

Customer Perceived Value among University Students in Preadmission and Postadmission Stages

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Received: 18-07-2025	Revised: 24-08-2025	Accepted: 10-09-2025	Published: 24-09-2025
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine the differences customer perceived value before and after experiencing higher education services. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire, from the university students. Results show that there are significant differences amongst the dimensions of perceived value at pre-post admission stages. Findings also help university administrators to manage the perceptions of students according to their expectations at both stages. The study also contributes to the body of knowledge by highlighting that customer perceived value may vary before and after the actual service experience within the higher education context. Future research directions are also discussed.

Keywords: Customer Perceived Value, Pre-Post admissions, Services, Higher Education, Students

INTRODUCTION

As the consumer expectations vary so does the consumer behavior across the service journey, as customers form initial expectations before service consumption and subsequently evaluate their experiences after service delivery (Oliver, 1980; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). From this we can infer that in case of student experience in higher education, expected benefits might be different before admission, while enrolled students assess value based on their actual service experiences.

Thus, CPV should not be viewed one time like most of people do before the service purchase and then no further evaluation but it should be viewed as a dynamic evaluation that may change between the pre-service and post-service stages. If overlooked this may cause misalignment of service delivery with evolving customer expectations and value perceptions (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Heinonen et al., 2010). Examining perceived value across these stages can therefore extend existing knowledge by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how value perceptions develop before and after the actual service experience.

There has been extensive research on CPV but questions still prevail on its in-depth understanding like its conceptualization, dimensions, and temporal nature remain open (Woodruff, 1997; Parasuraman, 1997; Zauner et al., 2015). Similarly a typical questions is still unanswered that whether customers use the same criteria to evaluate value before purchasing a service and after experiencing it as it is difficult to evaluate service before experience. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) find out that the services evaluation across stages

of experience can vary. Similarly, Woodruff (1997) and Parasuraman (1997) also endorsed that for the more in-depth understanding of how customers learn about and evaluate value and how such knowledge can be incorporated into value strategies.

This issue becomes more significant in services because value is shaped through ongoing interactions and experiences rather than through a single exchange. Customers form expectations before service consumption, but subsequent encounters with employees, processes, technology, and the service environment can alter their value perceptions (Helkkula et al., 2012; Martín-Ruiz et al., 2012). Research has further shown that value may evolve during successive stages of service delivery, suggesting that customer evaluations are not necessarily stable throughout the service journey (Gallarza et al., 2017).

In higher education, the moments of truth vary at both stages as during admissions students interact with only admissions, institutional visits, and few of faculty members whereas at the later stage they are more intact with admin offices including exams, registrar, etc. and large number of faculty members so their expectations vary at the very core. As students are usually interact with different university services or aspect of overall service (Hossain, et. al., 2010) so their expectations are different in pre-admission and post admission stages (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Bhattacharjee, 2001) so this should be studied that how differently prospective and current students perceive value in higher education services. Consequently, whether the dimensions and relative importance of customer perceived value remain consistent before and after the actual service experience remains an important empirical question. Addressing this issue can extend customer value research by explaining how value perceptions develop across different stages of a service relationship rather than treating perceived value as a single, static evaluation. Lai et. al., (2012) suggested that future research should be conducted that how student's undergraduate purchase and their future postgraduate purchase affect their evaluation of perceived value. Toledo, Martínez, & García, (2017) studied the factors effecting perceived value and outcome of perceived value among university graduates. They collected quantitative data using unidimensional scale and they acknowledged as a limitation. They also suggested that research should be undertaken by considering the time at which research is undertaken (right after graduation) because of the diversity and complexity of concept (perceived value).

The study of customer perceived value across different stages of the service journey is highly relevant to the higher education sector in Pakistan. Higher education institutions are facing growing competition for attracting and retaining students, making the overall service experience an important consideration beyond the academic program offered otherwise students may transfer during degree programs. Most of studies and even higher education institutions focus on satisfaction through areas such as administrative support, teaching quality, facilities, infrastructure, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Mastoi et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2021; Butt et al., 2024). Universities from both sectors including public and private has also demonstrated the role of service delivery in shaping students' satisfaction and institutional perceptions (Usman, 2010; Tahir & Saleem, 2021).

