

MARKETING INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS LOYALTY AND FUTURE INTENTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Applying the marketing concept in higher education can significantly improve the performance of these institutions. The role of marketing is particularly important in ensuring the loyalty of students and timely influence on their future intentions, especially nowadays when the decrease in the number of students is a big problem in our country, but also in neighboring countries. From the marketing aspect, this paper provides the results of research on the relationship between student loyalty and their future intentions in higher education. The research was conducted on students of two state universities in the Republic of Srpska. Research results show that there is a strong relationship between student loyalty and future intentions of students in higher education. The obtained results are significant for universities that want to keep students at the institution, but also to secure partners even after the completion of their studies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Loyalty in higher education is gaining importance due to the problem faced by almost all higher education institutions in the world, which is the departure of students from the institution, i.e. leaving their studies before completion. [Kotler and Fox \(1995\)](#) stress that retaining enrolled students is just as important as attracting them. Many authors believe that retaining existing customers or service users is more important than market share, but this requires building relationships with them. The development of a customer relationship management strategy, known in the world as CRM (Customer Relationship Management), opened up numerous opportunities for building the aforementioned relationships ([Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 152](#)). This strategy proved to be useful for companies in order to build loyalty and attract new users, while service users received numerous

benefits such as: information about products/services, greater opportunities to compare products from different manufacturers in terms of price, quality, etc. The goal of CRM is to create long-term relationships with service users through the creation of trust. Relationship marketing is the basis for building loyalty and customer satisfaction, that is, service users. This way of managing relations with customers can also be applied in higher education. Building relationships with students is the way to improve education services, improve quality and thus increase the satisfaction of users of these services. When we talk about the loyalty that results in keeping students at the institution, it does not refer to staying beyond the regular deadline for completing studies, in the sense of renewing the years of study, but it implies completing the studies within the stipulated period. Universities apply marketing instruments for this purpose, although they all reluctantly admit it. The application of marketing instruments in higher education in no way diminishes the social importance, purpose and mission of the existence of these institutions. On the contrary, it enables them to achieve their vision and mission as well as to improve all aspects of the quality of service they provide. Students' loyalty should be viewed through the current dimension and future intentions. The current dimension refers to the spread of positive propaganda about the university, and regular attendance at classes. Attending classes improves the quality of teaching and especially motivates teachers to innovate and improve their lectures in accordance with modern methods and techniques, which is why the final results are better. Future intentions mean students staying until graduation, staying on the next cycle of studies, but also cooperation after graduation through alumni organizations. Alumni associations are made up of former students of a university. The goal of these associations is to maintain the connection of the university with its graduate students after graduation, and through them with the enterprises and companies they work for. Former students can contribute to the development of the university in various ways, such as: creating curricula, creating a university development strategy, promoting the faculty, etc. The experience of former students is very important for future students. The relationship between students' loyalty and their future intentions is the subject of research in this paper, and the following hypothesis has been put forward:

Loyalty of students is positively related to their future intentions (staying at the institution until the end of their studies, pursuing the next level of studies, and spreading positive propaganda about the institution).

The aim of the paper is to show the relationship between loyalty and future intentions of students, from the marketing aspect. Also, the aim of the work is to show the importance of applying marketing principles in non-profit

