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Analyses of word-of-mouth communication and Its effect on students' university preferences

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Abstract

Word-of-mouth is totally formed by satisfaction of customer and transparent communication based methods. The power and meaning of word-of-mouth is relevant to speaker's relationship with the product or service, satisfaction of speaker will lead to convey messages that are positive about product and service. With this motivation felt by the speaker, it is seen that he joins deliberately or not to the process which helps the process about the benefits to product or to service. As far as the increasing number of universities is concerned; the dimension of presentation is coming into prominence. This situation shows us word-of-mouth effect could be effective in the presentation of universities. The purpose of this study is to put forward how word-of-mouth advice method works in the university preference process. In this work, quantitative research method such as survey technique is used.

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Key words: Word-of-Mouth Communication, Advertisement, Public Relations, Marketing, Process of University Preferring

Introduction

It is a fact that there are different ways to influence people apart from the traditional conduits (such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines). It is also observed that sometimes advice from a friend may be much more effective than

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various advertisements and presentations. Nowadays, due to the promotion of numerous products by mass media, many of which cater to the same needs, consumers are required to make objective opinions and refer to independent sources in their decision-making (Cop and Gümüş, 2009, pp.179-202). Thus, word-of-mouth communication or ‘buzz marketing’ has become one of the most important tools of communication in the modern world. Previous studies have revealed that word-of-mouth communication has a significant effect on consumer satisfaction regarding products and services related to buying decisions (Bush et al., 2005, pp. 257-264) as well as their attitudes toward buying in general (Bone, 1995, pp. 213-223). Bansal et al. (2000, pp.166-177) also underscored that word-of-mouth communication influences buying decisions, while Murray (1991, pp. 10-25) emphasised that it decreases the risks of such decisions.

In this era of globalisation and the use of widespread communication technology, the need for university-educated individuals has been rapidly increasing and consequently, this has intensified the level of competitiveness between existing universities. Despite the increase in promotional activities and advertisements, word-of-mouth communication is still more effective for presenting various aspects that can influence consumers (i.e. students) decision-making processes (Silverman, 1997, pp. 32-37). Therefore, this study examines the effect of word-of-mouth communication on students’ university preferences and to what extent such communication influences their decision-making behaviours.

2. Word-of-Mouth Communication

As a form of mass media, word-of-mouth communication is one of the widest and the most important tool for consumers and it can influence where they shop, what they buy and how they evaluate certain products. In addition, such communication can affect the expectations, awareness, perceptions and attitudes of consumers (Iglesias et al., 2001, pp. 410-425); Reichheld and Schefer, 2000, pp. 105-114; Ward and Lee, 2000, pp. 6-20; Ha, 2004, pp. 329-342). As a result, the importance of word-of-mouth communication as a channel of information has been the subject of focus in the aforementioned studies. This mechanism wields immense influence on the consumer’s preference, dependence and changing behaviour (Marangoz, 2007: pp. 395-412) and it facilitates the consumer’s knowledge of the necessary information for decision-making (Stewart and Kamins, 2003, pp. 282-309).

Word-of-mouth communication was initially emphasized by Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz in 1995, although its definition did not refer to formal communication among consumers regarding certain products (Kau & Loh, 2006, pp. 101-111). According to Stokes and Lomax (2002, 349-357), word-of-mouth communication serves as a so-called messenger and receiver about brands, products or services, rather than verbal face-to face communication. Ranaweera and Prabhu (2003, pp. 374-395) described such communication as an emotional dimension that influences consumers’ decisions regarding various services and products, while the American Communication Institute (AMA) defined word-of-mouth communication as the sharing of information between consumers (via various resources) concerning certain products and promotions (www.marketingpower.com/layouts/Dictionary 14/12/2013).

In general, people share advice regarding aspects such as relationships, films, food, on a daily basis (Rosen, 2000, p. 7) and they acquire additional information through their physical surroundings and mass media (East, Hamond and Wright, 2007, pp. 175-184). In the service industry, word-of-mouth marketing is extremely essential since expectations regarding services are not as clear as those of concrete products. Moreover, factors such as cultural situations and past experiences can specially influence consumers’ opinions, regardless of their current similar cultural environments (Ateşoğlu and Bayraktar, 2012, pp. 95-108). Furthermore, in their leading research regarding word-of-mouth communication, Arndt (1967) and Dichter (1966) indicated that such communication can increase the expertise of individuals and strengthen their communicative relationships (Cheung, Anitsal and Anitsal, 2007, pp. 235-249). Therefore, it can be understood that word-of-mouth communication is an effective and powerful method of communication, particularly when important information is imparted by reliable and credible sources (Ennew, Banerjee and Li, 2000, 75-83).

