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THE INFLUENCE OF UNIVERSITY – STUDENTS RELATIONSHIP ON ATTITUDE,  
WORD OF MOUTH, AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

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This research paper attached hereto, entitled “Title of Research Paper” prepared and submitted by” Candidate’s Name” in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Public Relations is hereby accepted.

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## **Abstract**

The public relations function aims to build and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and the public. In recent years, universities have focused on improving teaching environments, academic information systems, and facilities, all of which contribute to enhancing organization-public relationships (O-PR). The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between the university and its students (O-PR) and how it affects students' attitudes toward the university, as well as the impact of these attitudes on students' word-of-mouth recommendations and academic performance. The study employs the organization-public relationships (O-PR) theory as the basis for developing a theoretical framework. It investigates the relationship between O-PR and attitudes toward the university, and the connections between these attitudes, word of mouth, and academic performance. The convenience sampling method is used in this study, with a total of 300 responses collected through a questionnaire survey. The results support the relationship between O-PR and attitudes toward the university, with significant and positive connections between attitudes toward the university and word of mouth. However, the relationship between attitudes toward the university and academic performance is not supported by this study. The study discusses the theoretical implications of the relationships between O-PR of universities and their students, students' attitudes, and the effects on their word-of-mouth recommendations and academic performance. Finally, practical implications for universities to improve communication with students and understand their needs are discussed.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### Abbreviations

CGPA  
GPA  
O-PR  
WOM  
UTAR

### Definition

Cumulative Grade Point Average  
Grade Point Average  
Organization-Public Relationship  
Word of Mouth  
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

**STUDENT DECLARATION FORM**  
Department of Public Relations  
Academic Honesty Regarding Final Year Projects

The following are examples of academic dishonesty extracted from “Student Handbook” that are more applicable to final year projects.

- plagiarism, i.e., the failure to properly acknowledge the use of another person’s work;
- submission for assessment of material that is not the student’s own work;
- collusion, i.e., obtaining assistance in doing work which is meant to be solely the student’s own work;
- use of fabricated data claimed to be obtained by experimental work, or data copied or obtained by unfair means;

It is important that the student reads the Student Handbook and understands the seriousness of academic dishonesty. The student should pay particular attention on how to avoid plagiarism.

**Student Final Year Project Declaration**

I have read the student handbook and I understand the meaning of academic dishonesty, in particular plagiarism and collusion. I declare that the work submitted for the final year project does not involve academic dishonesty. I give permission for my final year project work to be electronically scanned and if found to involve academic dishonesty, I am aware of the consequences as stated in the Student Handbook.

**FYP Title:**

The influence of university-students relationship on attitude, word of mouth, and academic performance

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of the relationship between an organization and the public (O-PR) on students' attitudes toward the university, as well as how these attitudes impact their word of mouth (WOM) recommendations and academic performance. This chapter begins by providing the research background, research questions, research objectives, problem statement, the significance of the study, the scope of the study, the definition of terms, and the summary of the whole research in Chapter 1.

### **1.2 Research Background**

Most university students are aged between 18 to 26, they tend to make choices on what they planned to study at this university. Adults aged between 21- 26 tend to have a greater sense of stability and are able to make a permanent choice. Hassel and Lourey (2005) suggested that students who are able to graduate on time and achieve good academic performance in university are more likely to exhibit higher levels of motivation and focus on their future goals. It is very important to know which courses are able to satisfy and able to fulfill the experience. Therefore, every student must begin with the mindset that is able to define their own goals and future career. According to McCabe and O'Connor (2013), while early childhood teachers may critique and advise their students in class, university lecturers primarily serve as silent managers, guiding and teaching their students without taking an active role.

Furthermore, Yohannes et al. (2021) argued that online learning is a suitable alternative to face-to-face learning during the Covid-19 pandemic since it allows students to study from their homes. However, students may encounter difficulties such as connectivity issues, difficulty keeping up with coursework, and a lack of time to adjust from face-to-face to online learning (Yohannes et al., 2021).

Next, early in the 20th century, the formal practice of what is today referred to as "public relations" began. Early definitions prioritized press relations and exposure, but more contemporary

definitions include "engagement" and "relationship building" notions. Public relations are defined as helping an organisation and its public adapt to each other" by PRSA in 1982 (Hutton, 1999). As mentioned, public relations is defined as the profession's shifting role and creating exposure to the public. Having poor public relations can negatively impact how the public perceives a university.

