



Sustaining Parental Loyalty in Repeat Participation of Youth Exchange Programs:

A Study of Factors that Promote Repeat Participation in Sending Multiple Children with a Non-Profit Organization in Finland

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Abstract:

The aim of this research is to investigate factors that contribute to parental loyalty in repeat participation in youth exchange programs. Through purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews, the study analyzed the experiences and perspectives of nine Finnish parents that sent a child or children on high school exchange with YFU Finland.

The results indicate that trust, reputation, and service quality are significant triggers in the parental decision-making process, underlined by positive experiences. Parents who had been on YFU exchange themselves, trusted in their own positive experience in determining the exchange organization for their child. These parents perceived YFU experienced familiarity with YFU practices, i.e. trusted the YFU service quality. In contrary, other parents' triggers could be divided in three stages: learning about YFU's reputation through other's positive exchange experiences, obtaining positive experiences of YFU's service quality themselves, and finally, hearing about their child's positive exchange experience.

The research provides insights on how organizations can foster parental loyalty for rare, educational purchases' by offering personalized and supportive services, leading to positive experiences and, in turn, repeat participation. The study offers significant value beyond YFU Finland in terms of enhancing customer retention in a highly competitive market.

Keywords: Customer loyalty, Non-profit organization, Youth Exchange program, Parental decision-making, Repeat participation.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The topic of customer loyalty is a critical area of study in marketing, as it is crucial for organizations to understand how to retain their customers and build long-term relationships, particularly for non-profit organizations offering youth exchange programs. While these long-term exchange programs offer numerous benefits to participating youth, sustaining parental loyalty, and encouraging repeat participation in such programs pose a significant challenge for non-profit organizations like YFU Finland. As exchange programs are typically considered a once-in-a-lifetime purchase, non-profit organizations depend on program participants' fees to stay afloat. It is therefore crucial for YFU to understand the factors that promote parental loyalty to ensure that the organization includes this understanding into its loyalty strategy. Repeat participation in youth exchange programs can greatly benefit non-profit organizations by increasing their stream of income.

This bachelor thesis aims to explore the factors that promote repeat participation in youth exchange programs among Finnish parents, specifically those who have sent multiple children on exchange with YFU Finland or have themselves been on exchange and have had one child on exchange. A qualitative research approach was used which involved conducting semi-structured interviews. The interviews aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence parental loyalty to YFU Finland and promote repeat participation in youth exchange programs. The research findings provide insights into the factors that promote repeat participation in youth exchange programs among Finnish parents, which is valuable for YFU Finland and other non-profit organizations offering similar programs.

This study holds significant value beyond the benefits that YFU Finland can reap from repeat participation. It addresses a significant gap in the literature, as it is one of the first to examine customer loyalty and repeat purchase behavior in a non-profit context, specifically within a once-in-a-lifetime purchase. This study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the importance of understanding customer behavior in non-profit organizations and provides a foundation for further research in this area, potentially expanding to other areas, such as the non-profit context, geography, or rare purchase types.

1.1 Problem statement

The thesis statement of this research is that understanding the factors that promote parental loyalty in repeat participation of youth exchange programs can provide valuable insights for non-profit organizations, on how to increase the number of families participating in their programs and maintain their engagement over time, especially in times of high competition. By keeping the existing customers, non-profit organizations can retain their loyal customer base and stand out in a highly competitive market. This research is in the scope of marketing and contributes to the literature on customer loyalty and retention strategies in rare purchases.

The research question is: *What are the triggers for parents to send multiple children on youth exchange programs with the same organization?*

The research objectives are:

- To analyze how the parents' experience of their own or the first child's exchange influenced the decision to send a (further) child on exchange with the same organization.
- To understand how the parents' experience with sending and/or receiving exchange organizations influenced the decision to send a (further) child on exchange with the same organization.

To answer these research question and objectives, a thorough literature review was conducted to establish the current state of research on customer loyalty, customer purchase decision-making and rare and education-related purchase, and to provide a theoretical framework for the study.

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the factors that promote parental loyalty in repeat participation of youth exchange programs. Specifically, the research aims to understand the triggers that lead parents to send multiple children on exchange programs with the same non-profit organization in Finland. The research focuses on the decision-making process of these parents, the role of their experience with their first child or their own exchange experience and the role of the non-profit organization in fostering parental loyalty. The research provides

valuable insights for non-profit organizations on how to increase the number of families participating in their programs and maintain their engagement over time.

1.3 Demarcation

The study is delimited to a non-profit youth exchange organization operating in Finland, specifically YFU Finland. The target group is parents who have sent multiple children on exchange programs with YFU Finland and parents who have previously participated in YFU Finland's exchange program themselves and send their child-ren on the same program.

The study is also limited to high school programs, including high school exchange, cultural immersion, and volunteer programs offered by the selected non-profit youth exchange organization in Finland. The focus is on understanding factors that promote repeat participation among parents who have sent multiple children on high school exchange programs with the organization.

Another demarcation is the focus on non-profit organizations. Unlike for-profit organizations, non-profit organizations rely on funding from donations, grants, and program participants fees. However, for repeated participation to occur, the parents must be willing to invest their time and resources into the program again. This research aims to uncover the reasons behind their loyalty to a non-profit organization.

Additionally, the research is delimited to the context of Finland. The cultural and societal differences between countries can have a significant impact on how customers make decisions. By focusing on a specific country, the research can provide insights that are applicable to that specific context.

1.4 Definitions

Further children: This term refers to refers to other children of the same parents who have already participated in an exchange program e.g., siblings of participants who have already been on a youth exchange program.

Youth exchange: This refers to a program in which young people travel to another country for a period of time to live with a host family, attend school, and experience a new culture. Youth exchanges can be organized by various organizations, such as non-profit groups, government agencies, and educational institutions.

Non-profit organization: An organization that is established for charitable, educational, religious, or other similar purposes and does not distribute profits to its members or shareholders.

Parental decision-making / parental customer loyalty: These terms refer to the role that parents play in making decisions about their child's participation in a youth exchange program. Parental decision-making could include factors such as the child's academic goals, the family's financial situation, and the parents' own experiences with travel and international education. Parental customer loyalty could refer to the extent to which parents continue to support the youth exchange organization or program over time, perhaps by referring to other families or having their own children going on exchange with the same organization.

Advantages of long-term exchanges for youngsters: This refers to the potential benefits that young people can gain from participating in a youth exchange program that lasts for an extended period of time, such as several months or a year. These advantages could include improved language skills, greater cultural awareness, enhanced personal growth and independence, and better academic performance.

1.5 Presentation of the company

YFU Finland (Suomen Youth For Understanding ry) is a non-profit organization that has been promoting and facilitating intercultural exchanges and understanding since 1965. The organization operates under the umbrella of Youth For Understanding International, a global network of independent non-profit organizations dedicated to promoting intercultural understanding and global competence. (YFU Finland, n.d. –a)

YFU Finland offers various programs for young people that put a strong emphasis on cultural immersion, including long-term high school exchanges for 15 to 18-year-olds and volunteer programs. Their long-term exchange programs last between four to twelve months, providing

youth with the opportunity to live with a host family and attend school in a foreign country while immersing themselves in a new culture and language. These exchange programs enable both Finnish and international students to experience life in a different country, develop cross-cultural relationships, and foster mutual understanding. YFU Finland is committed to providing a safe exchange experience that promotes personal growth, cultural awareness, and leadership development. (YFU Finland, n.d. –b)

YFU Finland is recognized for providing quality support to its participants and their families, and the organization has a thorough selection process and standards for host families. Annually, the organization facilitates numerous youth exchange programs for young people from Finland and various parts of the world, creating a positive impact on their lives and fostering greater global connections and understanding. (YFU Finland, n.d. –c)

Outbound Statistics	
Year	How many Outbounds left (All quarters)
2017	138
2018	144
2019	98
2020	44
2021	68
2022	69

Table 1 Historical data of Students going on exchange with YFU Finland 2017-2022

2 THEORY

This chapter begins by establishing a theoretical foundation for understanding customer loyalty, including a discussion of the triggers for loyalty and the strategies organizations use to foster it. The chapter then provides an overview of consumer purchase decision-making, with a particular focus on infrequent, once-in-a-lifetime purchases such as higher education. Overall, this chapter aims to provide a deep understanding of the theoretical frameworks and practical applications of customer loyalty and purchase decision-making in the context of youth exchange programs.

2.1 Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is based on several factors, such as customer satisfaction, trust, and commitments, which can influence repeat purchase behavior. Customer loyalty is a crucial element of business success, as it leads to repeat purchases, increased spending, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Kotler et al. (2016, p. 153) have identified various types of customer loyalty, including behavioral, attitudinal, transactional, brand, relationship, cognitive, cultural, and structural loyalty. Some studies (e.g., Oliver, 1999) suggest that all types of loyalty involve both behavioral and attitudinal components, challenging the notion of behavioral loyalty as a distinct type. Behavioral and attitudinal components are two important aspects of customer loyalty. The behavioral component refers to the customer's actual repeat purchase behavior, such as the frequency of purchases and the amount spent. On the other hand, the attitudinal component refers to the customer's emotional attachment and preference towards the brand or product, such as their satisfaction level, trust, commitment, and perceived value. Both components play a critical role in shaping customer loyalty. For example, Kotler & Keller (2016) say that customers may continue to make repeat purchases even if they are not entirely satisfied with the product or service due to a lack of viable alternatives or high switching costs, demonstrating behavioral loyalty. At the same time, customers who have developed a positive emotional connection with the brand or product may continue to make repeat purchases due to their genuine trust and preference, demonstrating attitudinal loyalty.

According to Kotler & Keller (2016), transactional loyalty stems from customers who are loyal due to incentives, while brand loyalty is associated with customers loyal to a specific brand or product line. Relationship loyalty emerges due to the personal connection customers have developed with the company or its employees. Cultural and structural loyalty results from alignment with customers' cultural identity or legal requirements, respectively. True loyalty is the result of genuine trust, while spurious loyalty is a consequence of the lack of options or high switching costs. Finally, latent loyalty represents customers who have a favorable attitude towards a brand or company but have not yet developed loyalty behaviors.

