
GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES AND MARKETING: THE CASE OF THE LATEST RECRUITMENT COHORT IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES

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Abstract. *University faculty members and managers agree that modern generations of students differ in values, beliefs, and dominant traits, while their attitudes and preferences are often conflicting and contradictory. This leaves open the question of whether those generational peculiarities are taken into account by university recruitment officers?*

To address this question, a research project was initiated to examine the ways in which students made the decision to enroll in communication study programs at specific university in the 2018 intake. This research aimed to look into the communicational priorities of the newly recruited students as well as into their content preferences.

A questionnaire was designed to systematically assess the students' motives in seeking specific information, their choice of specific communication channels, and the possible triggers that led to their decisions to enroll in specific communication programs.

To further identify differences, Generation Y students were researched in an additional focus group study on the attitudes of students who started communications studies at the same university in 2016. Both scientifically and practically valuable results showed surprisingly different preferences for visual and textual material. The data gathered also indicates a considerable difference between the attitudes of students, which emerged over the course of just two years.

Apart from its data, the scientific novelty of this research can be seen in the interdisciplinary fusion of different approaches that involve marketing, education science, communication, the management of educational organizations, and generational theory.

Practically, the findings of this research will help university recruitment officers to design new and more efficient marketing strategies that effectively target Generation Z students.

Keywords: *communication, communication channels, communication tools, generational theory, Generation Y, Generation Z, study program marketing, enrollment management, visual communication.*

Introduction

The direct trigger of this research was the crisis that the researchers found themselves in in September 2017, when the enrollment of new students failed at the academic department the researchers are affiliated with. The contrastingly successful intake of new students in 2018 prompted the authors to take a closer look at the reasons for the failure and the success of the marketing strategies of the study programs offered by the department, which took place in the course of just two years.

While looking for possible avenues of research, the authors detected a certain gap in the scientific toolkit that was required to address this challenge: there was a shortage of scientific insight integrating issues of education management and marketing into the context of generational change. Therefore, it was decided to undertake a qualitative analysis and, in preparation for a follow-up quantitative investigation, to develop a theoretical survey and design a corresponding research instrument, along with producing insights for in-depth analysis.

The first, preparatory, step taken was to deepen the knowledge of the existing research on generational change in order to catalogue generation-relevant creativity

components, marketing channels, and tools, and, accordingly, to create a questionnaire aimed at the adequate detection of students' preferences for a specific study program.

The second, executionary, step was to interview students of different enrollment years, thus gathering and analyzing data from two intakes – 2016 and 2018.

The third and final step of analysis and evaluation was to identify yearly differences in the attitudes of students, as well as differences in the triggers which led to the decision to join the study programs of Mykolas Romeris University's Communication Institute. Here a substantial change in social media usage was detected that might have remained invisible if not for the gap created by failed enrollment in 2017.

In informal discussions concerning study process routines, academic and administrative staff shared mostly intuitive observations that after the failed enrollment year the fresh intake of students was different in behavior from the students of earlier intakes. The faculty noted different behavior in the classroom (for example, visibly manifest boredom or habitual sinking into mobile phones), preparation, and motivation for studies (for example, still requiring a lot of assistance and confirmation), as well as the differing degrees of maturity and responsibility of the students.

While teaching in classrooms, the authors had a sense that the changes in values and beliefs as well as the alteration of attitudes and preferences was often quite a conflicting and contradictory process. For example, a high demand to hear others' opinions was contradicted by low participation in the expression of the student's own opinion, or, on the practical side, in contributing to the marketing of a native study program via their daily social media activities.

Theoretically, both scientists and marketing practitioners consider a typical Generation Z (Gen Z) representative, currently under the age of 20, to be a mobile-first digital native obsessed with privacy,¹ and, simultaneously, a natural entrepreneur in cutting-edge technologies.² Researchers emphasize better performance mainly in the field of IT and in activities which require creativity or innovation, and even prove this assumption with statistical data.³

Some even claim that, since members of Gen Z frequently indulge in creative activities and video games, they are expected to be rather strong at multitasking, utilizing efficient technology, displaying individualism (or dislike of teamwork), deploying

- 1 Loveland, E., "Instant Generation", *Journal of College Admission*, no. 235 (2017): 37; Watson, H., "How Obsessed Is Gen Z with Mobile Technology?", The Centre for Generational Kinetics, 2018, <https://genhq.com/how-obsessed-is-gen-z-with-mobile-technology/>; Kleinschmit, M., "Generation Z Characteristics: 5 Infographics on the Gen Z Lifestyle", Business 2 Community (4 December 2015). Retrieved from <https://www.business2community.com/infographics/generation-z-characteristics-5-infographics-gen-z-lifestyle-01394477>
- 2 Williams, K.C., and Page, R.A., "Marketing to the Generations", *Journal of Behavioral Studies in Business* 3 (2011): 5; Loveland, *supra note*, 1: 37; Kleinschmit, *supra note*, 1.
- 3 Bencsik, A., et al., "Y and Z Generations at Workplaces", *Journal of Competitiveness* 6, 3 (2016): 100.

creativity, possessing a global point of view, and expressing a preference for non-standard and personalized work.⁴

However, generational issues, both internationally and nationally in Lithuania, are the subject of education or vocation-centered research rather than the marketing-related approach. Although practical research studies are sometimes conducted in this regard, their findings are rarely conveyed to the wider public (the underlying theory and practical studies are to be introduced in the next section). In any case, the lack of scientific research in the Lithuanian context of marketing for generations in the education sector certifies the novelty of the topic of this research.

