

MANAGING ALUMNI LOYALTY. POLAND FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: The aim of the paper is to identify the loyalty management determinants of university alumni. As the pandemic has influenced all walks of life, including university performance and, as a result, the relations between the university and the alumni. The paper also addresses the impact of COVID-19 on selected alumni loyalty programs. The critical literature research was enriched with the analysis of loyalty programs of selected 15 universities under the EU-sponsored “Forge of Professionals 7” project, with the follow-up analysis of 2 universities during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, alumni loyalty determinants were developed. Managing alumni loyalty could be divided into three groups: alumni-based, university-based, and mixed. The most important factor influencing alumni loyalty is not the organization of alumni loyalty management, but the communication tools used by a university. The implementation of the results can bring numerous benefits to the universities: they can enjoy great flexibility in managing alumni relations systems. The university willing to strengthen alumni relations must take this from a strategic point of view. Establishing flourishing alumni relations is always a long process, requiring bold planning and consistent execution. Its value is a practical approach to the management of the relationship between a university and its alumni, and as such, it can greatly contribute to improving policy and practice in higher education.

Key words: Higher education, Alumni loyalty, Alumni programs, University relations management.

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Introduction

Many higher education institutions in the world have for years benefited from cooperation with alumni (Brown and Mazzarol, 2009; Weerts et al., 2009; Newman and Petrosko, 2011). It is multi-level cooperation, covering a wide variety of activities on the part of both the alumni and universities. However, the question of how to build alumni loyalty so that it can produce a tangible effect from this cooperation for universities and graduates remains open. It is especially so in the post-pandemic situation, after COVID-19 forced university management to focus on remote activities and reduce direct contact with students for over a year (Guarner, 2020). Alumni loyalty programs should encourage contact and enable a lasting

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relationship to be established that can encourage alumni to cooperate with the university at different levels, even long after they have completed their studies. As the approach to the topic is very innovative and is still being researched, it is the formal relations that are the main focus of our text rather than the informal bonds that can be simultaneously established.

Thanks to the emotional bond with the university emerging during studies and the ability to sustain it, universities can achieve tangible (e.g. donations) and intangible (e.g. volunteering) benefits. For graduates, in turn, universities opening up, providing access to infrastructure (libraries) and educational offerings (training, discounts on studies) facilitates professional and social development. On the other hand, the success of their graduates ensures the most successful advertising for universities, especially if they share their experience with those who still stand before the decision of choosing a university and course of study (Abdimomynova et al., 2021; Valinurova et al., 2022). What is more, when the alumni volunteer program has been developed well, it can facilitate the recruitment of potential students. (Bugaj et al., 2011).

A review of literature on defining alumni loyalty from the points of view of different fields of study was provided by, among others, Iskhakova et al. (2017) and Rojas-Mendez et al. (2009). These reviews suggest, however, that building alumni loyalty from a university management perspective has not been sufficiently investigated. The main drawback of the existing literature is that it investigates alumni loyalty and alumni relations from the static point of view: as the existing and well-established relation. The literature overlooks the dynamic of alumni relations, and how universities can engage alumni and make alumni relations thrive. Therefore, the purpose of the present publication is to identify the loyalty determinants of university alumni and loyalty programs aimed at university graduates. As the pandemic has influenced all walks of life, including university performance and, as a result, the relations between the university and the alumni, the paper also addresses the impact of COVID-19 on selected alumni loyalty programs. The presentation of our results will be preceded by a review of the research on building alumni loyalty, a general characterization of the loyalty programs aimed at university graduates, and an analysis of selected practices in this field to meet all logistical tasks - from supply logistics to the logistics of distribution.

Defining Loyalty and Alumni Loyalty

Loyalty is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon lacking one clear definition. It can be considered from the perspective of economics, management, marketing, sociology, psychology, and higher education studies. In reviewing the literature, we have applied the critical analysis method, analyzing and synthesizing material from diverse sources and identifying the elements of the model. This way, we could overview a number of publications on the topic and evaluate their usefulness. It also enabled us to review a variety of different approaches to the issue of loyalty as seen from different perspectives.