2.1. Positive/Negative Word-of-Mouth Communication

Word-of-mouth communication can have both positive and negative effects. Positive word-of-mouth communication is one of the instruments for marketing experts since positive opinions can influence consumers to purchase the brand in question (Arndt, 1967, pp. 291-295). Conversely, negative word-of-mouth communication can have the opposite effect. In this regard, the majority of previous studies have indicated that consumers are more affected by negative word-of-mouth opinions than positive ones (Mangold, Miller and Brockway, 1999, pp. 73-89; Lam and Mizerski, 2005, pp. 215-228; Tybout, Calder and Sternthal, 1981, 73-79). In addition, negative word-of-mouth communication not only damages a brand's reputation but also influences consumers' buying behaviours regarding the product (Hoyer and MacInnis, 1997, p.37). With regard to the latter, it has been observed that a displeased consumer conveys his/her opinions to at least five people (Mangold et. al, 1999, pp. 73-89) and to as high as nine people on average (Buttle, 1998, pp. 241-254). Furthermore, in the process of purchasing goods, especially newer products, word-of-mouth communication from existing consumers has a significant effect on consumers' buying behaviours (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard, 1993, p. 621).

2.2. Active/Passive Word-of-Mouth Communication

Word-of-mouth communication includes two dimensions: active and passive communication. Active word-of-mouth communication refers to conveying ideas about certain goods and services, shops, management, etc., whereas passive word-of-mouth communication denotes the gathering of information by consumers' friends, families and colleagues before buying certain goods (Lampert and Rosenberg, 1975, pp. 337-354). With regard to the latter, passive word-of-mouth communication also functions as a form of active communication since these individuals, upon retrieving the information, convey their ideas to additional parties (Christiansen and Tax, 2000, pp. 185-199). Through either of these communication methods, consumers directly or indirectly formulate their opinions regarding certain products and trust the opinions of those close to them. Moreover, based on these seemingly trustworthy comments, potential consumers also save time in their decision-making processes (Silverman et al., 2006: 601-634).

2.3. Word-of-Mouth Communication Model

In Figure 1, Kotler and Armstrong's consumer's buying model (2004: 198) is set off by Karaca's (2010: 138) word-of-mouth communication model to analyse the decision-making process of potential university students. In this case, the word-of-mouth communication model consists of five steps. First, the consumer (i.e. student) becomes aware of his/her needs. Second, he/she collects information regarding how to satisfy such needs. In this step, the approach can differ based on various resources such as previous experiences, certain beliefs and the opinions of friends, relatives and salespeople. Third, the consumer evaluates the gathered information. Fourth, the consumer decides to buy the most appropriate product based on the evaluation. Finally, after the buying process is complete, the consumer evaluates and develops either a positive or negative opinion regarding the product or service in question (Severn, Belch and Belch, 1990, pp. 14-22).