organizations such as higher education institutions, which face various problems in their functioning in modern society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the paper *A business marketing strategy applied to student retention: a higher education initiative*, the authors propose a model of managing relations with students for the purpose of retaining students in the same way as companies do to retain customers (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007, p. 328). Higbee, Arendale and Lundell (2005) stated that two million students annually would drop out of college in the absence of developmental education. Student retention has become a real challenge for the academic community. The measures taken must be more effective, because every lost student means “one unfulfilled dream” and for every unfulfilled dream there are long-term consequences (Fike & Fike, 2008, p. 85). The fact is, the loss of students has bad consequences for universities, but also for the individual, family and society as a whole. The application of marketing in the field of higher education should not be understood by university managers and academic citizens as an unrealistic concept imported from the business world. Marketing in higher education should be understood as a philosophy and strategy for the development of the higher education sector, which meets the needs of domestic and international clients (Maringe, 2006). In the work *Student loyalty modeling*, Lerbin and Aritonang (2014), studying the factors of student loyalty, came to the conclusion that trust is the basic factor of loyalty and that a student who trusts an institution remains loyal to it. Many authors point out that the two most important factors that influence the achievement of student loyalty are students’ trust and commitment to the institution. Trust represents “the willingness to rely on ... in whom he has confidence” (Ljubojević, 2002, p. 94). Commitment refers to the alignment of students’ abilities, skills and value systems with the expectations, requirements and values of the higher education institution (Rojas-Méndez et al., 2009, according to Tinto et al., 1993). Back in 1995, Mountain Empire Community College saw a significant dropout of students, which made this problem a management priority. A faculty plan for student retention was developed and a committee dedicated to that goal was formed (Sydow & Sandel, 1996, p. 3). Haverila, Haverila and McLaughlin (2020, p. 358) came to the conclusion that different strategies for managing relations with students are applied for domestic and foreign students. Namely, the future intentions of students are different for these two categories of students. The importance of maintaining contact and relations with former students was shown in the paper *Antecedents of Student’s Behavioral Intentions in Higher*

Education Institutions, where the importance of the role of the behavioral dimension, but also the cognitive dimension of future student intentions, is particularly highlighted (Binnawas, Khalifa & Bhaumick 2020, p. 1949). There are numerous researches in this area, and some of them are: Schlesinger, Cervera & Wymer (2021), Elliot & Shin (2002), Rodić-Lukić (2015), Maxwell-Stuart et al. (2018), Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota (2010), Abdelhamid, Polo Peña, & Mahrous (2020), Todea et al. (2022).

3. SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

After enrolling in an educational institution, students compare the perceived service with the expected one. In this sense, students evaluate in detail the quality of teaching programs, the quality of teachers, the environment in which they live, the additional values that the institution provides them in terms of equipment, libraries, sports and other activities, the availability of technology in teaching, the professionalism of non-academic staff and numerous other factors. If the perceived service is below expectations, the student is dissatisfied. If the perceived service is equal to or above the expected, the student is satisfied. In higher education, numerous studies show that perception has a great influence on student satisfaction (Alves & Raposo, 2006; Hartman & Schmidt, 1995). Namely, upon arriving at the faculty, students have already formed expectations. More often than not, these expectations are higher than what they actually experience at the university. This creates a feeling of dissatisfaction or, in the worst case, dropping out of the faculty. Taking into account the above, higher education institutions monitor and compare the perception and expectations of students, with the aim of determining the source of dissatisfaction and acting in the direction of eliminating, that is, reducing the gap between the experienced and expected feelings of students. By comparing the perception of students in relation to their personal traits, characteristics, status and other characteristics, significant data is obtained on how a certain dimension of service quality is perceived. The prerequisite for creating loyalty is customer satisfaction. It does not mean that every satisfied customer will become loyal, but to become loyal, the customer must be satisfied with the product or service. Satisfaction is a prerequisite for loyalty, but it is not the only one, which should not be neglected. It is important to take into account the intensity of satisfaction, that is, the intensity of the consumer's response to the service (Veljković, 2009, p. 176). A satisfied consumer can always replace the product with another, if a better one appears that he thinks can better satisfy his needs. This means that loyalty is only associated with an extremely satisfied consumer, fond of and enthusiastic about the product, who, in addition to buying, also spreads positive propaganda and

thus attracts new customers. What does loyalty mean in higher education? In higher education, loyalty can mean a stronger connection with students, forming a positive opinion, spreading positive propaganda, strengthening the image and reputation of the institution, staying at the university until the end of the studies, continuing the studies at the next level, and the connection after the end of the studies. This leads to a greater number of new service users and the retention of existing ones. In the secondary sense, loyalty implies the profit benefit for these institutions. Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen (2001) in their research found two key determinants of student loyalty, namely the quality of teaching as perceived by students and emotional commitment to the institution. The results indicate that the impact of service quality on loyalty is about twice as great as that of commitment. The authors showed that the importance of different aspects of quality differ significantly depending on the type of study, which is a good way to develop loyalty specific to certain study programs (Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen, 2001, p. 341). The Figure shows the elements of student loyalty.