Moreover, for O-PR, Ferguson (2018) proposed that the research unit of the public relations paradigm should be related to organisation relationships in 1984 and conducted further research on the study in 2018. Ledingham and Bruning (1998) suggested the measurement of organisational relationships starts from the four dimensions of trust, openness, involvement, commitment, and investment. After this, Hon and Grunig (1999) proposed to measure from six dimensions. They replaced openness, involvement with satisfaction, exchange relationship, and communal relationship. These six dimensions have also been widely used by other authors in other O-PR studies, and the studies from Mohammed (2014), Shen (2017), and Ki and Hon (2007), Kim and Hunter (1993) showed attitude has a direct influence on behavior intention. Additionally, Veresova and Mala (2016) also emphasize that students' attitudes toward school have a significant impact on their academic performance.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The O-PR is crucial in every university. During the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, many universities changed their tactics, such as modifying teaching environments, implementing new grading systems, addressing the university's organization-public relationship, supporting international students, and adjusting transportation systems. According to McCabe and O'Connor (2013), students sometimes evaluate their lecturers based on skills such as management, teaching, and knowledge. Similarly, university students observe how their university management handles various challenges, like the switch to online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic, difficulties faced by students in online classes, changes to online assessments instead of in-person exams, and alternative grading systems, as factors influencing their evaluation of the university's O-PR. In this

situation, the responsibility of the university's O-PR is to assess and address the students' needs and concerns. Therefore, we conducted research to determine how O-PR affects student attitudes. O-PR is vital in every organization, as Rivero (2014) noted that organizations with strong public relations have a significant impact, both internally and externally, on the organization's image and the public's perception of the organization. Using a university as an example, if the university has a poor reputation among the public, it may also influence student attitudes. If students have a negative attitude towards the university, they may share this negative sentiment through WOM communication.

Buttle (1998) identified three key characteristics of WOM communication. Firstly, WOM is a verbal and informal interaction that occurs between people as a social phenomenon. Secondly, it is viewed as a type of information source about an organization. Finally, Bone (1992) stated that word of mouth is 'company independent', meaning that it is not under the direct control of the organization. WOM communication is a crucial factor for any organization. Moreover, word of mouth can affect the relationship between the organization and the public. For example, a good O-PR in a university will influence the word of mouth of the students. The results of the study showed that active communication behaviors by the public have a positive impact on the quality of the organization-public relationship outcomes for all organizations studied. Based on the statement stated above, O-PR can affect an organization's reputation, such as a university (Yang, 2005). Next, according to Ahmad Ramli and Samat (2020), O-PR can impact respondents' attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, when a university has poor management of its organization-public relationship, it can lead to negative student attitudes toward the university. This negative perception can then impact students' word of mouth recommendations and their academic performance. Lo (2012) found that word of mouth plays a crucial role in affecting people's decisions, such as customers' purchasing choices, and some organizations can influence this form of communication (ShengChung, 2012). A problem arose for Coca-Cola when they utilized local residents' word of mouth on a banner advertisement in Amsterdam, causing dissatisfaction among the city's residents. As reported by Dutch News BV

(2020), the banner, which read "I will never again say: there are too many tourists in my city," made many tourists reluctant to travel to Amsterdam due to the ongoing lockdown situation at that time.

Additionally, we found limited resources on the topic of O-PR in university settings, as online journals and research studies in this area are scarce. For example, Yang's research (2005) on the effects of O-PR on organizational reputation from the perspective of the public and the study from Foroudi et al. (2021) linking brand attitude to WOM and revisiting intentions in the restaurant sector illustrate the limited scope of existing research. Furthermore, few studies demonstrate the impact of attitude on word of mouth, particularly in the context of universities. For instance, Godes and Mayzlin's study (2004) on using online conversations to study word-of-mouth communication only explore online interactions concerning online markets and shops, with no information related to universities and WOM. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of research on the aspect of control mutuality in the context of O-PR factors. For example, Sisson's research (2005) on authentic relationship management to heighten control mutuality in social media only shows how human control mutuality impacts attitudes in a social media context, without any research on how O-PR factors, such as control mutuality, affect student attitudes in a university context.

Moreover, the results of research conducted using online libraries and Google Scholar indicate a limited number of studies exploring the effect of O-PR on student attitudes in university settings and the impact of these attitudes on academic performance. Al-Qahtani and Higgins's research (2012) states that the transition from face-to-face learning to online learning caused students to face various difficulties, such as internet problems, lack of direct social interaction with university staff and management, and negative impacts on communication development. O-PR influences student attitudes, and these attitudes, in turn, can affect students' academic performance.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between O-PR and attitude towards university?
2. What is the relationship between attitude towards university and word of mouth?



3. What is the relationship between attitude towards university and academic performance?

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

1. To examine the relationship between O-PR and attitude towards university.
2. To examine the relationship between attitude towards university and word of mouth.
3. To examine the relationship between attitude towards university and academic performance.

### **1.6 Significance of Study**

The significance of this study lies in providing empirical evidence regarding the factors that can influence the relationship between universities and students. Additionally, it aims to identify the correlation between students' attitudes and their academic performance. The study also investigates whether attitude has an impact on word-of-mouth communication. As a result, this research holds importance in the field of university management.