Regardless of this amount of research, there still scarcity that whether students' expectations and perceptions of higher education change over the time from admission and their subsequent experience as enrolled students. The issue is particularly relevant to Pakistan given the Higher Education Commission's emphasis on student-centred quality enhancement, stakeholder involvement, institutional performance, and evidence-based improvement under the PSG-2023 framework (HEC, 2023). This will help institutions in improving recruitment communication, service provision, resource allocation, and the overall student experience. Accordingly, this study extends the existing Pakistani higher education literature by considering customer perceived value as an evolving construct that may differ before and after students experience the actual service.

The paper comprises of introduction, review of literature establishes the conceptual foundation of customer perceived value in the higher education context. Methodology sections covers the research design, data collection, and analysis procedures, followed by the presentation and discussion of empirical findings. The paper concludes with implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Complexity of Customer Perceived Value

Customer perceived value (CPV) has remained an important but conceptually challenging area of marketing research. Although the idea of value has been central to marketing since its early development, there is still no universally accepted definition or measurement approach that captures its full nature (Woodruff, 1997; Parasuraman, 1997; Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). Early studies approached value through different perspectives. Sheth et al. (1991), for example, proposed functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional values, whereas Zeithaml (1988) conceptualized value as an overall assessment based on the benefits received and sacrifices made. Later, Sweeney and Soutar (2001) developed the PERVAL scale, while Smith and Colgate (2007) organized value around functional, experiential, symbolic, and cost/sacrifice dimensions.

These contributions demonstrate that value is neither a single nor a universally fixed construct. Rather, its meaning may vary according to the individual, situation, context, and nature of the offering (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). Consequently, considerable research has examined the consequences of CPV, including satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase behavior, while comparatively less attention has been directed toward establishing a comprehensive understanding of how the construct itself is constituted and measured. This continuing conceptual diversity indicates that CPV remains an area in which further theoretical and empirical development is warranted.

Perceived Value Across Pre- and Post-Service Experience

A further issue concerns the temporal nature of perceived value. Customers do not necessarily evaluate a service from a single point in time; their expectations and subsequent evaluations may develop as they move through different stages of the service journey. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) demonstrated the applicability of perceived-value measurement in both prepurchase and postpurchase settings, while Woodruff (1997) argued for greater attention to how customers perceive value throughout the consumption process. Similarly, Parasuraman (1997) highlighted the contextual and customer-specific nature of value, suggesting that what constitutes value may differ according to circumstances.

More recent service research has reinforced the view that value is experienced and interpreted through interactions and consumption experiences rather than being determined solely at the point of purchase (Helkkula et al., 2012; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Despite this perspective, empirical research has more commonly examined perceived value at a particular point in the customer journey or focused on its relationship with post-consumption outcomes. Limited attention has therefore been given to whether the dimensions and relative importance of perceived value remain stable when customers move from expectations before service consumption to evaluations formed through actual service experience. This issue is particularly important for services, where the customer relationship continues after the initial exchange and repeated interactions can reshape perceptions of value.

Customer Perceived Value in Higher Education

The higher education sector provides an appropriate setting for examining this issue because education is an experiential and relational service in which students interact continuously with academic, administrative, technological, and support systems. Existing higher education research has established

perceived value as an important component of students' evaluation of university services. Petruzzellis and Romanazzi (2010), for instance, examined value and satisfaction in the higher education context and demonstrated the importance of students' evaluations of educational services. Teeroovengadum et al. (2019) further incorporated perceived value into a higher education model linking service quality, image, satisfaction, and student loyalty. More recently, Iskandar et al. (2024) examined students' perceived value in higher education and showed that service quality and organizational justice can contribute to students' value perceptions.

The present study represents an extended replication of Ehsan (2024), undertaken to examine the robustness and broader applicability of the findings obtained in the earlier study. Replication is important for establishing the consistency of empirical findings and for assessing their generalizability across different samples and research settings (Hubbard et al., 2021). While Ehsan (2024) identified differences in students' perceived value between the preadmission and postadmission stages, the earlier investigation was based on a comparatively smaller sample and limited institutional coverage.

The current study retains the central research focus while substantially expanding the sample and incorporating a wider range of universities. This broader empirical base provides an opportunity to determine whether the previously observed differences remain evident across a more diverse student and institutional population. Accordingly, the contribution of the present study lies not in introducing an entirely different phenomenon, but in strengthening, extending, and testing the generalizability of the earlier evidence concerning the temporal nature of customer perceived value in higher education.