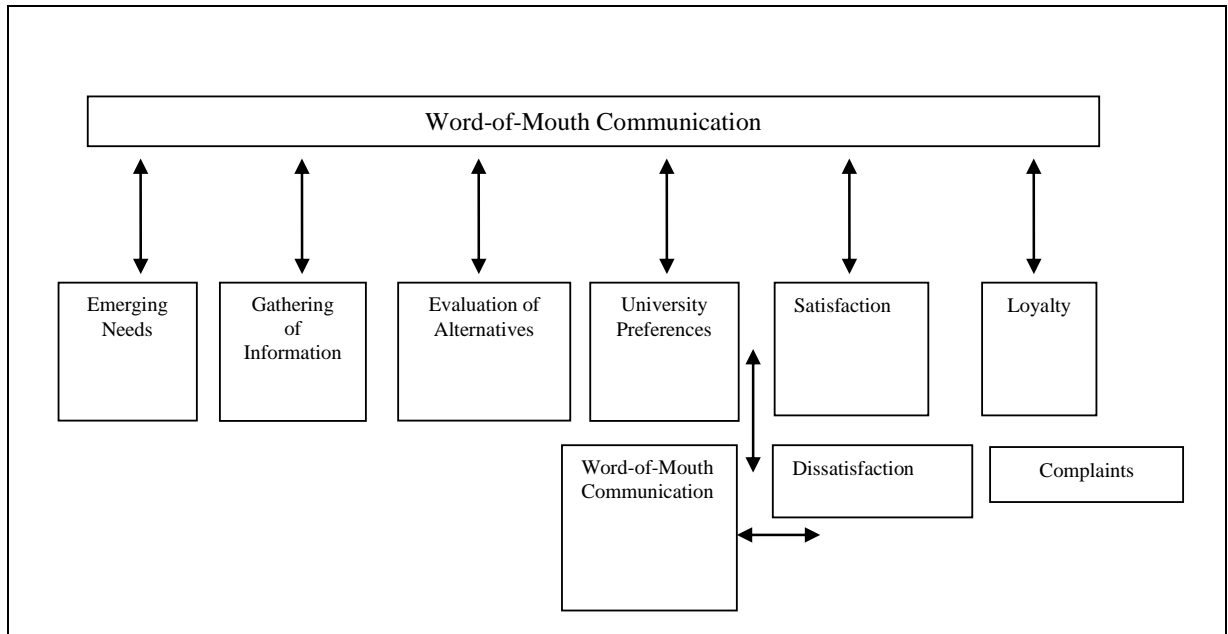


Figure 1: Word-of-Mouth Communication Model regarding Students' University Preferences

3. Factors that Affect Students' University Preferences

Higher education is the most important step towards social and economic prosperity in an individual's life. In this sense, it is extremely important for a graduating high school student to select a university that fulfils his/her needs. In Turkey, there are many factors that affect students' university preferences of which the two most significant are graduating from high school and taking the Undergraduate Placement Exam (LYS). Students who are successful in this exam gain admission to an undergraduate department and earn the right to major in their preferred area of specialisation. The overall question, however, is what to consider when selecting a university. On the one hand, one of the most important decisions in an individual's life is choosing a job that is appropriate for his/her skills, which, in turn, provides both financial security and personal satisfaction. On the other hand, many young people prefer gaining admission to an undergraduate department and acquiring skills that they enjoy, regardless of the pressures of future unemployment and parental influence (Amca, 2011: <http://www.emu.edu.tr/amca/universitelerinTercihEdilmesiniEtkileyenFaktorler.pdf>).

4. Aim of the Research

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of word-of-mouth communication on students' university preferences and to what extent it influences their decision-making behaviours. As stated earlier, due to the widespread use of communication technology in this era of globalisation, the need for university-educated individuals has been rapidly increasing. As a result, this has escalated the level of competitiveness between existing universities. The universities have to ensure that their services cater to the comprehensive demands of the students'. Among the factors that affect students' university preferences, positive word-of-mouth communication concerning various aspects and services of the university is extremely pivotal. In fact, any negative aspects regarding a specific university can have an adverse effect on students' decision-making processes.

Hypothesis created according to the researches done in the field of marketing communication in higher education. Also information gathered from the non-governmental organisations has been taken into consideration while model of the research is defined. According to the previous researches the decision-making process of potential university students' enquired and different variables taken into consideration while evaluating the sub-processes. The competitive and complex structure of the process is increasing for the potential university students' and that makes new variables are becomes prominent for them. Hypothesis developed by focusing on the word-of-mouth effect on the decision-making process.

Based on the above rationale and literature review, the following hypotheses are posited:

Hypothesis 1: In students' decision-making processes, word-of-mouth communication has an effect on Emerging Needs, Gathering of Information and Evaluation of Alternatives.

Hypothesis 2: Word-of-mouth communication has an effect on students' decision-making behaviours, especially after considering satisfaction and loyalty.

Hypothesis 3: Word-of-mouth communication has an effect on students' decision-making processes, especially after considering dissatisfaction and complaints.

Hypothesis 4: There are some differences between students' decision-making behaviours with regard to university preference and demographical variables.

Hypothesis 5: In students' university decision-making processes, active and passive behaviours through word-of-mouth communication have indicated some variations.

