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UNIVERSITIES' ENROLLMENT CHALLENGE: THE ROLE OF CORPORATE IMAGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on gathering information regarding the importance of the university image for students and its influence on student satisfaction, loyalty and enrollment intentions. Consequently, the main aim of the paper is to evaluate whether the corporate image of a particular higher education institution affects students' satisfaction, loyalty and enrollment intentions. The results of the MANOVA analysis show a significant correlation between corporate image and satisfaction, explaining that corporate image influences satisfaction among students. Without any doubt, as confirmed in this paper, the corporate image construct has a strong and remarkable influence on satisfaction, loyalty and enrollment intentions of students. Having in mind the importance of the corporate image construct, it is proven to be a strong antecedent for all three determinants, satisfaction, loyalty and enrollment intentions, whose positive effect is crucial for the survival of the universities worldwide, which presents the main practical contribution of the paper.

Keywords: Corporate image, satisfaction, loyalty, enrollment intentions, higher education

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions, as an important pillar for human resources development, play a crucial role in the economic growth and overall development of countries worldwide. The upcoming period brings even more intense scenarios of competition among educational institutions, where higher education institutions need to explore new ways in order to compete and survive. Landrum et al. (1998) state that the university's image may represent a valuable intangible asset in the competitive area because by

gaining a positive image from the environment, educational institutions are able to occupy a distinctive place in the target market. Universities and educational institutions around the world have spent large amounts of money on communication campaigns to attract prospective students. Despite this, they usually fail to create a recognizable and distinctive corporate image, mostly because of the difficulty to differentiate an intangible product, which is education in the case of universities and schools (O'Loughlin, Szmigin, 2005; Bravo et al., 2010).

Moreover, the corporate image sometimes can be more important than its quality, because it is an image that actually influences choices made by students at a particular institution (Kotler, Fox, 1995). The image of the educational institution may influence who applies for studies (Landrum et al., 1998; Fielder et al., 1993; James et al., 1999), student satisfaction (Clow et al., 1997; Eskildsen et al., 1999) as well as student loyalty (Eskildsen et al., 1999). Researchers also claim that image is one of the main factors influencing students' willingness to apply for enrollment (Yavas, Shemwell, 1996; Landrum et al., 1998; Parameswaran, Glowacka, 1995).

However, literature on the university image as perceived by its students and how this image affects their behavior remains scarce. In this sense, the main aim of the paper is to evaluate whether the corporate image of a particular higher education institution affects students' satisfaction, loyalty and enrollment intentions. The paper consists of several subsections, beginning with the introduction followed by the theoretical conceptualization on corporate image in higher education, satisfaction and loyalty among students and enrollment intentions. The hypothesis development and methodology follow, along with the analysis and discussion. At the end, the authors clarify the limitations of this research and the practical implications.

2. Literature review

2.1 The corporate image in the context of higher education

Due to the fact that universities are becoming more aware of how important it is to attract valuable students and build a strong perceived image, the whole concept of corporate image is receiving greater attention (Bok, 1992; Parameswaran, Glowacka, 1995; Theus, 1993). Throughout the literature, there are many different definitions of what the corporate image concept represents in the higher education system (Liou, Chuang, 2010; Da Costa, Pelissari, 2017; Amendola, 2004). There has been a broader consensus, since the beginning of the 20th century, when the corporate image was defined as a set of all important invisible components of the school (Howcroft, 1991), to the present, when the corporate image is defined as a concept that comprises of both, the physical and non-physical attributes of the school interpreted by its stakeholders (Nguyen, LeBlanc, 2001).

In educational services management, the corporate image concept is mostly used as a positioning instrument that influences the students' final decision where to study (Milo et al., 1989; Nguyen, LeBlanc, 2001; Weissman, 1990). A study on the university's corporate image published by Kazoleas et al. (2001) found that the corporate image may vary among different stakeholders of the university, and as such sends contradictory signals toward the environment and community. Many authors agree that the corporate image has a direct impact on the success of universities (Golgeli, 2014; Dowling, 1986). Similarly, Fombrun and Shanley (1990) state that generated advantages of a positive image could be a high student retention rate and attractive area for betterqualified applicants to enroll. Moreover, Treadwell and Harrison (1994) add that maintaining a positive corporate image as a strategic managerial issue affects the institution's ability to recruit desired faculty members and to retain and attract motivated students. The research findings from different areas, including marketing, advertising, management and PR have shown that companies with a good corporate image usually enjoy a greater record of sales and market share (Shapiro, 1982), loyal customers (Andreassen, Lindestad, 1998), positive quality perceptions (De Ruyter, Wetzels, 2000), and increased customer engagement (Bhattacharya, Sen, 2003).