Two main approaches to the concept of loyalty can be found in the literature on the subject (Burns and Schneider, 2019; Oliver 1999; Vianden and Barlow, 2014; Manzuma-Ndaaba et al., 2016). The first, behavioral, has got to do with a specific, repeated behavior that can be measured (Uncles et al., 2003; Aspinall et al., 2001). It can be reduced to the fact that the consumer spends his or her budget earmarked for the use of this type of service in a single institution. The second approach, emotional, is combined with subjective feelings and perception, with an emotional bond created between the customer and the service provider (Uncles et al., 2003, Garland and Gendall, 2004; Daryanto et al., 2014). It has to do with a specific attitude of a customer who maintains his or her desire to use again certain services despite marketing efforts and other situation factors aimed at making him or her change his or her decision (Oliver, 1999). This is also an attitude within which the customer speaks well about the service (Faizan Ali et al., 2016), making a positive recommendation.

Loyalty is also built as a consequence of different emotions that a student and then a graduate may experience (Hsu et al., 2016) when interacting with the university. For example in the model by Douglas et al., (2008); who link loyalty to identifying with the university, a willingness to recommend the university to friends, and a declaration of choosing that university should the alumni wish to continue their studies (Pabian, 2019); in the model developed by Leonard et al. (Daryanto et al., 2014), service quality, college image, price, trust, and satisfaction perspective are taken into account; in the model of Hennig-Thurau et al., (2001), three main elements have the largest impact on loyalty: quality of service offered, emotional involvement towards the university and trust. On the other hand, Olivier (1999) says that every loyalty must go through four stages: (1) Cognitive (Loyalty to information such as price, features, communication (e.g., advertising), and so forth), (2) Affective (Loyalty to a liking “I buy it because I like it”), (3) Conative (loyalty to an intention “I’m committed to buying it”), (4) Action (“loyalty to action inertia coupled with the overcoming of obstacles”).

Alumni loyalty is a complex, specific behavior towards the entire educational process, including the educational service offered by universities and the bonds with other students of the year or major. It is also connected with the good and bad memories related to studying, which may induce the willingness to continue to participate in the life of the academic community or not. The alumni loyalty process can be created by the university or by the graduates themselves. The main difference between them lies in the divergent purpose of the process, the loyalty provider, and the recipient of the message. It can also differ in the expected behavior, related to reaping the profits (financial or otherwise) by one or both parties. Moreover, it differs in the dominant activities, which may not always be transferable to the relationship between the alumni and the university, and vice versa. Above all, though, alumni loyalty involves the assumptions of bonding, forming habits, and repetitive behaviors, as well as the willingness to return and reuse. On this basis, alumni behavior can be predicted and planned. Thus, loyalty can also be seen as a

continuation of the purchase of quality education services, for certain reasons, motivating the behavior of the alumnus, making him or her indifferent to incentives from other universities (Sutherland and Canwell, 2004; Austin and Pervaiz, 2017), and as a set of factors that influence this choice. So, alumni are theorized to become loyal in a cognitive sense first, then later in an affective sense, still later in a conative manner, and finally in a behavioral manner, which is described as “action inertia” (Oliver, 1999; Hsu et al., 2016).

In the text, we will use the definition of an alumnus loyal to a university as a person who wishes to maintain close contact with the university even after graduation. Alumni loyalty will be an active attitude toward the university, and loyalty programs will be an activity of the university toward its alumni. Thus, a loyalty program is a planned and implemented activity of the university toward its alumni designed to shape their pro-loyalty attitude toward the university.

Assumptions for alumni loyalty programs at universities

Building and managing alumni loyalty is a long-term process the effects of which are only visible after a few years of implementation (Bugaj et al., 2013; Rybkowski, 2014). Cooperation between alumni and universities can occur in very different ways (Iskhakova et al., 2016): it can be an initiative coming from the alumni themselves or from the university, and it may be limited to occasional communication and participation in selected events organized by the university, it may be an intensive communication process using various IT tools, direct and indirect contacts and consultations (including proposals for changes to training programs or proposals for new courses of study (Hsu et al., 2016, Subrahmanyam, 2017).