The initiators of this research sought to learn whether knowledge of generational peculiarities could boost the proficiency of a marketing effort to attract students to choose a specific university study program. The research was organized as a case study which focused on the question of the relevance of communication study program marketing strategies in relation to the target audience of Gen Z.

To address this question, the researchers examined the ways in which students came to the decision to enroll in communication study programs at Mykolas Romeris University. Thus, the research first sought to look into the communicational preferences of newly recruited students, i.e.: into motives in seeking particular information; into choice of communicational channels and tools; and into preferences for the specific shaping of information on study programs.

1. Defining the key characteristics of Generation Y and Generation Z

Recent Lithuanian and international generational studies have mostly focused on differentiating Generations Y and Z, and are usually accomplished in the framework of the science of education, or research that is practically related to human resources. International human resource and marketing practitioners, especially in the USA, are concerned primarily with the marketing perspective. Nevertheless, there is a certain shortage of Lithuanian research that considers the specific marketing angle.

Initial generational studies, mostly in Western countries, helped to identify the time boundaries of these generations. Generational theory and the identification of different generations by specific year gaps is now widely discussed in the scientific literature of post-Soviet countries, and most questions are addressed to the applicability of by-year generation maps to a group of countries with arguably very different historic, social, and political experiences.

As Howe and Strauss observe, “this is what constitutes a generation: it is shaped by events or circumstances according to which phase of life its members occupy at

4 Berkup, S., “Working with Generations X and Y in Generation Z Period: Management of Different Generations in Business Life”, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, 19 (2014): 224.

the time”⁵ – that is, social, cultural, and historical factors make for the different experiences of different people. Table 1 was compiled to sum up different, sometimes contradicting, national and international research to reflect both converging and diverging issues of the Lithuanian case as seen in the local and global context.

Table 1. Yearly boundaries of different generations in the global and Lithuanian contexts⁶

| Generation | Gen X | Gen Y (Millennials?) | Gen Z |
|---------------------------|--|---|--|
| | | Millennials | |
| Year/author | 1961–1981 (Howe and Strauss, 2007, 44–45) | 1977–1994 (Williams and Page, 2011, 5) | 1995–2010 (Williams and Page, 2011, 5) |
| | 1965–1977 (Williams and Page, 2011) | 1982–2005 (Howe and Strauss, 2007, 44–45) | |
| World milestones | Vietnam war | Cold War ends | September 11 WTC terror attack |
| | Cold War | | |
| Lithuanian context | 1968 | 1986 | 1991–1999 |
| | Prague spring | SSRS perestroika starts in USSR | return to normality |
| | 1972 | 1988 | 2004 |
| | self-immolation of R. Kalanta | Lithuanian movement for independence breaks out | NATO and EU membership |
| | (Labanauskas, 2008, 65–66) | (Labanauskas, 2008, 65–66) | (Labanauskas, 2008, 65–66) |
| | | Gen Y | Gen Z |
| | 1981–2002 (Mažeikaitė and Gruževskis, 2018, 111–113) | 2003 and later (Mažeikaitė and Gruževskis, 2018, 111–113) | |

Generational theory provides valuable insights into the values and attitudes of Gen Z. Namely, Gen Z individuals cultivate attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that supplement their tech-saturated world with certain elements inherited from past generations.⁷ Research by the Centre of Generational Kinetics on the year 2017 and

- 5 Howe, N., and Strauss, W., “The Next 20 Years: How Customer and Workforce Attitudes Will Evolve”, *Harvard Business Review* 85, 7–8 (2007): 42.
- 6 Source: Howe and Strauss, *supra note*, 5: 44–45; Labanauskas, L., “Profesinės karjeros ir migracijos sąryšis: kartos studija”, *Filosofija. Sociologija* 19, 2 (2008): 65–66; Mažeikaitė, D., and Gruževskis, B., “The Position and Shifts of Work Values in the Context of Different Generations in Lithuania”, *Socialinė teorija, empirija, politika ir praktika* 17 (2018), 111–113; Williams and Page, *supra note*, 2: 5.
- 7 Villa, D., and Dorsey, J., *The State of Gen Z: Meet the Throwback Generation* (The Centre for Generational Kinetics, 2017), 3.

some earlier years noted that Gen Z members enter the labor market earlier to be self-sufficient quicker, earning their own money and thus contributing to the economy and getting valuable first-job experiences in advance.⁸ This international research can be confirmed by everyday observations and statistical data on the typical university student: students are increasingly taking jobs to cover their living and study expenses in Lithuania.

The demand for communication skills and, indirectly, communication study programs, is supported by several international generational workplace studies. Tulgan⁹ declared that managing Gen Z requires a huge remedial effort on broad transferable skills like work habits, interpersonal communication, and critical thinking, and a huge investment in remedial technical training. Differently from Gen X, Gen Z performs better in communication and problem-solving, but would like to be stronger in public speaking.¹⁰ Importantly, the same research states that Gen Z representatives search for required skills not only at university or at college, but also on YouTube or any other platform which provides video material. This suggests that both study processes and the marketing of study programs should take into account that video material is a substantial factor.