5. Methods

Methodology of this paper is based on the literature review of word-of-mouth communication model. The hypothesis created in view of the fact that different variables for the students' can effect the university preferences and the perception of potential university students'. Questionnaire Forms developed in the light of Kotler and Armstrong's consumers' buying model (2004: 198). This is set off by Karaca's (2010: 138) word-of-mouth communication model to analyse the decision-making process of potential university students. In this case, the word-of-mouth communication model consists of five steps. In order to determine the effects of word-of-mouth communication on the decision-making processes of potential university students, a questionnaire was administered to students who visited the various university information centres (established by İstanbul Gelisim University) located throughout Turkey. During the process of administering the questionnaire, assistance from the instructors was obtained. A total of 1,137 questionnaires were collected. With regard to the forms, the information was transmitted and evaluated using the SPSS for Windows 21.0 statistical program.

6. Research Data and Results

Table 1.: Participants' Demographical Features

Demographical Variables	Demographical Features	N	%
Sex	Female	625	55.0
	Male	512	45.0
Educational Background	Secondary School	1098	96.6
	University	39	3.4
Age Group	18–20	894	78.6
	21–30	189	16.6
	30 –...	54	4.7

According to Table 1., when considering the participants' demographical features, the number of males and females were closely related, whereas those with secondary school education outnumbered those with university education. With regard to age group, the 18–20 age group was dominant comprising 894 students. Based on this information, we can state that young people (18-20 years) with high school degrees constitute a significant portion of the students considering university education.

In this study, potential university students were asked from whom they gathered information to determine the factors of word-of-mouth communication. The results included: 'For Myself' (93.1%); 'For my Child' (4.0%); 'For my Friend' (0.6%); and 'For my Acquaintances' (2.3%). With respect to the question, 'Who is the most reliable source for gathering information?', the answers consisted of the following: 'People who attend universities' (56.8%); 'Instructors who work at universities' (23.3%); 'Acquaintances' (16.4%); 'Internet' (3%); 'Printed publications' (6%); and 'Television' (1%). Based on these aforementioned results, it can be stated that the effect of word-of-mouth communication on students' university preferences is typical.

Table 2.: Word-of-Mouth Communication in preference for universities with regard to Emerging Needs, Gathering of Information and Evaluation of Alternatives

		I definitely agree	I agree	I neither agree nor disagree	I disagree	I do not agree at all	Average
		%	%	%	%	%	
Emerging Needs	Influence of ideas from my family, friends and acquaintances	41.2	46.0	10.0	2.4	4.0	4.25
	Influence of ideas from the instructors who work at the university	32.7	52.3	13.3	1.6	1.0	4.16
	Influence of Ideas from students who attend the university	36.1	45.7	15.8	1.7	7.0	4.15
	Influence of ideas from students who graduated from the university	33.2	48.2	15.1	2.7	7.0	4.11
Gathering of Information	If university preference is the subject matter, then I definitely accept advice from my surroundings (i.e. family, friends, acquaintances, etc.)	34.3	46.2	15.3	3.8	4.0	4.10
	If university preference is the subject matter, then I trust the information that I gather from my surroundings (i.e. family, friends, the media, etc.).	35.5	44.9	14.7	4.4	4.0	4.11
	For my university preference suggestions of renowned people are important for me	33.7	45.6	15.0	5.2	5.0	4.07
	I definitely check the websites of universities to gather information	33.2	45.5	16.4	4.0	1.0	4.06
Evaluation of Alternatives	Renowned instructors affect my university preferences	31.2	43.6	18.4	6.1	7.0	3.99
	My acquaintance's preferences affect my university preferences	33.1	43.8	17.7	5.2	3	4.04
	Hearing about the university affects my university preferences	32.1	45.8	16.9	5.0	2	4.05

To analyze the three communication factors indicated in Table 2. (i.e. Emerging Needs, Gathering of Information and Evaluation of Alternatives), a five-point Likert scale was utilized. Is word-of-mouth communication effective as

an external stimulus on students' university preferences? The results of the Likert scale demonstrate the following average rates for each factor: Emerging Needs, 4.25, 4.16, 4.15 and 4.11, respectively; Gathering of Information, 4.10, 4.11, 4.07 and 4.06, respectively; and Evaluating Alternatives, 3.99, 4.04 and 4.05, respectively. According to these results, word-of-mouth communication has an effect on these three factors.