Loyalty programs offered by universities can help in building and then managing alumni loyalty. They are an initiative aimed at progressively increasing the willingness of alumni to take advantage of the various services offered by universities. From peer-to-peer contacts, also with teaching staff, participation in conferences and workshops organized by universities, to further use of its educational services (e.g. MOOCs or postgraduate studies). Loyalty programs allow to build knowledge about the alumnus and allow the university to draw long-term financial benefits from this relationship. It can involve alumni (Daryanto et al., 2014; Snijders et al., 2019) in the efforts of the university to recruit new students and create an institutional framework for alumni to support university students in their choice of career paths. Their aim is, on the one hand, to build loyalty to the university, but also to build a sense among the alumni that the school is loyal to them.

Research Methodology

On the basis of the literature review above, it can be inferred that from a university management perspective, alumni loyalty is a two-way relationship, with certain benefits for both parties. These benefits are understood differently on each side. It was assumed that they are determined by different factors. The authors used a detailed three-stage research method: (1) critical literature review, focusing on defining loyalty in general, including brand loyalty; (2) analysis of alumni loyalty

programs of selected universities; and (3) follow-up qualitative coding analysis of alumni loyalty programs during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2 universities. The research questions that the authors have focused on are: (1) What are the criteria to describe the alumni loyalty programs? (2) What are the criteria to analyze alumni loyalty from the perspective of HEIs? Thanks to such a research procedure, commonly employed in higher education research (Tight, 2004), the authors were able to identify the determinants of this loyalty and the determinants of loyalty programs aimed at university alumni.

The definition of alumni loyalty determinants was the result of a review of literature and research to date, international practices concerning the creation of more or less formalized relationships between alumni and universities were then reviewed. Also, other materials collected for the “Forge of Professionals 7” (“Kuznia Kadr 7”) project in 2013-2015 were analyzed. On this basis, the determinants of loyalty programs were identified. Eventually (in August 2020), two cases of loyalty activities addressed to university graduates (Jagiellonian University in Kraków: JU and Lund University: LU) were analyzed to finally select determinants of alumni loyalty based on real-life activities. The Authors applied Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to facilitate the research and make it more objective (Flick, 2014). The MAXQDA2018 was employed in qualitative coding, based on an inductive approach (which is recommended while researching new phenomena). Due to travel restrictions and communication obstacles, the follow-up phase of the research (August 2020) was limited to two universities since the team was not able to obtain the relevant information from other institutions in a timely manner.

34 documents pertaining to alumni loyalty published since March 2020 were found, including two YouTube videos posted by LU. These two videos were especially informative for the research since the first provided a general explanation of the whole idea of alumni relations and the role they might play in the lives of graduates (LU, 2020a), while the other one was the address of the Vice-Chancellor of LU (key administrative figure of the university), referring directly to the situation of alumni during the COVID-19 pandemic (Schantz, 2020). Even a greater number of documents were found from JU than LU and this is so because the JU has recently posted 17 interviews with alumni, discussing their professional careers, and offering their suggestions for alumni-university collaboration. However, due to the common structure of the interviews (discussed below), there is no actual disparity between LU and JU in the quality of the content of the documents.

Altogether, there were 195 fragments coded with some of the codes overlapping, since fragments could be ascribed to two or even more different codes. Four main groups of codes were applied, referring to 1) alumni relations programs organized and managed by the universities; 2) alumni groups and their expectations; 3) university-alumni communication; and 4) the university’s envisioned alumni engagement (i.e. plans that are not already covered under point no. 1). Since one of the objectives of the research project was the analysis of alumni relations at the time

of the pandemic, we also applied a separate code: COVID-19. The categorization of the documents was done by one coder by employing an inductive coding approach. Initial coding was later reviewed by the other Author to reduce biased coding, thus, following a well-established practice in computer-assisted qualitative research (Pereira et al., 2017).