From the Lithuanian perspective, research was conducted¹¹ that compared cognitive, instrumental, and emotional values at the workplace between four generations of employees. It was concluded that in Gen Z the need for emotional values at work was distinctively higher in comparison to other groups. Priority now more than ever is given to “interesting work”, “work place guarantees”, “a job that matches my skills”, “nice colleagues”, and “the compatibility of job and family.” Among cognitive values on the rise are “the possibility to express one’s self”, “the possibility to take initiative”, and “the possibility to acquire new skills.” The most popular instrumental values are: that “work should be not too demanding”, “convenient working hours”, and “long vacation.” “Fun work environment” and “flexible work schedule” were also among priorities in an international study.¹²

Another study compared Gen Y and Gen Z in training, learning, and personal development. The results showed that representatives of Gen Y are rather “rapid, individual, based on IT, alternative, just in time”, while Gen Z only expressed preferences that were “based on interest, informal learning”.¹³

8 “Is Gen Z’s Self-Worth Determined by Social Media?”, Infographic, The Centre for Generational Kinetics, 2015. Retrieved from <https://genhq.com/igen-genz-social-media-trends-infographic/>

9 Tulgan, B., *Meet Generation Z: The Second Generation within the Giant “Millennial” Cohort* (RainmakerThinking, Inc., 2013), 7.

10 Villa and Dorsey, *supra note*, 7: 10.

11 Mažeikaitė and Gruževskis, *supra note*, 6: 113.

12 Villa and Dorsey, *supra note*, 7: 12.

13 Bencsik, A., et al., “Y and Z Generations at Workplaces”, *Journal of Competitiveness* 6, 3 (2016): 96–97.

Which of these conclusions can, by analogy, be applied to the marketing of communication study programs? With a view that young people of Gen Z are already working and at the same time wish to study, heavy emphasis should be placed on content regarding new skills in demand, guaranteed room for taking initiative, as well as convenient and flexible study time.

Gen Z members never knew a world without online conversation. Therefore, dealing with young people of this particular generation necessarily requires mastery of the communication tools of social media, as well as strong managerial control.¹⁴ At the same time, educationists¹⁵ maintain that communication technologies are substantially shaping the ways of life of Gen Z, and are causing the major problems and imbalances that they face. Day-to-day usage of modern technologies can cause psychological disorders including narcissism, social phobia, attention disorder, and depression. Frequent changes in teenagers' moods are sometimes called Facebook depression. All of this might be seen as a result of the fundamental change whereby the doll and the toy car were replaced by the PC and the tablet, or where learning how to make PowerPoint presentations about summer vacations happened in the very first year at secondary school.¹⁶

Based on their research, scientists¹⁷ point out that digital culture, distinguished by excessive speed and large information load, has a neurological impact. The reason for this is seen in the fact that processing several information flows at the same time is a cognitive problem which might be considered to represent the modern face of the classical problem of cognitive dissonance. According to researchers:

*“Only the existence of hyperlinks in a text decreases the understanding of a text because it destroys the flow of text reading; and, having got involved into the Internet action, regressive movements of eyes get more frequent and it becomes more difficult to keep the reading line, to filter background interferences, the dependence on insignificant irritants existing in memory is increasing. Pictographic and text-scanning skills intensify, and skills of deep (intent) reading and focused thinking weaken. The new generation faces more difficulties in learning decoding skills, loses the ability to concentrate, reflect and critically evaluate as internet habits, especially fast change of attention, reflect in activity of thinking even when not being on the Internet”.*¹⁸

In other research, Targamadžė focuses on the deteriorating quality of socialization among Gen Z.¹⁹ Gen Z faces socialization problems because its members deal with the

14 Tulgan, *supra note*, 9: 6.

15 Rosen, 2012, quoted in Targamadžė et al., *Naujoji (Z) karta – prarastoji ar dar neatrastoji? [The New (Z) Generation – Lost or Undiscovered yet?]* (Šiauliai: Titnagas, 2015), 4.

16 Targamadžė et al., *Naujoji (Z) karta – prarastoji ar dar neatrastoji? [The New (Z) Generation – Lost or Undiscovered yet?]* (Šiauliai: Titnagas, 2015), 4.

17 *Ibid*, 116.

18 Targamadžė et al., *supra note*, 16: 116.

19 Targamadžė, V., “The New Generation at the Crossboard of Cultures: Socialization Aspect”, *Multicul-*

increasingly different and intersecting values, standards, and rules of different cultures, countries, nations, organizations, individuals' virtual and real environments, etc. Such complex intersection requires an individual decision as to which standard or rule to accept, which value to agree with, and which to deny and reject. Thus, it is necessary to help them to decide by encouraging (not coercing) them to make conscious decisions in choosing a certain standard or rule. Values, based on which standards and rules are formed, will be the essential axis of the individual's socialization at the intersection of different cultures. Though the situation of socialization is charged with the problems listed above, at the same time it provides valuable clues for marketing specialists on how to attract and maintain the attention of Gen Z individuals.

Another valuable perspective for our research is the noted decisive impact of human connections in Gen Z. Tulgan believes that human connections are more valuable for Gen Z than for any previous generation.²⁰ Villa and Dorsey observed that almost half of Gen Z representatives say that they often or always seek input from friends and family before making a purchase.²¹ This could be a generational peculiarity regarding whom Gen Z trust most, or it could be related to their current stage of life. Gen X is only slightly less likely than Gen Z to ask for input on purchases – 44% of them say that they often or always get the opinion of friends or family before making a purchase.²² Gen Z members still trust the corporeal over the online, as 30% prefer to get information on a brand from a real customer of the brand and 19% from an online influencer, meaning a well-known blogger, YouTube or internet personality, etc.²³

Ultimately, we are comparing two generations, the members of which are even more likely to say that they want to hear from a real customer and less likely to say that they want information from an online influencer. What we see is that friend and family recommendations exert a crucial influence on the choice of brand both for Gen Z and Gen X, so the focus of marketing strategy should not only be on future students themselves but on their family and social environment as well.

As mentioned above, in the eyes of Gen Z, YouTube is already a platform for studying; however, it is not only studying that matters. The national study of the Centre for Generational Kinetics found that in the US 30% of Gen Z members believed that YouTube advertisements were more trustworthy than advertising on any other communication channel, including television, print, radio, and social media.²⁴ Considering how much time Gen Z members spend watching online videos, this makes

tural Studies, Issue 1 (2016): 69.

