

# Gender and generation differences in university students' word-of-mouth willingness

## **Gender and generation differences in university students' word-of-mouth willingness**

**Student loyalty in the higher education sector helps college administrators to establish long-term relationships with both current and former students. Study have chosen to examine one of the components of loyalty, namely the willingness of students to spread positive information about the university. The study aimed to empirically examine the willingness of positive word of mouth communication by gender, and generation. The study utilised a quantitative design. The survey was conducted in a private university with a population of about 2,100 students. The data were collected using convenience sampling during the winter semester of the academic year 2018/2019 in two groups of bachelor level full-time students. There were 114 usable responses. Research has found that university's students are mostly willing to spread positive information about their alma mater. The statistically significant differences in the willingness of positive word of mouth communication by gender were confirmed ( $p < .0001$ ). We failed to reject the hypothesis about differences in gender ( $p = 0.1708$ ). Thus, university programs loyalty should adapt their approach, to incorporate at least gender differences.**

### **Introduction**

Globalisation and market competition pressure in the education sector urge higher education institutions to increase their economic responsibility and performance continually (Watjatrakul 2014). Nevertheless, today, more than ever before, universities face enormous challenges due to the current drop in student numbers due to the attitude of potential and current students to higher education, the costs of education compared to future benefits, and last but not least by the competition of a large number of universities (Rizkallah and Seitz 2017). Student loyalty in the higher education sector helps college administrators to establish appropriate programs that promote, establish, develop and maintain successful long-term relationships with both current and former students (Annamdevula and Bellamkonda 2016). Many universities, in this context, have even approached the principles of student satisfaction's management and measurement in order to keep them as customers as long as possible. As a result, higher education institutions in many countries are standing at crossroads and face various challenges (Strach 2017).

Customer loyalty can be defined as a higher probability of making new and repeated purchases, spontaneously recommending a particular service provider and spreading the positive word of mouth (Tahal et al. 2017). The purpose of this study is to empirically examine the willingness of positive word of mouth communication by gender, and generation.

Several research studies have shown that measuring customer satisfaction's management and measurement alone, without variables that have an impact on profitability or other desired

outcomes, is not sufficient (Erjavec 2015). Loyalty, as a specific expression of student satisfaction, can be manifested in a variety of ways. For instance, by studying at the next level of education at the same university, by spreading positive information, by recommending university programs to others (Webb and Jagun 1997). Since research on repurchasing of university products is more appropriate for secondary research, we have chosen to examine only one of the components of loyalty, namely the willingness of students to spread positive information about the university. Thanks to it, the universities maintain a reputation and, more importantly, get new students in a completely natural way. Fact, that customer satisfaction drives word of mouth is quite straightforward and not very surprising: practically every textbook on customer satisfaction states somewhere that satisfied customers speak positively about the company whereas dissatisfied customers spread the negative word (Kraigher-Krainer et al. 2017). The scholars result also show that university provides no basis for differentiation among the constructs, but age and gender play a significant role in determining the different perceptions of students about the loyalty (Annamdevula and Bellamkonda 2016). Even though there is some evidence which suggests, that elderly consumer tend to be more brand loyal compared to younger consumers (Mathur et al. 2017). Results from surveys also show that they should be interpreted differently for men and women and loyalty programs should adapt their approach, to incorporate gender differences into loyalty reinforcing measures (Audrain-Pontevia and Vanhuele 2016).

## Methodology

According to the purpose of this study, to empirically examine the willingness of positive word of mouth communication by gender, and generation, two hypotheses were formulated:

- H10: There is not a statistically significant difference in the willingness of positive word of mouth communication by gender. H1A: There is a statistically significant difference in the willingness of positive word of mouth communication by gender.
- H20: There is not a statistically significant difference in the willingness of positive word of mouth communication by generation. H2A: There is a statistically significant difference in the willingness of positive word of mouth communication by generation.

The study utilised a quantitative design. The survey was conducted in a private university with a population of about 2,100 students. The data were collected using convenience sampling during the winter semester of the academic year 2018/2019 in two groups of bachelor level full-time students. There were 114 usable responses, which represent 95% of the sample. The respondents' demographic data (see Table 1) showed that male students represented 44.74% of the sample (N=51) and female students represented 55.27% of the sample (N=63). Table 1 also presents the structure of the respondents by generation.

