

INTERNAL IMAGE OF CZECH TERTIARY BUSINESS SCHOOLS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE INTEREST OF NEW APPLICANTS FOR STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Attracting prospective students could be difficult and expensive. Candidates, when choosing a future school for their studies, consider a great number of factors. Information from official university websites does not suffice to persuade. Word of mouth plays a significant role, among others. The aim of this paper is to present findings about important factors influencing the overall satisfaction of current students with university life as well as their willingness to share positive references. The study took place in the Czech Republic with students attending business schools at universities. Primary data was collected via an online questionnaire with students with bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees ($n = 274$) and in-depth interviews ($n = 10$). Data was processed with regression analysis and Spearman's correlation coefficient. The main findings suggest that there is a close positive correlation between students' satisfaction and the willingness to recommend the university. The quality of student life and the reputation of the school were identified as the most important factors influencing this satisfaction and willingness to recommend.

KEYWORDS

References, satisfaction, university students, WOM

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Highlights

- Influence of students' satisfaction on willingness to recommend the university to potential students.
- The key factors:
 - The comparison of the university with its competition and the university's reputation (from the area of the institution's reputation and image).
 - The attractiveness of courses and the teachers' attitude towards students (from the area of study factors).

INTRODUCTION

Schools invest considerable amounts of money in their promotion to attract more students. No more than three schools or universities typically make it to a student's final shortlist, thanks to marketing activities (Caffee, 2017). Yet not all institutions are fully aware of the power of word of mouth (WOM) from their current students. Referrals are important not just as feedback for the institution to improve its services and lead it towards further innovations, but they can also become an important tool of promotion (Jalkala and Terho, 2014; Siering et al., 2018). Often, referrals also play an important role in decision-making because consumers are more likely to choose a product or service when that particular product is recommended to them by a trusted friend (He et al., 2016).

When choosing a university, students are influenced by a great number of factors. In general, tuition, school fees, and location rank amongst the most influential factors (Kinzie et al., 2004;

Drewes, Michael, 2006). Nowadays, these aspects still play a role in decision-making. However, other factors, such as the learning environment, future job prospects (Agrey and Lampadan, 2014), and the university's reputation (Gamoga and Ambang, 2020), are all considered. Research by Schlesinger et al. (2021) suggests that alumni satisfaction and identification with the university and the university's brand image are also key factors for recommendations.

In the Czech Republic, where most students attend public schools, and, thanks to the country's relatively small size, location is not as important as in countries like the U.S., the promotion, reputation, and internal image of universities may have a significant impact on students' decision making.

Referrals from current students could be a source of important information for prospective students when choosing a university, as this information is actually personal and could be considered more reliable than the official information presented by the university

itself. Shields and Peruta (2019) found in their research in the USA that 55% of students find speaking to current students as one of the primary sources helping them choose a school. Referrals from students could be reliant on lots of partial factors connected with student life at the university. Examples include the appearance and amenities of the university campus, the teachers and their approach to students, the applicability of knowledge earned at the university to practical life, the university's culture (including communication between management and students), etc.

The objective of the paper is to determine which factors could have a major influence on the overall impression and satisfaction of current students and, therefore, could also influence their recommendation to prospective students. The connection of the identified factors and the willingness to spread positive WOM will be assessed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of brand image and internal image

The image of any organization contains several elements (Avenarius, 1993). The most important of these elements are reputation, the degree of being known, and the specific profile. Thanks to global integration and business competition, companies are encouraged to pay more attention to their brand image and its potential (Alhaddad, 2015). According to Wood (2004), a strong brand image enables the creation of a strong relationship between customers and companies.

There are two important relationships connected with brand image: one with brand trust, which leads to advocacy intention, and the second with repurchase intention (Huang et al., 2020). A successful brand can be created through brand experience because a positive experience with the brand leads to brand satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009). According to Dass et al. (2021), intellectual brand experience is the most important for achieving brand love and trust in higher education. Also, sensory and affective dimensions in brand experience and behavioral dimensions have a high impact.