Firstly, understanding the importance of O-PR in a university is crucial for university management. In times of crisis or other issues, good public relations are necessary to ensure student satisfaction. The impact of O-PR on students' attitudes and their word-of-mouth communication towards the university is also a significant aspect for university management to consider. Factors such as trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality can be used to better understand students. For instance, if a student lacks trust in the university, their attitude towards it will be negative, which can then influence their word-of-mouth communication. Furthermore, if students are not satisfied with the O-PR, their attitude and word-of-mouth communication toward the university will also be affected. Commitment is important in fostering a positive relationship between the organisation and the public. Therefore, university management should recognise the importance of fostering commitment between themselves and the students. Lastly, control mutuality and trust are interconnected and can influence the impact of public relations tactics in resolving conflicts within an organisation. Thus, university management should recognise the importance of establishing a stable relationship with students to positively influence their attitudes and word-of-mouth

communication.

Previous research has mainly focused on academic performance, with limited research exploring the relationship between university O-PR, students' attitudes, and academic performance. Thus, this study aims to bridge this gap by investigating university students' attitudes toward the university's O-PR and how these attitudes can impact their academic performance. Specifically, the research will examine students' levels of trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality towards the university's O-PR and how these attitudes may influence their academic performance. Additionally, the study will explore whether negative attitudes toward the university's O-PR can have an adverse effect on academic performance. Through the use of survey forms, the study seeks to provide evidence of how students' attitudes toward the university's O-PR can influence their academic performance. Questions such as "Most students like me are happy in their interactions with this university" and "I feel very confident about the university's capabilities" will be used to assess how students react to the university's O-PR and how the university builds trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality.

### **1.7 Scope of Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of university O-PR on students' attitudes and how these attitudes affect their behavior and academic performance. Specifically, the study will focus on the relationship between university students and university O-PR and how it influences students' attitudes. The study will examine students' word-of-mouth communication as an indicator of their behavioral intention. Moreover, the study will explore how university O-PR affects students' attitudes and how these attitudes, in turn, affect their academic achievement. To achieve these objectives, a quantitative data method will be employed to collect and analyze data through statistical methods. Additionally, interviews will be conducted to gain a more in-depth understanding of the perceptions and opinions of the participants. A survey will be distributed via Google Form to 300 UTAR students to gather data for this study.

## **1.8 Definition of Terms**

For a better understanding of this study, the following terms are defined in the context of this research.

O-PR – It is a public relationship between a university and its students.

Trust - It refers to a student's confidence in relying on their university.

Satisfaction - A feeling of happiness or pleasure of students toward their university.

Commitment - An intention of students to establish and maintain a solid and long-term relationship with their university.

Control mutuality - It relates to the power relationship and decision-making processes between the university and students.

Attitude - A feeling or way of thinking that affects a student's behaviour towards their university.

Word of mouth - It refers to students passing information using oral communication about their experience and satisfaction with their university.

Academic Performance – A extent to which a student has attained their educational goals and it is measured by cumulative grade point average (CGPA) or continuous assessment.

## **1.9 Summary**

The first chapter is focusing on presenting information to acknowledge the background of O-PR that affects the attitude of university students and how their attitude affects word of mouth and academic performance. Therefore, the explanation of the research question and objectives was created. In this chapter, research about the problem statement. Moreover, the significance of the study shows how important is this research, and who gets benefits from reading this research. Follow by the scope of the study able to know what this research is focusing on and lastly, the definition of terms, able to understand the definition of the word expressed in this research.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This research project is going to provide an overview of the literature review, hypothesis development, and theoretical framework as well as introduce theoretical aspects of Organization-Public Relationship (O-PR) affecting student's attitudes and student's attitude influence their academic performance and word of mouth toward the university.

### **2.2 Organization-Public Relationship (O-PR)**

The definition of public relations is a management function that builds and maintains mutually beneficial connections between an organisation and the public on which its performance depends (Broom & Sha, 2013). As a result, the focus on interactions between an organisation and its public, namely the organisation-public relationship (O-PR), is critical in the study of public relations. According to Jackson and Center (1995), the desired objective of public relations is to improve O-PR. Ledingham and Bruning (1998) describe the O-PR as the circumstance that arises between an organisation and its major public in which one entity's actions affect the social, political, economic, and cultural well-being of the other entity. Hon and Grunig (1999) proposed O-PR aspects such as trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and commitment. The focus variables for the research of O-PR have been the factors of trust, commitment, satisfaction, control mutuality, and other relationship outcomes (Bruning et al., 2008; Huang, 2001; Kim, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning 1998; Stojanović et al., 2020; Bortree & Waters, 2008; Yang & Grunig, 2005). The method of building relationships or the effects of those ties has always been fundamental to defining O-PR (Bowen et al., 2016; Browning et al., 2020; Muhammad, 2014). In the context of this research, O- PR is defined as a public relationship between a university and its students.