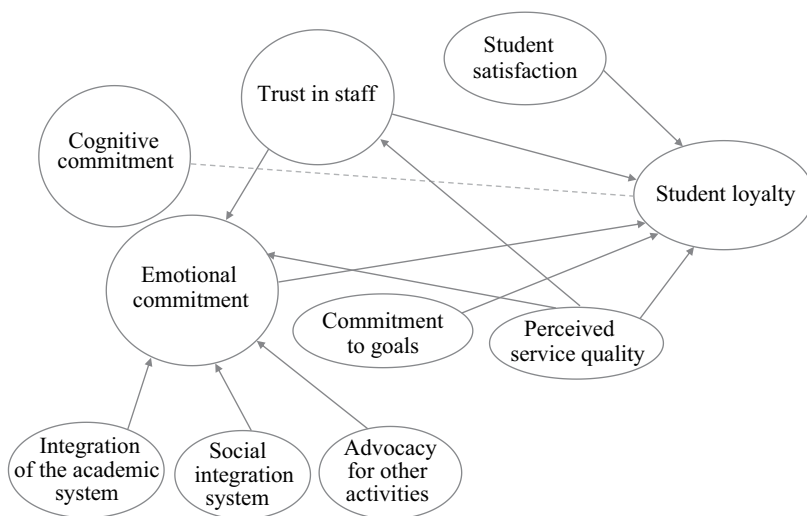


Figure 1. Elements of student loyalty

Source: Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen, 2001, p. 336.

According to the figure, student loyalty is formed under the influence of the following elements: emotional commitment, cognitive commitment, and trust in teaching and non-teaching staff, commitment to goals, service quality and student satisfaction (Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen, 2001, p. 336). Unlike the satisfaction of service users, which can be short-term and reflect the current state, the attitude about service quality is formed on the basis of a long-term,

overall assessment of performance. In the case of services, this is particularly important, because the quality of the service, unlike tangible goods, is not a specific goal that must be met, but an integral part of the entire service provision process and the complete management of the institution. Therefore, the issue of service quality, and therefore loyalty in higher education, is much more complex. Loyalty certainly must be based on satisfaction, but loyalty is the ultimate and basic goal of the institution. It is this commitment to the stated goal that will lead to the loyalty of existing and attracting new service users. The risk of students leaving the university will be reduced, the university will become more competitive, and the relationship between students and all employees as well as between the employees will be better. For users of services in service companies, experts recommend the business philosophy of “absolute retention of users”, because these users, if they are dissatisfied with the service, do not return to the institution and cause more damage to the institution with their oral propaganda.

In education, the retention rate refers to the number of students who remain at the institution until the end of their studies. At educational institutions, it is primarily necessary to assess the losses that universities suffer from the departure of students, which are mostly of a non-financial nature. There is no universal definition of student retention or dropout. The most common understanding of retention is the time during which students remain at universities and progress towards completing their degree program within a given time frame. The concept of dropping out of school is related to a person who leaves an educational program early, before completion and graduation. The term “completion rate” refers to the estimation of the proportion of students who start studying and who will complete their studies. In some countries, graduation rates include the estimation of how many students will change majors before graduating. In order to increase retention rates, it is important that universities recognize the diversity of student needs.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Empirical research in this paper included additional processing (analysis) of a sample created for the purposes of Nedeljka Elez’s doctoral dissertation entitled “The role of the marketing concept in ensuring the loyalty of users of services of higher education institutions” at the Faculty of Economics of the University of East Sarajevo (Elez, 2021). For the purposes of the research, students of the University of East Sarajevo and the University of Banja Luka were surveyed. The sample included students from all scientific fields (social, humanistic, technical, natural and medical sciences). Students of all study cycles and all study

statuses were included, considering their availability (attendance at lectures). The sample used in this paper is a deliberate convenient sample, which implies that it is formed from the available units of the basic set. The number of surveyed students was 1032 students, of which 520 students from the University of East Sarajevo and 512 students from the University of Banja Luka. The survey was anonymous. The survey was conducted in the winter and summer semesters of the academic year 2018/19. Given that the survey included 1032 respondents (520 East Sarajevo, 512 Banja Luka), and that the sample should represent the phenomenon as a whole, i.e. should be as similar as possible to the phenomenon as a whole in terms of its structure and general characteristics (Dragović, 2008, p. 57), the sample was in its characteristics completely similar to the basic set because it included all categories of students and all study cycles. In accordance with the specifics of the research itself, which was carried out exclusively on the student population, it could be said that the sample was representative.