The brand image also plays an important role in differentiating brands from one another (Anwar and Jalees, 2020). It is formed through various instances of communication that create associations. All this leads to the creation of a certain perception in the minds of consumers (Dülek and Saydan, 2019). Companies should pay attention to their brand image, which is constructed from their visual, product, and service images (Huang et al., 2020). A well-chosen logo could also help a company distinguish itself from competitors (Erjansola et al., 2021) and with self-expression (Park et al., 2013). In the creation of a strong logo and brand, Sadeghvaziri et al. (2022) suggest universities focus on functional, visual, and self-expressive aspects and, thus, stimulate students to create a strong emotional bond. This premise is based on the tendency to connect high-quality products with the attractive visual effect of the logo. In higher education, branding strategies mostly concentrate on advertising activities, aiming to gain new students (Sujchaphong et al., 2020). Leonard (2019) mentioned the importance of improving and increasing the online presentation for universities (such as websites, social media, etc.). His findings confirmed the positive relationship between loyalty and e-trust.

Internal branding is also of great importance for a company, as employees' brand-supportive behavior leads to strengthening the corporate brand (Hoppe, 2018). Internal image is linked with employee satisfaction and loyalty (Hejlová, 2015). With more and more organizations on the market, it is not easy to retain employees. Employees' motivation plays a key role here (Mehta et al., 2010), and it is precisely motivation and organizational commitment that lead to employee loyalty (Khuong et al., 2020). The construct of satisfaction and loyalty leading to long-term relationships is also valid for the school environment (Borraz-Mora et al., 2020). The identification of students with their schools takes place thanks to the sharing of values and attributes, due to which the students can psychologically attach themselves to their schools (Bhattacharya, Sen, 2003). According to Nguyen et al. (2016), a successful school brand signifies the ability to fulfil students' needs, leads to trust in inadequate services, and helps in making school- and course-related decisions.

Today's society cannot escape the impact of the social factors that have been promoted through globalization. In this way, people are exposed to global brands (Wu et al., 2019). Social media and networking also play an important role in everyday life. People get used to using social media not just for communication but also become more and more interested in receiving gratification through it rather than in person (Phua et al., 2017). In 2019, in the European Union, almost 88% of young people aged 16-24 used social networks (CZSO, 2020b), and social networks are an important channel for reaching new potential students. For students, it is now easier to communicate and share their opinions about their university via social media than to do so face-to-face.

Recommendation and WOM

Gaining trust is a key element in customer relationship management. Customers who believe in the company and its products are more willing to share a positive experience with friends and relatives (Sernovitz, 2009; He et al., 2016; Eldegwy et al., 2018). Another factor that plays an important role in sharing positive recommendations is consumer satisfaction. Kotler (2007) states that customers whose expectations of a company are met, or the company even exceeds their expectations, are more loyal and speak positively about the company. In their research on hospital employees, the relationship between satisfaction and positive recommendations can also be found in employee satisfaction and willingness to give recommendations, as shown by Grass et al. (2021). Each consumer is affected by certain reference groups, whether or not they are members and their family. Close surroundings present the greatest influence (Novotny and Duspiva, 2014). Consumers' opinions change through the transmission of information, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Wu et al., 2019). According to Shen and Sengupta (2018), consumers present their personalities through consumption and discussing brands.

Consumers often rely on WOM during purchase decisions to help reduce uncertainty and the level of perceived risk (Murray, 1991). Positive recommendations spread spontaneously by WOM then influence customers' purchase intentions. If their experience matches the positive review, they will then spontaneously generate further positive recommendations (Barreda et al., 2015). Sharing recommendations amongst consumers is way more effective than traditional advertising techniques (Haikel-Elsabeh et al., 2019), and

they also help define the problems and functionality of institutional services, even potentially serving as an improvement of such services (Jalkala and Terho, 2014).