In 2013-2015, as a part of the “Forge of Professionals 7” project, alumni loyalty programs of 15 universities were surveyed: 4 American and 11 European ones, including 3 in Poland. These universities represented four geographic regions: The United States, Scandinavia (Sweden and Norway), BENELUX (Belgium and the Netherlands), and Central Europe (Poland and the Czech Republic). For the USA, the team researched two private universities (Harvard and New York University) and two public (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Prairie View AandM University). As for Europe, the team selected recognized research universities: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim; Uppsala University; Lund University; University of Amsterdam; Eindhoven University of Technology; University of Liège, Charles University in Prague; Masaryk University in Brno; Leon Koźmiński University in Warsaw; Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, and the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. All European universities had their alumni relations programs established relatively recently, especially compared to the American universities. The US examples provided insight into the business-like organization of alumni loyalty programs, much favored by European institutions of higher education.

In particular, the information and documents published on the home pages of universities and alumni associations were taken into account as data sources. In addition, the scientific publications on this subject were taken into account. The text uses the critical-empirical method, including case studies.

Determinants for managing alumni loyalty from selected international practices

The main purpose of the 2013-15 research was to determine the characteristics of loyalty programs. Based on the study, five groups of determinants were identified to manage loyalty programs aimed at university alumni. The categories were chosen to describe the loyalty determinants more objectively and to facilitate the comparison of the loyalty programs. They include (Bugaj, et al., 2013) (1) general information (describing the university where the loyalty program is organized); (2) organizational (relating to how the loyalty program operates/where it is located in the university structure); (3) communicational (describing how data on alumni is obtained and relative to the channels and content of communication with the alumni); (4) promotional (indicating to whom programs are addressed and which methods are used to promote loyalty programs) and (5) strategic (describing the extent of maintaining links with the university). In addition, more than 20 sub-determinants were identified, such as: university budget, type of university (private/public), the legal basis of the graduate organization (university/independent/co-operating), the source of funding (university/association-membership fees/association-sponsoring), the organization in the university structure (career office/promotion office/alumni

department/outside the university), the channels of communication for alumni (email/ telephone/ newsletter/ alumni magazine/ alumni reunions/ university open houses/ website/ social media/ letter) (Bugaj, et al., 2013). These determinants allow to describe any loyalty program aimed at university alumni.

Research has shown that loyalty programs for graduates are managed regardless of the type of higher education institution or the way in which it is organized (public/private; university/technical). In the United States, these programs have a long tradition (Hoffmann and Müller, 2008), while in continental Europe they started to proliferate only at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries (Iskhakova et al., 2016), and it was for this reason that research into mature American solutions was a very good reference point for research on AL. As a result of further studies, it was found that the process of building and managing alumni loyalty could be further divided into the following categories: alumni-based, university-based, and mixed. Alumni-based loyalty program is organized and managed by alumni themselves, independently of the university administration. University-based is quite reverse: organized by the university, aiming at keeping the alumni in touch with the university. Mixed organization means that independent alumni-organization is strongly supported (organizationally and sometimes even financially) by the university.

The activity of alumni associations and the ability to use the loyalty of former students make US universities an example of the most effective actions. In the United States, such associations are set up by former students who work closely with their colleges. Colleges, on the other hand, appreciate the value of their cooperation with the alumni and often create very large graduate offices/departments (for alumni relations). A mutual relationship with students is being built from the first year of study onwards (Lauren and Bent, 2015; Sheryl and Bourgeois, 2013; Noah and Drezner, 2011).

In Scandinavia, loyalty programs are launched and administered by universities. Their main goal is to maintain alumni connected not only with the university but also among alumni themselves. At the University of Lund, the first association of economic studies graduates was founded in 1990. The association of engineering graduates followed in 1996, and it was only in 2006 that a university-wide association was called into being (Paulson, 2013). At the oldest Swedish university, the Uppsala University, the alumni association was formally established in 2003 (Sarah and Schütz, 2013). Swedish universities are focused on building networks that enable multi-faceted, international, and active cooperation, with young graduates getting help in finding employment (Sarah and Schütz, 2013; NTNU, 2013]. In the case of Polish universities, grass-roots initiatives are most common, with students setting up an association whose aim is to enable them to maintain mutual contacts (Rybkowski and Bugaj, 2014).