The Commitment-Trust Theory, proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994), has been proven effective in predicting customer loyalty in service contexts which suggests that customers' commitment to a company and their trust in its service quality are key factors in predicting customer loyalty. For example, a study by Tsai and Huang (2009) found that the theory was a

strong predictor of customer loyalty in the banking industry, while a study by Kim et al. (2004) found that the theory was effective in predicting customer loyalty in the airline industry. While this provides a valuable framework for understanding customer loyalty, it is important to note that the model is not without its limitations. Some researchers have argued that it may not be suitable for all industries and contexts, and that other factors, such as social influence, may also play a role in shaping customer loyalty (Ganesan, 1994; Johnson et al., 2006).

There is scarce research about customer loyalty in the non-profit context beyond donorships and volunteerism. However, Jeong's (2019) study provides valuable insights into the drivers of supporter loyalty in non-profit organizations, indicating that transparency and professionalism significantly influence trust, while service quality, communication, and performance have a strong effect on satisfaction. The study also suggests that building trust and satisfaction can positively influence each other and increase supporter loyalty. Despite the wealth of research on customer loyalty in other contexts, such as for-profit businesses, academia has yet to study customer loyalty in the context of non-profit youth exchange programs. These findings underscore the need for further research on customer loyalty in non-profit contexts beyond donorships and volunteerism, particularly in the context of non-profit youth exchange programs, to inform effective loyalty-building strategies.

2.2 Triggers for customer loyalty

Customer loyalty is an important aspect of business success, and understanding the triggers for loyalty can help organizations retain customers and build long-term relationships. Grönroos (1994) proposes that customer loyalty can be triggered by two main factors: service delivery and service outcome. Service delivery triggers refer to the quality-of-service delivery, including factors such as competence, courtesy, and responsiveness of service providers. Service outcome triggers, on the other hand, refer to the outcome of the service encounter, including factors such as the perceived value and satisfaction with the service. Grönroos (1994)

Research has supported the importance of these triggers for customer loyalty. Rust and Zahorik (1993) found that service quality was a key driver of customer loyalty, and that customers were more likely to be loyal when they perceived that service providers had high levels of competence and responsiveness.

In addition to Grönroos' triggers, other factors have been identified as contributing to customer loyalty. Oliver (1999) identifies customer satisfaction as a trigger for customer loyalty. Morgan and Hunt (1994) propose that trust and commitment are key drivers of true customer loyalty, and that trust is a crucial factor in building and maintaining customer loyalty. This model of Customer Loyalty in Service Contexts identifies three key factors that influence customer loyalty: satisfaction, commitment, and trust. Satisfaction is necessary but not sufficient to build customer loyalty; commitment involves a psychological attachment to the service provider, while trust is the customer's belief that the provider will act in their best interest. Service quality, defined as the customer's overall evaluation of the service, can influence satisfaction, trust, and commitment. According to Oliver (1999), while the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty is well-established, it is important to consider external factors such as situational and competitive contexts that may influence customer loyalty. Oliver suggests that loyalty is a multi-dimensional construct that includes both attitudinal and behavioral components, and that it can be influenced by both internal and external factors.

Perceived value is another trigger that can contribute to customer loyalty (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Zeithaml (1988) defines perceived value as "the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given." When customers perceive that they are receiving a high level of value from a business, they are more likely to continue doing business with the company, which can lead to true loyalty. Similarly, Cronin and Taylor (1992) found that perceived value was a key driver of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Overall, customer loyalty is a complex and multifaceted concept that can be influenced by a range of factors. The identification and understanding of these key triggers can provide businesses with valuable insights into how to build and maintain customer loyalty. By working to deliver high-quality services that meet customer needs and expectations, businesses can foster long-term loyalty and sustainable success.

2.3 Organizations' customer loyalty strategies

Customer loyalty is an essential aspect of business success as it can help organizations retain customers and build long-term relationships. It is very expensive to acquire a new customer rather than to retain an existing customer (Kotler & Keller, 2016 p. 163). As mentioned earlier,

there are several factors that trigger customer loyalty, including, but not limited to, service delivery, service outcome, customer satisfaction, trust, and commitment. However, organizations must manage these triggers in a way that is thought through in order to reap the benefits of those customer loyalty triggers. Customer-relationship management is a marketing strategy that focuses on using information about current customers to nurture and maintain strong relationships with them. This chapter explores various customer loyalty strategies, including reward programs, personalized experiences, exceptional customer service, community building, continuous engagement, and quality products or services.

Scholars have identified seven customer loyalty strategies explained as follows:

Reward programs

Reward programs are designed to offer customers incentives such as discounts, free items, or exclusive access to events or products based on their loyalty to the company. These programs can be implemented in various ways, such as point systems, tiered rewards, or surprise rewards. Studies have shown that reward programs are effective in increasing customer loyalty by providing a sense of value and recognition (Chen et al., 2021). In addition, reward programs can also encourage customers to make repeat purchases and increase their overall spending (Bolton et al., 2000).

Personalizing customer experiences

This can increase customer loyalty by making customers feel valued and understood. This can include personalized emails, product recommendations, and targeted marketing. Personalization can be achieved by collecting and analyzing customer data, such as purchase history and preferences. Studies have shown that personalized experiences can lead to increased customer loyalty, satisfaction, and trust. (Chen & Barnes, 2007)

Providing exceptional customer service

It can foster a strong emotional connection with customers, leading to increased loyalty. Exceptional customer service can include factors such as prompt responses, effective problem-solving, and personalized interactions. Studies have shown that customer service quality is a key driver of customer loyalty (Rust & Zahorik, 1993; Verhoef et al., 2009). In addition, providing exceptional customer service can also increase customer satisfaction, trust, and word-of-mouth recommendations (De Ruyter et al., 2001).

Building a community

Building a community around a brand can increase customer loyalty by creating a sense of belonging and shared values. Community building can be achieved through social media, events, or forums where customers can interact with each other and with the brand. Studies have shown that community building can increase customer engagement, loyalty, and advocacy (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In addition, building a community can also provide businesses with valuable insights into customer needs and preferences (Mollen & Wilson, 2010).

Consistent engagement

Consistent engagement with customers through social media, email newsletters, or other channels can help maintain a strong relationship and increase customer loyalty. Continuous engagement can include factors such as providing relevant content, responding to customer inquiries, and offering exclusive promotions. Studies have shown that continuous engagement can lead to increased customer retention, loyalty, and satisfaction (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Schmitt & Zhang, 2018). In addition, continuous engagement can also increase brand awareness and customer lifetime value (Kietz, 2021).

Providing high-quality products or services

Providing high-quality products or services is essential for building customer loyalty. If customers consistently receive high-quality products or services, they are more likely to continue doing business with the company. Research has shown that customer satisfaction is strongly linked to loyalty (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Rust & Zahorik, 1993). In addition, providing quality products or services can lead to positive word-of-mouth recommendations and increased brand reputation, further strengthening customer loyalty (Kumar et al., 2007).

Customer feedback and communication

Encouraging customer feedback and communication can be an effective way to build customer loyalty. By actively listening to customer concerns and addressing them promptly, businesses can show customers that their opinions are valued and that the company is committed to meeting their needs. This can lead to increased trust and satisfaction, which can in turn strengthen customer loyalty. (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) In addition, communication can help businesses understand customer preferences and tailor their products or services to better meet those preferences (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

To conclude, there are numerous strategies that businesses can use to encourage and maintain customer loyalty. Reward programs, personalized experiences, exceptional customer service, community building, continuous engagement, quality products or services, and feedback and communication are all effective strategies that can help businesses foster long-term relationships with customers. As research shows, focusing on these strategies and understanding the factors that drive customer loyalty, businesses can increase customer retention, boost revenue, and achieve sustainable success in the long run (Reichfeld, 1996).

2.4 Consumer purchase decision-making

Consumer purchase decision-making is a complex process that involves several stages including problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012, p. 152-154). Consumers may use different decision-making processes depending on various factors such as the type of product, level of involvement, personal characteristics, and situational factors. This section explores the various factors that influence consumer purchase decision-making and the different decision-making processes used by consumers. Figure 1 shows the decision-making process according to Kotler & Armstrong (2012)

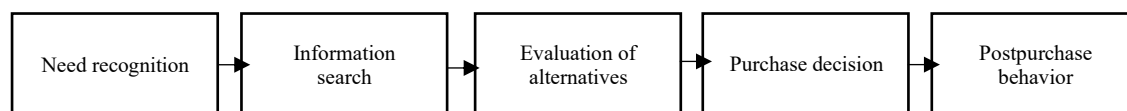


Figure 1 Buyer Decision Process by Kotler & Armstrong (2012 p. 152)

Problem or Need recognition is the first stage of the consumer purchase decision-making process. It occurs when a consumer perceives a need or a problem that can be solved through a purchase. The need or problem can be triggered by internal stimuli such as hunger or thirst, or external stimuli such as advertisements or recommendations from friends (Solomon et al., 2019). Once the consumer has recognized a problem or need, the next stage is information search. The consumer may search for information internally, such as recalling past experiences with the product or service, or externally, such as searching for information online or asking for recommendations from others. The amount of information search depends on the level of involvement and the perceived risk associated with the purchase (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012).

After gathering information, the consumer evaluates the different alternatives available. The evaluation process involves comparing the features and benefits of each alternative and assessing how well they can satisfy the consumer's needs and preferences. The consumer may use various decision-making rules, such as heuristics or decision criteria, to simplify the evaluation process (Solomon et al., 2019). After evaluating the alternatives, the consumer makes the purchase decision. The decision can be influenced by various factors, such as the availability of the product, the price, the brand image, and the social influence of others (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Following the purchase, the consumer evaluates the satisfaction level with the product or service. If the product or service meets or exceeds the consumer's expectations, it results in positive post-purchase evaluation, which can lead to repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. However, if the product or service fails to meet the consumer's expectations, it can result in negative post-purchase evaluation and lead to customer dissatisfaction and even customer defection (Solomon et al., 2019).