In their research, Ghosh et al. (2001) established that the students' trust in their alma mater leads to the willingness to advocate for their school in front of other people and to customer advocacy. According to Sarkar and Sarkar (2016), a consumer who has a strong connection with the brand and trusts the brand deeply is not only spreading positive WOM but also advocating this brand to attract new consumers to consume the brand as well. Schlesinger et al. (2021) showed in their research that the key to alumni recommending their alma mater through WOM is identification, satisfaction, and the university's brand image.

School choice

In the U.S., in the past, some of the most important factors impacting the choice were the distance from home, tuition, and compulsory fees (Drewes and Michael, 2006). Also, Judson et al. (2006) considered these factors to be the most influential while also adding the factors of image and reputation. In their research in Thailand, Agrey and Lampadan (2014) determined the learning environment and potential future job prospects as the most important factors influencing school choice as factors applicable in an international institution. Another factor they mentioned was the institution's reputation. Dirin et al. (2021) point out the importance of using relevant digital channels, which are used by students to search for information.

According to Safari et al. (2020), teachers also play a key role in the education system. Berková et al. (2020) point out the increasing importance of the implementation of entrepreneurship education in higher education programs. This could be accomplished by the employment of entrepreneurs to lessons.

In their study, Misran et al. (2012) recommend that schools promote intensively and spread more information about the school via mass media and by appointing an ambassador

who would share what campus lifestyle is like and students' overall experience in high school.

Universities around the world are assessed according to various factors and lined up to rankings. Examples of international rankings are The Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE) or the U.S. News & World Report (USNWR) (Dearden et al., 2019). Each ranking uses its own criteria. For example, THE ranking assesses the quality of teaching, science, and research, citations, public opinion, companies' opinions, etc. (THE, 2021). Apart from other factors, the USNWR (2021) evaluates universities according to regional reputation indicators, citations, and research. University rankings create an opportunity to attract prospective students as they create prestige and provide information for students about each universities' attributes (Dearden et al., 2019).

Joseph et al. (2012) confirmed that branding efforts are important during the student's search process, wherein making the final choice, experiential factors such as personal visits to the campus, interactions with students and university representatives, and WOM from family members and friends play the key role. In the research from Shields and Peruta (2019), institutional websites, campus visits, and speaking with current students are the primary sources of information received by students about a school in the USA.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

For the purposes of this research, in-depth interviews ($n = 10$) with business school students from Czech universities were conducted, followed by a questionnaire survey ($n = 271$). The interviews served as preliminary research and to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Students from public universities in the Czech Republic, which have a dominant position in the market, students from business schools of the Czech Republic, as well as students from private schools, were targeted. In total, there were respondents from 19 public and 2 private business schools from the Czech Republic. The aim was to address respondents in quota according to the level of their current study (see Table 1).

	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctor's
Statistics from the Czech Statistical Office	63%	32%	5%
Respondents	59%	37%	4%

Table 1: Compliance with the quota (source: CZSO, 2020a and questionnaire sample demographics)

The respondents evaluated 50 factors related to students' satisfaction with the university they attended (see Table 2). These factors represent the following areas selected based on the literature survey:

- learning environment (Agrey and Lampadan, 2014);
- institution reputation and image (Judson et al., 2006);
- factors related to students' studies (Safari et al., 2020; Berková et al., 2020).

Multivariate regression analysis was used to assess the importance of these factors. The regression analysis estimates the relationship between two variables - the response variable (explained) and the explanatory variables (Evangelos, 2010). The variables explained are:

- students' satisfaction with their institution (the university they currently attended);
- willingness to recommend their institution to secondary school students (potential applicants).

Some of the questions were intentionally asked twice with minor modifications, first at the beginning of the questionnaire before evaluating the set of satisfaction factors and for a second time at the end of the questionnaire. The aim was to compare how the top-of-the-mind (quick-thinking) assessment of their satisfaction and willingness to recommend would differ from their assessment after a more thorough reflection on these factors. To assess the dependence between the individual variables explained, the Spearman correlation coefficient was used.

All variables in the models were rated either on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 = highest satisfaction, 5 = lowest) or are binary variables (e.g., involvement of experts from practice in courses 1 = yes, 0 = no). For binary variables, a higher rating (1) means higher satisfaction, so it can be assumed that these variables will be negatively correlated with the explained variables. Statistically insignificant

variables at the 10% significance level were removed from the models by gradual sequential elimination. The models were further subjected to econometric verification and adjusted based on the results.