#### **2.2.1 Trust**

One of the most crucial elements in O-PR is trust. According to Jo (2018) and Hon and Grunig (1999), trust is an essential predictor of relationship quality, especially in O-PR. Lacking trust, the

public will just not support or contribute to the work of the organisation. Openness is a component of trust that incorporates and uncovers the sentiments and beliefs of a company's interactions with its customers (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Honesty, trustworthiness, and competency are stated to be characteristics of trust. Besides that, complaints must be addressed by decision-makers. Furthermore, consumer complaints are used to build the organisation's relationships with the general public and to foster broad-mindedness, which leads to greater trust between the two groups (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Trust is essentially a faith held by the public that an organisation is dependable, trustworthy, and follows through on its promises (Ki, 2006). In the context of this research, trust refers to a student's confidence in relying on their university.

### **2.2.2 Satisfaction**

The mutual gratification stage in public relations fosters companies and the clients to reach an agreement and make complementary changes together so that the two-party gain from the relationship. Satisfaction is a general consumer attitude toward a service provider, or an emotional experience of the difference among what consumers expect as well as what they receive in terms of achieving a need, objective, or desire (Hansemark & Albinsson, 2004). A satisfied connection generates more advantages than costs, according to Ki and Hon (2007), who defines satisfaction as the degree to which the benefits of partnerships surpass the expectations between both sides. According to the research, satisfaction is the degree to which each side feels favourably about the other. In the context of this research, satisfaction is a feeling of happiness or pleasure of students toward their university.

### **2.2.3 Commitment**

A person's beliefs, feelings, and perceptions lead to a mental status known as commitment, which motivates the alacrity or intent to establish and maintain a solid and long-term relationship. Commitment is the belief that a continuing relationship with the other person is essential enough to merit maximal effort to preserve them (Ki, 2006). This signifies that the engaged party feels the relationship is worthwhile for improvement in order to secure its long-term viability. Ledingham and

Bruning (1998) state that commitment, a crucial component that must be developed in order to have a productive connection, is one of the O-PR practices that influences how well the public sees and reacts toward the organisation (Jahansoozi, 2007). Hon and Grunig (1999) defined commitment as the degree to which a person believes in and experiences the relationship between an organisation and the public. In the context of this research, commitment refers to the intention of students to establish and maintain a solid and long-term relationship with their university.

#### **2.2.4 Control Mutuality**

Most O-PR studies have discovered that control mutuality, along with trust are the two primary factors influencing the impacts of public relations tactics on resolving disputes and therefore it is crucial for great public relations practises. Control mutuality is a key factor in how much public viewpoints are communicated to an organisation's management (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Control mutuality, which is a standard of mutuality as well as the engagement of stakeholders, is necessary for the interconnection of partners and the sustainability of a partnership (Huang, 2001). According to Ferguson (2018), control mutuality known as “how much control both parties to the relationship believe they have, how power is distributed in the relationship, whether the parties to the relationship believe they share goals, and whether there is the mutuality of understanding, agreement, and consensus” (p. 17). In the context of this research, control mutuality relates to the power in relationships and decision-making processes between the university and students.

### **2.3 Attitude**

An attitude is a long-lasting belief, feelings, or emotions toward certain objects (Marcela & Mala, 2016). According to Sheeraz et al. (2016), consumers’ attitudes are able to influence their purchase intentions, a positive attitude toward the brand can influence their purchase intentions and then lead to action. Heffernan et al. (2018) stated that, if student trust and satisfaction in an organisation increase, it will contribute to their connection with the university. In this research, attitude toward the university is known as student feelings, opinions, and beliefs about the university based on the

element of university organisation public relations (trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction).

## **2.4 Word of mouth**

Word-of-mouth communication refers to a communication process that spreads recommendations to both individuals and groups for a product and service (Mahaputra & Saputra, 2021). The receiver will take the recommendation from other consumers as a high informational value message about the brand (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015). This means consumers' making decisions will usually rely on word-of-mouth communication (Sundaram & Webster, 1999). Positive word of mouth can lead a consumer to make the decision, but negative word of mouth will be even more powerful, as the consumer will tell another consumer about their bad experience (Dandis et al., 2021). In university terms, students' word of mouth is based on their experience, satisfaction, and how they perceived the university (Heffernan et al., 2018). The comment and recommendations students give about the university can be considered as word of mouth. The content of word of mouth will be affected by the attitude of a student toward the university (Heffernan et al., 2018). According to Heffernan et al. (2018), positive word of mouth can contribute to a university's reputation. It plays an important as a strong university reputation able to contribute more competitive power and position of the university (Heffernan et al., 2018). In this research, word of mouth is referred to students spreading information about their experience and satisfaction with their university using oral communication.