Empirical research was carried out using an instrument for collecting primary data - a questionnaire with a Likert scale. The obtained data were processed using the statistical package SPSS20. Analysis of data on satisfaction, loyalty and future intentions of service users was performed using descriptive statistics. Inferential statistics were used to prove the hypothesis. The questionnaire for measuring the satisfaction and loyalty of users of higher education services was created in accordance with the specifics of higher education institutions. The questionnaire used a 1-5 Likert scale, 1 meaning “completely false” and 5 meaning “completely true” for the given statement. The students could circle the numbers between (2, 3, and 4) according to their opinion.

The claims were arranged as follows:

- Statements 1–10 referred to the dimension of satisfaction with the service and opportunities to participate in value creation,
- Statements 11–15 referred to the dimension of students’ intentions in the future,
- Statements 16–20 referred to the emotional dimension, attachment and loyalty.

The questions were structured as follows:

1. I believe that the faculty where I study has a good reputation.
2. I am satisfied with the lesson plans that are adapted to the students.
3. My colleagues and I are sufficiently involved in creating a better quality of life at the faculty in all segments (creating lesson plans, making important decisions, etc.).
4. I am satisfied with the teaching staff at the faculty.

5. I think that with the degree I get, I will be able to find a suitable job.
6. I am satisfied with the price of the study.
7. If the price were higher, I would enroll in the same study program again.
8. My expectations were met in every respect.
9. I am satisfied with the up-to-date information on the website of the faculty/university.
10. I am satisfied with the participation of the faculty/university in social networks.
11. I am willing to stay at the faculty until graduation.
12. I am ready to regularly participate in the student survey and express my opinion and suggestions for the improvement of the educational service.
13. I am ready to continue my education at the same faculty.
14. I want to stay in touch with the faculty after graduation.
15. I would recommend the faculty to others.
16. I have confidence in the employees of the faculty.
17. I feel close to the other students with whom I study every day.
18. I am proud of the faculty where I study.
19. I speak positively about the faculty to others.
20. If I were to enroll at the faculty again, I would enroll at the same one.

The empirical part of this paper is based on the research from the mentioned doctoral dissertation, but the analysis is based on a more detailed analysis of certain dimensions of loyalty and their relationship with future intentions, which was not done in the dissertation.

5. RESULTS

When examining the satisfaction, future intentions and loyalty of users of higher education services, a questionnaire with a Likert scale was applied. The questionnaire consisted of the following dimensions: satisfaction with the service and the opportunity to participate in value creation, intentions in the future, emotional dimension, commitment and loyalty. Descriptive statistical indicators were presented for each dimension.

On the dimension examining satisfaction with the service and opportunities to participate in value creation, the lowest achieved score was 10, and the highest was 50 points. The arithmetic mean was 35.65, with a standard deviation of 8.54 points. Skewness (-0.431) indicated a slight negative asymmetry, and kurtosis (-0.350) indicated a platykurtic distribution. The distribution was statistically significantly different from normal ($SK=0.069$, for the number of degrees of freedom 1032, $p=0.000$).

Table 1. Statistics - rating of satisfaction with the service

Statistics		
Satisfaction with the service and opportunities to participate in value creation		
Total number (N)	Valid	1032
	Missing	0
Arithmetic mean (Mean)		35.6502
Standard deviation (Std. Deviation)		8.53695
Asymmetry (Skewness)		-.431
Statistical error of asymmetry (Std. Error of Skewness)		.076
Flattening (Kurtosis)		-.350
Statistical error of flattening (Std. Error of Kurtosis)		.152
The minimum		10.00
The maximum		50.00
S-K	Statistic	.069
	Df	1032
	Sig.	.000