Variable	Average	Median	Mode	Mode frequency	Standard deviation
Comparison of the institution with the competition	2.21	2	2	105	0.968
University reputation	2.20	2	2	106	1.160
Availability of study rooms	1.25	1	1	213	0.582
Availability of IT equipped study rooms	1.33	1	1	229	0.955
Availability of library	1.69	2	2	166	0.543
Availability of dormitories	3.08	3	3	178	0.702
Availability of school canteen	1.98	2	2	166	0.911
Availability of cafe	1.25	1	1	231	0.742
Availability of sports grounds	3.45	4	4	111	0.953
Availability of gym	3.35	4	4	107	1.094
Availability of relaxation area	1.93	2	1	119	1.125
Indoor school environment	1.87	2	2	111	0.887
Outdoor campus environment	1.99	2	1	108	1.029
Quality of school canteen	2.67	3	2	89	1.109
Organization of workshops	0.80	1	1	217	0.400
Organization of concerts	0.18	0	0	222	0.386
Bonus lectures outside regular courses	0.83	1	1	224	0.379
Organization of job fairs	0.72	1	1	196	0.448
Organization of parties	0.30	0	0	191	0.457
University logo	2.27	2	2	111	1.042
Promotional items	2.37	2	3	98	0.914
Feeling proud of the university	2.14	2	2	104	1.023
Feeling proud of the school	2.26	2	2	100	1.064
University relationship towards students	2.37	2	2	114	0.983
Assessment of graduates by employers	2.14	2	2	88	1,000
PR and media	2.37	2	2	100	0.964
Usefulness of subjects	2.48	2	2	124	0.938
Study plan	2.61	3	2	100	1.001
Level of exam difficulty	2.88	3	3	98	0.896
Mediation of internships	2.87	3	3	85	1.190
Individual approach to students	2.77	3	3	94	1.174
Attitude of study counselors	2.25	3	2	108	1.056
Troubleshooting while studying	2.23	2	2	97	0.996
Student organizations	0.31	0	0	188	0.462
Quality of foreign language teaching	2.66	3	2	97	1.051
Opportunity to communicate with international students	2.56	3	3	76	1.212
Study abroad options	1.75	1	1	140	0.916
Level of fun during lessons	2.81	3	3	111	0.938
Attractiveness of courses	2.45	2	2	113	0.889
Expert knowledge of teachers	1.89	2	2	121	0.821
Willingness of teachers to consult	1.99	2	2	112	0.894
Teachers' approach towards students	2.40	2	2	117	0.921
Presentation skills of teachers	2.41	2	2	122	0.792
Use of practical examples	0.70	1	1	190	0.459
Involvement of experts from practice in courses	0.70	1	1	190	0.459
Projects in cooperation with companies	0.24	0	0	206	0.428
Possibility of work in real projects	0.17	0	0	224	0.379
Competitions	0.13	0	0	235	0.340
Simulation games	0.23	0	0	209	0.421
Availability of e-learning	0.53	1	1	143	0.500

Table 2: Variables used in models (source: Questionnaire 2020, n = 271)

RESULTS

Satisfaction is one of the crucial factors influencing one's willingness to recommend (Schlesinger et al., 2021). Thus, the first model (see Table 3) explains the students' satisfaction with the institution (university) they attend depending on the observed factors. After sequential elimination, the resulting model contains 5 variables and explains 35% of the variability. The variables were sorted according to the size of the regression coefficient, the size of which characterizes the degree of influence of the given variable on students'

satisfaction. For example, for the variable "comparison with the competition", the value of the regression coefficient of 0.29 can be interpreted that an increase of such a factor by one point on the Likert scale translates to an increase in the student's satisfaction with their school by an average of 0.29.

This model, as with all presented models, was tested for the assumptions of the linear model, all assumptions were fulfilled (at a significance level of 0.01), and the multicollinearity among the explanatory variables was not demonstrated (see Table 8 in Appendix 1).