## **2.5 Academic performance**

Academic performance is one of the important elements in testing and examining students' capability in completing education (Nazari & Far, 2019). According to Alhadabi and Karpinski (2019), Grade Point Average (GPA) is usually used to measure a student's academic performance which reflects their academic success. In other words, GPA is used to measure achievement in the course (Alhadabi & Karpinski, 2019). There are different factors that can affect academic

performance. According to Gelisli and Kazykhankyzy (2021), students' attitude toward school is one of the factors that can influence academic achievement. According to Marcela and Mala (2016), student's attitude toward university and subject is an important factor to affect them in taking good results in academic. In research from Geddes et al. (2010), a positive attitude toward school can provide greater motivation to learn and eventually lead to better outcomes of academic performance, while a negative attitude toward school will easily lose interest in school and less motivation to learn. In the context of this research, academic performance is referred to students' CGPA and their grades in education.

## **2.6 Hypothesis development**

### **2.6.1 Relationship between trust and student's attitude**

According to Hidayanti et al. (2018), consumers will make decisions guided by their trust in the brand. They will believe in the brand and hope for something positive that the organisation will provide. It is assumed that a consumer who trusts a brand and has a desire and eagerness to rely on it would have favorable buying intentions for that brand (Lau & Lee, 1999). Therefore, student's trust can also know as the student's confidence level on the service and education that the university provided (Latif et al., 2021). To fully realize the potential, a trustworthy connection is necessary. When students are challenged to succeed in an encouraging setting, they are more likely to take an active role in the process and help produce positive results (Lee & Smith, 1999). From past studies, there is a positive relationship between trust and attitude, therefore, the hypothesis below was developed:

H1: Trust is positively related to student attitude toward university

### **2.6.2 Relationship between satisfaction and student's attitude**

According to Latif et al. (2021), student satisfaction is a result that the experience in the environment and education of the university provided. In this situation, the university has to provide a high-quality service in order to maintain student satisfaction. Student's attachment to the university



can be strengthened if the service they get from the university can meet their expectation (Heffernan et al., 2018). Consumers' attitudes regarding brands and favourable repurchase behaviour are believed to be influenced by consumer satisfaction (Wang et al., 2019). Consumer satisfaction is associated with branding since it determines the customer's expectations of how well the services are provided by the organisations. Actionable knowledge on how to further satisfy clients is thus an important objective (Oliver, 1999). It is believed that the relationship between satisfaction and attitude exists in the university setting. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Satisfaction is related to student attitude toward university

### **2.6.3 Relationship between commitment and student's attitude**

According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), commitment is referred to a person's intention to maintain a long-term and stable relationship with others. The organisation is suggested to invest in its relationship with consumers as brand commitment can promote consumers' brand attitude (Wang et al., 2019). There are studies that mentioned that brand commitment plays an important role in forming attitudes (Hur et al., 2011). Wang et al. (2019), stated that strong commitment can cause the consumer to form a good attitude. In terms of a relationship with the university, higher commitment means the student can have a stronger connection and relationship with the university (Muhammad, 2014). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Commitment is positively related to student attitude toward university

### **2.6.4 Relationship between control mutuality and student's attitude**

Control mutuality helps in building and maintaining the relationship between the organisation and the public (Jo, 2018). According to Sisson (2017), control mutuality will also contribute to the creation of value for the public and improve the relationship in the organisation- public-relationship. The public will be more likely to form a positive attitude when an organisation practice control mutuality (Jo, 2018), which lead us to the following hypothesis:

H4: Control Mutuality is related to student attitude toward university

### **2.6.5 Relationship between student's attitude toward university and word of mouth**

Word-of-mouth communication refers to a communication process that spread recommendations to both individuals and groups for a product and service (Mahaputra & Saputra,2021). According to Yang and Yoo (2004), attitude plays a significant role in determining an individual's behavioural intention. There is also research showing that users' attitudes can effectively influence positive word of mouth (Lien & Cao, 2014). According to Heffernan et al. (2018), students' word of mouth is based on their experience, satisfaction, and how they perceived the university. When a student goes through the dimension of O-PR, they might generate different attitude towards the university, which lead them to have different content of comment for the university. According to Heffernan et al. (2018), a positive student attitude will lead to positive word of mouth. It is considered that the relationship between attitude toward university and word of mouth occurs in the university setting. Then, we generated the following hypothesis:

H5: Student attitude toward university is positively related to word of mouth

### **2.6.6 Relationship between student's attitude and academic performance**

Academic performance is one of the important elements in testing and examining students' capability in completing education (Nazari et al., 2019). The attitude of a student can bring influence their behaviour during class, which can also help them to focus on academics (Geddes et al., 2010). Student who has a high interest in the class and a positive attitude will tend to get higher performance (Geddes et al., 2010). According to Gelisli and Kazykhankyzy (2021), students' attitude toward school is one of the factors that can influence academic achievement. According to Marcela and Mala (2016), student's attitude toward university and subject is an important factor to affect them in taking good results in academic. In the university context, there is a relationship between attitude toward university and academic performance. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Student attitude toward university is positively related to academic performance