Several factors influence the consumer purchase decision-making process. One of the critical factors is the level of involvement of the consumer. High-involvement purchases, such as buying a car, a house, or a higher education, require extensive information search and evaluation of alternatives. On the other hand, low-involvement purchases, such as buying a pack of gum, may require minimal information search and evaluation of alternatives (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Personal factors, such as age, income, personality, and lifestyle, can also influence the consumer purchase decision-making process.

For example, younger consumers may be more likely to buy trendy products, while older consumers may be more concerned with quality and durability. In addition, situational factors, such as the time of day, mood, and location, can also influence consumer purchase decision-making (Solomon et al., 2019). Culture and social factors also play a significant role in consumer purchase decision-making. Culture shapes consumers' values, beliefs, and attitudes towards products and services. Social influence from family, friends, and other reference groups can also influence consumer purchase decision-making, particularly for high-involvement purchases (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). While this model is widely accepted by academia, some scholars have argued that problem recognition should not always be the first stage. In a study published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* in 2018, researchers proposed an alternative framework called the "Needs-Based Model," which suggests that the

initial stage of the purchase decision-making process is based on consumers' fundamental needs, rather than problem recognition (Haws et al., 2018).

Another alternative model is the Consumer Decision Journey model proposed by Court et al. (2009). The Consumer Decision Journey model suggests that the purchase decision-making process is not a linear process, but rather a circular process that includes four stages: initial consideration, active evaluation, closure, and post-purchase. This model illustrated in Figure 2, considers the role of customer experience and advocacy in the decision-making process and emphasizes the importance of building relationships with customers beyond the point of purchase (Court et al., 2009).

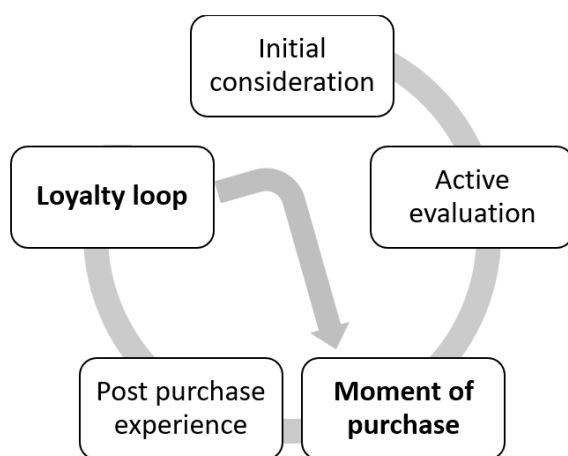


Figure 2 Decision-making Process adapted from Court et al. (2009)

The first stage is the "Initial Consideration Set," where a consumer becomes aware of a particular product or service category and begins to consider options within that category. This stage is typically triggered by a need or a desire, and consumers may use various sources of information to generate a list of potential options. The second stage is the "Active Evaluation" stage, where consumers research and evaluate the options in their consideration set. This stage often involves online research, such as reading reviews and comparing prices, but may also include seeking advice from friends and family, visiting physical stores, or trying out products.

The third stage is the "Moment of Purchase," where the consumer makes a decision to buy a particular product or service. At this stage, consumers may be influenced by factors such as price, availability, and brand reputation. The fourth stage is the "Post-purchase Experience," where the consumer evaluates their decision and experiences with the product or service. This stage can be critical in building brand loyalty, as positive experiences can lead to repeat

purchases and word-of-mouth recommendations. The final stage is the "Loyalty Loop," where the consumer enters into a relationship with the brand and becomes a repeat customer. This stage is characterized by ongoing interactions with the brand, including additional purchases, customer service interactions, and advocacy.

Given the complexity of the consumer purchase decision-making process, companies must understand the factors that influence consumers' decision-making and tailor their marketing and retention strategies accordingly. This can involve creating targeted marketing campaigns that appeal to specific demographic groups, using persuasive messaging and branding, providing clear and accurate product information, and creating a positive post-purchase experience. By understanding and addressing consumers' decision-making processes, companies can increase their chances of success and build long-term relationships with customers.

2.5 Once-in-a-lifetime education-related purchase

The "Once-in-a-lifetime purchase" refers to products or services that are considered rare, expensive, and important, and are usually purchased only once in a person's lifetime. In the context of higher education, the decision to pursue a degree is often considered a once-in-a-lifetime purchase. For example, the decision to enroll in a university or college, choose a major, and pay tuition and fees are all part of this decision-making process. The theory suggests that customers are more likely to engage in extensive information search and evaluation processes when making a once-in-a-lifetime purchase and may also be more influenced by external factors such as social norms and advice from friends and family. (Yang et al., 2019)

The literature about once-in-a-lifetime purchase suggests that consumers are highly selective and cautious when making a purchase that is perceived as a one-time event in their lifetime (Yang et al., 2019). A study by Rook and Fisher (1995) provides further support for the idea that consumers have different decision-making processes for once-in-a-lifetime purchases compared to routine purchases. The study found that consumers use more emotion-based strategies and rely more on personal values and goals when making once-in-a-lifetime purchases. In contrast, consumers use more rational-based strategies and rely more on price and quality considerations when making routine purchases. Once-in-a-lifetime purchases often

involve a high level of personal investment and may have long-term implications, making consumers more careful and cautious in their decision-making.

This concept is relevant for youth exchanges as these are generally services that a person buys once-in-a-lifetime and generally for one's own child, as it is rare for a child to purchase such a thing for him- or herself. Additionally, the theory suggests that consumers may rely on reputation and past experiences to guide their decision-making when it comes to such significant purchases as the decision may involve significant financial investment and emotional considerations, such as concerns about the safety and well-being of their child in a foreign country. Thus, the once-in-a-lifetime purchase theory may help explain the decision-making process of parents in the context of youth exchange programs. The literature suggests that consumers are highly selective and cautious when making a purchase that is perceived as a one-time event in their lifetime. Therefore, parents who have had positive experiences with an organization in the past may be more likely to send their other children on youth exchange programs with the same organization, further highlighting the relevance of the once-in-a-lifetime purchase theory in the context of the research question. (Yang et al., 2019)

In the context of youth exchange programs, research has shown that parents may perceive the decision to send their children as risky or uncertain, and emotional factors may also play a role in their decision-making process (Lee, 2018). Two other studies have shown that parents play a major role in their children's educational decisions, including their decision to study abroad. According to a study by Maulana (2017), 90% of parents in the Higher Education sector reported playing a major role in their children's collegiate decision, and 65% of international students surveyed stated that their parents were the ones who made decisions about the program and host country. Furthermore, the influence of parents on the students' intention to study abroad was apparent. The study also revealed that family influence can be in the form of finance, information, expectation, persuasion, and competition, as argued by Pimpa (2003) in a study on Thai students' choices of international education. These findings highlight the significant influence of family, specifically parents, on education-related purchases, such as study abroad programs (Maulana, 2017; Pimpa, 2003).

3 METHOD

In this chapter, the research methods used in the empirical part of the study are presented. The choice of method is crucial in ensuring that the research questions are answered effectively and accurately. According to Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 41 & 546), research methods are techniques that are used to collect and analyze data to answer research questions.

In this research, a qualitative approach was employed, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of parents who have sent multiple children on exchange programs with the same non-profit organization. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, and saturation was achieved when no new data provided additional insights. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to ensure consistency in data collection while allowing for flexibility in exploring areas of interest. This method was appropriate for answering the research questions and helped to increase the validity and reliability of the data collected. In the following subsections, argumentation as to why those methods were preferred is explained. Figure# shows the method choice and subsections of this chapter.

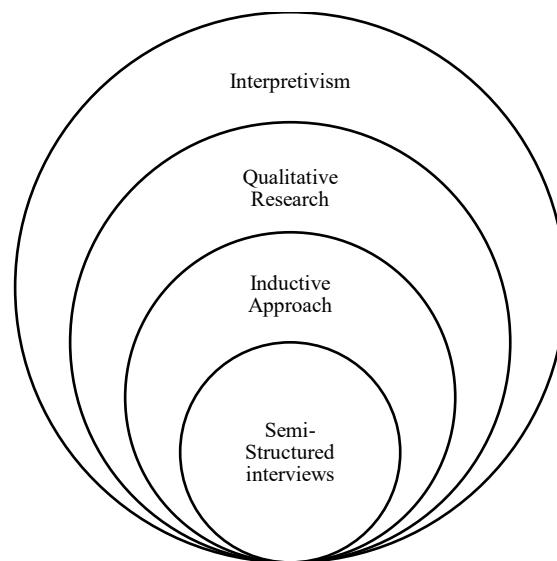


Figure 3 Research onion of this research. Adapted from Saunders et al. (2012, p.128)

3.1 Research philosophy and approach

Eriksson & Kovalainen (2015) identified various philosophical positions used by business researchers to guide their research interests, including Positivism, Postpositivism, Critical Realism, Interpretivism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism, and Post-Structuralism. Among these,

the researcher argues that interpretivism is the most suitable approach for investigating the triggers for parents to send multiple children on exchange programs.

Hermeneutics, Positivism and postpositivism are not appropriate philosophical positions for this study since they assume that there is a fixed reality that can be objectively measured and observed. These perspectives may be more appropriate for studies that aim to challenge dominant narratives and deconstruct power structures rather than investigate subjective meanings and triggers for parental decision-making in sending multiple children on exchange programs. However, the triggers for parents to send multiple children on exchange programs are subjective and cannot be reduced to mere objective measurements. Critical Realism, which combines positivist and constructionist thinking, is also not applicable since it seeks to identify the structures of the world, which is not the focus of this research. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015)

In contrast, interpretivism approach is concerned with subjective and shared meanings of human actions and events (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2015, Saunders et al., 2012, p.137). This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding and interpreting the subjective meanings of individuals and intersubjective processes that constitute seemingly objective features. They do not predefine dependent and independent variables, but rather focus on the complexity of human sense-making as situations emerge. These philosophical positions recognize that human experiences are shaped by multiple social and cultural factors, which are context-specific and cannot be easily reduced to objective measures (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015).

Therefore, an interpretive research approach is particularly relevant for studying the triggers for parents to send multiple children on exchange programs, as these triggers are likely to be shaped by complex and context-specific factors such as family dynamics, cultural values, and personal experiences.