In the Czech Republic, alumni associations were established relatively recently and are organized independently of the activities of universities. An association of graduates of Charles University in Prague was founded in 1996 (Bugaj, et al., 2013),

while at Masaryk University in Brno, exactly 10 years later. Among the problems the Czech associations face are small membership rates and limited budgets, although they are still able to provide scholarships to the best young researchers, for example, through the procurement of external sponsors (UK, 2013; Masaryk university, 2013).

Research Results- Examination

The main body of the research pertaining to the COVID-19 situation was based on the analysis of documents presented on-line by the alumni programs of two universities: Lund University in Lund, Sweden (one of the top research universities in Scandinavia) and the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland (one of the top Polish research universities). Lund University and the Jagiellonian University in Kraków were selected for in-depth examination because they represent top national research universities with a rather short history of institutional support for alumni relations management. These two universities provide an excellent example of different strategies for strengthening alumni relations and building their loyalty. Both universities launched their organized alumni loyalty programs rather recently (2009 in the case of LU (Rybkowski, 2014), 2014 in the case of the JU (2014), especially as compared to the North American system of higher education. The alumni loyalty programs should not be confused with already existing, albeit weak, alumni associations. Neither country can rely on a long tradition of alumni engagement in activities of the alma mater after graduation (Rybkowski, 2014). Understanding the position of these universities and the relatively short history of their university-supported alumni relations, the comparison between them is possible and justified. In the case of Jagiellonian University, a driving force for building stronger ties with alumni was a grant from the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) aiming at strengthening collaboration with alumni living and working abroad (JU, 2020). By comparing the present activities of LU and JU, the authors were able to examine if the pandemic has any impact on their alumni loyalty programs and if there is any significant shift in the scope and focus of such programs. Both universities have their websites dedicated to alumni relations, as both have special (although rather small) offices for alumni relations. For our analysis, only documents that have been posted since March 2020 were considered, meaning all the documents that went public after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. In the case of Lund University, an interesting source of documents concerning Alumni Relations is “Lundensaren”, a newsletter published four times per year in electronic version, distributed among alumni via email (Schantz, 2020a). During the period important for this research, two issues were published: Issue 32 (April 24, 2020) (LU, 2020b) and Issue 33 (June 12, 2020) (Schantz T., 2020a). In the case of the Jagiellonian University, part of the project supported by NAWA required the presentation of worldwide “success stories” of JU alumni (NAWA, 2019), therefore 17 of the JU documents have a very similar structure of interviews with alumni, discussing their education, career path, present professional occupation, and their

thoughts about possible alumni engagement (JU, 2020a). Because of such a common structure of the interviews, JU radically differs from LU in two categories: “Present professional career” and “Alumnus/Alumna as a role model”, because these were parts of the interviews required by the JU grant agreement.

Although LU’s Alumni Newsletter: “Lundensaren” is prepared specially for the graduates of the University, much of the information provided by this online quarterly concerns the present situation of LU without actually prioritizing alumni. The information concerned: research scholars engaged (Lund, 2020i); new facilities of the university (Lund, 2020c); or visits of some prominent guests (Lund, 2020d). Sometimes these texts are not originally prepared for “Lundensaren” and the Newsletter serves only as the means of sharing information about LU’s activities available otherwise. Due to such nature of these documents, the Authors have analyzed them in detail only when they represented direct connections with alumni, like the story of a LU alumnus Martin Karlqvist and his role in the creation of the international blockbuster hit *Midsommar* (Lund, 2020e).

The MAXQDA-assisted analysis has captured key similarities and differences between JU and LU in their perception of alumni relations. Both universities recognize that alumni relations should be treated not as a one-time action/event, but as a relation that should be cherished to make it fruitful and meaningful for both sides. Therefore, the universities emphasize the importance of recurring events and declare that communication or just staying in touch with alumni is one of the key priorities, although the universities differ in the types of content they prefer to share with alumni (JU focusing on personal success stories (JU, 2020a); while LU preferring distribution of information about recent accomplishments of the university (Lund, 2020c; Lund, 2020). Appreciating the importance of personal contacts networks for the contemporary job market, alumni of both universities see alumni integration (e.g. through founding regional chapters of alumni associations) as one of the most positive outcomes of staying in touch with the alma mater. Moreover, the alumni network is also perceived as an important tool in assisting younger generations of graduates in entering the job market, and for both universities, this opportunity was equally important.