## **2.7 Theoretical Framework**

In the organisation-public relationship model, communication is considered a way of connecting organisations and their clients. Hon and Grunig's (1999) scale has become one of the most extensively used methods of evaluating connections in public relations research (Kim, 2001). Trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment are the four relationship result criteria included in the original measure. Besides that, there are two indications of relationship type which are exchange relationship and communal relationship. This six-dimensional O-PR metric is widely utilised to evaluate various types of organisations, cultures, and nations. Later, it eliminated exchange and communal relationships. The section that follows discusses more concerns with the conceptualization of these factors of O-PR quality and suggests an improved framework (Grunig & Huang, 2000). The type of relationship that already exists between an organisation and its public may have an influence on the outcome (Hon & Grunig, 1999). As a result, trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment are some factors used in O-PR quantification according to Hon and Grunig (1999). Public relations practices will help an organisation build a relationship with its public. The dependent variable in this research is student academic performance and word of mouth. Møller Jensen and Hansen (2006) provided several parameters for measuring this dependent variable (2006). Figure 1 depicts a theoretical framework that reveals a relationship across variables, implying that O-PR and attitude have a strong association with student academic performance and word of mouth.

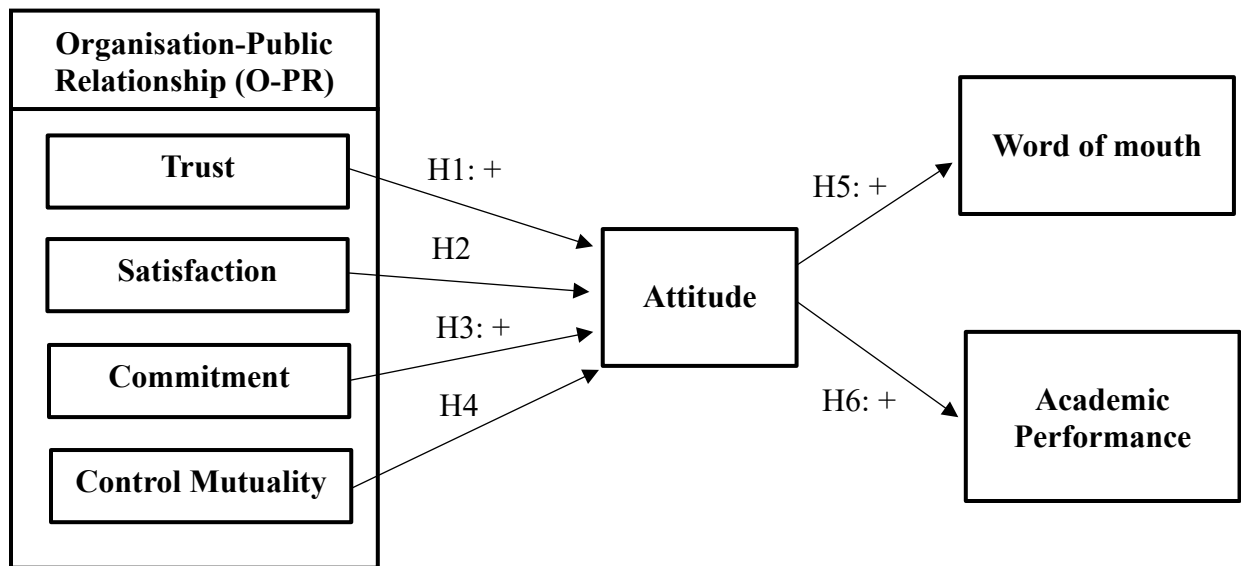


Figure 1: Theoretical framework development

## 2.8 Summary

In summary, chapter 2 cover different component including a literature review, theoretical framework, and hypothesis development. Each element in the theoretical framework has done research in the literature review session before proceeding theoretical framework and hypothesis development. At the same time, past studies also provide further knowledge on the research topic. Based on the literature review and theoretical framework, a total of six hypotheses were developed in Chapter 2.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the research design aimed at addressing the hypotheses raised in Chapter 2. Specifically, the research aims to investigate the connection between university-student relationships and students' attitudes toward the university, as well as the relationships between attitude and word-of-mouth communication (WOM) and academic performance. Through this research, we aim to identify the links between these variables.

### **3.2 Research Design**

Quantitative research was the focus of this study. The study conducted survey research to prove the hypothesis. The research focused on objectivity and aimed at the relationship between different variables. It has identified whether there is a relationship between two variables, rather than what kind of relationship between them. Quantitative research focuses more on objective facts, while qualitative research focuses more on subjective feelings. Therefore, quantitative research would be more appropriate than qualitative research in this experiment.