2.2 Students' satisfaction

Nowadays, satisfaction is explained as a state of mind in which the customers' needs, wants, and expectations are aligned with his or her expectations, contributing to future repurchase and loyalty. In general, the satisfaction concept is the result of mutual interaction between the consumer's prepurchase expectations and post-purchase evaluation (Gilbert et al., 1982). Hence, these statements confirm Oliver's (1980) thinking that satisfaction is a post choice evaluation judgment concerning a specific purchase decision.

Assessing the students' satisfaction level helps higher education institutions identify those aspects that set them apart from others and, on the other hand, discover the areas that cause dissatisfaction, so they can provide improvements that can answer to the students' needs and expectations. Through measurement of student satisfaction, institutions are able to get data of how effective they actually are in terms of providing certain educational services to the market. There is a chance that one will be loyal to a certain institution if the student's satisfaction exceeds the student's expectations; any repeated enrollment intention, positive word-of-mouth and further use of provided services explains customer

satisfaction (Anderson, Sullivan, 1993). Yeboah and Atakora (2013) have concluded that institutions, which have the ability to satisfy students' needs through integrated communication, are able to succeed in the competition market. Napoli and Wortman (1998) explain the different factors that are crucial for students' increased level of satisfaction, such as, self-esteem, life events during university years, social competence, psychological well-being, social support, and the university academic, social and administrative systems.

2.3 Students' loyalty

During the last few years, the financial system for higher education institutions has been changed across many countries, whereas institutions' performances have become increasingly important when taking into consideration where funds and money will be allocated (Arnaboldi, Azzone, 2005; DeShields et al., 2005). Within those performances, student loyalty has become a very important concept for higher education institutions (Marzo-Navarro et al., 2005). Hence, the concept of student loyalty and drivers for loyalty are a high priority when determining the most appropriate management strategy of an institution. Just as the loyalty construct is crucial for businesses where products are the focus of attention, the construct is also of high importance for services (Dick, Basu, 1994). Oliver (1997: 392) defines this as a "deeply held commitment to rebuy a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior". Thus, the loyalty concept implies a certain level of continuity in how a student relates to a specific institution. This all influenced loyalty to become one of the key concepts in higher education institutional management (Helgesen, Nesset, 2007b). Also, Jones and Sasser (1995) view loyalty as a construct through which students have a sense of belonging and affection towards a specific institution.

Moreover, the loyalty concept is really present when a student resists all the pressures to switch to another institution (Newman, Werbel, 1973). Hence, loyalty in the service industry is measured as students' faithfulness to a particular higher educational institution. Therefore, students' purchasing behavior (i.e. enrollment intentions) is also determined by the level of their loyalty. Afterwards, true loyalty was found to be a construct developed when strong

positive relative attitudes are associated with a high degree of repeated enrollment decisions.

2.4 University enrollment intentions

The decision-making process made by students in order to choose the proper institution to study at is broadly seen as a problem, due to the huge number of institutions offering the same or similar programs and opportunities. Therefore, it is up to the higher education institution to build a strategic model, incorporated with a positive corporate image to attract students and decrease the number of students who switch to another university. Decision making models are usually called the purchase behavior of consumers, where the same model can be used in a process of enrollment intentions of students related to deciding at which university to enroll. According to Kotler and Fox (1995) purchase behavior is generally a complex process comprised of several stages, including need arousal, information search and evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and the post purchase feeling.