Since managing alumni relations is not a new concept in higher education and many institutions across Europe adopted some alumni relations programs (Bugaj et al, 2013), the similarities between JU and LU are not astonishing. The differences between them, however, provide meaningful insights into the nature of alumni relations and possible improvements discussed in further parts of the paper. The most striking difference concerns the approach to defining the alumnus/alumna. While JU just assumes that the term “alumnus/alumna” is self-evident and does not need any further explanation, in the case of LU four documents (LU, 2020a; Lund, 2020g; Lund, 2020f), (out of 13 in total) refer to the legal definition of alumnus/alumna, also in the reference to the Swedish law of personal data protection (Lund, 2020f).

Although both universities understood that alumni relations should incorporate graduates living and working abroad, only in the case of JU one of the priorities was

described as strengthening the ties with the Poles who graduated from JU and then were successful abroad. Thus, the JU target group was defined not as foreign nationals who had attended the university (typical for LU perception) (Lund, 2020f), but specifically as Polish graduates who had moved abroad (JU, 2014; JU, 2020). For Lund University strengthening the ties with alumni is important, but the University's rationale is based on treating the alumni as a part of a broader university community. This role and place of alumni in the life of LU was expressed in "Greetings to alumni from Vice-Chancellor" (Lund, 2020f). From the Swedish perspective, the community of alumni deserved being asked about their well-being, especially during COVID-19 pandemic. This problem was directly addressed by Lund University but was completely omitted by the Jagiellonian University, leading to yet another finding: for JU, COVID-19 is just a small part of alumni careers' background, some kind of nuisance in their professional development (quoting from the interviews with alumni: "at present, we are coping with the COVID-19 coronavirus, and the travel sector is one of the most hurt by current restrictions"(UJ, 2020d) or "It is a big challenge to create a laboratory and a research team during the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic"(UJ, 2020e). But in the case of Lund University, the pandemic is perceived as a serious problem affecting the lives and well-being of former students.

Discussion

The research shown above presents a comparative study from the perspective of a Polish university paralleled with a Swedish one. The Alumni Office of Lund University was also referring to the practices and strategies of US universities of development but given the Swedish perspective, the Office has not been merely mirroring the solutions widely accepted in the States. As it was noticed, one of the examples the Alumni Office faced in Lund was a lack of interest in large alumni reunions that are common in North America (Rybkowski, 2014). After some initial attempts, the office focuses on smaller scale events (ca. 50 attendees) that offer a more relaxed atmosphere and enable renewing contacts with other alumni. Although LU understands the possible impact of alumni giving back, the university has decided to separate the Alumni Office from fundraising (Development Office) (Lund, 2020h). These offices need to rely on different communication strategies and, as Karen Paulson explained, it would be inappropriate to speak about university achievements and ask for money at the same time (Rybkowski, 2014).

The surprising focus of the Jagiellonian University on Polish alumni living and working abroad is the result of the conditions of the project accepted (and sponsored) by NAWA. Being part of a broader initiative to make Polish universities more recognizable worldwide, the Alumni UJ project has had to respond to NAWA's expectations. This also leads to another problem: although external financial assistance by NAWA gave JU the opportunity to intensify alumni relations, the requirements of the sponsor have limited the scope of the activities organized by the University.

The results of the research prove that institutions of higher education are heavily dependent on their organizational culture. 21st century approach to institutional efficiency and accountability resulted in many publications focusing mainly on university management understood as pure economic activity. The complexity of universities as social institutions makes such an approach counterproductive as an academic culture still plays important role in university decision-making processes (Lis and Rybkowski, 2021). Establishing and strengthening alumni relations shows the transformative power of university education (and university experience in general), as it was elaborated in Mitchell Stevens's book *Creating a Class: culture within the university is part of the process of "integrating formal instruction seamlessly with the rest of students' lives"* (Stevens, 2007, p. 1). This transformative power does not end with the moment of graduation but can be continued thanks to strong alumni relations, thus further strengthening the civic impact of the universities.