Model 1: OLS using observations 1-271					
Dependent variable: Satisfaction					
	coefficient	std. error	t-ratio	p-value	
Const	0.332	0.181	1.831	0.0683	*
Comparison of the institution with its competition	0.291	0.065	4.478	< 0.001	***
Attractiveness of courses	0.221	0.066	3.350	0.0009	***
University reputation	0.151	0.047	3.230	0.0014	***
University relationship towards students	0.127	0.055	2.239	0.0260	**
Study plan	0.114	0.055	2.073	0.0391	**
Mean dependent var.		2.446	S. D. dependent var.		0.968
Sum squared resid.		160.500	S. E. of regression		0.778
R-squared		0.656	Adjusted R-squared		0.354

Note: *, **, *** indicates the level of significance (0.1; 0.05; 0.01)

Table 3: Model 1 - students' satisfaction (source: Questionnaire 2020, n = 271)

Based on the results of the regression model, only two of the three originally defined areas are significantly important for students' satisfaction with their university, namely, the institution's reputation and image and factors related to the provided education.

The area of an institution's reputation and image is represented by three factors. First, "Comparison of the institution with its competition" is also the factor with the highest impact on students' satisfaction. Comparing a school with competing institutions can be important given the number of universities providing education in business and economics on the Czech market and the availability of information about the school, its awards, placement in university rankings, etc. The second factor in this area was the "university reputation." The last factor in this area is the university's relationship with the students, the way they are treated, and how they are perceived.

The importance of the university's position in comparison to competing institutions and the reputation of the university were also confirmed by the results of in-depth interviews, where two factors were highlighted in particular: 1. whether the content of courses allows easy use of attained know-how in real life and 2. free time activities organized by the university and student organizations operating at the university.

The university's reputation and its position within the market are quite often important for future good job prospects, as Agrey and Lampadan (2014) also pointed out as one of the most important factors influencing school choice.

As expected, another area represented by statistically significant factors is factors related to the students' studies. The most important factor in this area is "the provision of attractive courses". This is understandable, as finding something attractive could mean a positive experience

with this subject, which leads to customer satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009).

It is somewhat surprising that this model lacks factors related to relationships and communication between teachers and students that were also assessed in detail by students in the questionnaire survey.

The importance of the second factor of this group, which is the "study plan" (representing the study plan students must pass in their selected study programs), points to the students' awareness of the study content and its importance. They perceive the need for a comprehensive and practical approach to the study plan, allowing the transfer of acquired knowledge in real life, not just a formal requirement to earn their degree.

Using the same methodology, a regression analysis, the dependence of the willingness to provide a recommendation of the student's home institution to secondary school students was examined. In this model, significant factors are reflected in all three areas (see Table 4).

In the area of institution reputation and image, the factors "comparison of the institution with its competition" and "university reputation" are repeated again. The significantly higher value of the regression coefficient for the factor of "comparison of the institution with its competition" compared to the previous model is worth noting. This difference is not surprising, as we can be more inclined to make more objective evaluations of universities when giving recommendations than when evaluating one's own satisfaction with the university, meaning a better position of the university compared to the competition will play a more important role in one's willingness to give recommendations.

Again, there were other factors from the area of "factors related to the students' studies" in the model. Compared to the

Model 2: OLS using observations 1-271					
Dependent variable: Recommendation1					
	coefficient	std. error	t-ratio	p-value	
const	-0.341	0.274	-1.248	0.2132	*
Comparison of the institution with its competition	0.655	0.067	9.794	< 0.0001	***
Involvement of experts from practice in courses	-0.248	0.110	-2.251	0.0252	**
Teachers approach towards students	0.194	0.0561	3.467	0.0006	***
University reputation	0.133	0.050	2.640	0.0088	***
Availability of sports grounds	0.103	0.053	1.934	0.0542	*
Mean dependent var.		2.044	S. D. dependent var.		1.101
Sum squared resid.		182.053	S. E. of regression		0.829
R-squared		0.444	Adjusted R-squared		0.434