Contribution and Benefits of the Study

Examining CPV at the preadmission and postadmission stages can contribute to both theory and higher education practice. From a theoretical perspective, the study can provide evidence on whether students employ similar or different value dimensions before and after experiencing university services, thereby contributing to the continuing debate concerning the contextual and temporal nature of CPV. It can also extend existing value research beyond the conventional focus on purchase intentions, satisfaction, and loyalty by examining changes in the construct itself.

From a managerial perspective, identifying differences between expected and experienced value can assist university administrators in understanding where institutional promises and actual service experiences converge or diverge. Such knowledge can inform admission communication, programme positioning, student support, academic services, and resource allocation. In this respect, universities can manage value not only as a means of attracting prospective students but also as an ongoing element of the student experience. The study consequently provides a service-oriented perspective in which CPV is examined across the transition from prospective customer to actual service recipient.

Connie and Sally (2012) supported that the consumer perceived value is sort of personal and time-bound – that support the current research that how much it is important to find out the differences among students' perceptions from admission to graduation.

In higher education, students interact with different service providers across the student journey, and these interactions can shape how they perceive value. Before admission, contact is often limited to administrative and admission staff, whereas after enrolment, students interact more extensively with faculty and other academic services. As discussed that perceived value can change with experience and context, it is quite interesting to evaluate these stages separately (Woodruff, 1997; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Alves, 2011). Therefore, this study addresses the following research question: Do the dimensions of customer perceived value in higher education vary before and after admissions?

Dimensions of Perceived Value

This has been majorly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct (Sheth, Newman and Gross, 1991; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Smith and Colgate, 2007). One of the most cited work on this concept comes from Sheth et al. (1991) who presented five dimensions including functional, emotional, social, conditional and epistemic value while Sweeney and Soutar (2001) emphasized functional, emotional and social value in consumer settings. There is one totally different set of dimensions by Smith and Colgate (2007) including functional, experiential, symbolic and cost-related dimensions.

Personal and axiological influences have received comparatively limited attention in perceived value research. Factors such as culture, religion, education and personality can shape how customers evaluate products and services, while personal values provide the criteria through which such judgments are formed (Holbrook, 1994; Parasuraman, 1997; Hubert et al., 2001). Since personal values can influence behaviour and evaluation, their inclusion can offer a broader understanding of perceived value (Richins, 1994; Collin et al., 2007).

More recent perspectives have therefore treated perceived value as a context-dependent concept influenced by personal, situational and temporal factors. Connie and Sally (2012), for example, integrated ideas from economics, psychology, axiology and marketing to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how customers form value judgments.

Table 1: Dimensions of Perceived Value

Study	Main value dimensions identified
Sheth, Newman & Gross (1991)	Functional value; social value; emotional value; epistemic value; conditional value
Sweeney & Soutar (2001)	Quality/performance-related value; price/value for money; emotional value; social value
Sweeney, Soutar & Johnson (1999)	Social acceptability; emotional response; price/economic value; performance-related value; versatility
Smith & Colgate (2007)	Functional or instrumental value; experiential or hedonic value; symbolic or expressive value; cost/sacrifice value

Inferring from the above discussion the major work related to perceived value is reviewed and it is found that work of Ledden, et. al, (2007) including dimensions of perceived value including Functional, Emotional, Social, Epistemic and Aesthetics/Image value is most suitable for higher education industry. Following is the short description of each dimension of perceived value in the context of higher education explained by Ledden, et. al, (2007).

Theoretical Framework

Students encounter multiple academic, administrative, technological, and support services throughout their university journey, and these encounters can shape their expectations and evaluations of the overall service experience (Hossain et al., 2010). In the preadmission stage, prospective students primarily assess the expected benefits of an institution based on available information, reputation, communication, and anticipated educational outcomes, whereas postadmission students evaluate value through their actual interactions with university services (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Bhattacharjee, 2001).

Consequently, the dimensions through which students assess perceived value may differ between these two stages. This issue is particularly relevant in Pakistan, where universities operate within an increasingly competitive higher education environment and are required to respond to changing student expectations while improving the quality of institutional services. Building on the multidimensional

nature of customer perceived value and its application to higher education (Ledden et al., 2007), the present study examines the dimensions through which students perceive value at the preadmission and postadmission stages.

The study therefore seeks to identify whether students attach different meanings and importance to value before entering a university and after experiencing its services. This stage-based perspective provides a conceptual basis for understanding customer perceived value as an evolving evaluation within the higher education service journey.