20 Tulgan, *supra note*, 9: 6.

21 Villa and Dorsey, *supra note*, 7: 21.

22 *Ibid*, 21.

23 *Ibid*, 22.

24 Villa and Dorsey, *supra note*, 7: 22.

sense. Gen X, on the other hand, were more traditional, viewing television advertisements as being most trustworthy. In typical Gen X fashion though, social media advertisements were not far behind, and were chosen as the second most trustworthy variant.²⁵

The final point concerns the growing immersion in “natural” international and intercultural exchange. Since early childhood, most members of Gen Z have already travelled the world with their parents. How does this affect their wish for mobility and international experience? Tulgan summarizes this in the short formula of “global mindset, but local reality”.²⁶ Tulgan explains that Gen Z members know more about far-flung parts of the world than any previous generation ever did, but are likely to be far less geographically adventurous. This is because Gen Z members are plugged into the online world, which has no boundaries. At the same time, representatives of Gen Z engage themselves more in their personal environment at the tactical level; therefore, a relentless focus on the local is tangible.²⁷ Why, then, do marketing campaigns cite the possibility of mobility as an important reason to make a decision regarding study?

Table 2. *Theoretical framework for research into Gen Z marketing attitudes (source: composed by authors)*

| Research perspective | Characteristics mentioned | Authors |
|----------------------|---|---|
| WORK | Starts working earlier than other generations | Villa and Dorsey, 2017 |
| | Demand for broad transferable skills | Tulgan, 2013, 6 |
| | Better in communication and problem-solving | Villa and Dorsey, 2017 |
| | Wish to be stronger in public speaking | Villa and Dorsey, 2017 |
| | YouTube and other platforms for studies | Villa and Dorsey, 2017 |
| | Need for emotional values | Mažeikaitė and Gruževskis, 2018, 126 |
| EDUCATION | Studies based on interests, priority to informal learning | Bencsik et al., 2016, 96–97. |
| | Socialization aspects, Facebook depression | Targamadzé, 2015, 4; 2016, 69 |
| MARKETING | Word of mouth (WOM) and human connections | Tulgan, 2013, 6; Villa and Dorsey, 2017, 21 |
| | Global mindset, local reality | Tulgan, 2013, 7 |

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Tulgan, *supra note*, 9: 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

2. Channels and tools to implement the marketing of a study program

When choosing a university to enroll in, students can be considered to be consumers, and universities as brands or companies providing services.²⁸ Thus, a framework emerges in which promoting enrollment to universities can be considered as a case of service marketing.²⁹ The success of marketing, whether traditional or driven by social media, is usually built upon several key characteristics. The structure of marketing, especially when it is highly technological, may be described by a structural set known as the principle of the 4Cs: communication technology, connection, cooperation, and collaboration.³⁰

Cooperation technologies create a space for group collaboration while respecting the authority of each contributor over information. Connection technologies such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter enable individuals to remain in contact at the workplace or socially.³¹ The popularity of communication technologies among younger generations is guaranteed by interaction, communication, and concentration on the related characteristics.³² In some cases, such interactions have impressive effects of doubling the conversion rates from prospects to students.³³

The connectivity dimension, in most cases, describes both cross-boundary geographical availability as well as freedom of communication. Cooperation is defined as group action to create content, also known as crowd creativity.³⁴

The final key element is collaboration in problem solving, which would apply almost around the clock in terms of IT. In a world where members of Gen Z can instantly stream their favorite TV show on Netflix and music on Spotify, they expect instant answers to any questions that cross their mind.³⁵ However, collaboration by traditional means (email, phone, direct connection) is also essential for the successful process of student admission.

28 Fagerstrøm, A., and Ghinea, G., "Co-Creation of Value through Social Network Marketing: A Field Experiment Using a Facebook Campaign to Increase Conversion Rate", in *Human Interface and the Management of Information. Interacting with Information*, edited by G. Salvendy and M. J. Smith (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), 231.

29 Enache, I., "Marketing Higher Education Using the 7 Ps Framework", *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov. Series V: Economic Sciences* 4, 1 (2011): 23.

30 Bowen, G., and Bowen, D., "Social Media: A Strategic Decision Making Tool", *Journal of Business and Economics* 7, 3 (March, 2016): 391.

31 *Ibid*, 390.

32 Chui et al., *The Social Economy: Unlocking Value and Productivity Through Social Technologies* (McKinsey Global Institute Report, 2012), 15.

33 Fagerstrøm and Ghinea, *supra note*, 28: 233.

34 Skaržauskienė et al., "Defining Social Technologies: Evaluation of Social Collaboration Tools and Technologies", *The Electronic Journal Information Systems Evaluation* 16, 3 (2013): 234.

35 Loveland, *supra note*, 1: 38.

As discussed above, a successful marketing strategy depends on the 4Cs. Building an efficient marketing funnel is also of great importance. A marketing funnel is a commonly adopted approach that describes the transformation of a prospect into a customer/user as a customer journey. The customer journey consists of steps which reflect a certain degree of the prospect's interest in a certain product or service from complete unawareness to established user. Although the complexity and the number of stages may vary from case to case, a standard marketing funnel usually has four stages, namely: attention, interest, desire, and action. The four-stage set is known as the AIDA model,³⁶ which describes the four cognitive stages that a prospect follows through until the final act of purchase of a product or service. At every stage, specific content and channels are employed to meet the needs of the prospect and to lead them to the next stage successfully.

