

Exploring Alumni–University Relationships in Latin America:

A Qualitative Study of Satisfaction, Identification, and Loyalty

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Research focus

This study examines how alumni construct and interpret their relationship with their alma mater, considering both the university and the School of Management as distinct but interconnected levels of analysis.

Theoretical foundation

This research builds on the Graduate–University Identification Model (GUIM), which explains how student–teacher interaction, satisfaction, and institutional image influence identification and, ultimately, alumni loyalty

Building on prior quantitative findings

Non-significant relationship

The relationship between quality of student–teacher interaction and university identification was not significant and was therefore removed from the model, indicating that interaction does not directly influence long-term identification

Strongest relationship: interaction → satisfaction

While student–teacher interaction strongly drives satisfaction, this effect remains short-term and does not extend to long-term identification with the university.

Implications for alumni strategy

While interaction strongly influences satisfaction, it does not automatically generate identification. This highlights the need to begin alumni engagement and relationship marketing strategies before students graduate.

Gender differences in the model

The model shows significant gender differences, with only half of the relationships being relevant for both groups. Satisfaction strongly influences identification for women but not for men, and women do not perceive links between interaction quality and image or between image and identification or loyalty, highlighting mixed evidence across groups.

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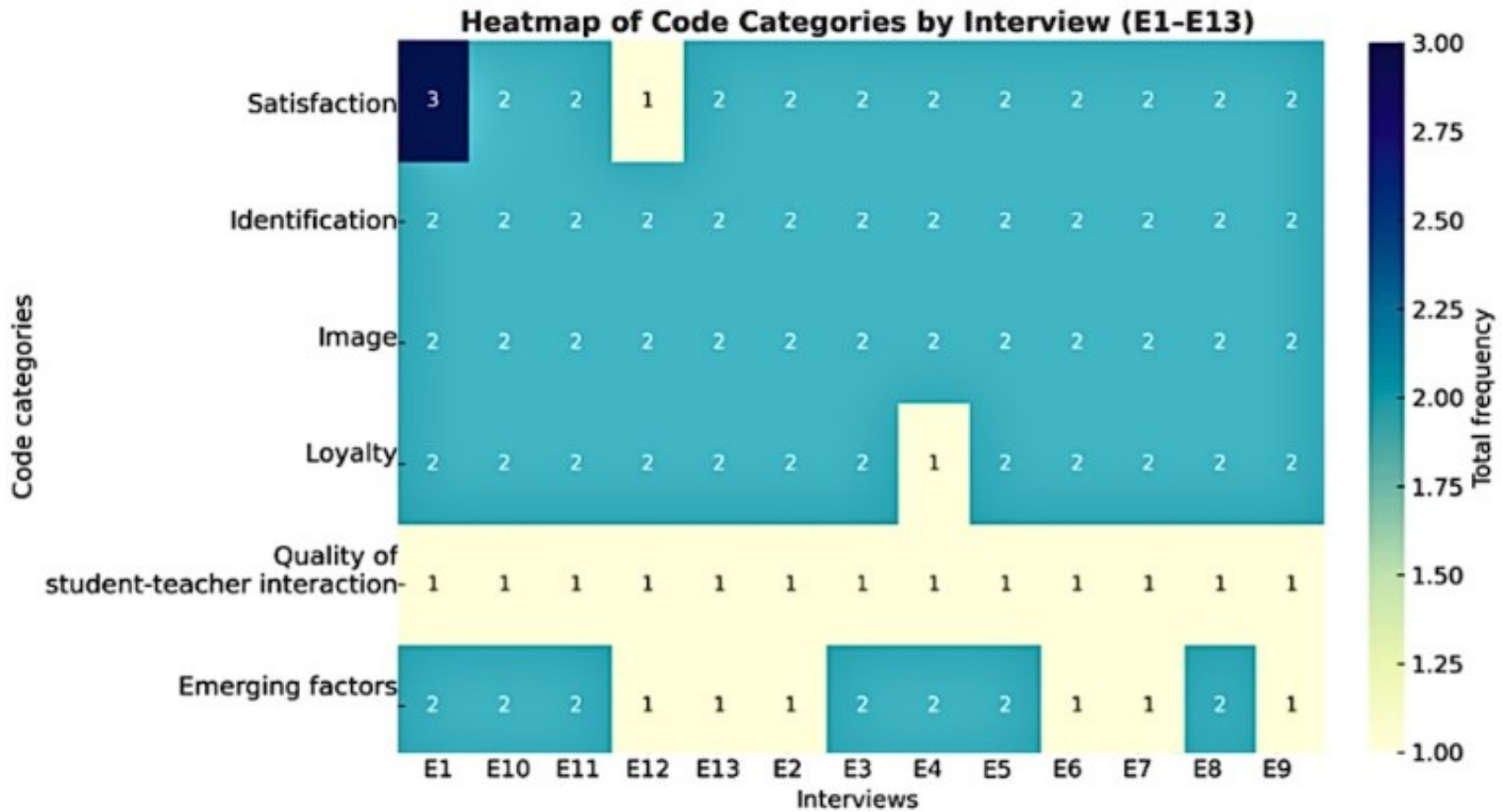
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Methodological approach