### **3.3 Sampling**

#### **3.3.1 Method**

In order to test the correlation of the data, students from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) are chosen as our research respondents for this study. The reason to choose UTAR is that it is easier to distribute questionnaires and get data from respondents. Convenience sampling was implemented in this study, and questionnaires was sent to UTAR students through email and face-to-face. A total of 326 respondent has been collected in this study. A total of 30 respondent has contributed useable data.

#### **3.3.2 Sample Size**

The sample size of this research is 300. A sample size between 30 and 500 is a common and necessary sample size (Delice, 2010). In a study with a similar theme and a university as the

research object, it set a sample size of 200 (Mohammed, 2014). With a sample size of 300, it is possible to calculate reliable estimates of population parameters with a margin of error of about 5%. It also provides a large enough sample to detect meaningful differences or relationships between variables (Cohen, 1988). G\*Power is a software developed by Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf to help calculate the sample size and power. Based on G\*Power, the minimum sample size of this study is 84. When the sample size is 300, the power is 0.98 which is higher than the required power 0.8. Therefore, the 300-sample size is valid for this study.

### 3.4 Measurement

The study used questionnaires to measure these variables. The questionnaire is listed in Table 1. The items in the questionnaire are adapted from the articles by Shen (2017), Hon and Grunig (1999), Morrell and Lederman (1998), and Chin-Tsu (2016). Table 2 shows this study uses the Likert-type scale with a 5-point format-1 means Strongly disagree, 5 means Strongly agree to measure organisation-public relationship (O-PR), student attitudes towards universities, and WOM. The students' academic performance will request student fill in their CGPA (Mushtaq & Khan, 2012).

**Table 1**

*Questionnaire (N=300)*

Construct	Item
	I believe that the UTAR treats students fairly and justly. (Q1)
	Whenever UTAR makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about its students. (Q2)
Trust	UTAR can be relied on to keep its promises to the students. (Q3)
	I am willing to let UTAR make decisions for students like me. (Q4)
	I feel very confident about the UTAR's capabilities. (Q5)
	UTAR has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do. (Q6)

	I am happy with this UTAR. (Q1)
	Both the UTAR and students like me benefit from the relationship. (Q2)
Satisfaction	Most students like me are happy in their interactions with UTAR. (Q3)
	Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship UTAR has established with me. (Q4)
	Most people enjoy dealing with this UTAR. (Q5)
	I feel that UTAR is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to students like me. (Q1)
Commitment	I can see that UTAR wants to maintain a relationship with students like me. (Q2)
	There is a long-lasting bond between UTAR and students like me. (Q3)
	Compared to other universities, I value my relationship with UTAR more. (Q4)
	I would rather work together with this UTAR than not. (Q5)
	UTAR and students like me are attentive to what each other say. (Q1)
Control mutuality	UTAR believes the opinions of students like me are legitimate. (Q2)
	UTAR really listens to what students like me have to say. (Q3)
	The management of UTAR gives students like me enough say in the decision-making process. (Q4)
	I look forward to going to UTAR each day. (Q1)
	I think it is important for me to go to UTAR. (Q2)
	There are other things more useful to me than going to UTAR. (Reverse) (Q3)
	What I learn in UTAR will help me in the future. (Q4)
Attitude	I like being in UTAR. (Q5)
	I think going to UTAR is a waste of time. (Reverse) (Q6)
	I am happy when I am in UTAR (Q7)
	What I learn in UTAR is worthless. (Reverse) (Q8)
	UTAR is of value to me. (Q9)

UTAR is important for me, even though I think there are better things to do than go to UTAR. (Q10)

Academic performance	Please fill in your current CGPA. (Q1)
Word of mouth	I will actively share my positive learning experience in UTAR with others. (Q1)
	It is enjoyable to share my experience in UTAR with others. (Q2)
	I often share my positive experience in UTAR with others. (Q3)
	I am willing to share other classmates' satisfying experience in UTAR. (Q4)
	I will encourage others to study in UTAR. (Q5)
	If someone asks for my opinion, I will recommend UTAR to him / her. (Q6)
	I am willing to spread positive news of UTAR to others. (Q7)

**Table 2.**  
*Measure Items*

Variable	No.of Items	Scale	Source/Year
Trust	6	Five-point likert scale	Shen, 2017
Satisfaction	5	Five-point likert scale	Shen, 2017 Hon & Grunig, 1999
Commitment	5	Five-point likert scale	Shen, 2017 Hon & Grunig, 1999
Control mutuality	4	Five-point likert scale	Shen, 2017 Hon & Grunig, 1999
Attitude	10	Five-point likert scale	Morrell & Lederman, 1998
Academic performance	1	Fill in	Mushtaq & Khan, 2012
Word of mouth	7	Five-point likert scale	Chin-Tsu, 2016