The theoretical model developed for the study is presented below.

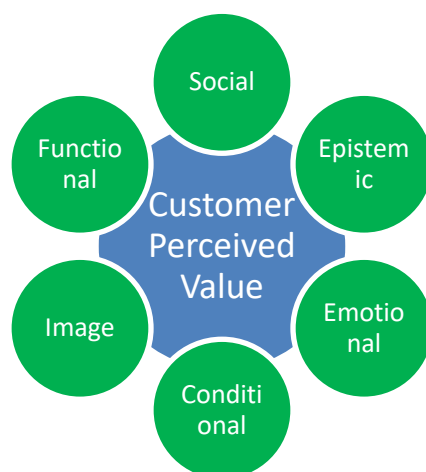


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses are developed on the considering the multidimensional nature of CPV in the higher education context. Each dimension include different set of points that can carry different importance for students depending on whether they are evaluating these points before admission or after admission.

Functional Value: In higher education, functional value primarily reflects the perceived quality and performance of the educational offering, including the quality of teaching and the suitability of the selected academic program.

- *H1: Students' assessment of the importance of functional value differs between the preadmission and postadmission stages of higher education.*

Epistemic Value: Epistemic value concerns the extent to which the educational experience stimulates curiosity, learning, intellectual interest, and the desire to acquire new knowledge.

- *H2: Students' assessment of the importance of epistemic value differs between the preadmission and postadmission stages of higher education.*

Social Value: Social value reflects the benefits associated with interaction with peers and the social meaning attached to studying at a particular university, including its perceived image within society.

- *H3: Students' assessment of the importance of social value differs between the preadmission and postadmission stages of higher education.*

Emotional Value: Emotional value represents the feelings and affective responses associated with the university experience, including students' developing attachment to the institution, faculty, and peers.

- *H4: Students' assessment of the importance of emotional value differs between the preadmission and postadmission stages of higher education.*

Conditional Value: Conditional value refers to the value that emerges from particular circumstances or situations. In case of higher education, this could include the related benefits it may include benefits associated with specific learning conditions, resources, or educational materials (Unni, 2005).

- *H5: Students' assessment of the importance of conditional value differs between the preadmission and postadmission stages of higher education.*

Image Value: Image value concerns students' perceptions of the physical and symbolic aspects of the university environment, including the appearance, design, and attractiveness of institutional facilities. Such tangible cues can be particularly relevant in service settings where the core service is largely intangible (Chahal & Kumari, 2012).

- *H6: Students' assessment of the importance of image value differs between the preadmission and postadmission stages of higher education.*

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: In this research given the nature of study, we conducted this study using a quantitative survey design in students' perceptions of value pre-post admission at any degree awarding institute. Cross-sectional data were collected by taking respondents opinions to evaluate CPV at both stages through a structured questionnaire.

Population and Sample: For the data collection, university undergraduate and graduate students were enrolled as respondents of this study. We approached almost ten universities of the region. Simple random sampling was used as sampling and we reached almost 900+ plus respondents out of which approx. 850 responded accurately. The sample size was considered adequate for the proposed statistical analysis and also provided representation from a broader institutional setting rather than relying on respondents from a single university.

Research Instrument: Self-questionnaire structure was quite simple in the first part we collected demographics, following the students opinions on dimensions of CPV before admission and after that post admission. All the survey items were Likert-type response format to allow comparison between the two stages.

Reliability Assessment: Internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. A coefficient of 0.70 or above was treated as an acceptable level of reliability. The measures used in the study were based on previously established dimensions of perceived value. The analysis therefore

concentrated on scale reliability and comparison of the same constructs across the pre-admission and post-admission stages.

Data Analysis: Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were first used to examine the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Reliability analysis was then performed for the study constructs. The paired-samples analysis provides evidence of whether students' perceptions of value change after experiencing the university environment. As pre-admission and post-admission assessments were obtained from the same respondents, paired-samples t-tests were used to determine whether significant differences existed in the importance attached to the dimensions of perceived value across the two stages. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5 per cent level ($p < 0.05$). A significant positive or negative mean difference indicates that the importance attached to a particular value dimension changed after admission, whereas a non-significant result suggests relative stability between the two stages.