Table 3.: Word-of-Mouth Communication in University Preferences with regard to Satisfaction and Loyalty and Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty

		I definitely agree	I agree	I neither agree nor disagree	I disagree	I do not agree at all	Average
		%	%	%	%	%	
Satisfaction and Loyalty	After considering a university, if the university satisfies my expectations, then I will definitely recommend it to others	36.1	47.8	14.0	1.8	3	4.18
	Positive evaluations and suggestions from others about the university definitely affect my university preferences	34.9	46.1	15.1	3.0	3	4.13
Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty	After considering a university, if it does not satisfy my expectations, then I will definitely warn others	34.6	52.7	10.7	1.9	1	4.20
	Negative evaluations and complaints from others about the university definitely affect my university preferences or influence my decision to no longer consider the university	34.9	42.0	16.8	5.9	4	4.05

In order to determine the effect of word-of-mouth communication on the factors of Satisfaction and Loyalty and Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty in Table 3, a five-part Likert scale was employed. Is word-of-mouth communication effective as an external stimulus on these factors? The results of the Likert scale indicate the following average rates for each factor: Satisfaction and Loyalty, 4.18 and 4.13, respectively; and Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty, 4.20 and 4.05, respectively. Based on these results, word-of-mouth communication has an effect on these two factors.

Table 4.: Analysis of Word-of-Mouth Communication and its Effect on University Preferences according to Sex (Independent Variable T-Test)

Scales	Sex	N	Average	Standard Deviation	P (sig)
Emerging Needs	Females	625	4.2012	.57841	.160
	Males	512	4.1230	.60352	
Gathering of Information	Females	625	4.1188	.64362	.705
	Males	512	4.0420	.66499	
Evaluation of Alternatives	Females	625	4.0656	.72240	.563
	Males	512	3.9753	.74713	
Satisfaction and Loyalty	Females	625	4.1752	.69172	.730
	Males	512	4.1289	.68460	
Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty	Females	625	4.1576	.67845	.512
	Males	512	4.0850	.71475	

As indicated in Table 4, the results of the independent variable t-test demonstrate that there is no difference between the scale averages of the five factors (i.e. Emerging Needs, Gathering of Information and Evaluation of Alternatives) with 95% reliability ($p > 0.05$). In light of this data, word-of-mouth communication does not affect students' university preferences according to sex.

Table 5.: Analysis of Word-of-Mouth Communication and its Effect on University Preferences according to Education (Independent Variable T-Test)

Scales	School	N	Average	Standard Deviation	P (sig)
Emerging Needs	High School	1098	4.1642	.59326	.049
	University	39	4.2179	.52308	
Gathering of Information	High School	1098	4.0856	.65765	.166
	University	39	4.0449	.55272	
Evaluation of Alternatives	High School	1098	4.0206	.73391	.901
	University	39	4.1453	.75624	
Satisfaction and Loyalty	High School	1098	4.1548	.68894	.789
	University	39	4.1410	.68776	
Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty	High School	1098	4.1243	.69625	.735
	University	39	4.1410	.68776	

As indicated in Table 5, the results of the independent variable t-test demonstrate that, in terms of education status, there is a meaningful difference in the scale average of Emerging Needs with 95% reliability ($p < 0.05$). However, there is no meaningful difference among the scale averages of Gathering of Information, Evaluation of Alternatives and Satisfaction and Loyalty with 95% reliability ($p > 0.05$). Thus, except for the factor of Emerging Needs, word-of-mouth communication does not affect students' university preferences according to education.

Table 6: Analysis of Word-of-Mouth Communication and its Effect on University Preferences according to Age (ANOVA)

Scales	Age Groups	N	Average	Standard Deviation	F	P (sig)
Emerging Needs	18–20	894	4.1779	.58127	.962	.382
	21–30	189	4.1124	.63497		
	30–...	54	4.1574	.58940		
Gathering of Information	18–20	894	4.0982	.64809	1.803	.165
	21–30	189	4.0622	.66527		
	30–...	54	3.9306	.70446		
Evaluation of Alternatives	18–20	894	4.0336	.72932	.347	.707
	21–30	189	4.0018	.73698		
	30–...	54	3.9630	.82076		
Satisfaction and Loyalty	18–20	894	4.1667	.68594	1.049	.351
	21–30	189	4.1296	.68446		
	30–...	54	4.0370	.74512		
Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty	18–20	894	4.1516	.68679	4.466	.012*
	21–30	189	4.0661	.69544		
	30–...	54	3.8889	.79305		

As indicated in Table 6., the results of the ANOVA show that, in terms of age, a meaningful difference in the scale average is only found in the Satisfaction and Loyalty and the Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty factors. Hence except for the factors of Satisfaction and Loyalty and Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty, word-of-mouth communication does not affect student's university preferences according to age.