The research approach was qualitative. It is a research method that uses non-numeric data to explore and understand social phenomena in depth. It involves collecting and analyzing data through a variety of techniques, such as interviews, focus groups, observation, and document analysis, to gain insight into the experiences, beliefs, and perspectives of the research participants. The purpose of qualitative research can vary, and it can be explanatory, exploratory, descriptive, evaluative, or a combination of these. Explanatory research seeks to

understand the reasons behind a particular phenomenon, while exploratory research aims to explore a new area or generate new ideas. Descriptive research aims to describe and summarize the characteristics of a particular phenomenon, while evaluative research assesses the effectiveness or impact of a particular intervention or program. (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 161-172)

In the case of this study, the purpose is exploratory because it is researching something that has not been researched before. The study seeks to explore the triggers that lead parents to send multiple children on exchange programs and gain a deeper understanding of their decision-making process. The qualitative research approach is well-suited to this purpose as it allows for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study and provides rich, detailed data that can reveal insights into the experiences and perspectives of the research participants.

3.2 Inductive Approach

In research, there are three main approaches to generating knowledge: inductive, deductive, and abductive. Each of these approaches has different strengths and weaknesses and is suitable for different research questions and contexts. Deductive reasoning involves starting with a general theory or hypothesis and testing it against empirical data to see if it holds true. This approach is often used in quantitative research, where researchers aim to test a specific hypothesis and make predictions based on established theories. Inductive reasoning, on the other hand, involves collecting and analyzing empirical data to develop new theories or insights. This approach is often used in qualitative research, where researchers aim to understand complex social phenomena and uncover new perspectives and interpretations of reality. Abductive reasoning is a hybrid of deductive and inductive reasoning and involves starting with an observation or set of data and then developing a hypothesis to explain it. This approach is particularly useful when existing theories or explanations do not fully account for the observed phenomenon. (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 144-145)

In this study, the use of an inductive approach over a deductive approach was chosen, because this allowed for a more flexible and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 146). Deduction, with its emphasis on hypothesis testing and cause-and-effect relationships, may be too rigid for a complex social phenomenon like parental decision-making (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 146). Instead, an inductive approach helped to

explore the different factors that may be influencing parents' decisions in a more open-ended way.

Additionally, an inductive approach is particularly suited to studying the social world, as it allows for a more contextualized understanding of human behavior (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 146). By focusing on the experiences and perceptions of parents, it was possible to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that are driving their decision-making. This is particularly important in a study of parental loyalty, which may be influenced by a range of factors beyond simply the characteristics of the exchange program or organization. Figure 4 shows the structure used.

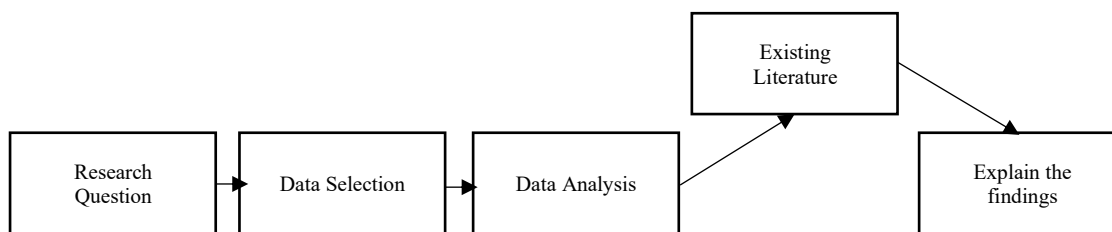


Figure 4 Research approach adapted from the Grounded Theory (Bryman, 2011, p.580)

3.3 Interview method

For this study, a semi-structured interview style was used. This paragraph presents the different types of qualitative interviews and the reasons of this choice.

Qualitative interviewing allows for a flexible and less structured approach that emphasizes the interviewee's perspective and can yield rich, detailed answers, also allows for follow-up questions that can lead to a deeper understanding of the research topic (Bryman, 2012, p. 470). Bryman (2012, p. 205) lists the following interview types: Structured, Standardized, Semi-structured, Unstructured, Intensive, In-depth, Focused, and Focus group. When deciding on the type of qualitative interview and questions to use, it is important to consider the research approach and questions at hand, and to recognize that interviews can be a useful means of gathering information that is not readily available in other sources, each offering different degrees of direction and flexibility in the questioning process (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015).

The unstructured and intensive interviews lack the structure and direction required to collect specific data, while in-depth interviews may be too time-consuming for the scope of the study. The focused interview, focus group, and group interview are not applicable as the research

topic does not pertain to a specific situation or event but rather a process, nor does it involve group discussions.

Therefore, the use of a semi-structured interview was chosen. It ensured that the researcher could explore participants' perspectives while maintaining consistency in data collection. Semi-structured interviews are adapted to identify triggers for parents to send multiple children on youth exchange programs with the same organization because they provide a pre-designed outline of topics, issues, or themes while allowing for variation in the wording and order of questions, making it possible to cover all relevant topics while also probing for more in-depth responses (Bryman, 2012, p.471).

3.4 Participants

In this study, nine interviews took place. In this part, the selection and choice of participant is explained.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), purposive sampling is particularly useful when the research aims to explore a specific phenomenon or group of individuals, as it can help ensure that the sample is representative of the population of interest. In addition, the use of purposive sampling can help increase the validity and reliability of the data collected, as it allows the researcher to select participants who are most likely to provide relevant and insightful information (Patton, 2015).

For those reasons, parents who have sent one or more children on exchange programs with YFU Finland were invited to participate in an interview. An invitation (Appendix 1) was sent to 253 parents that had a kid on exchange 2020-2022. The criteria for the selection of interviewees were as follows:

- At least two children have gone on exchange (Group 1)
- OR
- They've been themselves on exchange with YFU and have at least one child that has been on exchange. (Group 2)

It was important to ensure that the sample was sufficient to answer the research question. As stated earlier, the sample size of this study was of nine and the reasons are, on one hand, the

time constrains to lead and analyze the interviews, and on the other, the scarcity of parents that fit the criteria and agreed to be interviewed. It is to be noted that I4 was attended by two parents and I8 and I9 were parents of the same child yet, interviewed separately.

Interviewee	Was on exchange	Had two kids on exchange	Group
I1	No	Yes	1
I2	Yes	No	2
I3	No	Yes	1
I4	No	Yes	1
I5	Yes	No	2
I6	Yes	Yes	2
I7	Yes	No	2
I8	Yes	No	2
I9	Yes	No	2

Table 2 Interviewees Sample Grouping

The table below displays the number of parents of Finnish students that were invited to participate to an interview along with the historical data of the past six years.

Interview invitation sent to Parents by YFU Finland			
Year	Parents Reached	How many were themselves on exchange?	How many sent a second child?
2021-2022	134	17	9
2020-2021	119		

Table 3 Interview invitation- Mailing outreach

3.5 Interview guide

An interview guide is a tool used in qualitative research to ensure that the same topics are covered in each interview while allowing for flexibility in exploring the participant's unique perspectives and experiences. The interview guide typically consists of a set of open-ended questions that are developed based on the theoretical framework and research questions of the study. The use of an interview guide ensures consistency in data collection while allowing for flexibility in exploring areas of interest. The questions in the interview guide should have a connection to the theoretical framework and research questions of the study and should be designed to provide answers to those research questions. (Greener, 2008, p. 90)

In this study, a semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework and the research questions of the study. The interview guide includes both leading

questions (LQs) and supporting questions (SQs). The LQs are designed to directly address the research question and provide more in-depth information about the triggers that led parents to choose the same exchange organization for their multiple children. The SQs, on the other hand, are designed to support the LQs and provide more context and information about the decision-making process and the parents' experiences with the exchange organization.

The interview guide is divided into five main sections: Introduction, Decision-making process (HOW), Experience with sending organization (HOW), Experience with receiving organization (HOW), and Triggers (WHAT). Each section contains LQs and SQs that are relevant to the section's topic.

- The Introduction section provides background information and sets the tone for the rest of the interview.
- The Decision-making process (HOW) section focuses on the parents' decision-making process and how they came to choose the same exchange organization for their multiple children.
- The Experience with sending organization (HOW) section focuses on the parents' experience with the exchange organization before, during, and after their child's exchange program.
- The Experience with receiving organization (HOW) section focuses on the parents' experience with the receiving organization abroad during their own exchange program.
- The Triggers (WHAT) section focuses on the key factors that led the parents to choose the same exchange organization for their multiple children.

The interview guide was designed to facilitate the understanding of the underlying factors that motivated parents to send multiple children to exchange programs with the same non-profit organization. It also helped to explore how the parents' experience of the first child's exchange influenced the decision to send a further child on exchange with the same organization and how the parents' experience with sending and/or receiving exchange organizations influenced the decision to send a further child on exchange with the same organization. The specific questions that were asked during the interviews are available in Appendix 3 and 4.

3.6 Research Process

To conduct the study, nine interviews were carried out remotely using Microsoft Teams from April 6th to April 16th, 2023. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and included parents who have sent multiple children on exchange programs with YFU Finland or have been on exchange themselves and had at least one child on exchange. The interviews were audio and video recorded using an automatic transcription feature and were subsequently transcribed manually and anonymized. The qualitative data collected through the interviews was analyzed using an interpretive research approach to gain a deep understanding of the parents' experiences and perspectives.

3.7 Analysis of the data

Qualitative research generates a large amount of data in the form of prose, such as field notes, interview transcripts, or documents, which can be challenging to analyze. Unlike the well-established rules for analyzing quantitative data, there are few established rules for analyzing qualitative data, making it difficult for researchers to find a path through the thicket of prose that makes up their data. Thematic analysis is one of the most common ways of approaching qualitative data analysis. However, it is not an approach that has an identifiable heritage or has been outlined in terms of a distinctive cluster of techniques. Nonetheless, thematic analysis involves breaking down the data into smaller segments and identifying significant themes that can help give the data wider significance for the business and management community. (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 571-572)

In order to analyze the research question and sub questions regarding the triggers for parents to send multiple children on youth exchange programs with the same organization, the author utilized grounded theory as a research tool. Grounded theory is an inductive research method used to create new theories from acquired data (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 577), and in this case, the aim was to create a theory about the decision-making process of parents when it comes to sending multiple children on exchange programs with the same organization. As shown in Figure 4, the theory that answered the research questions was derived from both the collected data and the existing literature about the topic, thus being supported and explained by both sources.