	Generation Y		Generation Z	
	N	% of Total	N	% of Total
Men	21	18.42%	30	26.32%
Women	12	10.53%	51	44.74%
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28.95%</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>71.05%</b>

Table 1: The structure of the respondents by gender and generation

Source: Author

Paper and pencil interviewing were used for data collection. Respondents willingness of positive word of mouth communication were examined on three items with the questions as follows: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements "I say positive things about my university to other people (furthermore WoMC1). I recommend my university to someone who seeks my advice (furthermore WoMC2). I encourage friends and relatives to do a study at my university (furthermore WoMC3)." Seven points Likert scale was used to collect the answer with responses from "agree" (7

points) to “disagree” (1 point).

Used questions came from Zeithaml and Berry (1996) scale and were part of a 13 items set proposed for measuring a wide range of behavioural intentions. Also, they were used for instance as a validity measure of OFFSERVSENT questionnaire (Thelen et al. 2011) or in the negative word of mouth form to measure direct effects of anger and dissatisfaction on behavioural responses (Bougie et al. 2003). Reliability of the scale items was checked, by calculation of internal reliability Cronbach alpha coefficient, because of the version translated to the Slovak language was used. The coefficient alpha for the reliability of the entire set was 0.8748. Table 2 shows coefficients for individual items.

According to several authors the range reliability can be regarded as excellent if alpha > 0.9, good if alpha > 0.8, acceptable if alpha > 0.7, questionable if alpha > 0.6 and uncertain if alpha is > 0.5.

According to the results, the reliability of the scale was acceptable.

Row	WoMC1	WoMC2	WoMC3	Cronbach $\alpha$
WoMC1	1.000			0.8194
WoMC2	0.680	1.000		0.8386
WoMC3	0.732	0.717	1.000	0.8075

Table 2: Correlation matrix of word of mouth communication willingness items

Source: Author

Overall word of mouth communication willingness (furthermore WoMCW) index was calculated as follows:  $WoMCW = (WoMC1 + WoMC2 + WoMC3) / 3$ .

For choosing a right comparison method, Shapiro-Wilk W normality test was used to determine if normal distribution models a data set. As Table 3 shows, Shapiro-Wilk W test rejects the normal distribution hypothesis for all dataset ( $p < .0001$ ), and also for partial data set tests. After that non-parametric Wilcoxon / Kruskal-Wallis Tests were used to verify stated hypotheses.

The Shapiro-Wilk test	W	Prob<W
All data set	0.749607	<.0001*
WoMCW by gender (men)	0.696131	<.0001*
WoMCW by gender (women)	0.846615	<.0001*
WoMCW by gender (generation Y)	0.829927	0.0001*
WoMCW by gender (generation Z)	0.682297	<.0001*

Note:  $H_0$  = The data is from the Normal distribution. Small p-values reject  $H_0$ .

Table 3: The results of normality tests

Source: Author

The data were analysed using SAS JMP14 software. The described methodology has some limitations. Firstly, it is not easy to generalise results because of convenience sampling procedures were being used. Secondly a perceived lack of privacy or confidentiality, because of paper and pencil questionnaire, could cause response bias because of fear from reprisal. Thirdly, only two generations were compared because of the selected sample. This research has been applied to a specific university. The research should be expanded to other institutions offering higher education.

## Results

As Table 4 presents, there are some mean value differences in the word of mouth communication willingness. While men showed willingness with a rating around value 5.4, women with a rating around value 6.4. The revealed rating could mean that willingness of men is different from women. As the table also shows, the resulting p-value test ( $p < 0.0001$ ) means, that we reject hypothesis

H10, and after that, we can consider the differences between willingness by gender as statistically significant.