Note: *, **, *** indicates the level of significance (0.1; 0.05; 0.01)

Table 4: Model 2 - the students' willingness to recommend at the beginning of the questionnaire (source: Questionnaire 2020, n = 271)

previous model of students' satisfaction, this time, the factor is related to the "teachers' approach towards students". The inclusion of this factor may mean that students take the teachers' dignity and communication more into account when providing recommendations about an institution. The factor "the involvement of experts from practice in courses" is a binary variable, thanks to which the negative sign of the regression coefficient expresses a positive dependence. The participation of practitioners in teaching was also mentioned and positively perceived by respondents of in-depth interviews. Compared to the previous model, this model also includes a factor

from the area of "learning environment", specifically the availability of sports activities at the university campus. At first glance, this is more of an additional factor in this area, but for some students, the availability of nearby sports facilities can be very important. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents answered a question about their overall impression of their school. This question was a modification of the evaluation of the students' satisfaction with their university. Again, there was also a question about one's willingness to recommend their own institution to secondary school students; however, this time, with an emphasis on taking all the assessed areas into consideration.

Model 3: OLS using observations 1-271					
Dependent variable: Overall impression					
	coefficient	std. error	t-ratio	p-value	
const	-0.079	0.137	-0.574	0.5662	
Attractiveness of courses	0.207	0.046	4.540	< 0.0001	***
Student organizations	-0.202	0.071	-2.848	0.0047	***
Study plan	0.148	0.039	3.834	0.0002	***
Promotional items	0.135	0.038	3.587	0.0004	***
Troubleshooting while studying	0.113	0.037	3.130	0.0019	***
University relationship towards students	0.104	0.042	2.497	0.0131	**
Teachers' approach towards students	0.093	0.047	1.992	0.0474	**
Outdoor campus environment	0.091	0.035	2.627	0.0091	***
Assessment of graduates by employers	0.081	0.035	2.307	0.0218	**
Mean dependent var.		2.151	S. D. dependent var.		0.791
Sum squared resid.		69.426	S. E. of regression		0.516
R-squared		0.589	Adjusted R-squared		0.575

Note: *, **, *** indicates the level of significance (0.1; 0.05; 0.01)

Table 5: Model 3 - the students' overall impression (source: Questionnaire 2020, n = 271)

The evaluation of the overall impression of the university is influenced by several factors. In contrast to students' satisfaction, all three areas are represented in the model (see Table 5). In the area of "institution reputation and image," this time, "comparison of the institution with its competition" and the "university reputation" are missing among the significant factors; only the "university relationship towards students" remained statistically significant. New significant factors from this area are the "assessment of graduates by employers" and satisfaction with the school's "promotional items". The in-depth respondent emphasized the role of promotional items in building a sense of belonging to the university.

No factor was eliminated in the area of "factors related to the students' studies"; on the contrary, several factors were added. This may indicate that respondents, after deeper consideration, took the practical aspects of the provided education more into account. The "student organizations" factor was again a binary variable, so a negative sign of the regression coefficient is expected in the model. From the third area, "learning environment", not represented in the model explaining students' satisfaction, the factor of the external environment of the university (outdoor campus environment) appears among the significant variables.

Model 4: OLS using observations 1-271					
Dependent variable: Recommendation2					
	coefficient	std. error	t-ratio	p-value	
const	-0.460	0.266	-1.728	0.0852	*
Projects in cooperation with companies	-0.249	0.098	-2.535	0.0119	**
Willingness of teachers to consult	0.198	0.062	3.169	0.0017	***
Teachers' approach towards students	0.185	0.062	2.981	0.0031	***
Bonus lectures outside regular courses	-0.179	0.108	-1.664	0.0973	*
Mediation of internships	0.159	0.040	3.992	< 0.0001	***
Assessment of graduates by employers	0.144	0.047	3.062	0.0024	***
Study abroad options	0.126	0.048	2.610	0.0096	***
Comparison of school with competition	0.126	0.050	2.528	0.0121	**
Availability of dormitories	0.114	0.059	1.946	0.0527	*
Outdoor campus environment	0.112	0.044	2.534	0.0119	**
Mean dependent var.		2.011	S. D. dependent var.		0.944
Sum squared resid.		105.972	S. E. of regression		0.641
R-squared		0.557	Adjusted R-squared		0.539