Chapman (1984) was among the first to apply this process of buying behavior to education representing it as enrollment intentions. Servier (1986) revealed that most of the research studies have shown that the college or university location is one of the most important factors for the potential student's decision to apply and enroll. Absher and Crawford (1996) and Servier (1994) add that students could be looking for a university close to their home or workplace. In addition, a low-cost, nearby university is usually an important stimulator of a student's decision for future education decisions. Academic program offerings, its content range and duration were noted to have a significant impact on a student's university selection (Ford et al., 1999). Moreover, Ford et al. (1999) list important factors students think about while deciding where to study, including the range of study programs, flexibility of degree program and range of degree options. Most of the research studies found that the strongest predictor of university choice is the institutional image (Lay, Maguire, 1981; Murphy, 1981; Keling, 2006).

3. Hypotheses development

Many authors assessed the corporate image as an important construct for higher educational institutions and confirmed its crucial and strong influence on

students' satisfaction (Andreassen, Lindestad, 1998). Alves and Raposo (2010) add that the corporate image is the construct that mostly influences student satisfaction, but it is also relevant to student loyalty. Nguyen and LeBlanc (1998) found that satisfaction through the perceived service value directly effects the corporate image. This issue was explained by the assertion of Barich and Kotler (1991) stating that if students of an institution believe they receive good value through education, that particular institution has a strong positive image. Hence, all these contradictions brought up the claim that a clear relationship between satisfaction and image is obviously missing (Azoury et al., 2013), while Amendola (2004) found a strong relationship between the corporate image and satisfaction. Palacio et al. (2002) explain that the image has a significant effect on students' satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, Alves and Raposo (2010), identify the corporate image as one of the most important determinants of students' satisfaction and loyalty. Besides, the corporate image construct in higher education institutions is proven to be the most influential on student satisfaction (Dib, Alnazer, 2013). Thus, along the same lines, we propose that:

H1: The university's corporate image influences students' satisfaction.

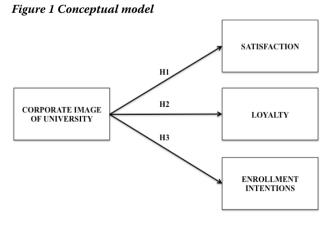
Ostrowski et al., (1993) found a significant relationship between the image of an organization and the loyalty of its customers. Schlesinger et al. (2015) confirmed a positive impact of the university image on the concept of satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, results showed that satisfaction and university image are proven to be strong predictions of loyalty, while behavioral loyalty by students is determined

not only by satisfaction, but also by their perceived image of the institution, the level of identification and the quality of the professor-student relationship. Furthermore, corporate image is seen as a leading motivation factor to a higher level of student loyalty, which in turn confirms that the corporate image is a leading indicator not only satisfying and retaining existing students, but also attracting new ones (Ali et al., 2012).

H2: The university's corporate image influences the students' loyalty

Numerous resources have already recognized the crucial role that the corporate image concept has on the process of student's enrollment intention (Barich, Kotler, 1991; Zeithaml, 2000). The corporate image concept is particularly important in developing and maintaining loyal students, which in the end will bring higher retention rates and higher enrollment rates for the university (Dick, Basu, 1994; Raj, 1985). Similarly, Scot (1999) confirms that many universities depend on their capacity to retain current students and attract new ones, allocation of resources, achievement of students, and providing attractive programs to the external environment. Hence, it is considered that marketing strategies and the corporate image are the most remarkable factors for survival. Other studies also support the idea that the corporate image is significantly correlated with enrollment intentions (Gatewood et al., 1993; Mehboob et al., 2012), so we are testing this hypothesis in our study as well, while Figure 1 presents the conceptual model of this research.

H3: The university's corporate image influences the students' enrollment intentions.



Source: Authors

4. Methodology

The questionnaire that was used within the research process is divided into five separate sections and is aimed to measure the following constructs: corporate image (Bravo et al., 2010), satisfaction (Bitner, Hubbert, 1994), loyalty (Gremler, Brown,

1996) and enrollment intentions (Ajzen, Fishbein, 1980), as well as demographics. All of the questions used a 7-point Likert scale, as suggested by the authors. Furthermore, we checked the scales reliability, which is presented in Table 1 indicating acceptable values of alpha and scale reliability.

