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## **Crafting The Servicescape For The Educational Services An Empirical Study**

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**Abstract:** *The world is witnessing a sea change in the knowledge centre and this has necessitated changes in the educational services in order to cater to the global needs. Moreover, because of inherent characteristics like the intangibility of services, the approach to the marketing of services is different than that of marketing goods. The intangibility of educational services challenges both, educational institutions and the students. Physical evidence, one of the 7P's of Service Marketing Mix plays a crucial role in incorporating tangibility. This study investigates the various elements of servicescape, how to prioritize the elements of physical evidence and there by crafting the service scape for the educational services. A questionnaire was administered to 150 respondents, out of which only 110 questionnaires were usable. Simple descriptive statistics have been used for the analysis. The results suggest that the primary importance, while designing the servicescape is to be given to students by seeking their views and priorities towards the facilities in the educational institutes. The results revealed that it is essential to analyze the various elements of physical evidence, allocate appropriate value or importance before crafting the service scape.*

**Keywords:** *Educational Services, Intangibility facilities, Servicescape, Physical evidence*

**Introduction**

The intangibility of service challenges educational institutes to make the offer believable and differentiable. At the same time students are looking out colleges around, searching for the best one, because the innovation in this field is bound to be more than in another service industry. The educational institutes can manage this by managing the service scape i.e. tangibility can be incorporated by managing the physical environment of service. Education as a service provides an intangible benefit (increment in knowledge, aptitude, professional expertise, Skills) produced with the help of a set of tangible (faculty expertise and learning) aids.

In any service organization the human behavior is influenced by physical surroundings. As natural world around us impact our behavior, so do the human made element. As Kenneth and Claw said within the service setting the physical surrounding of the service will affect both customers and employees. The physical elements of a service are called 'Servicescape'. The students who are pleased with the physical environment will tend to be more satisfied with the service and patronize the service again in future by promoting it using word of mouth.

Educational institutions face a typical question when it comes to design a service facility: whose needs are paramount in terms of facility needs? Is it Students or management? Perhaps it should be designed to meet the needs of both the service scape should match the firm's three possible operational positions which are cost efficiency, customization and service quality. In order to meet the needs of customer, their expectations have to be clearly analyzed. Once understood the priorities of the students, the service scape can be built such that the students are satisfied. The rationality of using the service scape in the education services is to make them self sufficient and help the students to get placed in better service encounter.

**Review of Literature**

Service is defined as "any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership in anything. Its production may or may not be tied to physical product" The education sector in India is heading for a drastic change than what earlier expected. With the privatization gaining importance

number of education in states may rise phenomenally in the new years to come (J.S.Panwar, 2004). With the global transformation of educational institutions into service oriented establishments the institutional services must continuously improve in order to satisfy the students (Rama Mohana Rao, 2005). The term education marketing connotes application of marketing principles in the educational services or alignment of education with marketing (S.M.Jha, 1994). India has to rise to the occasion urgently and reorient its higher education system to be vibrant, competitive, meaningful and purposeful (Nithyavathi & Shani, 2011).

Institutions are not having the desired service design and standards to meet the requirements of the students (Mamilla Rajasekhar et al, 2009). If the students perceptions of service quality enhances then there will be positive consequences in the form of overall students' satisfaction and overall service quality perception (Sumiti. k. Phadke, 2011). The highest scores on the parameters of intellectual capital, admissions and placements, infrastructure, industry interface and governance by business schools could make them stand on the top (Rajan, 2009).

The inherent intangibility of services makes physical evidence an important tool for tangibilization. (Bhattacharjee, 2006). Service environments communicate and determine the positioning of service, shape employee as well as customer productivity, guide customer through delivery system and may represent the core component of the firms search for competitive advantage (Christopher Lovelock et al., 2010). Physical evidence is the environment in which the service is delivered and where the firm and the customer interact and any tangible component that facilitate performance or communication of service. Bitner [1992] introduced the nomenclature of "servicescape" to the physical facility where the services are delivered or offered (Vinnu Jauhari & Kirti Dutta, 2009). Physical evidence is everything that a company physical exhibits to the customer. It includes the physical environment of the services outlet, the exterior, the interior, and all tangibles. It provides tangible cues to customer to develop service quality expectations (Rama Mohana Rao, 2005). Physical evidence enhances customer's perception of quality. Customer judge service quality through physical evidence and marketers tangibles the intangible service by providing the physical evidence (Ram Pal & S.L.Gupta, 2000).