Note: *, **, *** indicates the level of significance (0.1; 0.05; 0.01)

Table 6: Model 4 - the students' willingness to recommend at the end of the questionnaire (source: Questionnaire 2020, n = 271)

The last model resulting from the regression analysis explained which factors influence one's "willingness to give a recommendation", this time after considering all the partial factors (see Table 6).

Amongst the significant variables, factors from all three assessed areas are repeated. As expected, when compared to the previous model (one's willingness to give recommendation 1), there is a higher number of significant factors. For example, from the area "learning environment", the factor "dormitories" has been added, as their availability in the vicinity of the university campus is assessed as positive and plays an important role in giving a recommendation.

We can see that when students were evaluated at the end of the questionnaire, they took into account the particular factors they had to evaluate during the survey. There are more statistically important factors as well as some more practically focused ones. We assumed minor differences between the explanatory variables in all the models above at the beginning of the research. These differences were demonstrated in individual models, where the explanatory variables differ slightly. Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to determine individual dependencies (see Table 7).

Variable	Spearman correlations			
	Satisfaction	Recommendation1	Overall impression	Recommendation2
Satisfaction	1.000	0.595	0.441	0.368
Recommendation1	0.595	1.000	0.364	0.521
Overall impression	0.441	0.364	1.000	0.641
Recommendation2	0.368	0.521	0.641	1.000

Table 7: Spearman correlations (source: Questionnaire 2020, n = 271)

The values of the Spearman coefficients show a higher correlation between the variables that were evaluated in the same part of the questionnaire survey (satisfaction × recommendation 1; overall impression × recommendation 2) than between the individual modifications of the variables (satisfaction × overall impression; recommendation 1 × recommendation 2).

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the factors influencing student satisfaction in relation to willingness to give recommendations. The study confirmed the importance of image and reputation (Judson et al., 2006; Agrey and Lampadan, 2014) as one of the key factors in student satisfaction, which, in consequence, affects recommendations and willingness to give those recommendations (Kotler, 2007, Schlesinger et al., 2021). On the other hand, the relationships with the learning environment, as the literature suggests (Judson et al., 2006), were not found. This could be thanks to focusing on current student, who are probably already used to the university campus and, thus, considering it as one of the less

important factors for their lives at university. As the campus is often visited during open days, it is still important to keep it up for a positive first impression (Shields and Peruta, 2019).

As Schlesinger et al. (2021) discovered, alumni tend to recommend their alma mater through WOM if they feel identification and satisfaction. We can conclude it applies also to business school students who have not graduated yet. Our results support the findings of Ghosh et al. (2001), who linked students' trust in their alma mater and their positive WOM, as also published by Sarkar and Sarkar (2016).

The importance of teachers' willingness to consult and teachers' approach towards students in students' satisfaction leading to higher willingness to share good references are in line with the results of García and García (2021), who highlight that good teachers are one of the top factors influencing students' academic success. Teaching quality as crucial for competitiveness is also stressed by Fajčíková and Fejfarová (2019). Orientation on practice in provided education as an important factor for students' satisfaction was also proven by Depoo et al. (2022). Practically

oriented education was also proven earlier by Berková et al. (2018) as an important motivator.

This research also has its limitations. It is focused only on students from universities in the Czech Republic. Data collection was disrupted by the situation caused by precautions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which complicated the involvement of a larger number of universities, especially private universities. In one way, it could be convenient thanks to the popularity of public universities, thus avoiding the influence of factors such as school tuition and other fees. On the other hand, the burden of tuition could affect the motivation of students and, thus, make some other factors reconsidered. Future studies in this area should consider repeating the research with a higher representation of private schools and in other countries and comparing the results. Another aspect that could have influenced the obtained data is the time-consuming nature of the questionnaire, which had 41 questions with a total of 211 possible answers, and it took respondents an average of 10 minutes to complete. It is, therefore, possible that they could already have been losing attention at the end of the questionnaire.