Table 1 Reliability statistics for all four constructs in the research model

Construct	N of items	Alpha	
Corporate Image (CI)	17	0.940	
Satisfaction (S)	2*	0.800	
Loyalty (L)	12	0.933	
Enrollment Intentions (EI)	3	0.886	

^{*} Variable S2 was excluded from reliability statistics because it represents confirmation of S1 variable in the negation form. Source: Authors

Data was collected using a sample of students attending some of the study programs at a school within the public university in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A total of 200 students were interviewed face-to-face (Szolnoki, Hoffmann, 2013) during the lecture sessions of undergraduate and postgraduate classes. Descriptive statistics of the sample by age, show that the mean age of respondents is 23.01. In addition, descriptive statistics of the sample demonstrate that the majority of respondents were females (58.5%).

5. Analysis

In order to test the previously presented hypotheses, the MANOVA analysis was performed. It is the multivariate analysis, which is used to test a hypothesis where one independent variable (or more) have a statistically significant effect on a set of two or more dependent variables. In the case of this research, the independent variable is a construct related to the Corporate Image (CI), while the set of dependent variables include three constructs related to the students' Satisfaction (S), Loyalty (L) and Enrollment Intentions (EI). Multivariate Tests are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Multivariate Testsa

	Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta squared	Noncent. parameter	Observed power ^d
	Pillai's Trace	0.989	3882.757b	3.000	134.000	0.000	0.989	11648.270	1.000
Intercept	Wilks' Lambda	0.011	3882.757b	3.000	134.000	0.000	0.989	11648.270	1.000
	Hotelling's Trace	86.927	3882.757b	3.000	134.000	0.000	0.989	11648.270	1.000
	Roy's Larg Root	86.927	3882.757b	3.000	134.000	0.000	0.989	11648.270	1.000
CIT	Pillai's Trace	1.499	2.154	189.000	408.000	0.000	0.500	407.191	1.000
	Wilks' Lambda	0.105	2.386	189.000	402.722	0.000	0.528	450.599	1.000
	Hotelling's Trace	3.805	2.671	189.000	398.000	0.000	0.559	504.799	1.000
	Roy's Larg Root	2.502	5.401°	63.000	136.000	0.000	0.714	340.253	1.000

Note: * a. Design: Intercept + CIT, b. Exact statistic, c. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level, d. Computed using alpha = 0.05 *Source: Authors*

As shown in Table 2, it is tested whether the Corporate Image (CI) as perceived by students at an observed university has a significant impact on three dependent variables related to their Satisfaction (S), Loyalty (L) and Enrollment Intentions (EI). The hypothesis of the research is that there will be a significant multivariate main effect for all four research constructs. The hypothesis is tested through the General Linear Model or Multivariate procedure in software SPSS. Using the matrix algebra, computations are done with the aim to find the ratio of the variability of the Between-Groups sums of squares and cross-products matrix to that of the Within-Groups SSCP matrix.

In the interpretation process of the MANOVA analysis, first it is important to look at the overall F test for all three unique dependent variables Satisfaction Total (coded ST), Loyalty Total (coded LTx) and Enrollment Intentions Total (coded PIT). What is most important to look at is the statistical value called Wilks' Lambda (λ) and the F value connected with it. Lambda is actually an amount of the variance percentage in the dependent variables that is not explained by differences in the level of the independent variable and it can vary between one and zero. It is desirable that Lambda be near zero, which means that there is almost no variance that cannot be explained by the Corporate Image (CI). In the case of the collected sample, the Wilks' Lambda is 0.105 and has an associated F of 2.386, which is statistically significant at p<0.001 level.

In the next step of examination of given output, it is important to observe the Partial Eta Squared value associated with the main effect of the Corpo-

rate Image (CI), which has a value of 0.528, and the Observed Power to detect the main effect, which in case of the collected data is 1.000. Both of the above-mentioned computed parameters are at the statistically satisfactory level. Hence, it shows that the one-way MANOVA, which was done on the sample of students revealed a significant multivariate main effect for independent variable Corporate Image (CI) in which Wilks' $\lambda = 0.105$, associated F (189, 402.722) = 2.386, p value <0.001, Partial Eta Squared = 0.528.

The Observed Power to detect the effect was 1.000, so consequently, this demonstrates that the Corporate Image (CI) as perceived by students at an observed university has a significant impact on three dependent variables related to their Satisfaction (S), Loyalty (L) and Enrollment Intentions (EI). If the overall value of the F test is significant as in the case of our collected sample, then it is a common practice to go further and look at the individual dependent variables with a separate ANOVA test.