Institutions of higher learning can use their physical environment to craft a unique image for themselves. Branding in educational institutions involved a two-way recognition, add that the universities must adopt a brand as there prior to the beginning of brand promotion to the external audiences (Akotia). Service customers are interested in the ambience. Even after the customer has consumed a service, he may remember the tangible features of a service brand and look forward to going there the next time (Rajendra Nargundkar, 2006). Facilities may also play a role in attracting and repelling a student from a service establishment. Within the service setting, the physical surroundings of the service affect both customers and employees (Kenneth et al, 2003). Measuring on the parameters of quality, education standards, physical infrastructure and academic facilities and capabilities, teaching facility, the Indian Higher Education System reveals that the regional colleges and universities are at the bottom of the hierarchy. The Government has to improve standards of education in regional universities through conscious efforts (Ushadevi, 2006).

#### **Need For The Study**

As the world move towards the global economy, the service sector has become a very significant contributor. In this scenario the customers of various services, even students as customers of educational institutions are in a state of increased awareness and expectation. Need for concentrating on services environment of educational institutions was really felt, as demand was always greater than supply. The technological changes and shrinking global boundaries have increased the importance of servicescape for educational services. As the students are the service takers, the primary importance, while designing servicescape should be given to students in designing facilities, because these facilities will be used mostly by them. In diverse and cluttered educational services, management of institutions would depend on effective brand differentiation based on adequate brand identification. That brand identification can be gained by understanding the significance of servicescape in marketing of educational services. The need for the study is felt on these grounds.

### **Objectives of The Study**

The study is aimed at the following objectives;

- i. To list the components of service environment for educational services.
- ii. To identify students prioritization of elements of physical evidence.
- iii. To craft the servicescape for the educational institutions based on the prioritization of various elements of physical evidence.

### **Methodology**

The main foundation of the study is the questionnaire based sample analysis. The sample was believed to be quite representative of population but nonetheless, it was a convenience sample. The target group is the composition of the students who have finished their under graduation course and looking forward to join an institution to do post graduation. A Well structured questionnaire is circulated to target group of 150, out of which only 110 were used, as the others are either partly filled or completely unfilled. The secondary source of data included texts, journals, magazines, newspaper and websites. The analysis of the study is based on the calculated Mean Values of various responses as the questionnaire is constructed on five-point scale (5- Outstanding, 4- Excellent, 3- Better, 2- Good and 1-Not bad). Higher the Mean Value, higher the rank. higher the priority for the elements of the servicescape and vice versa. Based upon the priority the servicescape is thus crafted. The present study analyzed the expectations of the students who were aspiring to do post graduation course. The result of the study i.e., the service scape so designed may not be applicable in full fledged manner to all the levels of educational services i.e., primary and secondary etc.

### **Analysis & Results**

This paper has made an attempt to study the students' perspective of prioritization of the elements of servicescape for educational services. The elements of servicescape include facilities exterior, facilities interior and the other tangibles. Five sub elements are identified under each element to get more insight into the study. The students have been asked to indicate their quality of expectation for each sub element. The student's expectation of various elements of facilities exterior with corresponding Mean values and ranks are presented in the table-1.

<b>Facilities exterior</b>	<b>Mean value</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Building exterior	2.81	2
Parking	2.36	4
Transportation	2.60	3
Surroundings	2.23	5
Basic Amenities	3.40	1

*Table 1 : Average Means and Rank for facilities exterior elements*

It indicates from table-1 that the respondents have ranked for various elements of facilities exterior for educational service. Higher the Mean value, higher the rank and vice versa. The results revealed that the highest rank is for the Basic Amenities with Mean value 3.40, followed by building exterior (Mean value 2.81), transportation (Mean value 2.60), parking (Mean value 2.36) and the last surroundings (Mean value 2.23). As shown in the table, the score for all the elements expect Basic amenities are between 2-3 on 5-point rating scale, indicating that the students expect building exterior, parking, transportation, and surroundings to be offered in better condition. Whereas the Mean value of 3.4 for Basic Amenities indicates that this facility is expected to be good.

The elements of Faculty Expertise, Width of Specialization, Ambience, Library & lab facilities and Students clubs are identified as sub elements of facilities interior. The responses are depicted in Table-2.