FINDINGS

The final sample consisted of 850 respondents from 10 universities. Male respondents represented 62 per cent of the sample, while 38 per cent were female. With respect to age, 40% were between 20 and 22 years, and 55% were between 23 and 25 years. The remaining 5 per cent were above 25 years of age. The age profile shows that the majority of respondents were between 20 and 25 years, which is consistent with the typical age composition of university students.

Table 2: Demographics

Demographics	Options	Percentage
Gender	Male	62%
	Female	38%
Age	20 – 22	40%
	23-25	55%
	Above 25	05%

Scale reliability was ensured as its value is higher than 0.80 in both stages as results are as follows:

Table 3: Reliability of Construct

Constructs	Items	Pre-CA	Post-CA
Functional Value	PreF1, PreF2, PreF3, PreF4, PreF5, PreF6	0.918	0.944
Epistemic Value	PREP1, PREP2, PREP3, PREP4	0.899	0.896
Social Value	PreS1, PreS2, PreS3, PreS4, PreS5, PreS6	0.801	0.872
Emotional Value	PreEm1, PreEm2, PreEm3, PreEm4, PreEm5, PreEm6	0.883	0.895
Conditional Value	PreC1, PreC2, PreC3, PreC4	0.854	0.921
Image Value	PreI1, PreI2, PreI3, PreI4, PreI5	0.928	0.952

Following are the paired sample t-test to reflect the difference in perceived value dimensions in the pre-post admission stage.

Table 4: Paired T-Sample Results

Preadmission Vs Postadmission	Pre-Post	t	Sig.	Results
Functional Value	.118	3.081	.002	Accepted
Epistemic Value	.021	.809	.419	Rejected
Social Value	.147	3.421	.001	Accepted
Emotional Value	.231	4.268	<.001	Accepted
Conditional Value	-.294	-3.612	<.001	Accepted
Image Value	.076	1.419	.156	Rejected

Hypothesis 1-Functional Value, 2-Epistemic Value & 6-Image Value are rejected as the difference in the importance of dimension is not significant (Sig-Value is above 0.05). On the other hand 1-Functional Value, Hypothesis 3, Social Value, 4-Emotional Value & 5-Conditional Value are accepted as the difference in the importance is significant with sig value of below 0.05.

DISCUSSIONS

The results indicate that functional value differed significantly between the pre-admission and post-admission stages. This suggests that students reassess academic quality, program usefulness, and institutional performance after experiencing the university directly. Functional value is closely linked with the quality and performance of an offering (Sheth et al., 1991; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). No significant difference was found for epistemic value, showing that students continue to value knowledge, learning, and intellectual development at both stages. Epistemic value has been identified as an important component of perceived value in higher education (Ledden et al., 2007; Lai et al., 2012).

Significant differences were observed for social and emotional value. After admission, students develop relationships with classmates, faculty, and the wider university community, which may strengthen their social experience and emotional attachment to the institution. Previous studies also recognize social and emotional benefits as important dimensions of perceived value (Sheth et al., 1991; Lai et al., 2012).

Conditional value also differed significantly. Students' perceptions may change with their academic, financial, and personal circumstances after admissions. CV is generally associated with changes in value may arise from particular situations or conditions (Sheth et al., 1991). Finally, image value did not differ significantly, suggesting that university reputation remains important at both stages. Institutional image can influence university selection & also to shape students' evaluation post admission (Alwi et al., 2020).

PRACTICAL & THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Universities can use these findings to focus resources on the value dimensions that change most across the student journey. Since functional, social, emotional and conditional value differ between pre- and post-admission stages, these areas should be managed differently for prospective and existing students, while epistemic and image value require consistent attention throughout. The results also suggest that perceived value should be assessed separately at pre-admission and post-admission stages based on observations.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that the importance of perceived value dimensions varies between the pre-admission and post-admission stages. This supports the view that perceived value is context-dependent and may change across situations, industries and time (Küpeli and Özer, 2020). Accordingly, assessing perceived value separately at the pre-post admission stages provide accurate understanding of students' evaluations.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study addresses the earlier limitation of a small sample by including 850 respondents from ten universities; however, some limitations remain. First, the study relies on self-reported responses, which may be influenced by recall or response bias, particularly when students evaluate their pre-admission perceptions after enrolment. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to observe how perceived value changes over time; future research may adopt a longitudinal approach. Finally, as the study focuses on business students, future studies may test the framework across other academic disciplines and institutional settings to improve generalizability.

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