Table 7.: Tukey's B-Test Results

Age Group	N	1st Group	2nd Group
18–20	894	4.1516	
21–30	189	4.0661	4.0661
30–...	54	3.8889	

As indicated in Table 7., the results of the Tukey b-test indicate that there is a meaningful difference in the Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty scale between the 18–20 and 30 and higher age groups. In light of this data, reliance on word-of-mouth communication is apparent as age decreases.

Table 8.: Analysis of Active Word-of-Mouth Communication and its Effect on University Preferences according to the Channel of Information (Chi-Square)

	Gathering of Information	Evaluation of Alternatives	Satisfaction and Loyalty	Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty	Emerging Needs
Channel of Information Chi-Square	175.555	197.859	157.140	162.203	226.943
df	4	4	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

As indicated in Table 8., according to the results of the chi-square test, all p-values are under 0.05. Under these circumstances, In addition, as potential university students share information (i.e. they are active), the effect of word-of-mouth communication on their university

Table 9.: Analysis of Active Word-of-Mouth Communication and its Effect according to the Channel of Information (Kruskal-Wallis Test)

		After Preferring Satisfaction and Loyalty			After Preferring Dissatisfaction						
		Channel given Information	N	Mean Rank	Channel given Information	N	Mean Rank				
		Face to Face Talk	768	647,22	Face to Face Talk	768	665,36				
		Talk on the phone	232	447,96	Talk on the phone	232	414,24				
		Talk on the Internet	117	341,77	Talk on the Internet	117	286,34				
		Via E-mail	17	254,44	Via E-mail	17	246,91				
		By writing comment about product on blog sharing with internet users	3	550	By writing comment about product on blog sharing with internet users	3	369,57				
		Total	1137		Total	1137					
Emerging of Needs	Channel given Information	N	Mean Rank	Gathering Information	Channel given Information	N	Mean Rank	Evaluation of Alternatives	Channel given Information	N	Mean Rank
	Face to Face Talk	768	666,46		Face to Face Talk	768	653,73		Face to Face Talk	768	657,41
	Talk on the phone	232	415,24		Talk on the phone	232	442,92		Talk on the phone	232	441,9
	Talk on the Internet	117	286,24		Talk on the Internet	117	308,79		Talk on the Internet	117	300,43
	Via E-mail	17	245,91		Via E-mail	17	284,18		Via E-mail	17	183,29
	By writing comment about product on blog sharing with internet users	3	368,67		By writing comment about product on blog sharing with internet users	3	389,5		By writing comment about product on blog sharing with internet users	3	425,67
	Total	1137			Total	1137			Total	1137	

As indicated in Table 9., the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test show that the average sequence values are relatively similar. According to this data regarding the channel of information, the respondents preferred face-to-face conversations the most, followed by talking on the phone. Considering this factor, in the process of word of mouth, when potential students are active, in other words, when the channel which they give information is overwhelming, this comment may be done according to the process. According to results of Kruskal Wallis (see table 9), in each 5 groups of word of mouth preferred channel in the first place is Face-to Face Communication, the second place becomes ‘talking on the phone’.

Table 10.: Analysis of Passive Word-of-Mouth Communication and its Effect on University Preferences according to the Channels of Information (Chi-Square Test)

	Gathering of Information	Evaluation of Alternatives	Satisfaction and Loyalty	Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty	Emerging Needs
Channel of Information Chi-Square	85.204	80.575	87.343	75.885	122.329
df	4	4	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

As indicated in Table 10, the results of the chi-square test show that all of the p-values are under 0.05. Moreover, as potential university students gather information (i.e. they are passive), the effect of word-of-mouth communication on their university preferences also demonstrates alterations in the process.