At the attention stage, the most important goal is to introduce the brand and the product to the prospect. When a prospect is already aware, they enter the interest stage. There an investigation takes place, when more information and details are acquired. If the information obtained is convincing, the prospect moves to the desire stage, when an emotional connection with a brand is formed.³⁷ Now an action stage comes, when a prospect begins the process of acquisition.

In the case study which is discussed in this paper, the focus is on the entire funnel. This research seeks to understand the proper channels and the kinds of content that catch the attention of Gen Z members and result in their action of enrolling in the study program.

2.1. Marketing channels

Gen Z is a highly technologically capable generation that has always used the internet³⁸; therefore, digital channels were mainly used to recruit students. The channels assessed in this investigation were: social media, paid advertisement on the internet, direct communication, and other digital media – see Figure 1 in results chapter 4.1.

Social media channels have an important role in marketing for younger generations. It is part of human nature to socialize, gather into communities, and share recommendations; therefore, Gen Z members, who spend considerable time online, also prefer socializing and looking for recommendations online on different social media channels.³⁹ It is noteworthy that when shaping social media communication

36 Hassana et al., "Strategic Use of Social Media for Small Business Based on the AIDA Model", *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 172 (2014): 262.

37 Ahmad, Z., and Umar, M., "A Comparison of Brand Awareness in High-Involvement and Low-Involvement Products: A Case of University of Gujrat" (Paper presented at the 5th International Conference on Statistical Sciences, Lahore, Pakistan, 2009), para 5.

38 Bashford, S., "Tweenage Angst", *Marketing* (19 May 2010), 28.

39 Uitz, I., "Social Media – Is It Worth the Trouble?", *Journal of Internet Social Networking & Virtual*

strategies for direct dialogue with prospects, heavy emphasis should be placed on choosing the right representatives of the university. To promote the rapid establishment of personal contact, students could be considered for contact persons, as they have the advantage of being of the “same blood” as applicants and, therefore, have higher credibility.⁴⁰ A study program can be considered a high personal involvement product. In the case of high-involvement products, it is common that there are more efforts to obtain accurate in-depth information about the product or brand⁴¹; therefore, channels which provide more detailed information could prevail. All of this makes social media not a primary source of information. For reliable in-depth information, prospects might look for lengthier articles, visit official webpages, or seek a professional interview.

In common practice, paid advertisements and banners on internet websites are used to promote awareness. Their function is to grasp the attention of prospects, but Gen Z members are accustomed to using different sources of information and being subject to the constant overflow of information.⁴² Hence, grasping their attention is a highly challenging task. During this investigation, banners and advertisements were rated low when retrieving information about study programs was considered. Predominant trust in live interaction aligned well with some major values of Gen Z – namely authenticity and “realness”.⁴³

3. The research methodology for the cases of recruitment in 2016 and 2018

The methodology applied in this research was a qualitative case study analysis. The choice of qualitative research strategy was determined by the need for in-depth analysis in the field, which was cross-analyzed with the help of several different approaches. Thus, different perspectives were integrated into a united one: a case study that was small in scope, which was examined in depth and compared with similar cases with the help of additional methods.

Methodologically, case analyses are determined by place and time⁴⁴, time and activities, case details, and context descriptions.⁴⁵ The case analyzed in this paper was limited in time: it concerned recruitment in 2018. There were also certain geographical limits: the research targeted students who chose study in one particular program

Communities, Article ID 313585 (2012): 2.

40 Fagerström and Ghinea, *supra note*, 28: 231.

41 Ahmad and Umar, *supra note*, 37: para 4.

42 Williams and Page, *supra note*, 2: 29.

43 Williams and Page, *supra note*, 2: 29.

44 Cresswell, J. W., *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 17.

45 Stake, R.E., *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 13.

at one particular university. The aforementioned limitations were taken into account by the authors, although the information discovered is new and is valuable both scientifically and practically.

The case study strategy is suitable for highlighting important theoretical aspects in the situation under study⁴⁶ and preparing action plans both for practice and for future marketing.

Quantitative and qualitative data gathering methods were chosen according to Yin⁴⁷ and Yazan.⁴⁸ As major disagreement remains ongoing on this matter between leading methodologists of case study analysis, this research chose to follow the Yin standpoint.⁴⁹ To ensure the quality and comprehensiveness of the case study, the analysis of different sources of information (documents, research papers, marketing whitepapers and reports, questionnaire, focus group, etc.) was applied.

Generally, this study employed three research methods – document analysis, survey (questionnaire) of the 2018 intake, and focus group discussion of the 2016 intake. The first two methods were applied for triangulation of the case study analysis. The focus group method was used to emphasize the generational differences in regard to marketing, and was not part of the triangulation of the case study method.

The instrument for the survey (questionnaire) was created to encompass an ongoing marketing effort, including tools and channels that were practically applied. The intake of 2018 consisted of 26 students from the national program and 10 international students; all 36 were questioned, as well as 10 Erasmus+ students who studied together with the international students at the time the research took place. Their answers were included for a comparative perspective, and could easily be excluded. Because the collected material provided applicable insights which were helpful in the process of analysis, it was decided not to exclude the responses of the Erasmus+ students from the analysis framework.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts, each related to research questions. The structure, research question, and questionnaire question are presented in Table 3.

46 Yin, R. K., *Case Study Research: Design and Method*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 27.

47 *Ibid.*

48 Yazan, B., “Three Approaches to Case Study Methods in Education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake”, *The Qualitative Report* 20, 2 (2015), 142.

49 *Ibid.*, 134.

Table 3. *Structure of questionnaire (source: composed by authors)*

| Structure part | Research questions | Questions provided |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Identification of information sources/channels/tools. | Which information resources were most popular among the 2018 intake? Which were the least popular, or were not used at all? | A list of 12 different sources was provided to outline different possibilities, including: WOM, consultations online and via phone, articles, internet channels, visits, etc. An open-ended question and an option to name other unmentioned resources of information was provided. |
| 2. Identification of key factors of the choice. | Is the most popular also the most efficient? | The open-ended question was: Which of the above had a decisive impact on your choice to study at MRU? |
| 3. Identification of key interests in marketing material. | What is the most interesting element of prospective studies? | A question seeking students' ideas was asked: What would students prioritize in advertising studies at MRU? (With 8 options provided to choose from and the possibility to mention their own priority). |
| 4. Identification of most attractive information formats. | What are the preferred information formats? | A list of 8 types of information (textual, oral, and visual) was provided, with an option to mention their proposal. |

The focus group research was organized as part of the study process, and included questions similar to those in the questionnaire described above. Two focus groups were assembled: one with BA students of the 2016 intake from different communication study programs; and one with MA students of the 2018 intake. The characteristics of the research group and the research are presented in Table 4. Due to its duration, the completed research was classified as a brief focus group discussion. The focus group discussion was prepared and implemented following instructions for structure, length, preparation, and implementation phases, as well as ethical principles.⁵⁰

Table 4. *Focus group information (source: composed by authors)*

| Group number | Group characteristics | Research characteristics |
|------------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Focus group 1: bachelor's students | 8 students in the same age group: 4 male, 4 female, with intakes split between 2015 and 2016 due to postponed studies | 58:26-minute video recording |
| Focus group 2: bachelor's students | 6 students in the same age group: 2 male, 4 female, all from the 2016 intake | 47-minute length recording |
| Focus group 3: master's students | 7 students with a five-year age difference: 5 female, 2 male | 52:53-minute video recording |

50 Gaižauskaitė, I., and Valavičienė, N., *Socialinių tyrimų metodai: Kokybinis interviu: Vadovėlis* (Vilnius: Registrų centras, 2016), 157.

In the process of this research, the researchers followed the ethical principles of voluntary participation (during both research methods), confidentiality (for focus group participants), anonymity (for survey participants), and informed consent (during both research methods).

4. Research results for the cases of recruitment in 2016 and 2018

Based on the declared aims of this research – to look into the communicational preferences of newly recruited students (that is, motives in seeking particular information; choice of communicational channels and tools; and preferences for the specific shaping of information on study programs) – the research questions presented in Table 2 were grouped into the three main categories of information, and the following sub-chapters will address each category.

4.1 Where did they get information about university studies from?

In the interview with the 2018 intake, students were given twelve categories of the delivery of study information. The preferences of Lithuanian students were distinctly led by word of mouth (WOM). This means that they valued the opinions of their friends, relatives, and acquaintances – especially those who were studying or had earlier studied at the same university. Google search, the university's website, and featured articles online were also highly trusted. The fifth most popular way of receiving information on university was contact with the admission commission.

The student preferences listed above can provide corrective guidance for university marketers on new priorities in shaping marketing strategy. While management of the quality of study and maintenance of the good reputation of the organization are permanent efforts, our research suggest that activities that utilize social media, Google Adwords, etc., should peak immediately before and during enrollment. The adequate training of admission staff and monitoring of the consultation process is also essential.

The answers of international students suggested that the main source of information on study programs were the comments of university admission specialists. WOM was second, followed by the university's website and social media. Thus, international marketing requires the development of the capacity for fast, direct contact with all who are interested. This means that different means of communication (WhatsApp, Webinar etc.) would be advantageous in comparison with slow and old-fashioned counselling via e-mail. The results discussed in this chapter are presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Sources of information regarding university studies

The results of the focus group show that before enrollment into university the students of the 2016 intake visited study fairs and other similar events (a study fair is typically a huge exhibition of study programs from different universities designed

to attract crowds of visitors). This provided them with an opportunity to compare the content of different study programs. The comparison of alternative study programs might be considered a substantial element of a student's choice. Google search was also trusted, after which the university's website, social media, and the WOM of acquaintances who were studying at the university followed. Interestingly, the parents of some students were MRU alumni who recommended that their children study at the university.

4.2 What made a decisive impact on their choice?

Figures 2 and 3 present factors which were decisive in making the final choice. The strongest factors for Lithuanian students were: WOM, content of study program, and study information on university website. These priorities are in agreement with the criteria listed in international and Lithuanian scientific literature (Table 2).

Not surprisingly, substantial peculiarity was evident in the choice factors of international students regarding their motivation to study in Lithuania. When explaining their choice of country, international students mentioned the fact that Lithuania is a member of the European Union; that study quality was considered high; and that the lower living costs were an advantage, especially in comparison to Nordic or Western countries. This information was taken from open comments on the value of studies at open forums of different universities, but the effort to find statistical data or in-depth research regarding country preference has thus far been fruitless.

Accesability for working
Study disciplines
WOM
Interesting webpage info
Carrier possibilities

Figure 2. *Decisive impacts for national students*

Wish to study in LT

WOM

Webpage info
Interesting disciplines

Figure 3. *Decisive impacts for international students*

Participants of the focus group with experience at study fairs maintained that university ratings were important. However, the more important factor was what they called “interesting courses”, the feedback of fellow students, and the city that the university is in. MA students paid attention to the convenient schedule of classes.

4.3 Which information format is most attractive?

The results regarding the preferred format show a slight difference between national and international students. Lithuanian students looked exclusively for video material that was supplemented with short text, but text was not always obligatory. This can be explained by the abundance of other textual and WOM information which reaches them from numerous sources in their native tongue.