The study adopts a qualitative design based on thirteen in-depth interviews with alumni who graduated between 2010 and 2021, allowing for a deeper understanding of how these dimensions are experienced and interpreted over time

Heatmap of Code Categories



Student–teacher interaction

Central driver of engagement

Faculty-student interaction emerged as the most influential factor shaping alumni experiences, consistently mentioned across all interviews

Relational mechanism

Alumni described professors as mentors and key referents who fostered academic development, professional confidence, and a strong sense of belonging

Long-term impact

These interactions function as the primary mechanism through which trust is built and long-term attachment to the institution is sustained

Satisfaction vs. Image

Satisfaction as a variable dimension

→ Satisfaction was found to be context-dependent. While alumni expressed high satisfaction with academic quality and learning experiences, they reported mixed perceptions regarding administrative processes, communication, and institutional support

Institutional image as a stable dimension

→ In contrast, institutional image remained consistently strong. Alumni associated the university with prestige, ethical values, and professional recognition, which reinforced long-term pride and identification

Dual identification

University-level identification (symbolic)

→ Identification with the university is primarily symbolic and rooted in institutional prestige, shared values, and public reputation. It reflects a broader sense of belonging to the institution as a whole

School-level identification (relational)

→ Identification with the School is more relational and grounded in everyday experiences, including classroom dynamics, faculty interaction, and peer relationships

Nested identities

→ This finding confirms the presence of nested identities within higher education institutions, where alumni simultaneously relate to multiple organisational levels

Alumni loyalty

University-level loyalty (symbolic)

At the university level, loyalty is expressed through pride, advocacy, and a long-term sense of affiliation, often linked to institutional reputation

School-level loyalty (relational)

At the School level, loyalty is driven by reciprocity and relational closeness. Alumni feel motivated to give back due to their personal experiences and connections

Fragility of relational loyalty

However, this form of loyalty appears more fragile and requires continuous engagement efforts to be maintained over time

Discussion

Dual structure of alumni relationships

→The findings show that alumni relationships are structured around a dual dynamic that combines symbolic identification with the university and relational attachment to the School, rather than a single, homogeneous bond

Different underlying logics

→Satisfaction operates as an episodic and context-dependent evaluation, whereas identification represents a more stable and enduring psychological attachment that sustains long-term alumni engagement

Role of faculty as a bridge

→Faculty play a central role in translating institutional identity into lived experience, acting as the key relational mechanism that connects symbolic belonging with sustained engagement

Context matters: Latin America

→Alumni engagement is shaped by contextual factors such as informal networks, curricular relevance, and sociopolitical positioning, highlighting the need for regionally grounded approaches to alumni relationship management

Conclusion

Theoretical contribution

→ This study extends the Graduate–University Identification Model by incorporating a multi-level perspective that captures both university and School-level dynamics

Managerial implications

→ The findings highlight the need for alumni engagement strategies that integrate both symbolic and relational dimensions, rather than focusing exclusively on institutional reputation

Contextual relevance

→ In the Latin American context, informal networks and contextual factors play a central role in shaping alumni engagement and must be considered in institutional strategies

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