However, the experiment-wise alpha protection provided by the overall or omnibus F test does not cover the univariate tests, so division of confidence levels by a number of tests is necessary. Consequently, since it is important to look at the value of F tests for the three dependent variables, including the students' Satisfaction (S), Loyalty (L) and Enrollment Intentions (EI), it is required that p is less than 0.017 (0.05/3). This particular statistical procedure ignores the fact that variables might be inter-correlated, so these separate ANOVAs do not take variables' inter-correlations into account. The output of analysis is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Tests of between-subjects effect

Source	Dependent variable	Type III Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta squared	Noncent. parameter	Observed power ^d
Corrected	ST	53.511ª	63	0.849	3.265	0.000	0.602	205.706	1.000
	LTx	147.105 ^b	63	2.335	4.685	0.000	0.685	295.149	1.000
	PIT	186.618°	63	2.962	3.160	0.000	0.594	199.072	1.000
Intercept	ST	2244.888	1	2244.888	8629.780	0.000	0.984	8629.780	1.000
	LTx	3507.125	1	3507.125	7036.630	0.000	0.981	7036.630	1.000
	PIT	3266.436	1	3266.436	3484.415	0.000	0.962	3484.415	1.000
CIT	ST	53.511	63	0.849	3.265	0.000	0.602	205.706	1.000
	LTx	147.105	63	2.335	4.685	0.000	0.685	295.149	1.000
	PIT	186.618	63	2.962	3.160	0.000	0.594	199.072	1.000

Note: * a. R Squared = 0.602 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.418), b. R Squared = 0.685 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.538), c. R Squared = 0.594 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.406), d. Computed using alpha = 0.05 Source: Authors

Table 3 presents a segment of the output table, which represents a report of the ANOVA test on the three dependent variables students' Satisfaction (S), Loyalty (L) and Enrollment Intentions (EI). As the table shows, the F values for all three dependent variables are statistically significant at our criterion of 0.017. Hence, this confirms that, given the significance of the overall test univariate main effects for the Corporate Image (CI), the following results were obtained for students' Satisfaction (S): F (63, 136) = 3.265, p value < 0.001, Partial Eta Square = 0.602, Observed Power = 1.000, then for Loyalty (L), F (63, 136) = 4.685, p value < 0.001, Partial Eta Square = 0.685, Observed Power = 1.000 and for Enrollment Intentions (EI), F (63, 136) = 3.160, p value < 0.001, Partial Eta Square = 0.594, Observed Power = 1.000.

Thus, according to the results of the analysis all three hypotheses are confirmed. The university's corporate image influences the students' satisfaction (H1), loyalty (H2) and enrollment intentions (H3).

6. Discussion

Basically, the results of the MANOVA analysis show the significant correlation between the corporate image and satisfaction, explaining that the corporate image of the school influences satisfaction among its students. As the literature review shows, most of the empirical works which investigated the mutuality between the concept of the corporate image and satisfaction found a positive influence. More precisely, the corporate image is an antecedent of the satisfaction construct. Azoury et al. (2013) research confirms the first hypothesis by claiming that both existing components of the corporate image, cognitive and affective, have crucial effects on the formation of satisfaction in students' minds. Also, conclusions made by Azoury et al. (2013) confirm the positive influence of the service offering quality and recognition in the overall student satisfaction.

Strong effects of the corporate image on the satisfaction concept were demonstrated also by Palacio et al. (2002). These conclusions imply once more the positive influence and strong relationship between the corporate image and the satisfaction concept in the university environment. As a matter of fact, Alves and Raposo (2010) argue that the corporate image is one of the most important determinants

of satisfaction and loyalty, both contributing to increased and repeated enrollment intentions. Without any doubt, as confirmed in this paper, the corporate image construct has a strong and remarkable influence on satisfaction, loyalty and enrollment intentions of students.