Means and Std Deviations	Number	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Men	51	5.4901961	1.2226618	0.1712069	5.1463169	5.8340753
Women	63	6.4126984	0.5764627	0.0726275	6.2675182	6.5578787
Wilcoxon/Kruskal-Wallis test (Rank Sums)	Count	Score Sum	Expected Score	Score Mean	(Mean-Mean0)/Std0	
Men	51	2046	2932.5	40.1176	-5.124	
Women	63	4509	3622.5	71.5714	5.124	
2-Sample Test, Normal Approximation			1-Way Test, ChiSquare Approximation			
S	Z	Prob-> Z	ChiSquare	DF	Prob->ChiSq	
2046	-5.12414	<.0001*	26.2865	1	<.0001*	

Table 4: Word of mouth communication willingness (WoMCW) by gender  
Source: Author

As Table 5 presents, there are some mean value differences in the word of mouth communication willingness. While Generation Y showed willingness with a rating around value 5.8, Generation Z with a rating around value 6.1. The revealed rating could mean that the willingness of Generation Y is different from Generation Z. As table also shows, the resulting p-value test ( $p = 0.1708$ ) means, that we failed to reject hypothesis H20, and after that, we cannot consider the differences as statistically significant.

Means and Std Deviations	Number	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Generation Y	33	5.8181818	1.0037807	0.1747358	5.4622566	6.174107
Generation Z	81	6.0740741	1.0341395	0.1149044	5.8454071	6.3027411
Wilcoxon/Kruskal-Wallis test (Rank Sums)	Count	Score Sum	Expected Score	Score Mean	(Mean-Mean0)/Std0	
Generation Y	33	1681.5	1897.5	50.9545	-1.366	
Generation Z	81	4873.5	4637.5	60.1667	1.366	
2-Sample Test, Normal Approximation			1-Way Test, ChiSquare Approximation			
S	Z	Prob-> Z	ChiSquare	DF	Prob->ChiSq	
1681,5	-1.36644	0.1718	1.8758	1	0.1708	

Table 5: Word of mouth communication willingness (WoMCW) by generation  
Source: Author

## Conclusion

Institutions of higher education are increasingly moving towards including a student relationship perspective in their strategic planning, which makes student loyalty a central aspect of any market strategy (Helgesen and Nettet 2011). Although the literature on the topic of customer satisfaction and loyalty is very rich, there are only a few studies on loyalty from students' perspective in higher education (Shahsavari and Sudzina 2017).

Research has found that university's students are mostly willing to spread positive information about their alma mater. The statistically significant differences in the willingness of positive word of mouth communication by gender were confirmed. We failed to reject the hypothesis about differences in gender.

The study provides, for managers, a practical overview regarding variables affecting students' loyalty. Research has found that university's students are mostly willing to spread positive information about their alma mater. However, in order to gain the willingness to disseminate positive information about the university, management must not forget other stakeholders. Matching the students' needs and wants cannot slip into the benevolence in exams, teaching or an overall lack of quality.

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## **Kľúčové slová/Key Words**

higher education institution, loyalty, word of mouth, gender, generation  
vysokoškolská inštitúcia, lojalita, od úst k ústam, rod, generácia

## **JEL klasifikácia/JEL classification**

M31, I23

## **Résumé**

### **Ochota študentov ústne šíriť dobré meno univerzity v závislosti od rodu a generácie**

Budovanie lojality umožňuje univerzitám nadviazať s dlhodobé vzťahy o súčasnými a bývalými študentmi. Štúdia sa rozhodla preskúmať jednu zo zložiek lojality, konkrétne ochotu študentov šíriť pozitívne informácie o univerzite. Konkrétne, jej cieľom bolo empiricky preskúmať rozdiely v ochote pozitívnej komunikácie podľa rodu a generácie respondenta.

Štúdia využívala kvantitatívny dizajn. Prieskum sa uskutočnil na súkromnej vysokej škole s počtom študentov približne 2100. Údaje boli zhromaždené pomocou dotazníkového prieskumu v priebehu zimného semestra akademického roka 2018/2019 v dvoch skupinách denných bakalárskych študentov. K dispozícii bolo 114 použiteľných odpovedí.

Výskum zistil, že študenti sú väčšinou ochotní šíriť pozitívne informácie o svojej alma mater. Štatisticky významné rozdiely v ochote pozitívnej ústnej komunikácie podľa pohlavia boli potvrdené ( $p < .0001$ ). Nepodarilo sa však odmietnuť hypotézu o rozdieloch v rode ( $p = 0.1708$ ). Preto by univerzitné programy lojality mali prispôbiť svoj prístup, minimálne začleniť do svojich stratégií rozdiely medzi mužmi a ženami.

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