Lithuanian students made some specific suggestions on how to improve the publicizing of study programs. They observed that it is worth emphasizing practical issues in the study process, including future demand for skills acquired and career opportunities. They wished for more live streaming of a student’s life and real, experience-based posts on social media.

In contrast to Lithuanian students, international students preferred comprehensive textual information from a direct source – the university itself. Erasmus+ students were a distinctive group, and they recommended that: more effort was put into the promotion of the country (Lithuania); a wider range of better courses designed for Erasmus + students was offered; and more information on everyday life in Vilnius and Lithuania was provided, suggesting that purely study-related information was not enough. It is important to note that the answers of both international and Erasmus+ students were only recommendations, and need further research. On the other hand, it is already clear that the current international marketing strategy needs a considerably more careful and meaningful approach to targeting this specific audience.

In summary, the decision to spend a semester or two abroad is conditioned not only by the direct goal of studying but also by the social and cultural environment. Erasmus+ students are likely a valuable source of positive WOM. Lately this has been

somewhat forgotten, but some of the answers of the Erasmus+ students in this study suggest that they could potentially spread the word about studies in Lithuania far and wide.

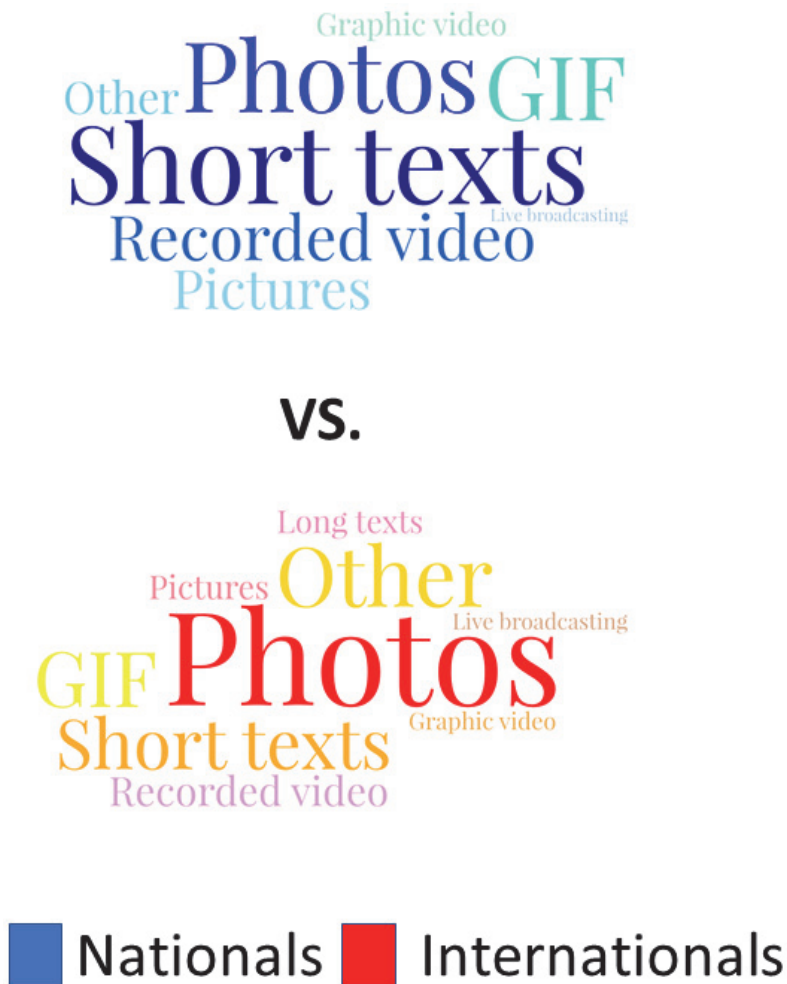


Figure 4. *Content preferences*

In focus group research, the questions related to study content triggered some emotional answers. Nearly all MRU students started following social media related to their study program after their decision to enroll in the study program had been

made. While the creators of study-related content on social media aim to project their study experience, new intake representatives were quite blunt in their criticism: this is not content that makes you click; it is lacking in visual material and real experience; and there is a deficit of recognizable faces and leaders.

Students observed that it looks like posting for posting's sake, just to fill an empty gap of several days. Content that is arguably not "authentic" is mentioned by Loveland's⁵¹ research as one of the major factors that alienates the two latest generations of young people. Therefore, admission consultation specialists and marketers of specific programs should pay special attention to how their study program looks on its related Facebook account and in other social media.

BA students of the 2016 intake are major users of Instagram, and they were also quite critical as to how their study program is presented on this platform. They suggested the encouragement of participation to develop all kinds of interactivity (voting, quiz, Q&A sessions etc.). Some students expressed an aversion to heavily pushed, hyper-positive, repetitive points like "nice building", "wonderful library", "convenient class schedule", or "interesting courses". They would prefer to form their own opinions by evaluating video and photo material of the same building, library, etc.

BA students were proud of university teachers who are present in the Lithuanian public space, and consider it proof of their competence. However, pride comes with enrollment: before entering university they did not make the connection between the public face and the university. Therefore, the public presence of university faculty representatives provides material for the WOM of enrolled students, and could potentially reach the next generation of students.

Conclusions

The choice of theoretical approach in this research was motivated by the need to fill the gap in generational marketing in the field of education. At the moment, this gap is covered by the isolated analytical insights of scientists who are dealing with data produced by research in the separate fields of generation studies, human resources, education, and marketing. Unfortunately, in Lithuanian science this kind of research is limited to the first two fields of generation studies and human resources. Based on this circumstance, it is concluded that marketing in the field of education as well as on generational differences is a promising subject which requires more fact-finding research.

Further in-depth analysis involves the 4Cs (communication technologies, connection, cooperation, and collaboration) principle, which is instrumental in establishing substantial trends of social media that would correspond to substantial features of different generations. An overview of generational creativity revealed that cooperation and collaboration are two key aspects for Gen Z. This makes possible the

51 Loveland, *supra note*, 1: 37–38.

gathering of empirical data on social manifestations of different age groups and their interaction in different areas of activity.

The marketing funnel approach and the application of the AIDA model for the marketing of educational institutions puts special emphasis on the right balance between the accumulation of the knowledge of the user and building the positive image of the organization itself. Both goals are to be pursued simultaneously; at the same time, this holistic approach enables meaningful and detailed research. Centering on marketing funnel research allows communication channels and types of content which are favored by Generation Z to be established, triggering their action to enroll into a study program.

This research confirmed the slightly different communication preferences of different intakes, especially between the bachelor's and master's levels and national and international students. This can lead to customized marketing aiming at different target audiences with different means and content. The emergence of age-related differences in further quantitative research could prove to be evidence indicating the more precise watershed of a new generation. In turn, this would enable the more precise tailoring of the marketing of specific study programs.

The earlier-neglected opinions of Erasmus+ program participants are especially distinctive, with the potential for further research and in-depth analysis. This research confirmed the universal power of WOM, which can be a factor in organizing the marketing campaigns of international studies, and the power of the WOM of Erasmus students might prove very productive.

Motivation in seeking particular information indicates the importance of live, real testimony made by a recognizable and authoritative person. This kind of testimony and WOM in general is shaped by the public reputation of the university rather than a particular marketing strategy. The enhancement of the public reputation of a university is a long-term process which has many factors at work. This includes the quality of studies, the attractiveness of programs, and the right teaching methods for different age groups. Publicizing authentic testimony might be efficient, but at the same time there are some ethical and legal problems that must be addressed by further research.

In order to make Gen Z click (literally and metaphorically), testimony and marketing information needs to be as versatile as possible in terms of content, topics, and forms. Every click won means that something has been noticed, memorized, and shared. Overall, quality video material leads the priority list of the latest generation of students, with the exception of international students who desire comprehensive texts and contextual information in a language that they understand. This is a clear indication that education marketing specialists need to apply different strategies for the international and Lithuanian markets.

When marketing budgets are meagre, creativity and the mobilization of inner resources can help. One obvious avenue is the more efficient integration of students and interns, including internationals, into the marketing effort. This brings us back to

the golden rule of classical marketing: that every member of an organization should be involved in marketing. The novelty here is that, in the hashtag (#) era, new means of communication enable this to be accomplished in a variety of new, never-before-thought-of ways. This research earmarks several avenues to follow, to develop further, and to apply instantly in practical marketing in a parallel manner.

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KARTŲ SKIRTUMAI IR RINKODARA: NAUJAUSIŲ STUDENTŲ PRITRAUKIMO Į KOMUNIKACIJOS STUDIJAS ATVEJŲ ANALIZĖ

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Santrauka. *Universitetų dėstytojai ir administratoriai sutaria, kad dabartinės studentų kartos vertybės, įsitikinimai, vyraujančios asmeninės savybės yra kitokios, taip pat šios kartos ypatybės yra prieštaringos ir konfliktuojančios tarpusavyje. Neatsakyta į klausimą, ar universitetų studentų priėmimo specialistai atsižvelgia į kartos savitumą. Siekiant atsakyti į šį klausimą sumanytas tyrimo projektas, kuriuo siekta išsiaiškinti, kaip studentai nusprendė pasirinkti komunikacijos studijų programą konkrečiame universitete per 2018 m. priėmimą. Tyrimo tikslas buvo patyrinti, kokius komunikacijos kanalus ir kokį turinį pirmiausia rinkosi stodami to meto abiturientai. Autorių grupė sudarė klausimų sąrašą, kuris padėjo sistemškai aiškintis, kas motyvavo studentus pasirinkti vieną ar kitą komunikacijos kanalą, taip pat padėjo nustatyti galimus veiksnius, kurie atvedė iki sprendimo stoti į konkrečią komunikacijos studijų programą. Respondentai apklausti raštu. Toliau gilinantis į kartų skirtybes, vadinamoji karta Y buvo tirta papildomame tikslinės grupės diskusijos (angl. focus group) tyrime: buvo nagrinėtos tam pačiame universitete 2016 metais komunikacijos studijas pradėjusių studentų nuostatos. Gauti rezultatai atskleidė stebėtinai skirtingas preferencijas vizualinei ir tekstinei medžiagai. Surinkti duomenys rodo reikšmingus studentų nuostatų skirtumus, kurie susidarė vos per kelerius metus. Šie rezultatai vertingi tiek mokslškai, tiek praktine prasme. Be duomenų, šio tyrimo mokslinis naujumas gali būti grindžiamas jo tarpdalykiškumu: tyrime derinami skirtingi požiūriai, apimantys rinkodarą, edukologiją, komunikaciją, švietimo įstaigų valdymą ir kartų teoriją. Praktine prasme tyrimo rezultatai padeda universitetų priėmimo specialistams kurti naują, veiksmingesnę studijų rinkodaros strategiją, nutaikytą konkrečiai į Z kartos stojančius jaunuolius.*

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *komunikacija, komunikacijos kanalai, komunikacijos įrankiai, kartų teorijos, Y karta, Z karta, studijų programų marketingas, priėmimo rinkodara, vizualinė komunikacija.*

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