Source: Authors' calculation

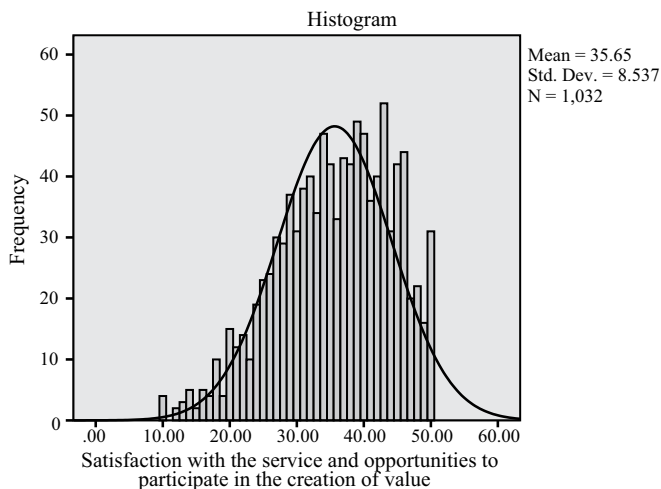


Chart 1. Service satisfaction rating

Source: Authors' calculation

When it comes to the dimension related to intentions in the future, the lowest achieved score was 5, and the highest was 25 points. The respondents achieved an average of 20.03 points, with a standard deviation of 4.49 points. Skewness (-1.024) indicated negative asymmetry, while kurtosis pointed to the conclusion that the distribution was leptokurtic. Based on the results of the Smirnov-

Kolmogorov test, which for 1032 degrees of freedom was 0.134, and which was statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p=0.000$), it could be argued that the distribution was statistically significantly different from the normal.

Table 2. Statistics - assessment of future intentions

Statistics		
Students' intentions in the future		
Total number (N)	Valid	1032
	Missing	0
Arithmetic mean (Mean)		20.0291
Standard deviation (Std. Deviation)		4.48806
Asymmetry (Skewness)		-1.024
Statistical error of asymmetry (Std. Error of Skewness)		.076
Flattening (Kurtosis)		.704
Statistical error of flattening (Std. Error of Kurtosis)		.152
The minimum		5.00
The maximum		25.00
S-K	Statistic	.134
	Df	1032
	Sig.	.000

Source: Authors' calculation

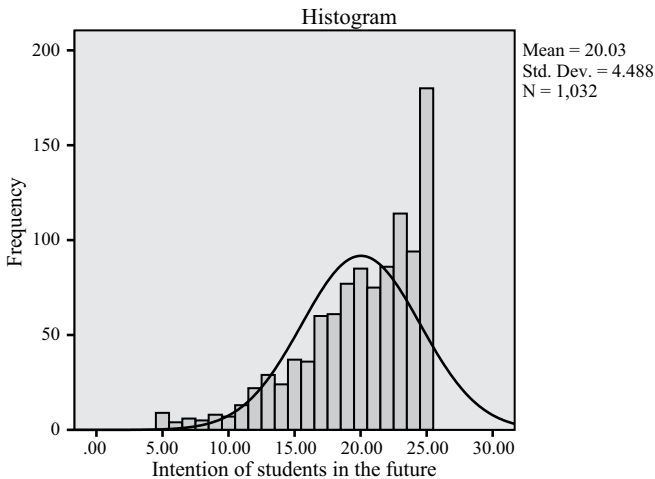


Chart 2. Assessment of future intentions

Source: Authors' calculation

On the third dimension Loyalty - commitment (emotional dimension), the lowest achieved score was 5, and the highest was 25 points. The respondents on this

dimension achieved an average of 18.94 points with a standard deviation of 4.76 points. The distribution was negatively asymmetric (skewness was -0.694) and platykurtic (kurtosis was -0.117). Testing the statistical significance of the deviation of the obtained distribution from the normal model, showed that the deviation was statistically significant (SK=0.117, for the number of degrees of freedom 1032, $p=0.000$).