Table 11.: Analysis of Passive Word-of-Mouth Communication and its Effect according to the Channel of Information (Kruskal-Wallis Test)

Emerging of Needs	After Preferring Satisfaction and Loyalty			Gathering Information	After Preferring Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty			Evaluation of Alternatives		
	Channel given Information	N	Mean Rank		Channel given Information	N	Mean Rank	Channel given Information	N	Mean Rank
	Friend	345	671,41	Friend	345	662,78	Friend	345	679,20	
	Internet	491	472,18	Internet	491	479,58	Internet	491	479,05	
	Mass Media	261	613,72	Mass Media	261	617,29	Mass Media	261	598,84	
	Bilboard	38	574,82	Bilboard	38	532,41	Bilboard	38	527,34	
	Television	2	727,00	Television	2	738,25	Television	2	538,00	
	Total	1137		Total	1137		Total	1137		

As it is indicated on the table 11, in the light of chi-square results, it is seen that average sequence values are not close to each other. Considering that, when the potential students are passive, in other words; channel, which they prefer, are overwhelming they gather some information. This comment may be constituted. According to results of Kruskal Wallis Test (see table 11) , model of word of mouth communication is seen in the first place in process of emerging needs, preferred channels has been defined as friends. In gathering information section, preferred channel in the first place is Television in the second place is Friends. In the evaluation of alternatives process preferred channel is friends; in the second place is mass-media. However; average sequence values of billboard and TV show similarity with mass-media. If the rates are analyse, after preferring they are satisfied or not section, potential university students gather this information in the first place from TV, second place from Friend channel.

7. Results and Discussion

Human Being's sharing his feelings and thoughts from his or her existence proves that he is a social creature. These sharing are so much important in making decisions with the study which is constituted. From the view of human being's being social creature, it is aimed to study that how important student's sharing with the other in university choices. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of word-of-mouth communication on students' university preferences. In light of the five hypotheses posited earlier, the results are the following. First, the findings of the five-point Likert scale (i.e. 3.99, 4.04 and 4.05, respectively) indicate that word-of-mouth communication does affect the factors of Emerging Needs, Gathering of Information and Evaluation of Alternatives. Thus, Hypothesis 1 (In students' decision-making processes, word-of-mouth communication has an effect on Emerging Needs, Gathering of Information and Evaluation of Alternatives) is supported. Second, the frequency average rates in the process of Satisfaction and Loyalty were 4.18 and 4.13, respectively, which indicates that word-of-mouth communication has an effect on this process. Thus, Hypothesis 2 (Word-of-mouth communication has an effect on students' decision-making behaviours, especially after considering Satisfaction and Loyalty) is supported. Third, the results of the five-point Likert scale in the process of Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty were 4.20 and 4.05, respectively. These rates indicate that word-of-mouth communication does affect students' university preferences after considering Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty. Thus, Hypothesis 3 (Word-of-mouth communication has an effect on students' decision-making processes, especially after considering Dissatisfaction and Disloyalty) is supported. Fourth, the results of the ANOVA and the t-test indicate that, although the differences were not significant, some meaningful differences in the demographical variable did exist. Thus, Hypothesis 4 (There are some differences between students' decision-making behaviours with regard to University Preference and Demographical Variables) is supported. Finally, the results of the chi-square test show that all of the p-values were less than 0.05. This indicates that, when sharing (or gathering) information, students' active (or passive) behaviours show alterations in the process. Thus, Hypothesis 5 (In students' university decision-making processes, active and passive behaviours through word-of-mouth communication have shown some variations) is supported. If all these results are considered as a whole, word of mouth communication is ultimately important in process of preferring university of potential university students. Nowadays, as far as the success of universities in preferring process, features of education service, advertisement, and public relations are underlined. Without a doubt, besides these implementations are very important in advertising of a university, last but not least word of mouth communication is a must, which can't be ignored. Word of mouth communication factor is uncontrollable process because of its formation, but most applied researches which is based on this area have shown that in case processes of work is leaded well, word of mouth communication effect may affect attitude toward institution well, From this point of view, universities' implementations which is aimed to both inner target community and outer target community are very important factor in increasing universities successes. Based on all of the aforementioned results, word-of-mouth communication is an important and significant factor in students' university decision-making processes. The managerial implications of higher education institutions must be developed and updated according to the word-of-mouth communication effect. Different variables such as the ownership structure, history, basic fields of education etc. of the university must be taken into consideration while managing the perception of the potential university students' perceptions. Therefore, universities should focus on promoting positive aspects about their respective institutions through this channel of information to maintain success in the future.

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