As research on high school students has shown, the referral factor of current students plays a significant role in choosing a college. Universities should, therefore, strive to make the references of their current students as positive as possible. Based on our findings, it follows that the school should focus on the following:

1. Attention to feedback from students and staff, suggestions for improvement, and motivation of teachers, as relationships between students and staff (variables: the willingness of teachers to consult, teachers' approach towards students) resulted in significant results in the formation of positive WOM.
2. Development of cooperation with companies, i.e., creation of a functional database and communication with companies from various industries, informing educators about new collaborations, creating an internship portal for students, and promoting it not only among students but also among companies (based on the significance of variables: projects in cooperation with companies, mediation of internships, involvement of experts from practice in courses).
3. Building the school's reputation and sense of belonging, i.e., high-quality and visually appealing university-wide promotional items, efforts, and activities that will help achieve the highest possible placement in world and national university rankings (based on the significance of a variable university reputation).
4. Development of relationships with students, especially better communication, i.e., via social networks, a well-designed and clear website, and understandable presentations of schools' achievements (based on the significance of variable university relationships towards students).
5. Building a friendly and comfortable campus and student residencies, i.e., a pleasant atmosphere while visiting the campus, providing the needs of students outside of class time - relaxation places and the capacity of study rooms (based on the significance of variable outdoor campus environment, availability of dormitories).

6. Support of extracurricular activities at school, i.e., regular communication with associations and student bodies, support of their activities, and use of them as a communication channel with students (based on the significance of variable student organizations).
7. Appropriate communication with potential applicants, i.e., providing teaching/learning experience to high school students, promoting cooperation with the private sector, building alumni clubs (based on the significance of variables: assessment of graduates by employers, involvement of experts from practice in the course and comparison of the institution with its competition).
8. The motivation of current students to provide references, i.e., supportive attitude of teachers and university staff in teaching and communication with students and others (based on the significance of variables: university relationship towards students, the attractiveness of courses).

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to evaluate the importance of different areas of student life at universities and the importance of these areas for students' satisfaction and willingness to give recommendations to prospective students.

The analysis confirmed the significant importance of factors in the areas of the institution's reputation and image and factors related to the student's studies. Factors from these two areas were included in all four models. The most significant factors were the comparison of the university with its competition and the university's reputation from the area of the institution's reputation and image, the attractiveness of courses, and the teachers' attitude towards students from the area of study factors.

The comparison of factors influencing satisfaction and one's willingness to recommend at the beginning of the survey and the end of the survey brought interesting results. It is obvious that after deeper consideration, the students involved more aspects in their assessment of their university, especially in terms of their personal experience with their education and the school environment. In the quick assessment, the students mostly evaluated their university according to external factors (such as the university's reputation and the comparison of the university with its competition), even though internal factors still played an important role.

The motivation for this paper was to explore what drives students' recommendations besides the varying levels of tuition and other costs related to higher education, especially since there is such a large number of students studying at public universities in the Czech Republic. The tuition and costs at Czech public universities are still, to this day, quite low, and therefore, not the issue influencing the choice. Our research has proven that the role of WOM is more significant, and universities should focus on the analyzed areas impacting the rate of positive recommendations.

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APPENDIX

Assumption	Tests	Satisfaction	Recommendation1	Overall impression	Recommendation2
Homoskedasticity	Breusch-Pagan test (p -value)	0.19	0.04	0.02	0.05
Normality	Normality of residues (p -value)	0.03	0.06	0.09	0.13
Specification	LM test (p -value)	0.14	0.02	0.02	0.36
	Reset test (p -value)	0.22	0.04	0.05	0.24
Multicollinearity	VIF <10	fulfilled	fulfilled	fulfilled	fulfilled

Table 8: The classical assumption of models (source: Questionnaire 2020, $n = 271$)