Table 3. Statistics – Commitment assessment

Statistics		
Loyalty-Emotional dimension or commitment		
Total number (N)	Valid	1032
	Missing	0
Arithmetic mean (Mean)		18.9409
Standard deviation (Std. Deviation)		4.75933
Asymmetry (Skewness)		-.694
Statistical error of asymmetry (Std. Error of Skewness)		.076
Flattening (Kurtosis)		-.117
Statistical error of flattening (Std. Error of Kurtosis)		.152
The minimum		5.00
The maximum		25.00
S-K	Statistic	.117
	Df	1032
	Sig	.000

Source: Authors' calculation

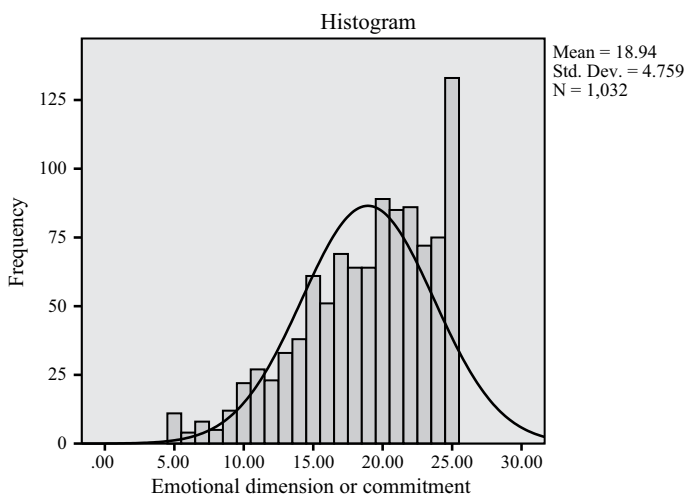


Chart 3. Commitment assessment

Source: Authors' calculation

On the questionnaire that measures loyalty, the minimum score was 20, and the maximum was 100 points. The arithmetic mean of the results was 74.62, with a standard deviation of 16.32 points. Skewness was negative (-0.651) which indicates negative asymmetry. The distribution was leptokurtic because the kurtosis was 0.79. The deviation of the obtained distribution from the normal model was statistically significant ($SK=0.70$, for the number of degrees of freedom 1032, $p=0.000$).

Table 4. Statistics – Loyalty assessment

Statistics		
Loyalty - satisfaction		
Total number (N)	Valid	1032
	Missing	0
Arithmetic mean (Mean)		74.6202
Standard deviation (Std. Deviation)		16.32630
Asymmetry (Skewness)		-.651
Statistical error of asymmetry (Std. Error of Skewness)		.076
Flattening (Kurtosis)		.079
Statistical error of flattening (Std. Error of Kurtosis)		.152
The minimum		20.00
The maximum		100.00
S-K	Statistic	.070
	Df	1032
	Sig	.000

Source: Authors' calculation

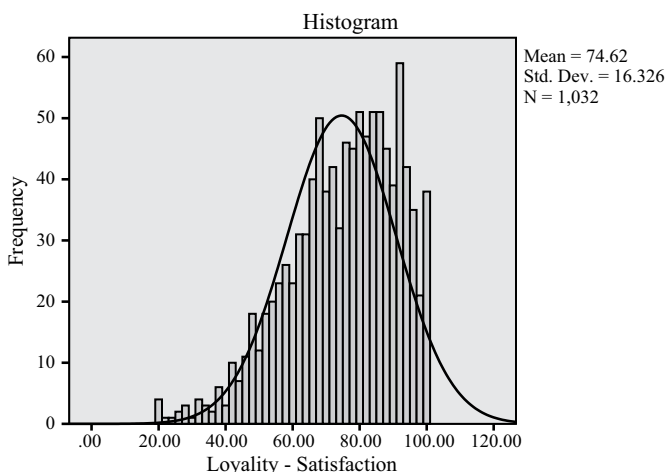


Chart 4. Loyalty assessment

Source: Authors' calculation

In order to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between loyalty (the emotional component of student attachment and satisfaction with the service) on the one hand, and students’ intentions in the future on the other, Spearman’s correlation coefficient was used, as a non-parametric alternative to Pearson’s r coefficient. The non-parametric alternative was used because there were pronounced asymmetries in the distribution of the results of the mentioned variables.