The analysis process consisted of three phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 578). During the open coding phase, the collected data was broken down into smaller segments to identify significant concepts and themes. Then, during axial coding, the researcher connected the dots between the categories identified in the open coding phase to create new categories and understand the cause-effect relationship. This phase involved linking codes to contexts, consequences, patterns of interaction, and allowed exploring a broader view of the research question. (Appendix 5)

Finally, during the selective coding phase, the researcher identified the core category that addressed the research questions with proper data to support the conclusions. This was done by finding the prevalent theme in the analyzed material and then drawing conclusions and analyzes. By identifying the core category, the researcher was able to pinpoint where the possible problem lies and draw appropriate conclusions.

The analysis process using grounded theory allowed the researcher to identify significant themes related to the triggers for parents to send multiple children on youth exchange programs with the same organization. By breaking down the data into smaller segments and identifying significant themes, the researcher was able to draw appropriate conclusions and answer the research questions with proper data that supported the conclusions. The analysis and relationship between the themes and topics are discussed in the results chapter.

3.8 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are two important concepts in research methodology that are essential for ensuring the quality and credibility of research findings. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately measures or examines the concept it claims to be measuring or examining. Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the consistency and stability of a measure or method of data collection over time and across different conditions. These two concepts are crucial in ensuring that research results are trustworthy and can be used to make informed decisions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In this study, several measures were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected. To ensure validity, the study was designed based on a thorough review of relevant literature, and the research questions were formulated to address the specific research

objectives. To ensure the reliability of the data collected, several measures were taken. First, the same interview guide was used for all participants in each group, to ensure that they were asked the same questions in the same order. Second, the interviews were conducted by the same interviewer to minimize inter-rater variability. Lastly, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure that the data was accurately captured and could be analyzed systematically. (Flick, 2018)

The measures taken in this study are consistent with best practices for ensuring the validity and reliability of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While there are inherent limitations to qualitative research, such as subjectivity and potential bias, the measures taken in this study help to mitigate these limitations and increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

It is be noted that the researcher worked for a sister organization active in Switzerland and its pre-knowledge of the organization from the inside might have affected the interpretation of the results.

3.9 Ethics

The researcher considered the ethical implications of their research and took measures to ensure that the study is conducted in a responsible and respectful manner. One of the key considerations was confidentiality and anonymization of data, which involved protecting the privacy of research participants by ensuring that their personal information was not disclosed to unauthorized parties (TENK, 2021). Careful storage of data was also crucial, as it ensures that the data is/was kept secure and accessible only to authorized personnel (Arcada, 2022a).

Another important consideration was ensuring that the data collected accurately represents the population being studied. Additionally, the interviews were designed and transcribed to ensure compliance with GDPR regulations, which involved obtaining informed consent from participants (Appendix 2), ensuring that the transcripts of the interviews were kept secure (EU GDPR, 2016).

Finally, designing the interview guide was also an important consideration in research-ethical considerations. The questions were clear and easy to understand, avoiding any potentially

sensitive or invasive questions (Arcada, 2022b). By taking these ethical considerations into account, it was ensured that their study was conducted in a responsible and respectful manner, while also generating valid and reliable findings.

4 RESULTS

These interviews ranged in length from 32 to 68 minutes and shed light on several key themes. One important theme that emerged was how parents became familiar with the organization, whether through personal experiences with hosting or going on exchange themselves, or through family and friend connections. Another theme was the parents' experiences with both sending and hosting organizations and how these experiences influenced their decision to choose YFU. Additionally, the study explored the deciding factors or triggers that led parents to decide to send their children on exchange, as well as differences between parents who had been on exchange themselves and those who had not. Out of the nine interviews, three were conducted with parents who had sent two kids on exchange (Group 1: Interviews 1, 3 and 4), while the remaining 6 interviews (Group 2: Interviews 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) were with parents who had been on exchange themselves with YFU and sent their children with the same organization.

4.1 Familiarization with the organization

In exploring the factors that led parents to choose YFU to send their children on exchange, a common theme emerged: familiarization with the organization. The study found that all of the parents interviewed had some prior knowledge or experience with YFU before deciding to send their own children on exchange. This familiarity gave them a sense of comfort and trust in the organization, making it easier for them to make a decision. In this section, the various ways in which parents got to know about YFU are explored in detail, including through family connections, online research, recommendations from friends and acquaintances or being an exchange student themselves.

For some interviewees, their own parents hosted exchange students when the parents were younger (I3, I5). This experience gave the parents firsthand exposure to YFU and the exchange program. As a result, they had a positive impression of the organization and later considered YFU when deciding to send their own children on exchange. The positive experience of hosting

an exchange student left a lasting impression on the parents and influenced their decision to send their own children on exchange with YFU.

"My family hosted an exchange student from Texas when I was about 13 years old. We got to know the organization by accident, and it was a really nice experience to have her at our place. When my kids were of that age, I recommended YFU to them because of my good impression of the organization based on my background." I3

In some cases (I6, I7), the interviewed parents had siblings who had participated in YFU's exchange program and had positive experiences, which made the parents consider YFU when deciding to send their own children on exchange. Having a family member who had gone on exchange and who had positive experiences on exchange can be great advocates for YFU. As one parent explained, their family became a "YFU family" because of the positive experiences their older siblings had on exchange. The organization's ability to provide a positive exchange experience for multiple family members over several years helped build trust and confidence in the organization.

"We are a YFU family. It started in 1977 when one of my sisters went to the US as an exchange student. Then, my other sister went the next year. Everything was handled so well that my parents trusted the organization, and I went in 81-82. Looking back, the positive vibe about the organization was that they really cared and showed it. We didn't even think about other options that much for my daughter, it was going to be YFU." I7

For one, a family member such as a cousin (of the parents) went on exchange, and this experience served as a reference point for parents when considering the program for their own children.

"My aunt's cousin was with YFU about 15 years ago and had a positive experience. She recommended YFU to us when my son wanted to go on an exchange program. We sent my son to America with YFU and it went well, so we also sent our daughter to Italy with YFU. YFU was all positives."I4

"I think the reason why they came through YFU was because my father's cousin's wife had been a YFU student. She had told my dad about YFU and that's why it got selected, first to host students and then for me to go on exchange. I don't think my parents even thought of any other organizations."I5

For some parents, they were the first ones in their family to go on exchange and had to do their own research and exploration of the program and organization (I2, I8). This process involved researching different organizations and weighing the pros and cons of each. As one parent explained:

"I think I chose the organization myself when I went on exchange. I was the one who ordered all the brochures and compared the differences between the organizations, and I guess with YFU I felt that the balance between the price and the content was the best. I like the idea of YFU being a nonprofit organization and the support that was offered throughout the year. And I had the pre-departure orientation."I8

Finally, one parent knew someone from their childhood or youth who was on exchange, and this experience stuck with them into adulthood. As one parent noted,

“When I was a teen, one of my closest friends used YFU to go to the States. This was my first introduction to the organization. Even though my family's history with YFU is very short, this reference gave me confidence in the organization.”¹¹

These experiences are significant because it highlights the role that personal experience, recommendations and positive word-of-mouth can play in shaping parents' decisions to send their children on exchange. By having a family member who has gone on exchange and had a positive experience with YFU, parents are more likely to trust the organization and consider it as an option for their own children. This type of personal connection and recommendation can be incredibly powerful in influencing decisions and building trust with potential exchange families.

4.2 Experience with Sending and Hosting organizations

During the interviews, interviewees discussed their experiences with YFU as a sending and hosting organization, including those who sent their kids during the COVID pandemic, which made the exchange experience and experience with the sending and receiving organization different than before the pandemic. One aspect that was consistently mentioned was YFU's extensive experience in the field, spanning over 60 years. This experience instilled a sense of trust and professionalism in the organization, with many parents believing that YFU would be able to handle and support their children in case of any problems, including those related to the pandemic.

Another factor that was highlighted by six parents was the non-profit nature of YFU, with a focus on the well-being of the children rather than financial gain. Participants appreciated that YFU utilized unpaid families and had a clear mission and purpose, as expressed by the organization's founder, Rachel Anderson¹.

Price was also mentioned by four parents, noting that the cost of the program was a factor in their decision-making process. However, they acknowledged that the price reflected the comprehensive support provided by YFU, including pre-departure training, ongoing support,

¹ Mission statement: YFU advances intercultural understanding, life-long learning, global competencies, mutual respect, and social responsibility through transformational educational exchanges for generations of youth, families, and communities, supported by dedicated volunteers and professional staff.

and insurance coverage and was in the same range as what other providers in the market were asking for making this aspect not a key deciding factor.

The long-term nature of the program, with the child staying with one host family for an extended period of time, was also seen as a positive by many parents. They believed that this allowed for a deeper cultural immersion and the development of long-term relationships.

4.2.1 YFU Finland

Sending their child on an exchange program can be a daunting task for parents, especially if it is their first time. Two key themes emerged as important throughout the interviews:

- Overall good experience with the sending organization, either from their own exchange or the exchange of their first child.
- Information sessions for parents.

Good experience with the sending organization was a crucial factor for seven parents when choosing YFU Finland as the organization to send their children on exchange. This positive experience included helpful and friendly service, a smooth process, good preparation, and familiarity with the organization. Parents who had previous experience with YFU as exchange students or had hosted an exchange student, in particular, found the process to be familiar and comfortable.

"We were in contact via email, and it was good. They always answered our questions right away, although there were no problems." I4

"Communication has always been easy, and we received prompt answers to any questions we had, no matter what was on our mind. [...] It was well organized, and we were informed about what we had to do and how to prepare. There were difficulties with visas, but YFU took care of it and found a solution. I don't have anything to compare it to, but it was as good as it has to be, and I wasn't expecting anything better." I9

In addition to good experience, YFU Finland's information sessions for parents were a significant factor in parents' positive experience with the sending organization. These sessions were designed to provide parents with detailed information about the exchange program, including the application process, the host family selection process, and the support provided by YFU during the exchange program. Parents who attended these sessions found them to be informative and professional, which increased their confidence and feeling of safety in the organization.

