An Ethnography To Understand Student Value Co-Creation In The Student Experience

Introduction

Literature and higher educational institutions (HEIs) recognise the martketized nature of higher education. For example, HEIs are reliant on reputation and sustainability to gain competitive advantage and recruit students (Little and Williams,2010; The White Paper,2011). Also, there is an increased interest in meeting student expectations (Money et al,2017), and listening to student feedback (Lizzio and Wilson,2008). Consequently, there is a need to understand and improve the student experience and provide 'value for money.' Vargo and Lusch (2004;2008;2016) develop Service Dominant Logic (S-D logic) and theorise value co-creation within service marketing. Value co-creation involves the student determining the value of the service through their interactions at all points of the service experience. Therefore, the student's engagement is crucial and their perception of how actors interact can influence their value co-creation.

Drawing on S-D logic, engagement can be understood as the way students invest operant and operand resources in purposeful learning activities. In education literature, it is defined as the 'time and effort' that students devote to educationally purposeful activities that influence the quality of their experience (Krause and Coates,2008). Through creating a university ecosystem, it explains the key actors and how students interact with them to co-create value. Vargo and Lusch (2016) define service ecosystem as "a relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange" (Vargo and Lusch,2016). Institutional arrangements are defined as the 'rules, norms, meanings, symbols, practices' within an ecosystem that students learn from their interactions with key actors (Vargo and Lusch,2016,6). Through recognising the institutional arrangements between actors and students, it is possible to create a university ecosystem. Exploring engagement will explain the value co-creation process, as supported by Hollebeek et al (2016) and their S-D logic informed customer engagement framework.

Current practices use student engagement to measure the perceived quality of HEIs and student satisfaction, such as the National Student Survey (NSS). Strategically, partnership approaches and student feedback is a critical approach to developing practices and incorporating the student experience (Lizzio and Wilson,2008; Trowler,2010). However, often influenced by academic presence and dependant on that point in time, there is a need for a longitudinal study in the natural environment for a deeper understanding.

This study reports on the first stage of the findings, exploring the university ecosystem that identifies the key actors that students engage with to co-create vale.

Method

Taking a post-positivism approach, this study draws from existing theory and views reality comes from theoretical understanding of human knowledge and interpretation (Kuhn,1970). Data is collected using ethnography, and overt and covert observations mean data comes from a range of active and passive participant observations and field notes. This longitudinal approach involves immersion into the student day-to-day life for a natural representation over the course of a year. Activities include lectures, seminars, learning environments, sports clubs, societies, union meetings, representative meetings, day and night time socialising, and home life. Content analysis makes sense of the extensive data collected (stored within NVivo), and coding and categorising the field notes to create themes (Goulding,2005).

Findings

This paper explores the first stage of the analysis, by creating a university ecosystem. To understand value co-creation, the first step is to discover whom the actors are and how students engage with them. The coding of the data is categorised into cases that represent different people and activities. In each case, the institutional arrangements (rules, norms, beliefs, symbols, and practices) are recognised and form the connections between the actors in the ecosystem.

Figure 1 illustrates the university ecosystem that illustrates the key actors, both people (blue) and environments (orange), that are a possible source of value co-creation. To clarify, learning environments include the library or university buildings that are used to study, including computer rooms and group study rooms. Clubs includes sports and societies training or meetings. Non-academic support is the university staff not timetabled to teach, including the employability team, IT, and library assistance.

Students recognise the influence that people and environments have, and their own responsibility for co-creating value. They discuss the detriments and benefits of their engagement, for example, socialising too much causes them to miss lectures, but it is their way of relaxing and meetings people which is important to their experience.

The first point of interaction is in welcome week and includes friends, socialising, home life, and lectures. Students discuss the influence this initial engagement has with other activities and people during their whole experience. For example, if students form good relationships with flat mates and enjoy socialising, they are less likely to seek other friendships and engage in other activities. If their flat mates engage in other activities then the student is more likely to engage in more too.

Engagement requires interaction and resource integration from students and other the actors and they see different actors as responsible for initiating interaction. For example, students expect services, such as the employment team, to cater to specific needs and market events to

them. Whereas, students actively seek support from the student union, be that welfare and academic support or feedback in representative meetings. A student is more likely to initiate engagement where they have confidence or trust in the likelihood of success. For example, students lack self-confidence in seminars and this deters them from answering questions or asking for extra support, whereas in union representative meetings they have confidence to seek help and feedback their thoughts because of the previous relationships.

Conclusion

This study creates a university ecosystem that identifies key actors who have an important role in influencing engagement and student perception of values. Initial findings show students recognise their ability to co-create value with other actors, and the influence these. The next stage of analysis will include understanding how students engage with these actors to co-create value, exploring the data that can specify the value.

References

Goulding, C., 2005. Grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology: A comparative analysis of three qualitative strategies for marketing research. *European journal of Marketing*, *39*(3/4), pp.294-308.

Hollebeek, L.D., Srivastava, R.K. and Chen, T., 2016. SD logic–informed customer engagement: integrative framework, revised fundamental propositions, and application to CRM. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, pp.1-25.

Krause, K.L. and Coates, H., 2008. Students' engagement in first-year university. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *33*(5), pp.493-505.

Little, B. and Williams, R., 2010. Students' Roles in Maintaining Quality and in Enhancing Learning: Is There a Tension? *Quality in Higher Education*, *16*(2), pp.115-127.

Lizzio, A. and Wilson, K., 2008. Feedback on assessment: students' perceptions of quality and effectiveness. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *33*(3), pp.263-275.

Money, J., Nixon, S., Tracy, f., Hennessy, C., Ball, E, and Dinning, T., 2017, Undergraduate student expectations of university In the United Kingdom: what really matters to them? Cogent education, 4(1), pp.1-11

Osborne, S.P., Radnor, Z. and Nasi, G., 2013. A new theory for public service management? Toward a (public) service-dominant approach. *The American Review of Public Administration*, *43*(2), pp.135-158.

Vargo, S.L. and Lusch, R.F., 2004. Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of marketing*, *68*(1), pp.1-17.

Vargo, S.L. and Lusch, R.F., 2008. Service-dominant logic: continuing the evolution. *Journal of the Academy of marketing Science*, *36*(1), pp.1-10.

Vargo, S.L. and Lusch, R.F., 2016. Institutions and axioms: an extension and update of service-dominant logic. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *44*(1), pp.5-23.

Department for Business Innovation and Skills, The White Paper, June 2011, UK Government, [Accessed on: 28 January 2017] Accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31384/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf