

MBA STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON STUDENT LOYALTY TO ALMA MATER

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ABSTRACT

Regardless of the importance of maintaining long-term relationship with alumni for MBA programs, little is known about the antecedents of student loyalty. This study proposes and empirically tests student engagement as a promising factor that would enhance MBA students' loyalty intention to the school after graduation. The study adopts a structural equation modeling approach which examines the effects caused by student satisfaction and student engagement on loyalty intention among MBA students. Data were collected at a major college in India. Two out of three research hypotheses are supported. Findings of this study are generally in line with existing literature. Yet, the study also provides a meaningful, new insight in the study of student loyalty. Managerial implications and future research directions are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Just like any business, it is imperative for higher education institutions to maintain long-term relationships with their constituents. Loyal students are important assets for higher education institutions not only during the time of their stay in the university but also after they leave the campus. A loyal student may support his/her alma mater through word-of-mouth communications, participation in activities sponsored by the school, and financial contributions (Hennig-Thurau, Langer, & Hansen, 2001). Student loyalty to a program is considered as one of major sources of competitive advantage (Lam, Shankar, Erramilli, & Murthy, 2004). Researchers and administrators alike have been eager to find out the factors that would enhance their graduates' emotional, communicative, and behavioral attachment to their alma maters.

Student loyalty, however, is an elusive concept. A number of studies have been devoted to proposing and testing factors that lead to student loyalty. Student loyalty is affected by a diversity of factors such as students' personal factors (Tinto, 1993), education service factors (Burt, 2001), and the quality of educational experiences (Elliott, 2002). Among them, perhaps the most predominantly studied factor as an antecedent of student loyalty may be student satisfaction. Many studies report that customer satisfaction serves as a founding block for establishing long-term buyer-seller relationship and loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994; Gustaffsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005; Oliver, 1999). Colleges regard student satisfaction as one of the most critical operating goals and urge their faculty and staff to proactively identify and meet the expectations that students bring to campus (Hill, 1995; Keegan & Davidson, 2004). Academic

programs rated high on student satisfaction are expected to be the ones with high customer loyalty, healthy return on marketing investment, and long-term profitability.

Yet, an increasing number of studies have posed challenges on the strength of the relationship between student satisfaction and loyalty. That is, students' satisfaction with college services has been reported to exert statistically significant, yet only a moderate level of, impact on student loyalty (Simpson & Siguaw, 2000; Yu & Kim, 2008). Similar observations were made in business sectors (Olsen 2002; Reichheld, 2003). Business practitioners report that a significant number of customers do leave them regardless of their high level of satisfaction and suggest that customer satisfaction may be a necessary but not sufficient condition to culminate in customer loyalty (Jones & Sasser, 1995). Student satisfaction, in this context, may be viewed as enacting a critical role during the development stage of student-school relationship, yet for that relationship to move into a next, stronger level such as student loyalty, additional factors may come into play.

In the past few years, there has been an increasing interest in the concept of customer engagement. Researchers in sociology, psychology, and education have reported engagement as an important underpinning for long-term relationships between a person and an object, brand, or organization (Achterger et al., 2003; Resnick, 2001; Saks, 2006). Engaged customers are psychologically connected, emotionally involved, and highly motivated to participate in activities that are related to the brands (London, Downey, & Mace, 2007). Common forms of their contribution to the brand include spreading viral marketing communications, participating in new product/service development, and in co-creating experience and value (Hoyer et al., 2010; Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008). Customer engagement, therefore, is viewed as an important indicant of the quality of an organization's interactive network with its current and potential customers (Neff, 2007; Sedley, 2010; Voyles, 2007).

While the importance of customer engagement in buyer-seller relationships has been extensively documented elsewhere, the concept has been applied to the higher education context only on a limited basis. Existing studies involving student engagement were conducted mostly at undergraduate levels in conjunction with learning (Carini et al., 2006; Skinner & Belmont, 1993) or at on-line programs (Arbaugh, 2000; Kim et al., 2005). Even among them, most studies addressed student engagement and its consequences while students were in college, without paying adequate attention on it beyond their graduation. Our best literature review could not locate any empirical study examining the student engagement as a precursor of post-graduate student loyalty to the program. Considering the fact that the business schools are regarded as a cash cow program in many universities (Piercy, 2000; Starkey et al., 2004) and that MBA programs are proven to be one of the most lucrative programs for their alumni being the most generous group when it comes to donating to their alma mater (Okunade, 1996), there is a surprising paucity in the literature that deals with factors underlying student loyalty among MBA students.

The purpose of this study is to examine student engagement among MBA students as a promising factor that would enhance their loyalty to the school after graduation. To be specific, the study proposes and tests a model that incorporates both student satisfaction and student engagement as antecedents of post-graduate loyalty intention among MBA students. Such an

endeavor in this study is expected to not only clarify the role of student satisfaction in the formation of student loyalty but also reveal the contribution of student engagement for the establishment of student loyalty among MBA students. This paper provides literature review dealing with MBA student satisfaction, loyalty and engagement; a conceptual model including hypotheses; research methods; findings from a survey; summarized and scrutinized results; and conclusions and implications of the study for higher education institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

MBA Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction can be defined as a favorable cognitive state resulting from a positive evaluation of a student's educational experience (Athiyaman, 1997). Satisfaction is experienced when a college's service delivered matches well with students' expectations (Szymanski & Henard, 2001). Student satisfaction is affected by a number of factors. First, academic dimensions of a college have been found as a major factor affecting student satisfaction. Major academic dimensions affecting student satisfaction include student-to-faculty ratios, program reputation, quality of teaching, faculty credentials, quality of student-faculty relationships, and quality of academic advising and career counselling (Elliott, 2002; Kotler & Fox, 1995; Martinez, 2001). At a personal level, a student's academic performance such as grade was found to be highly correlated to his/her satisfaction with the school (Babin & Griffin, 1998). Additionally, the quality of social experience of students was also found to be an important factor affecting satisfaction with the school. Tinto et al. (1994), for example, maintained that the social aspect of college life was one of the two most important factors that determine students' satisfaction with and intention to remain in an academic program.

Student satisfaction is not a short-term evaluation but rather an enduring attitude developed through repeated experiences with campus life. For services that are provided based upon the membership or contractual arrangements like an MBA program, satisfaction is known to have unique characteristics. Compared to a discrete service encounter where the customer satisfaction is largely determined by whether the contact employee is capable of diagnosing and fulfilling customer needs (Szymanski, 1988; Spiro & Weitz, 1990), the customer satisfaction in relationship is determined by a diversity of factors. Beatty et al. (1996) noted that customers in relationship tend to experience satisfaction when they perceive, from their relationship with the service provider, empathy, understanding of the customer, interpersonal care, trustworthy behavior, in addition to the augmented personal service. Students in an MBA program are also likely to engage in a comprehensive evaluation of their relationship with school using a number of factors. Sevier (1996), for example, has observed that college students evaluate their schools in terms of academic, social, physical, and even spiritual experiences. In this context, student satisfaction can be viewed as a global index that summarizes one's general feeling toward one's educational experiences (Bolton et al., 2000).

Students in an MBA program are also likely to evaluate the program in a holistic manner. Specifically, students tend to determine the quality of an MBA program after a comprehensive evaluation of institutional and curricular factors, faculty factors, and other student factors (Grove

& Hussey, 2014). Because satisfaction in that context is a product of one's intensive evaluation of past experience, it might even direct his/her future behavior (Fazio & Zanna, 1981; Suh & Yi, 2006). That is, since satisfaction is a consequence of one's direct past experience with the MBA program, it is likely to directly influence on a student's behavioral intention such as loyalty. For an MBA program aiming at delivering student satisfaction, therefore, it is imperative to identify and fulfill a diversity of expectations that the students bring into the campus (Caceres & Paparoidamis, 2007).

MBA Students' Loyalty Intention to their Alma Mater

Student loyalty can be defined as psychological attachment to their universities founded upon their feelings of identification and affiliation (Verhoef et al., 2002) and it is manifested as behavioral and attitudinal commitment toward an institution (Tinto, 1993). Student loyalty to a higher education institution is affected by a host of factors. First, individual factors of a student are known to influence one's loyalty. It includes student's individual predispositions (family background, abilities and skills, and so on), his/her commitment to the program, as well as satisfaction with the program (Tinto, 1993). Second, the service provider (i.e., the university) factor also affects student loyalty. Those factors include faculty credentials, educational service quality, prestige of the institution, availability of networking opportunities, and so on (Burt, 2001; Okunade & Berl, 1997). Finally, a group of researchers have adopted relationship marketing perspective and attempted to explain student loyalty from the relationship quality perspective. Research in this vein explains that student loyalty is largely shaped up by variables such as relationship quality with the school and its constituents (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001), quality of college life (Yu & Kim, 2008), and educational experience (Browne et al., 1998; Elliott, 2002; Martinez, 2001).

Just like a loyal customer's relationship with a brand is not restricted to a predetermined period but is continued for a long time, an MBA student's loyalty to the program is likely to be maintained during and after his/her time at the program (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001). School administrators would love to maintain an MBA student's loyalty not only before but also after graduation because an MBA graduates tend to have stronger alumni relationships and donate more compared with other types of graduates (Johnson, Thomas, & Peck, 2010; Okunade, 1996). Unfortunately, students' attachment to their alma mater declines rapidly after graduation (Burt, 2001). For an MBA program looking for loyalty from its alumni, it would be crucial to nurture loyalty intention among its students while they are still in the program.

Student Engagement

Customer engagement has been continuously gaining attention in marketing literature in recent years as an important customer-based metrics for measuring organizational performance. Customer engagement can be defined as "the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiates" (Vivek et al., 2012, p. 133). Engaged customers have a strong sense of attachment or connection with a brand/organization and are motivated to

voluntarily play key roles in performing marketing activities such as word-of-mouth communications, customer-to-customer interactions, participation in new product development, and co-creation of experience and values (Brakus et al., 2009; Brodie et al., 2011; Hoyer et al., 2010).

In higher education, the concept of engagement also encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors. London et al. (2007, p.456) has defined student engagement as “academic investment, motivation, and commitment that students demonstrate within their institution (both in and out of the classroom context), [as well as] the psychological connection, comfort, and sense of belonging that students feel toward their institution, their peers, professors, and administrators.” Thus, objects of engagement are diverse including the institution, fellow students, professors, as well as learning and other personal factors (London et al., 2007). Student engagement may be manifested in terms of emotional attachment to the program, dissemination of positive word-of-mouth communications, and co-creation of values and experiences through participating school-sponsored activities. Once the engagement culture is established among student body, an MBA program is likely to become a genuine cash cow for universities (Piercy, 2000; Starkey et al., 2004).

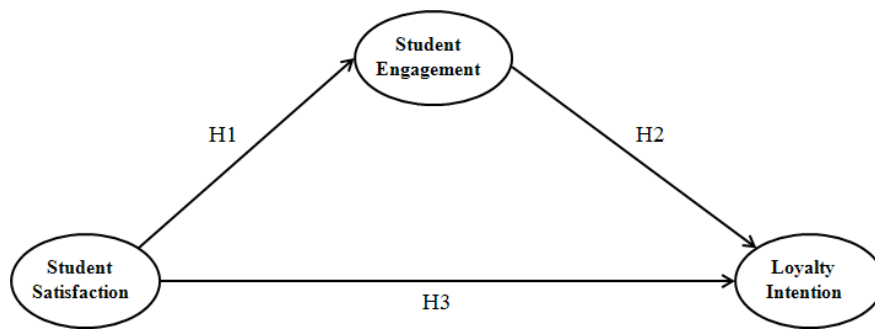
Regardless of such practical implications underlying student engagement, researchers and school administrators have been somewhat passive on that matter. Most studies have been conducted at undergraduate levels and only a handful done at graduate programs. Moreover, the concept of student engagement has been narrowly described in the literature as the student’s cognitive and affective attachment to the program or as involvement in the classroom, subject, learning, and so on (Carini et al., 2006; Klem & Connel, 2004; Marks, 2000). Albeit useful to some extent, such approaches fail to recognize student engagement as a part of prevailing student culture affecting many aspects including students’ behaviors. A more comprehensive perspective on student engagement may be gained based upon the MSI’s (2010, p.4) conceptualization which explains customer engagement is “customers’ behavioral manifestation toward a brand beyond purchase.” According to it, student engagement should include not only cognitive and affective attachment but also behavioral manifestation. Objects of engagement should also be expanded from learning or classroom to the MBA program or even college itself. And finally, student engagement is not likely to be truncated with graduation but can be extended beyond the level of their graduation. For example, Baruch and Sang (2012) reported that a number of MBA students maintain their involvement in the program after graduation. They further explained that MBA graduates’ involvement with the program is affected by factors such as satisfaction with their school experience, prestige of institutions, networking opportunity, and some demographic factors such as age and gender. Once appropriately managed, then, student engagement may be extended beyond graduation. Such recognition is important because if left alone, the graduates’ sense of attachment to the program is likely to decay rapidly with graduation (Burt, 2001). Therefore, it is imperative for any MBA program to establish student engagement as a cornerstone of their culture and instill loyalty intention while they are in the program. Practically speaking, it may be too difficult and costly for an MBA program to induce student engagement and loyalty to the program once they left the program.

MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND HYPOTHESES

The purpose of this study is to propose and empirically test student engagement as a concept that leads to student loyalty intention toward an MBA program. To maintain an objective perspective in theory testing, we developed a research model that is conducive to comparing traditional perspective to this research's point of view. Specifically, this study's research model incorporates not only student engagement but also student satisfaction, and examines their respective effect on loyalty intention. The research model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

A Model of Student Satisfaction, Student Engagement, and Loyalty Intention among MBA students



First, student satisfaction with the MBA program is likely to affect student engagement. A consumer's motivation toward engagement is dependent upon the value that one is expected to receive from the experience (Holbrook, 2006). An MBA student is likely to comprehensively evaluate the benefits of attending an MBA program in conjunction with monetary and non-monetary costs incurred. Once that benefit-to-cost evaluation is deemed positive, s/he may be motivated to be engaged in the program. An alternative explanation may be made based upon the reciprocal action theory (Li & Dant, 1997). According to it, an individual reciprocates actions taken by another in a relationship because, if the norm of reciprocity is violated, s/he would feel social indebtedness and guilt. Thus, s/he will return good for good, proportionately to what s/he receives in the relationship (Bagozzi, 1995). Once an MBA student experiences satisfaction with the program, s/he may feel obliged to return a favor for the program. The favor that the student reciprocates to the program may be manifested into engagement behaviors such as emotional attachment to the program, spreading positive word-of-mouth communications, participating in school activities, even making financial contributions. Based upon these, the following hypothesis is developed.

H1 Student satisfaction with an MBA program has a positive influence on student engagement.

Second, student engagement is likely to affect student loyalty intention to the MBA program. Once a consumer is engaged in a brand, s/he tends to increase participation in activities associated with the brand. Such interaction usually is accompanied by enthusiasm, making one develop even more favorable attitudes toward the brand (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). An accumulation of positive experiences through engagement is likely to motivate one to remain loyal to the brand (Vivek et al., 2012). Alternatively, Holbrook (2006, p.715) noted that engaged individuals might find intrinsic value from the engagement behavior and appreciate an engagement initiative for its own sake “as a self-justifying end in itself.” For an engaged MBA student, engagement behavior itself can be intrinsically rewarding perhaps due to a heightened sense of belonging to the program. Moreover, doing activities in association with and for the program may serve as a self-justifying end in itself. Thus, an MBA student who has performed engagement behavior for the program may feel a stronger connection to the program, develop a more favorable attitude toward the program, and consequently may become more loyal to the program.

H2 Student engagement in an MBA program has a positive influence on his/her loyalty intention with to the program.

Finally, student satisfaction is hypothesized to have a positive influence on loyalty intention. This hypothesis is in line with prior marketing studies reporting the close relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. In an MBA program, student satisfaction is established based upon one’s direct experience at the program. Since evaluations based upon one’s direct experience are strong predictors of future behavior (Fazio & Zanna, 1981), an MBA student being satisfied with the program is likely to maintain good feelings towards the program in the future. Similarly, the literature dealing with attitude-behavior consistency (Mano & Oliver, 1993) posits the close relationship between experience-based attitude and behavioral intention. In this context, student satisfaction is likely to exert a positive influence on loyalty intention among MBA students.

H3 Student satisfaction with an MBA program has a positive influence on loyalty intention.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were collected via a self-reported questionnaire administered to 270 students enrolled in an MBA program at a major university in India. The questionnaire was composed of four sections: student satisfaction measures, student engagement measures, the dependent measures (*i.e.*, loyalty intention measures), and demographic questions. A seven-point Likert scale was adopted as a response category for both dependent and independent measures. Student satisfaction was measured by using a three-item scale, which includes the students’ overall evaluation regarding the extent to which their needs are met, the extent to which their expectations are met, and overall satisfaction with the MBA program. Student engagement was incorporated into the questionnaire by using a seven-item scale that includes the student’s emotional attachment, word-of-mouth communication behavior, and participation of

the activities associated with the MBA program. The loyalty intention was measured by a two-item scale, addressing one's intention to continue the active relationship after graduation.

A total of 242 useable responses were collected. Demographically, 59.5 percent of the respondents were male and 40.5 percent female. All respondents were in their twenties. The school's MBA program was represented appropriately in terms of concentration areas, with 65 percent pursuing general MBA without concentration, 18 percent with finance concentration, and 8 percent with marketing concentration. Almost 95 percent of the students had cumulative GPA of 3.0 or above, and about 79 percent of them above 3.5. A review of the demographic profile of the respondents conducted by two school employees confirmed that the entire student population is appropriately represented by the sample.

RESULTS

Measurement properties of the scales developed for this study were evaluated using reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and nomological validity. The three scales used in this study had acceptable reliability. The scales of satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty intention among the MBA students had reliability coefficients of .88, .89, and .92, respectively.

Table 1 Constructs and Measure Assessment			
Constructs and Items	Standardized Factor Loading*	t	Cronbach's α
Student Satisfaction			.88
Meeting one's expectation	.88	-	
Overall satisfaction	.89	11.83	
Student Engagement			.89
Perceived bond with the program	.68	-	
Sense of belongingness	.81	11.31	
Mentioning the program to others	.74	10.44	
Posting messages in social media	.81	11.29	
Participation in activities for new students	.83	11.47	
Student Loyalty Intention			.92
Will actively communicate after graduation	.95	-	
Will actively participate after graduation	.89	20.09	

* Significant at .01 level.

Then, a confirmatory factor analysis using all three scales was carried out. One item dealing with satisfaction and two items measuring student engagement were removed from further analysis due to either poor factor loading or cross-loading. As shown in Table 1, all remaining items of each construct had significant factor loadings greater than .6, thus providing evidence of significant convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). A summary of construct correlations presented in Table 2 shows that none of the confidence intervals around the correlation estimates between the two factors (± 2 standard errors) includes 1.0, indicating the discriminant validity of measures (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Finally, constructs used in this study were found to behave consistently with pertinent theories in both marketing and psychology, as evidenced by the significant correlations among constructs. In summary, the

measures used in this study were found to have adequate measurement properties for a theory testing.

Table 2			
Construct Inter-correlations			
Construct	1	2	3
1. Satisfaction	1.0		
2. Engagement	.56***	1.0	
3. Loyalty Intention	.45***	.81**	1.0

*** Significant at .01

The hypotheses were tested by using structural equation modeling (SEM). We controlled measurement error by using a full SEM in which we estimated the three constructs and specified relationships among them (Figure 1) simultaneously. As Table 3 shows, the structural equation model fit the data well with satisfactory fit indices including adequate chi-square to degree of freedom ratio (2.65, $p < .01$), both GFI and CFI being well above .9 and RMSEA at .08 (Hair et al., 2006). The model explains 29% of the variance of MBA students' engagement behavior and 66% of the variance of students' intention to be loyal to their alma mater.

Table 3			
Hypothesis Testing Summary			
Path Modeled	(Hypothesis)	Standardized Coefficient	Result
Student Satisfaction → Engagement Behavior	(H1)	.54***	Supported
Engagement Behavior → Loyalty Intention	(H2)	.73***	Supported
Student Satisfaction → Loyalty Intention	(H3)	.14	Not Supported
Fit Indexes: $\chi^2 = 63.55$, $d.f.=24$, $p < .01$; GFI=.94; CFI=.97; SRMR=.04; RMSEA=.08			

*** Significant at .01

Hypothesis 1, which suggests a positive relationship between student satisfaction and student engagement is supported. This finding indicates the importance of satisfaction for MBA students to engage in the program. Hypothesis 2, dealing with the positive relationship between student engagement and the loyalty intention, is also supported. The finding indicates a tendency that an engaged student has a high likelihood of being loyal to the MBA program after graduation. Hypothesis 3 regarding the direct influence of student satisfaction on loyalty intention was not supported. Instead, student satisfaction was found to indirectly affect loyalty intention through the mediation of student engagement.

For a more rigorous theory testing, we compared our hypothesis-testing model with an alternative model. Specifically, this study's research model was compared with a nested model which posits student engagement as a full mediator of the relationship between student satisfaction and loyalty intention. In that alternative model, there was a significant decrease in the fit of the model (change in $\chi^2=5.674$, $p < .05$). Moreover, the variance explained in loyalty

intention was reduced, although all the paths in the model were statistically significant. In short, the alternative model neither had significantly increased model fit nor enhanced our understanding of loyalty intention among MBA students. Thus, the structural equation model in Figure 1 provides stable and parsimonious estimates of the multiple relationships in our data.

DISCUSSION

Although many authors support the perspective that higher education institutions are considered service organizations (Dolinsky, 1994; Zammuto, Keaveney, & O'Connor, 1996), a relational approach has only recently been applied to this specific field of services marketing. This study is in line with that perspective, yet extends the existing knowledge base by proposing and empirically demonstrating student engagement as an important construct that leads to student loyalty intention. This study, compared to existing studies, is unique because it examines student satisfaction and engagement in conjunction with MBA students' loyalty intention after graduation.

Findings of this study are generally in line with existing literature. Yet, the study also provides a meaningful, new insight into the study of student loyalty. First, student satisfaction is found to be an important factor exerting a direct influence on student engagement and an indirect influence on loyalty intention. This finding provides a meaningful clue for the controversy over the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. According to our study, student satisfaction alone was not sufficient to exert a meaningful influence on loyalty intention. Student satisfaction may enact a critical role during the formation stage of the student-program relationship. Yet, for that relationship to be escalated into the next level such as loyalty, mere satisfaction was not enough. Additional factors need to come into play. We found that it was through student engagement that student satisfaction exerted an indirect, yet significant influence on loyalty intention. Thus, student satisfaction needs to be sublimated into student engagement for one to develop loyalty intention to his/her MBA students. Otherwise, satisfaction with the MBA program may not be transferred into future behavioral intention. Thus, the administrators need to keep in mind that satisfaction is one thing and loyalty is another. Second, student engagement was found to exert a strong, positive influence ($\beta = .73, p < .01$) on loyalty intention among MBA students. Simply stated, engaged MBA students are the ones who will remain loyal after graduation. The very act of being engaged seems to solidify already favorable attitudes toward the program and student engagement serves as a precursor to the loyalty toward the program (Carini et al., 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

Graduate students are viewed as customers, and the schools establish their strategic goals in terms of student satisfaction and loyalty. Accordingly, a number of research calls have been made on the psychology of MBA students (Richards-Wilson, 2002). Regardless, student loyalty is an elusive concept. Oliver (1999), after observing the mixed findings on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty, has stated a call for research on additional factors that lead to customer loyalty. Similarly, Stewart (1997) exclaimed that a satisfied customer was

not enough. This research represents a response to such demands. The significant relationship between student engagement and loyalty intention demonstrated in this study should provide meaningful implications and an impetus for future research. MBA students' loyalty to their program is found to be affected not by satisfaction alone but by engagement. Instilling MBA students with a sense of engagement in the program is a cornerstone for getting them to continue their relationship with the alma mater. School administrators need to pay attention to such psychology of students and develop culture fostering that engagement is the norm.

This study, regardless of the meaningful findings, is not without shortcomings. First, the study has limited applications due to the lack of diversity in data. Data for this study was collected at one MBA program in India. While such a data collection setting allows us to control extraneous factors for a robust theory testing, the applicability of the findings to other contexts is somewhat hampered. Before applying the findings to a broader context, it would be necessary to replicate the study at more MBA programs. Second, this study has adopted loyalty intention as a proxy for actual loyalty. Although it has a good theoretical and practical grounds to assume a close relationship between them (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Woisetschlager, Lentz, & Evanschitzky, 2011), caution is advocated while applying the findings of this study. Finally, this study fails to incorporate other seemingly important variable that may determine the student engagement. For example, one's engagement with an MBA program may be affected by factors such as the prestige of the program, the student-faculty interaction quality, and the strength of existing alumni network. An inclusion of these attitudinal variables into the study's model would have reflected reality more precisely.

Findings of this study provide several implications for both administrators and scholars. Administrators of an MBA program looking into establishing strong alumni network need to keep in mind that delivering satisfactory education service is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the long-term relationship. A satisfied MBA student is not necessarily a loyal alumnus. Instead, engaged students are the ones who have a good chance of becoming loyal to the program. School administrators need to recognize the importance of fostering an environment which is conducive to student engagement.

For scholars, the findings of this study should suggest several research venues. First, it would be fruitful to identify strategies that effectively have MBA students engaged in the program. From a student perspective, being engaged in an MBA program requires commitment. They would have to take time in spreading word-of-mouth communications, exert effort in participating in activities sponsored by the program, and sometimes even donate their personal financial resources. Unless they find such activities to be intrinsically rewarding, their engagement may be neither strong nor lasting. In this context, identification of antecedents of student engagement among students in general, and MBA students in particular, can be a challenging, yet rewarding research topic. In addition, it would be interesting to examine student engagement in relation to other variables such as institutional, social, and individual factors. For example, there may be a particular segment of the MBA students that are more prone to getting engaged in the program than others. As Becker's (1960) side bet theory suggests, relationships are profitable only when they last long enough for the firm to recoup its costs and reap the benefits. Consequently, a firm should focus on identifying those customers

who are most likely to remain in long-term relationships with the firm. In an MBA program, figuring out these individuals in terms of their demographic and psychographic backgrounds would be useful in developing strategies. Finally, the findings of this study should provide an impetus for future research in a cross-cultural context. Culture and cultural values may add interesting twists to the tendency of student engagement in an MBA program. Indeed, there are a number of future research directions in the area.

In conclusion, this article presents a perspective in enhancing student loyalty to their MBA program. Service literature has made a significant progress over the years in expanding our understanding on satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty. MBA students' loyalty to the program, however, has received limited attention. There is a high expectation that the perspective and findings introduced in this study will be applied to future studies.

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