"There was one person who was really, really good. She could explain everything, and because they were in the parent meeting, there were some parents who were panicking and she answered them really clearly and in a good way. She was really experienced, really professional, and she knew what she was doing and what she was saying." I3

Furthermore, YFU Finland's preparation process was seen as comprehensive and beneficial by parents. This process included pre-departure orientation for both parents and exchange students, which provided them with essential information about the exchange program, the host family, and the culture of the destination country. Parents felt that this preparation process was essential in ensuring that their child had a positive experience on exchange, and they appreciated YFU Finland's efforts to provide this support. Some of the parents that have been on exchange themselves highlighted how important YFU Finland played a role, also after their own exchange, especially the post-exchange seminar and support which was qualified as "essential in tackling the reverse culture shock".

On another note, most parents (5) mentioned that contacts with YFU Finland during their kid's exchange would have been appreciated. They would have appreciated more communication during and after the exchange of their kids.

"I thought there would be some sort of contact with YFU once my child was abroad, but there was none. There was a lot of contact before the exchange, with applications and training, but then it was like nothing. I expected that there would be something for the parents who are here suffering while their kid is abroad." I1

By providing a positive experience for parents, YFU Finland was able to build trust and confidence in the organization, making it easier for parents to make the decision to send their child on exchange with YFU Finland.

	YFU Finland's Service quality	YFU Finland's Customer Service	YFU Finland's Community	YFU Finland's Reputation
Interviewee 1	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Interviewee 2	No	Yes	No	No
Interviewee 3	Yes	No	Yes	No
Interviewee 4	Yes	Yes	?	?
Interviewee 5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interviewee 6	Yes	No	Yes	No
Interviewee 7	Yes	?	No	Yes
Interviewee 8	Yes	No	Yes	No
Interviewee 9	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Table 4 Results YFU Finland's impact to decision

Service quality:

“The decision of trusting an organization with your child for ten months is a crucial one and the service quality is of utmost importance. This differs greatly from ordering a painter or other types of jobs. For us, service quality was a decisive factor in choosing YFU as the first organization and even though there were difficulties, it was natural to use them again as we knew the process and had previous knowledge of their background and reference cases. The stories from exchange students who had successfully completed the program and the information about changing families also helped set expectations.” I1

4.2.2 Hosting organization

During the interviews, six parents emphasized the importance of the support provided by the hosting organization. They valued having a support person in the host country who could provide proper assistance in case of difficulties, homesickness, or a need for a host family change. Parents emphasized the importance of the host family matching process in ensuring a successful exchange experience. They expressed trust in the hosting organization's ability to provide support in case of any challenges that may arise during the exchange. Several parents acknowledged that while they were aware that difficulties could arise, they believed that how the hosting organization handles these challenges is what ultimately matters.

“Challenges will always arise, whether in personal or professional life. What matters is how you solve them. If all goes fine and dandy, everyone can do that. Solving difficult situations is where the level of service, communication, and trust is weighed” I1

"I think that the area representative was there to help us out because we were all living in a small Texan town and most of us were from Europe. She helped us adapt and feel at home, which was really important. Adapting can be quite difficult, so having support is key. I got support and help from the area rep which I thought was really important." I7 about own exchange

"The area representative didn't seem to be on the kids' side and didn't provide much support when my daughter was homesick. According to my daughter, they were just told to try to adapt and that it was their fault. It didn't work out that well in Italy." I7 about own kid's exchange

“Parents care about their child's safety and well-being when they're away on an exchange program. It's important that the hosting organization ensures that the child has someone to contact in case of any problems with the family or any other situation. It's crucial that the child knows who to reach out to and who will take care of them in different situations” I6

"My son didn't really get along with his support person or area rep. He felt that she was more like investigating him and was on the family's side. He thought she was trying to find problems where there weren't any. The host family also didn't get along with the support person or area rep. So, his experience was different from mine." I8

“I heard from other exchange students about their difficulties during their stays, but YFU Switzerland managed it all well.” I2

Furthermore, six parents recognized the importance of activities organized by the host country to understand cultural specificities, support integration, and build friendships with other exchange students. It is worth noting that none of the parents had direct contact with the hosting organization in the host country, as the chain of communication was typically: hosting organization → YFU Finland → natural parents → YFU Finland → hosting organization.

Nonetheless, five parents felt that the hosting organization played a crucial role in ensuring a successful exchange experience for their child or their own exchange. Their satisfaction therefore relied on how the communication was handled by YFU Finland and information they received by their children.

“In my son's case, changing host family went very smoothly. The way it worked was that YFU Finland contacted us when the change was needed. It was a clear system and worked well.” I4

“The hosting organization didn't plan any activities or trips for the students, which was disappointing. I expected my daughter to meet other exchange students and attend gatherings, but there were no such opportunities provided by the organization.” I1

	H.O's Service quality	H.O's Customer Service	H.O's Community	H.O's Reputation
Interviewee 1	Yes (not positive)	?	No	No
Interviewee 2	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Interviewee 3	No	No	No	No
Interviewee 4	Yes	Yes	No	No
Interviewee 5	Yes	No	?	Yes
Interviewee 6	No	No	No	No
Interviewee 7	Yes	No	Yes	No
Interviewee 8	Yes	No	Yes	No
Interviewee 9	Yes	?	Yes	No

Table 5 Results Hosting Organisation's impact to decision

“The quality of service was good. Everything was arranged before I arrived, and the people I had to talk to and the information provided were helpful. The people I talked to were proactive and organized. I didn't have to contact the office staff, but the volunteers and former exchange students who went with us to the camp were friendly and nice.” I2

“I believe that the service quality provided by YFU USA had an impact on my decision to trust and choose them over other organizations. YFU USA has been around for 60 years, and the fact that they are still operating 40 years later suggests that they are doing something right. I value the organization's ability to take care of the kids and my ability to trust them.” I5

4.2.3 Partnerships

The interviews shed light on disparities in the quality of hosting organizations that YFU collaborates with. It has been observed that some partners of YFU provide better support and services than others, leading to varying experiences for the parents.

In the first example (I1), the parent shared her frustration with the hosting organization in the United Kingdom. The lack of support from the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for the student to find a suitable host family. The mother tried to support her child from afar and waited to reach out to YFU Finland to receive support. The whole process

took several months, leaving the student feeling miserable. The lack of resources or poor regional contacts might have contributed to the problem, making it a challenging experience for both the student and her mother. As the second child had already started the application process and signed the contract before the challenges occurred, it was hard for the interviewee to speculate the consequences, yet the second half of the first child's exchange was very positive, and this contributed to nurturing the trust towards YFU.

"The organization in the UK was clearly a different organization, and they had the different rules and different methods" I1

In the second example (I5), the parent shared her experience with a Canadian hosting organization that did not work as well as YFU. She regretted not being more proactive in addressing her daughter's concerns earlier, as she had initially dismissed them as complaints. Her daughter ended up having a hard time with her first host family, and it took some time before they reached out to YFU Finland for help. However, when they did, the organization responded promptly and found her a suitable host family. The mother learned from this experience and vowed to listen more carefully to her daughter's concerns in the future.

"I learned from my daughter that organization in Canada did not provide the same level of support and services as they did in Finland. Although I would still allow my other children to participate in YFU programs, I would listen more carefully to their experiences and concerns" I5

In the third example (I8 & 9), the parents shared their disappointment with the external hosting organization in the USA. They noted that there was little information about it from YFU Finland before the exchange and while on exchange, their kid did not attend any of the organization's trips or orientations. While they acknowledged that some of the orientations were held online due to COVID-19 restrictions, they felt that they were not very useful. They were disappointed that their son did not get to experience the full benefits of the YFU program, including its trips and orientations.

"He didn't go to any orientations. He had some online. He didn't really think they were so useful. And if I would have realized that it's more of the US organization partnership instead of YFU then I might have given it a second thought." I8

"I remember that it was a bit disappointing realizing that this is some kind of cooperation nowadays and so on, but no hard feelings." I9

I1 summarizes the importance of quality cooperation between organizations when providing services internationally. The challenge arises when there are inconsistencies or differences in service levels between countries, especially for organizations that operate in multiple countries.

If the service being sold is not standardized across all countries, customers run the risk of being disappointed or receiving an inferior level of service.

“I had my expectations set to the level of the Finnish organization, so as I was expecting the same kind of a customer service on same kind of a communication, you know, YFU Finland was offering. Only now I realize and know that that is not the case.” 11

4.3 Deciding factors/triggers

The interviews revealed that trust was a major factor that influenced the decision-making process. This trust was developed based on several factors, including the ethical business practices of the organization, how the organization handled challenging situations such as host family changes and visa problems, the overall exchange experience, and the years of experience that the organization had in the field.

Another important factor that influenced the decision-making process was service quality. Parents looked for satisfaction in their own or their child's exchange experience, host family matching, support provided during difficult times, and the level of support offered to both the student and parents during challenging times. Furthermore, the satisfaction of the first child on exchange played a significant role in shaping the parents' perception of the organization's service quality.

Reputation was also a key factor in the decision-making process. Parents often relied on their own exchange experience, or the points presented in the "Familiarization with the organization" section. The study also found that once parents had invested time and energy in comparing exchange organizations for their first child or for themselves, they were less likely to undertake a similar comparison process for subsequent children, even if the exchange of the first child was not perfect. By reputation, the respondents did not refer to the YFU brand, but as the quality of support and previous experiences from acquaintances (see familiarization).

The study highlighted the importance of the child's input in the decision-making process. Parents recognized that the willingness to go on an exchange program should come from the child, and they saw themselves as supportive partners who provide financial support and encouragement.

Overall, the interviews provided valuable insights into the deciding factors or triggers parents considered when choosing an exchange organization for their child. Trust, service quality, reputation, and the child's input were all critical factors that influenced the decision-making process. Exchange organizations that prioritize ethical business practices, handle challenging situations effectively, and provide high-quality services are more likely to be chosen by parents.

“We have never had a problem with them before, which is why we don't have to struggle. Everything goes smoothly and the information they provide is clear. We know what is coming next and what the next steps are because they are very clear about it. They seem very professional and that's one of their strengths. We have not encountered any unclear situations so far, so everything is very good.” I4

“I had a positive experience with YFU and felt I could trust them. They have a long history and many students have gone through their program, so they must be doing something right. If a company or organization has been around for 60 years, they can't be completely bad, can they?” I5

4.4 Differences between types of parents

Parents who have been on exchange themselves

They have a unique perspective on their children's exchange experience. Their own exchange experience provides them with an understanding of what their children may face during their exchange. In the study conducted, it was found that the majority of parents who had been on exchange did not face major difficulties resulting in a host family change while on exchange. However, even if something were to happen, they trusted that the organization would be there to support them because of its long history and common values. Those parents who did face difficulties during their exchange, such as host family change, adaption, or homesickness, received great support from YFU when it happened.

Because of their own positive experience during their exchange, parents who have been on exchange themselves had high levels of trust towards YFU. They believed that YFU could provide the same positive experience for their children. Almost all parents who have been on exchange themselves (5 out of 6) said that the orientations offered by the organization abroad were essential in the intercultural understanding process, especially the first one upon arrival, and allowed them to build long-term relationships with other exchange students through mid-term and additional activities. Additionally, the pre-return orientation was seen as very important to prepare for goodbyes and thanking the host family, and to prepare for reverse culture shock.

Finally, it is to be noted that those parents did not see themselves as proper customers, as I8 said:

“I can't see myself as a customer. Because I didn't order any brochures or look for any information or I didn't take any contact anywhere. We just sent the application and that's also there was no customer service that would have affected it.” I8

Overall, parents who have been on exchange themselves had high levels of trust towards YFU and found the orientations provided by YFU to be essential in the intercultural understanding process. However, these parents did not rely heavily on the information sessions provided by YFU, as they already had an understanding of what their own children would go through during their exchange.

Parents who have not been on exchange themselves

They rely heavily on the information provided by YFU to make a decision about sending their child on exchange. According to the interviews, these parents highly value the information sessions offered by YFU, as they provide a sense of professionalism and instill trust. The sessions help them understand the exchange program and what their child will go through during the experience.

Additionally, these parents appreciated that YFU could empathize with the participants' and parents' concerns, as they have been in similar situations themselves. This ability to understand the participants' and parents' perspectives was highly valued by the parents who have not been on exchange, as it made them feel heard and understood.

Finally, these parents were found to be more sensitive to external experiences, such as hearing positive or negative feedback about exchange organizations. Hearing positive feedback about YFU increased their sense of safety and trust, while hearing negative feedback about other organizations made them choose YFU. Overall, these parents relied on YFU's reputation, professionalism, and ability to empathize with their concerns to make a decision about sending their child on exchange.

	Group 1	Group 2
Tier 1 Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive experience of 1st child • Trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own Experience • Trust • Sense of safety

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of safety • Testimonies/reference Stories • Service quality • Known process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of programs
Tier 2 Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price • Reputation/long history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price • Long history

Table 6 Tier 1 and 2 triggers

5 DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the results of the study on sustaining parental loyalty in repeat participation of youth exchange programs. The discussion is based on the findings of the research and aims to analyze and interpret the results of the study. The chapter is structured into several sections that connect the different parts of the study.

5.1 Discussion of results

The research problem of this study is centered around understanding the factors that drive parental loyalty in repeat participation of youth exchange programs. The research question is “*What are the triggers for parents to send multiple children on youth exchange programs with the same organization?*”.

The research objectives are to analyze how the parents' experience influences their decision to send a further child on exchange with the same organization and to understand how the exchange organizations' experience affects parental decision-making.

- To analyze how the parents’ experience of their own or the first child’s exchange influenced the decision to send a (further) child on exchange with the same organization.
- To understand how the parents’ experience with sending and/or receiving exchange organizations influenced the decision to send a (further) child on exchange with the same organization.

The aim of the study is to investigate the factors that promote parental loyalty in repeat participation of youth exchange programs in Finland and to provide insights for non-profit organizations on how to increase the number of families participating in their programs and retain their loyal customer base in a highly competitive market.

5.1.1 Research Objective 1

“Analyze and understand how the parents’ experience of their own or the first child’s exchange influenced the decision to send a (further) child on exchange with the same organization.”

The research findings suggest that parents' past experiences play a significant role in their decision to send another child on exchange. When parents have had a positive experience with their own exchange or their first child's exchange, they are more likely to send a further child on exchange with the same organization. Such positive experiences can be attributed to several factors, including good preparation for parents, clear and proactive communication, relevant information, helpful and friendly service, smooth process, good preparation, and appropriate and professional support in case of difficulties. Additionally, great memories while on exchange, such as experiencing new cultures and forming new friendships, also contributed to positive experiences. These factors align with the findings of Court et al. (2009) and Yang et al. (2019), which suggest that positive experiences can lead to repeat purchases.

Parents who were on exchange

Parents who had participated in a long-term exchange program themselves had a particularly positive influence on their decision to send their child on exchange. These parents had a clear memory of their own experience, including how they felt and what they gained from it, and they believed in the benefits of long-term exchanges. (Oliver, 1999; Kotler & Keller, 2016)

One notable aspect of their experience was that they valued the type of exchange program, specifically a one-year program with a non-profit organization and one host family. They did not prioritize the destination as much as the type of exchange program, emphasizing the importance of the experience itself rather than the location. Furthermore, the value they placed on the exchange program was not monetary but rather focused on personal development and the outcome of their experience (Rook and Fisher, 1995). These parents believed that the exchange program helped them develop valuable skills and perspectives that they carried with

them throughout their lives, and they encouraged their children if they wished to go on exchange to have a similar experience.

Parents with first child experience

Parents who did not have personal experience with exchange programs themselves but relied on their first child's experience as a reference point for decision making, often emphasized the importance of the organization's support and professionalism in their child's positive experience. They valued clear and proactive communication, relevant information, helpful and friendly service, smooth processes, good preparation, and appropriate and professional support in case of difficulties Grönroos (1994).

These parents also placed significant importance on the feedback they received from their first child and how their child developed during the exchange program. Positive feedback from the first child about their experience, their host family, and the support they received from the organization contributed to these parents' confidence in sending another child on exchange with the same organization.

5.1.2 Research Objective 2

“How the parents’ experience with sending and/or receiving exchange organizations influenced the decision to send a (further) child on exchange with the same organization?”

Because of their own positive experience with the organization, all parents that had been on exchange themselves and had an overall positive experience did not even consider selecting another organization for their children. This shows the importance of personalized (Chen & Barnes, 2007), exceptional customer service (De Ruyter et al., 2001, Rust & Zahorik, 1993; Verhoef et al., 2009) and providing high-quality services (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Rust & Zahorik, 1993).

The results of parents’ experience with the organizations were very distinct between the sending organization (YFU Finland) and the receiving organization, especially if the receiving organization was an external partner and not a pure “YFU”.

Sending organization

The research findings indicate that YFU Finland's positive reputation (Kumar et al., 2007)

and helpful services played a crucial role in parents' decision to choose the organization for their child's exchange program. Parents who had prior experience with YFU as exchange students or hosts found the process to be familiar and comfortable, which made them more likely to choose YFU Finland for their children's exchange programs. These positive experiences were largely driven by YFU Finland's helpful and friendly service, a smooth process, good preparation, and familiarity with the organization. Additionally, professional support in case of difficulties, such as a well-structured and reliable emergency response system, is another important factor that can make parents feel more secure and confident in their decision to send their child on exchange.

The study also found that YFU Finland's information sessions for parents were a significant factor in building positive feeling towards YFU, especially for the parents who have not been on exchange. These sessions provided parents with detailed information about the exchange program, the application process, the host family selection process, and the support provided by YFU during the exchange program. Parents who attended these sessions found them to be informative and professional, which increased their confidence and feeling of safety in the organization.

Furthermore, YFU Finland's preparation process was seen as comprehensive and beneficial by parents. The process included pre-departure orientation for both parents and exchange students, which provided them with essential information about the exchange program, the host family selection process, and the culture of the destination country. Parents felt that this preparation process was essential in ensuring that their child had a positive experience on exchange, and they appreciated YFU Finland's efforts to provide this support.

The study also highlighted the importance of post-exchange support and communication for parents. The majority of parents expressed the need for more communication during and after their child's exchange program, and they would have appreciated more contacts with YFU Finland during this time. In particular, the post-exchange seminar and support were identified as essential in helping parents and their children tackle the reverse culture shock that often occurs after an exchange program.

All the above supports Jeong's (2019)'s findings that suggests that professionalism influences trust, while service quality, communication, and performance have a strong effect on satisfaction.

Receiving organization

The interviews with the parents revealed the importance of the support and assistance provided by the hosting organization. Parents valued having a support person in the host country who could provide proper assistance in case of difficulties, homesickness, or a need for a host family change. This support system is essential in ensuring a successful exchange experience, as it can alleviate stress and provide a safety net for the exchange student.

Parents also emphasized the importance of the host family matching process in ensuring a successful exchange experience. They expressed trust in the hosting organization's ability to provide support in case of any challenges that may arise during the exchange. Several parents acknowledged that while they were aware that difficulties could arise, they believed that how the hosting organization handles these challenges is what ultimately matters.

Additionally, parents recognized the importance of cultural activities organized by the host country to understand cultural specificities, support integration, and build friendships with other exchange students.

However, the interviews also revealed disparities in the quality of hosting organizations that YFU collaborates with. Some partners of YFU provide better support and services than others, leading to varying experiences for the parents. This highlights the need for standardization and quality control when it comes to international exchanges, as the level of service should be consistent across all countries and organizations.

5.1.3 Research Question

Based on academia and the results of this research, the research question “*What are the triggers for parents to send multiple children on youth exchange programs with the same organization?*” can be answered as follows:

The results suggest that the experience with the first child or the own positive exchange experience of the parents is a key factor that influences the choice and willingness to send another child on exchange. Four out of six and overall, seven out of nine respondents had some knowledge of YFU before going themselves or sending their first child on exchange through siblings, family members or friends (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Familiarization with the organization is an important factor.