The presented research considerations are limited by the follow-up data obtained during COVID-19 pandemic. They were to be complemented in a significant way by study visits to the described universities, which proved impossible to implement in the COVID-19 reality. The research will thus continue in the future, especially since more universities ought to be looked at and more experiences analyzed in order to arrive at more thorough and complex results which could become the basis for alumni programs in the future.

Conclusion

Managing a loyalty relationship between alumni and universities successfully is a long process that requires mutual commitment, and the benefits may only be visible after a few years. Scandinavian loyalty programs (similarly to those in the US) are equally geared to maintaining links with the alma mater as among the alumni themselves. This second type of communication – between the alumni – is particularly important in building an emotional, more lasting relationship. It can result in a preference for the employment of successive graduating years, active participation in networks of graduates (e.g. exchanges of memories, experience, and expertise support), and joint recreational activities (participation in sports events). Such ways of building and managing a community of graduates around a brand/institution (academic alumni community) bring long-term benefits, becoming an important asset to the life of a given university and the core of loyalty programs. This has also been confirmed by our research. First, the following determinants for graduate loyalty were identified as a result of a review of literature: service quality; commitment; satisfaction; value, including trust; university image; readiness to recommend the institution; intent to return to the university and identification with the university. Next, because of having summarized international loyalty programs and the research carried out for the "Forge of Professionals 7" project, the following were identified as the determinants of loyalty-building programs for alumni: (1) general information; (2) organizational; (3) communicational; (4) promotional; and

(5) strategic. The loyalty programs were further divided into alumni-based; university-based and mixed (as seen from the perspective of the alumni).

Communication tools aimed at alumni can be selected as an option. The way of treating an alumnus by a university is either subjective or objective. Similarly, an alumnus may treat the university subjectively or objectively (Rybkowski and Bugaj, 2014). Therefore, the alumni programs offered by the universities can be construed using the four groups described above. They can be characterized by the mode and frequency of communication between the university and the alumni.

As a result of this research process, the university's communication activities were additionally organized into 4 categories: (1) passive - not requiring any specific activity or involvement on the part of the alumni; the institution itself (through the website; email contacts, etc.) is the initiating party determining the information content, (2) reactive - requiring a low degree of involvement from the alumni – they must at least provide their address or respond to a university-initiated contact (graduate journals, telephone contacts), (3) partially active - requiring real involvement of the alumni as the receiving party (discussion forums, especially on social networks; graduate meetings), (4) proactive - requiring not only real engagement, but organized in such a way that graduates become the initiating party, the co-creator of the message (social media, but also organized graduate reunions). The 2014 study confirmed the diversity of loyalty programs being built and highlighted the diversity of the needs of graduates themselves. Thus, thinking about a comprehensive program for all university graduates may be wrong, because they themselves feel loyal to their friends with whom they shared the course of study or the faculty, and do not always feel connected to the entire alumni community. This relationship should therefore be more emotional and based on values, including trust and commitment of both parties. This was also confirmed by studies carried out in August 2020 at JU and LU. However, it can be concluded that before a given university begins to build a loyalty program, it should provide qualified staff, a high level of education, and adequate social conditions or create a place of which the graduates will really be proud. Irrespective of the size of the school or its status (public or private), the university and the authorities representing it must treat graduates in a personal manner typical of partnerships. It is, therefore, necessary to state clearly to whom the graduate program will be geared, what actions it will support, what objectives it intends to achieve, and what costs it will be able to incur. One should remember that managing alumni loyalty is a long-term process that cannot start only when students graduate. As early as the first year, students should be included in the efforts for graduates, because it teaches them how important they are to universities.

