the items given. Where the primary data source is used to determine the values of the predictive variables and the values of the observation variables from each sample unit used in this study. Data Collection Procedure The sampling technique used is convenience sampling, namely sampling of population elements that can work together and are easily accessible by researchers. The survey will be conducted on undergraduate students, in conducting the survey the researcher will provide question questionnaires and provide brochures of the brands that are the object of research. The projected number of research samples is 100 samples because a large number can help increase the accuracy of the estimated calculation.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of respondents

The distributed questionnaires, it was successful to collect data from 100 respondents. The characteristics of the respondents based on are shown in Table 1. The sex composition of the respondents is balanced between men and women.

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents by gender

Gender	Number
Male	50
Female	50

Table 2 shows the origin of the respondent's city. The data shows that most of the students come from outside the city of Surabaya. The cities outside Surabaya include Gresik, Sidoarjo, Bangkalan, and other areas.

Table 2. Characteristics of respondents based on the origin of respondents

City origin	Number
Surabaya	26
Outside Surabaya	74

Instrument validity test results

The results of testing the validity of the research instrument are shown in Table 3. If all questions have a correlation coefficient greater than 0.3, then the item is declared valid.

Table 3. The results of testing the validity of the instrument

Statement item	Coef. correlation	Meaning
1. 1Student Consumerism Towards Higher Education		
Item 1.1	0,564	Valid
Item 1.2	0,650	Valid
Item 1.3	0,653	Valid
Item 1.4	0,845	Valid
Item 1.5	0,851	Valid
2. . Expectations of the lecturer		
Item 2.1	0,691	Valid
Item 2.2	0,742	Valid
Item 2.3	0,828	Valid
Item 2.4	0,691	Valid
3. Job Preparation		
Item 3.1	0,640	Valid
Item 3.2	0,736	Valid
Item 3.3	0,733	Valid
Item 3.4	0,660	Valid
4. Emphasis on grades		
Item 4.1	0,823	Valid
Item 4.2	0,731	Valid
Item 4.3	0,748	Valid
Item 4.4	0,777	Valid
Item 4.5	0,846	Valid
5. 5Student Responsibilities		
Item 5.1	0,734	Valid
Item 5.2	0,915	Valid
Item 5.3	0,816	Valid

Instrument reliability test results

The results of the instrument reliability test in Table 4 show that if all alpha coefficients are greater than 0.6, then the research instrument is declared valid.

Table 4. Results of instrument reliability testing

Variable	Alpha Cronbach	meaning
Student Consumerism towards Higher Education	0,784	Reliable
Expectations of the lecturer	0,791	Reliable
Job Preparation	0,765	Reliable
Emphasis on grades	0,802	Reliable
Student Responsibilities	0,831	Reliable

Student consumerism toward higher education

Statements related to the measure of student consumerism attitudes towards education show that the average score is quite high above the median value of the measurement scale. These results indicate that the consumerism attitude of students toward higher education is quite high. Students position themselves as consumers by assuming that the education they undergo in college is the product they buy.

Table 5. The average score of consumerism attitudes toward education

Statement	Average score
I think education is the product I bought	3,63
My relationship with the University is like a customer and seller's relationship	3,56
I believe that most students think that education is the product they buy	3,69
Students should get a tuition refund if it is considered that there is nothing to be learned from the class	3,25
I believe students should think that education is the product they buy	3,50
Average overall score	3,53

The consumerism attitude of these students shapes their expectations of universities such as the relationship between sellers and buyers. As well as consumers who have expectations of the products purchased.

Expectations of educators

Table 6 shows students' attitudes toward lecturers. The average score is high, all above 4 on a scale of 5. The data shows high expectations of teaching lecturers.

Table 6. The average score of expectations for educators

Statement	Average score
Lecturers should ensure that lectures are interesting for students	4,75
Lecturers must relate lecture material to real life	4,38
Lecturers must have good interpersonal relationships with students	4,56
Lecturers must communicate the lecture contract clearly	4,75
Average overall score	4,61

Job preparation

Table 7 shows the assessment of attitudes toward job preparation by universities. On average, the overall score is still high, above 4. The statement "A good job is the result of a university education" gets the lowest score even though it is still above the median score.

Table 7. The average score of expectations on job preparation

Statement	Average score
A good job is the result of a university education	3,13
There is counseling from the university to guide students in the process of looking for work	4,38
The university is responsible for providing job placement services	4,13
Universities must provide education that prepares students to enter the workforce	4,75
Average overall score of the questions	4,09

Emphasis on grades

The average score for all statements in this section is 3.20 slightly above the mean. These results indicate that students still expect to get grades easily.

Table 8. Emphasis on school grades

Statement	Average score
Students don't have to work hard to get good grades	2,50
Lecturers should try not to give bad grades so as not to damage the student's GPA	4,06
Students are justified in choosing a class or course in which they are most likely to receive an A, even if they study little or nothing	3,25
Students must do whatever it takes to get good grades, even if they do dishonest things	2,50
Universities should offer several classes or courses that can easily score A's	3,69
Average overall score	3,20

Student responsibilities

Table 9 displays the scores of students' attitudes toward their responsibilities as students. A high average score above 4 indicates a responsible student attitude.

Table 9. Student responsibilities

Statement	Average score
Students have to work hard in class to get good grades	4,69
Students have to study a lot of material outside of class hours.	4,06
Students should pay attention to the material during lectures, even if they think the material is boring.	4,25
Average overall score	4,33

The relationship of student consumerism attitudes with students' attitudes toward educators, jobs, values, and responsibilities

Is there a correlation between consumerism and how students respond to lecturers, work, values, and responsibilities? Table 10 displays the statistical test. It turns out that the attitude of student consumerism is positively related to the expectations of educators, attitudes towards work, and values. While the attitude of consumerism in education is not correlated with responsibility. The findings at UPN "Veteran" Jawa Timur are the same as those of (Fairchild & Crage, 2014). Students with high consumerism attitudes correlate with high expectations of lecturers, preparation for work by universities, and high grades.

Table 10. Coefficients between student attitude variables

Attitude variable correlation coefficient	Student Consumerism	sig	Conclusion
Expectations of educators	0,587	0,017	Significant
work preparation	0,594	0,015	Significant
Score	0,624	0,01	Significant
Responsibility	0,246	0,359	Not Significant

Conclusion

This study aims to measure student attitudes toward consumerism education. This study also examines how the consumerism attitude correlates with the expectations of lecturers, job preparation, grades, and responsibilities. The data collected shows how the attitude of UPN “Veteran” Jawa Timur students. Students tend to act as consumers in the education provided by the university and also believe that this attitude is also owned and should be owned by all students.

Students' attitudes towards lecturers show high expectations of lecturer performance. Likewise, students' attitudes towards work preparation are provided by the university. Students' attitudes towards college grades show a tendency for high-grade expectations. Students' attitude towards responsibility shows a high level of responsibility. The correlation test found a positive relationship between consumer attitudes and expectations of lecturers, job preparation, and grades, but not with responsibility.

Suggestions to universities are to shape the mindset of students not only as consumers but also to play a role in education itself. This means that students are not only inputs but also involved in the educational process which also plays a role in determining the output and outcomes of higher education.

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