The triggers for parents to send multiple children on youth exchange programs with the same organization include positive experiences from their own exchange programs, satisfaction with the support and communication provided by the organization, and satisfaction with the host family placement and activities offered by the receiving organization. Parents who have already sent their first child on an exchange program with the organization are more likely to send their subsequent children due to positive experiences and a sense of trust in the organization. Additionally, parents who did not go on exchange themselves but were familiar with the organization's process and heard positive reference stories were more likely to send their children on exchange. Overall, a sense of safety, trust in the organization, the quality of the programs, and YFU's long history were important triggers for both groups of parents.

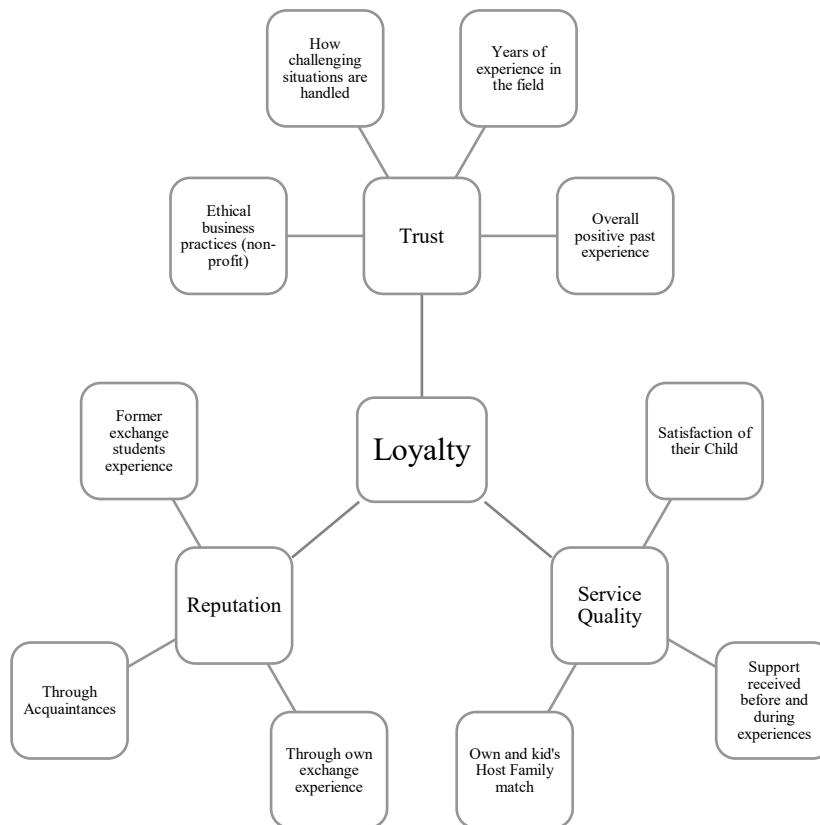


Figure 5 Tentative illustration of triggers of Parental Loyalty in the case of YFU

- Trust, service quality, and reputation were the major factors that influenced the decision-making process of parents when choosing an exchange organization for their child.
- Trust was developed based on the ethical business practices of the organization, how the organization handled challenging situations, the overall exchange experience, and the years of experience in the field.
- Service quality was important to parents, and they looked for satisfaction in their own or their child's exchange experience, host family matching, and support provided during challenging times.
- Reputation was also a key factor, with parents often relying on their own exchange experience or the experiences of acquaintances.
- Child's input in the decision-making process was also significant, with parents recognizing the importance of the child's willingness to participate in the program.
- Exchange organizations that prioritize ethical business practices, handle challenging situations effectively, and provide high-quality services are more likely to be chosen by parents.

Interestingly, the sense of belonging or community was not as strongly as theories could imply (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In fact, most parents said that the one person that was part of the community (e.g., area representative, personal that did a great presentation, volunteers at orientations) had an impact, yet the parents themselves do not feel part of this community and therefore is not an essential trigger.

5.2 Discussion of method

The utilization of a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews was deemed appropriate and successful overall. However, there were some limitations to the methodology. More specific follow-up questions could have been added to prevent misinterpretation of interviewee responses, such as inquiring about the factors that led to trust. Additionally, despite the importance of price/value in various theories, questions regarding this aspect were not actively included unless mentioned by the interviewees.

Furthermore, some interviewees were parents who participated in youth exchange programs 20-25 years ago. Although the recollections of their experiences were vivid and reflective,

further research would be necessary to explore the information search and triggers that initially led them to choose YFU.

While interviewees were cooperative, honest, and forthcoming, the possibility of language barriers affecting the accuracy and interpretation of communication should not be ignored as English was not the mother tongue of any parties. Despite the researcher's efforts to remain objective in interpreting the results, their extensive experience in the field may have influenced their analysis.

To further corroborate the findings and identify other significant triggers or reasons, a supplementary quantitative method such as a survey could have been employed to gather data from other parents within the research scope.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to understand the factors that drive parental loyalty in repeat participation of youth exchange programs. The research question was "What are the triggers for parents to send multiple children on youth exchange programs with the same organization?" The research objectives were twofold: to analyze how the parents' experience influences their decision to send a further child on exchange with the same organization and to understand how the exchange organizations' experience affects parental decision-making. Specifically, the study aimed to analyze how the parents' experience of their own or the first child's exchange influenced the decision to send a (further) child on exchange with the same organization and to understand how the parents' experience with sending and/or receiving exchange organizations influenced the decision to send a (further) child on exchange with the same organization.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that parents' past experiences play a crucial role in their decision to send another child on exchange with the same organization. Positive experiences can lead to repeat purchases, and personalized, helpful, and friendly services, good preparation, clear communication, and appropriate and professional support in case of difficulties are critical factors in parents' decision-making process. YFU Finland's positive reputation, helpful services, familiar process, and professional support in case of difficulties

played a crucial role in parents' decision to choose the organization for their child's exchange program. Overall, the study highlights the importance of positive experiences and support in parents' decision-making process, which can lead to repeat purchases and word-of-mouth recommendations and more importantly: Trust.

It is noteworthy that parents do not perceive themselves as "customers," despite the significant amount of money spent on the youth exchange program. It would be intriguing to explore which term they prefer to identify themselves in the context of a non-profit exchange organization. Additionally, since the exchange program is a one-time purchase, parents invest a substantial amount of time in the initial search for information. Unless challenges are not handled properly, they tend to remain loyal to one organization, as the decision-making process and purchase cycle extend over a year, with long-term implications.

6.1 Limitations of the study

More recent references could have been further researched, yet it seemed like the founding concepts, even if developed in the 90s or 2000s, remain very much up to date when it comes to loyalty.

The sample was quite homogenous and would have been great to have a better balance between parents who had been on exchange vs the ones who did not have that experience themselves. Despite the researcher diligence to avoid biases, the interpretation of results was subject to the researcher's own interpretation. Furthermore, the transcripts were not verified nor discussed with each participant. Verifying the identified themes through discussions would have aided in identifying commonalities among stories.

In addition, a mixed-methods approach would have been more beneficial for investigating the phenomenon than relying solely on qualitative methods. Incorporating a quantitative aspect could have provided greater clarity and credibility to the results. However, due to time limitations, the researcher was unable to include a quantitative component, and only a small number of participants were interviewed.

6.2 Suggestions for further studies

The following areas have the potential to deepen the understanding of youth exchange programs and the factors that influence parental decision-making, satisfaction, and loyalty in a non-profit context:

First, future studies could investigate the factors that make parents switch organizations between their children. This could involve examining the experiences and perceptions of parents who have switched organizations, as well as those who have remained with the same organization for multiple exchanges. Such studies could help organizations identify areas for improvement and better understand how to retain their participants.

Second, studies could investigate the decision factors that lead parents to choose a different organization from the get-go. This could involve examining the experiences and perceptions of parents who have chosen a different organization from the one they used previously or from the one recommended to them by their school. Such studies could help organizations better understand how to market themselves to potential participants.

Third, researchers could examine the triggers that led people to choose YFU 20-30 years ago and compare them with today's importance and triggers. Such studies could help organizations understand how societal changes and evolving values influence decision-making, and how they can adapt to meet the needs of today's participants and their families.

Fourth, future studies could investigate the role of cultural factors in sustaining parental loyalty in youth exchange programs, particularly in countries with different cultural values and norms. This could involve examining how cultural values influence decision-making, as well as the experiences of parents and participants from different cultural backgrounds.

Another area that future studies could explore is the impact of host family placement, expectations, and reasons for mismatches. This could involve examining the factors that lead to successful host family placements, as well as the challenges and outcomes associated with mismatches. Such studies could help organizations better understand how to support host families and participants, and improve program outcomes.

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Appendix 2

Consent Form

Sustaining Parental Loyalty in Repeat Participation of Youth Exchange Programs: A Study of Factors that Promote Repeat Participation in Sending Multiple Children with a Non-Profit Organization in Finland

One of the aims of this research is to define the triggers for parents to send multiple children on youth exchange programs with the same organization. To analyse how the parents' experience of their own or the first child's exchange influenced the decision to send a (further) child on exchange with the same organization. And to understand how the parents' experience with sending and/or receiving exchange organizations influenced the decision to send a (further) child on exchange with the same organization.

The ethical guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity will be adhered to the following. I agree that:

- My participation in the study is voluntary and is not compensated nor incentivized.
- Taking part in the Study will involve me being interviewed and I agree to this interview being audio and video recorded.
- All information is treated confidentially. No personal information about the participants will be published.
- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential.
- The data will be protected. Only the researchers will have access to the full transcripts and the supervisor for quality of the analysis.
- The data from this study will be analysed for the duration of this research.
- All information about the study will be saved in accordance with GDPR.
- My words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, but data collected about me during the Study will be anonymized.
- I can withdraw from the Study at any time, and I will not be asked any questions about why I no longer want to take part.
- If I withdraw from the Study my data will not be used.

Name of participant: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Kind regards,

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