Table 5. Correlations between student loyalty, commitment, satisfaction and future intentions

Correlations				
Student loyalty	Satisfaction with the service and opportunities to participate in value creation		Intention of students in the future period	
	Correlation Coefficient	.775**	Correlation Coefficient	.742**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	1032	N	1032
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)..**				

Source: Authors’ calculation

6. DISCUSSIONS

In this paper, a comprehensive approach to the research of factors influencing selected dimensions in higher education was made. Regarding the dimension that examines satisfaction with the service and the possibility of participation in the value creation, based on the results shown, it can be concluded that the respondents most often achieve results above average. This means that they are satisfied with the service and opportunities to participate in the creation of value.

When it comes to the dimension related to future intentions, the presented numerical and graphical descriptive statistical indicators indicate that the majority of respondents achieve results that are higher than average. This shows that the majority of students intend to continue their education at the faculty they study in the future.

In case of the commitment dimension (emotional dimension), the results show extremely high scores, which means that students have trust and closeness to the employed academic and non-academic staff at the faculty where they study, that they speak about the faculty mostly in a positive sense, and that they would recommend the faculty to others.

Regarding the questionnaire that measures loyalty, and based on the results obtained, the indicators are above average. This means that the respondents are satisfied with the service, that there is loyalty towards their faculty.

Based on the statistical connection between loyalty (the emotional component of student attachment and satisfaction with the service) on the one hand, and the intentions of students in the future period on the other hand, and based on the values that can be read from table 5, we see that there is an extremely high correlation (0.775) between student loyalty, satisfaction with the service and the opportunity to participate in value creation. Another important fact is that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.000 level. The above results can be interpreted in the context of the fact that students who are satisfied with the service and participate in value creation of the faculty services also show greater loyalty - attachment to the higher education institution where they study. For the correlation of loyalty and the intentions of students in the future period and the commitment of students, an extremely high correlation (0.742) was also obtained. It is statistically significant at the level of 0.000, which shows that loyalty significantly affects the future intentions of students in higher education.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The correlation between student loyalty and their future intentions in higher education is established by the following hypothesis “*Loyalty of students is positively related to their future intentions (staying at the institution until the end of their studies, pursuing the next level of studies, and spreading positive propaganda about the institution)*”. The obtained results show a high correlation of loyalty and future intentions of students. This means that students who are committed to the institution spread positive propaganda, promote the institution activities and thus attract new service users. Also, they are more willing to stay at the institution until the end of their education and to continue their studies at the next level of study. In accordance with the above, *the hypothesis was confirmed.*

Although every university thinks it takes enough care of its students, few actually take the essence of that relationship seriously. Students are what for-profit institutions call “best customers”. Only when they understand this, faculties can begin to engage with students in the sense of learning about them, their needs, preferences, and the criteria they use to make decisions about choosing the faculty to study at. After that, the faculty should provide students with other opportunities, apart from leaving as a result of their dissatisfaction. The research of student wishes, needs and opinions is the first step towards improving

mutual relations and implementing a strategy for managing relations with them. Marketing in this case provides all the necessary help and tools.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

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УТИЦАЈ МАРКЕТИНГА НА ЛОЈАЛНОСТ СТУДЕНАТА И БУДУЋЕ НАМЈЕРЕ У ВИСОКОМ ОБРАЗОВАЊУ

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САЖЕТАК

Примјена маркетиншког концепта у високом образовању може значајно побољшати перформансе ових институција. Посебно је значајна улога маркетинга у обезбјеђивању лојалности студената и благовременог утицаја на њихове будуће намјере, нарочито у данашње вријеме када је смањење броја студената велики проблем у нашој држави, али и у земљама окружења. Овај рад, са маркетиншког аспекта, даје резултате истраживања односа студентске лојалности и њихових будућих намјера у високом образовању. Истраживање је обављено на студентима два државна универзитета у Републици Српској. Резултати истраживања показују да постоји јака веза студентске лојалности и будућих намјера студената у високом образовању. Добијени резултати су значајни за универзитете који желе задржати студенте на институцији, али и осигурати себи партнере и након завршетка њиховог студија.

Кључне ријечи: *маркетинг, услуга, високошколске институције, студенти, лојалност, будуће намјере.*