<b>Facilities interior</b>	<b>Mean value</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Faculty Expertise	3.70	2
Width of Specialization	3.37	4
Ambience	3.89	1
Library and lab facilities	3.55	3
Students clubs	3.34	5

*Table 2: Average Means and Rank for facilities interior elements*

From the above table-2, it is evident that Ambience with Mean value 3.89 is ranked first and Students club with Mean value 3.34 is ranked low. Even though different ranks are allocated to the elements, it is noticed that all the elements have Mean score above 3 i.e.,

Faculty Expertise (3.70), Library and lab facilities (3.55) and Width of Specialization(3.37) implying that all these facilities are expected to be offered in excellent manner.

Other than the exterior and interior facilities, the Educational institutions can also use University & industrial ratings, Placements Records, Industry interface activity, Teaching aids and Prospectus as physical evidence to cope up with intangibility aspect of the service. The responses have been taken and presented in Table-3.

Other Tangibles	Mean value	Rank
University & industrial ratings	3.22	3
Placements Records	4.16	1
Industry interface	2.92	4
Teaching aids	3.67	2
Prospectus	1.88	5

*Table 3: Average Means and Rank for Other Tangibles*

The student's prioritizations of these elements are given in the above table-3 with corresponding Mean values and ranks. The ranked order of tangibles is Placements (4.16), Teaching aids, University & industrial ratings (3.22), Industry interface (2.92) and Prospectus (1.88). The Mean value of 4.16 for Placements signifies that a student expects outstanding placements from the service. The Mean values for Teachings Aids and University & Industrial ratings are above 3. This shows that an educational institution is expected to offer these elements in a better way. It is observed that the Industry-interface has Mean value of 2.92, signifying that a good industry interface is expected. It is revealed from table that the prospectus of the service is ranked low with calculated Mean value of 1.88.

The Mean Values with corresponding ranks of all the elements of servicescape are given in the above table. It has been observed that there exists an educational organization where without being concentrating on the physical setting of the service, just focus on promotions to get brand differentiation. The overall mean values and ranks of elements of servicescape are given in table-4.

Elements	Mean Value	Rank
Placements Records (PR)	4.16	1
Ambience (A)	3.89	2
Faculty Expertise (FE)	3.70	3
Teaching aids (TA)	3.67	4
Library and lab facilities (LF)	3.55	5
Basic Amenities (BA)	3.40	6
Width of Specialization (WS)	3.37	7
Students clubs (SC)	3.34	8
University & industrial ratings(UIR)	3.22	9
Industry interface (II)	2.92	10
Building exterior (BE)	2.81	11
Transportation (T)	2.60	12
Parking (PR)	2.36	13
Surroundings (S)	2.23	14
Prospectus (P)	1.88	15

*Table 4: Overall Mean Values and the Ranks of elements of Servicescape*

The above table-4, shows that the need for the hour is to prioritize the elements of physical evidence and craft a servicescape which satisfies both the organization and the students. It is evident from the table the placements have highest Mean Value of 4.16 indicating that the students are expecting placements to be excellent. The Mean Value of above 3.5 has been observed for elements like Ambience, Faculty Expertise, Teaching – Aids, Library & Lab facilities and the Mean Value of 3 for Basic Amenities, Width Of Specialization, Students Clubs and University & industrial ratings. The ranges of Mean Values from 3 to 4 signify that all these elements have to be offered in better condition. It is also observed that Industry–interface, Building Exterior, Transport, Parking facility and surroundings have Mean Value above 2 implying that these are expected to be good. Last but not least the Prospectus has the Mean Value of 1.88 indicating that this should be not bad.



**Conclusion**

From the study it has been found that the three components of the servicescape for Educational services are: Facility Exterior (Building exterior, Parking, Transportation, Surroundings and Basic Amenities); Facility Interior (Faculty Expertise Width of Specialization Ambience Library & lab facilities and Students clubs); and Other tangibles (University & industrial ratings, Placements Records, Industry interface, Teaching aids and Prospectus). When individually ranks are observed for various elements except for Placements the students have prioritized the facility interior elements than the facility exterior elements and other tangibles. The inventions and innovations in the field of technologies have a far reaching impact on improving the standard of education. Education is the reflection of one's premium privilege for any institution. In the marketing of education institutions, the benefits offered by physical evidence are increased faculty (employee) productivity, creation of good impression among students (customers) increased credibility of the education institution (service provider), the process of strategic management of service scape (physical evidence) is continues process and need to be updated constantly. By effectively managing the service scape the education institutions can subtly influence student perception and the faculty satisfaction at the service encounter. The Prioritization of various elements plays a vital role in developing a service scape which satisfies needs of both the education institutions (service provider) and the students (customers).

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