The result of the research proves that universities can enjoy great flexibility in managing alumni relations systems. From the fundamental question of the legal status of the alumni organization/association to the type of preferred communication style to the type of financial and organizational support provided to the alumni association. The research already completed by the Authors shows that managing

alumni relations is a complex process with many possible inputs and as many possible outcomes. In any case, the university willing to strengthen alumni relations must take this from a strategic point of view. Establishing flourishing alumni relations is always a long process, requiring bold planning and consistent execution. The distinct determinants of alumni loyalty and of loyalty programs for alumni confirm the complex nature of these actions. The criteria that have been developed are so universal that they can be applied to all kinds of HEIs, regardless of their size or specialization. Their implementation can bring numerous benefits to the university - both organizational, as discussed above, and financial. The effectiveness of the identified determinants and the actions (loyalty programs) require further research. As a result, it will be possible to develop a model of alumni loyalty, taking into account other aspects not considered in this article, such as generational differences (thus different needs of graduates when it comes to relations), technological progress directly affecting communication with and between graduates, closure/opening of universities in reaction to external changes (not only due to COVID-19) forcing them to develop solutions that have not yet been taken into account in building graduate loyalty or creating loyalty programs. Solid foundations of alumni loyalty also translate into university recognition and prestige, which is more and more often the currency in the 21st century higher education system globally (Bugaj and Rybkowski, 2018), thus requiring greater attention from the universities themselves.

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ZARZĄDZANIE LOJALNOŚCIĄ ABSOLWENTÓW. POLSKA W PERSPEKTYWIE MIĘDZYNARODOWEJ

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu była identyfikacja determinant zarządzania lojalnością absolwentów uczelni. Pandemia wpłynęła na wszystkie dziedziny życia, w tym na pracę uczelni, a co za tym idzie na relacje między uniwersytetem a absolwentami. Wykorzystano metodę krytyczno-empiryczną, w tym analizę programów lojalnościowych wybranych 15

uczelnia w ramach finansowanego przez UE projektu „Forge of Professionals 7”, oraz analizę relacji z absolwentami 2 uczelni w czasie pandemii COVID-19. W efekcie powstały determinanty zarządzania lojalnością absolwentów. Można je podzielić na trzy grupy: te inicjowane przez absolwentów, te inicjowane przez uczelnię i inicjatywy mieszane. Jednak najważniejszym czynnikiem wpływającym na lojalność absolwentów nie jest organizacja zarządzania lojalnością absolwentów, ale narzędzia komunikacji wykorzystywane przez uczelnię. Uczelnia, która chce wzmocnić relacje z absolwentami, musi spojrzeć na to ze strategicznego punktu widzenia. Nawiązywanie efektywnych relacji z absolwentami to zawsze długi proces, wymagający odważnego planowania i konsekwentnej realizacji. Jego wartością jest przedstawione praktyczne podejście do zarządzania relacjami między uczelnią a jej absolwentami i jako takie może w znacznym stopniu przyczynić się do poprawy polityki i praktyki w szkolnictwie wyższym.

Słowa kluczowe: Szkolnictwo wyższe, lojalność absolwentów, programy lojalnościowe, zarządzanie relacjami w uniwersytecie

管理校友忠诚度。国际视野下的波兰

摘要：本文的目的是确定大学校友忠诚度管理的决定因素。由于大流行影响了各行各业，包括大学的表现，以及大学与校友之间的关系。该文件还讨论了 COVID-19 对选定校友忠诚度计划的影响。在欧盟赞助的“Forge of Professionals 7”项目下，对选定的 15 所大学的忠诚度计划进行了分析，并在 COVID-19 大流行期间对 2 所大学进行了后续分析，从而丰富了批判性文献研究。结果，制定了校友忠诚度决定因素。管理校友忠诚度可分为三类：基于校友、基于大学和混合。影响校友忠诚度的最重要因素不是校友忠诚度管理的组织，而是大学使用的沟通工具。结果的实施可以给大学带来很多好处：它们可以在管理校友关系系统方面享有很大的灵活性。愿意加强校友关系的大学必须从战略的角度来看待这一点。建立蓬勃发展的校友关系总是一个漫长的过程，需要大胆的计划 and 始终如一的执行。它的价值是管理大学与其校友之间关系的实用方法，因此，它可以极大地促进高等教育政策和实践的改进

关键词：高等教育，校友忠诚度，校友计划，大学关系管理