Similar findings, which were elaborated using the MANOVA method, are also confirmed by many authors in the literature. For example, Dib and Alnazer (2013) found a strong relationship in higher education institutions between the corporate image and student satisfaction, loyalty and enrollment intentions. Observing the correlation among the corporate image and dependent variables, results from the paper imply a statistically significant influence between the independent construct of the corporate image and each dependent construct, i.e. students' satisfaction, loyalty and future enrollment intentions. It is important to bear in mind the importance of satisfied, loyal students and their repeated enrollment intentions at the same educational institution. In addition to these conclusions, Alves and Raposo (2010) and Helgesen and Nesset (2007a) identified in a similar way the relationship between the corporate image and all three dependent variables, i.e. satisfaction, loyalty and enrollment intentions.

Schlesinger et al. (2015) confirm these positive relationships among the university image and satisfaction, loyalty and enrollment intentions, stating that the corporate image as an important construct will have an influence if students are satisfied and loyal to a particular university. This is accomplished through keeping promises and translating them into practice. Students will then have a better understanding due to the validity of the service quality and the opportunities offered after graduation at the particular university.

The corporate image, as the only independent variable in this research, has a positive influence on all three dependent variables, i.e. satisfaction, loyalty and enrollment intentions of students. Having in mind the importance of the corporate image construct, it is proven to be a strong antecedent for all three determinants whose positive effect is crucial for the survival of universities worldwide.

There are certain limitations of this research which could have to some extent a significant impact on the conclusion itself and its absolute acceptance by other researchers as well as practitioners in the field. One of the largest constraints of the collected data set is the sample size considering the number of students who answered the questionnaire. Although statistically significant for this paper, the total sample size (N=200) is enough to make conclusions only for that specific university where the research was conducted. Further studies on the subject matter should increase the sample size in order to make more reliable conclusions and have at least two different universities as a control variable.

Another limitation is related to the type of data analysis used in this paper. Based on the sample and structure, the MANOVA method was used. This particular statistical method was useful to provide conclusions and confirm all three hypotheses defined at the beginning of the research. However, the SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) method could be added in future research because it would provide additional confirmation of the hypothesis, including more details about the intensity and direction of the relationship between the university's corporate image and its students' satisfaction, loyalty and enrollment intentions.

The third limitation concerns antecedents of the corporate image. This paper did not take into con-

sideration all the possible effects that could lead to a positive corporate image. In this sense, further research should explore a wider range of potential antecedents. That also includes not only applying quantitative techniques, but also the qualitative approach as an appropriate basis for further quantitative research.

Nevertheless, there are several practical recommendations derived from this study that should be addressed by the universities' management. Educational institutions need to become well aware of how important image management is, as a process that needs to be aligned with the strategy and vision of the institution. As a part of the management function, PR must be incorporated into the organizational structure of educational institutions, since it is one of the main tools for creating a positive corporate image. Although, the number of marketing departments whose main task it is to communicate and exchange information with stakeholders has increased, the PR function is more complex and needs to be strategically positioned and incorporated in all decision-making processes of a higher educational institution.

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Izazov sveučilišnih upisa: uloga korporativnog imidža u visokom obrazovanju

Sažetak

Ovaj je rad fokusiran na prikupljanje informacija koje se odnose na važnost sveučilšnog imidža te njegovog utjecaja na zadovoljstvo, lojalnost i namjere upisa studenata. Posljedično, glavni je cilj ovoga rada istražiti utječe li korporativni imidž određene visokoškolske institucije na zadovoljstvo, lojalnost i namjere upisa kod studentske populacije. Rezultati MANOVA analize pokazuju korelaciju između korporativnog imidža i zadovoljstva studenata, upućujući na to da korporativni imidž ima utjecaj na studentsko zadovoljstvo. Bez ikakve sumnje, a što se potvrđuje i ovim istraživanjem, korporativni imidž ima jak i snažan utjecaj, ne samo na zadovoljstvo, već i na lojalnost i namjere upisa. Imajući u vidu značaj korporativnog imidža, dokazano je da je kao takav, zapravo snažan prediktor za sva tri zavisna konstrukta ovoga istraživanja, a to su: zadovoljstvo, lojalnost i namjeru upisa te predstavlja temeljni elemenat za preživljavanje sveučilišta širom svijeta, što predstavlja glavni praktični doprinos ovoga rada.

Ključne riječi: korporativni imidž, zadovoljstvo, lojalnost, namjera upisa, visoko obrazovanje