### **3.5 Data Collection**

This research allowed us to identify how students react to the various factors affecting them at university. To express the data numerically, we utilized the quantitative research method, which was then analyzed through statistical methods. In addition, we conducted research to gain a more in-depth understanding of the perceptions and opinions of our participants. Our data collection procedure involved sending emails to individual UTAR university students with 32 questions pertaining to their attitudes, behavior, and academic performance. Data collection was conducted in March, and we received 300 valid responses, which we analyzed for our research.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

IBM SPSS was used as the statistical software in this research for data management, analytics, and investigation purposes. The IBM SPSS software platform offers a wide range of features, including advanced statistical analysis, a sizable library of machine learning techniques, text analysis, open-source extensibility, integration with big data, and easy application deployment. After collecting the data, we conducted a correlation analysis as part of the research.

### **3.7 Pilot Study**

Before the research, a pilot study was performed to determine the feasibility of the research plan and identify weaknesses in the study. In addition, it can ensure whether the questionnaire proposed in the research meets expectations, whether it can be understood by the target population, and the willingness to participate in the research (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Preliminary data from outcome measures can help

determine whether the originally selected sample size is appropriate (Hassan et al., 2006). According to Budiu and Moran (2021), most quantitative research requires a sample size of at least 40. Therefore, a pilot test was conducted with a sample of 40 to ensure the feasibility of the research plan and identify weaknesses in the study.

According to Table 3, Apart from Control Mutuality, the reliability of all variables meets the requirement – Cronbach's Alpha should be above 0.75. The control mutuality's Cronbach's Alpha is 0.631, therefore, one item in control mutuality is not adaptable. To meet the reliability requirement, the problematic item in the control mutuality variable was removed in subsequent analyses.

**Table 3**  
*Reliability statistics of the pilot test*

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Trust	.851	6
Satisfaction	.887	5
Commitment	.923	5
Control Mutuality	.631	5
Attitude	.801	10
WOM	.945	7

### **3.8 Reliability and Validity**

#### **3.8.1 Internal Consistency**

The results indicate that respondents were satisfied with the level of service provided, as measured by our questionnaire. This survey questions have been designed to measure the overall satisfaction with Strongly disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly agree. Respondents should provide a consistent level of agreement or disagreement to each question, such as three 'agrees' or three 'strongly disagrees,' to indicate excellent internal consistency. If respondents provide inconsistent responses, it

may suggest that the questions are poorly phrased and may not accurately measure consumer satisfaction.

### **3.8.2 Content**

Content validity refers to the effectiveness of an instrument in capturing each important aspect of the construct it seeks to measure in a test-like setting. In this context, a construct is a theoretical concept, topic, or idea that is typically not directly measurable. After collecting the data, statistical analyses using IBM SPSS were conducted to ensure the content and validity of the data. The questionnaire provided to students was also checked by the lecturer to ensure the validity of the questions.

### **3.9 Ethical consideration**

In this study, the full consent of the participants will be obtained before the implementation of the research, and the privacy of the research participants is protected to ensure the anonymity of the individuals participating in the research. Beyond that, be honest and transparent in any type of communication related to research. Research also avoids any type of misleading information, as well as presenting raw data results in a biased manner. Prior to conducting the quantitative research, we obtained permission from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) to ensure compliance with ethical research standards.

### **3.10 Summary**

In summary, the purpose of this research is to determine how various factors affect students' attitudes toward the university and to evaluate the impact of these attitudes on student academic performance and behavior intentions, such as word-of-mouth. By

collecting data on trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality, we will be able to determine the relationship between the university and its students. This data will then be used to analyze the students' attitudes and academic performance. The data collection for this research was conducted between February and March.

## Chapter 4 Results

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an explanation of the demographic information of the respondents, the findings from the data analysis, as well as the reliability and correlation analyses using the data obtained from the respondents.

### 4.2 Demographic

Referring to Table 4, there is a total of 64.3% of females and 35.7% of males are participating in this study. Therefore, the results clearly show that there is a majority of female respondents compared to males. Besides, most of the respondents are from 21 to 23 years old, they totally have 64 percent. Most of the respondents are Chinese with a total of 285 respondents (95%) and have 2 other ethnicity respondents. 88.3 percent of the participants in this research are undergraduate students, drawn from three different programmes.

**Table 4**

*Demographic statistics of respondents*

	Item	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	193	64.3
	Male	107	35.7
Ethnicity	Chinese	285	95.0
	Indian	13	4.3
	Others	2	.6
Age	18-20	94	31.3
	21-23	192	64
	Above 23	14	4.6
Programme	Foundation	31	10.3
	Undergraduate	265	88.3
	Postgraduate	4	1.3

### 4.3 Reliability Test

According to Table 5, there is a total of 37 questions are conducted in these studies and 6 instruments which are Trust, Satisfaction, Commitment, Control Mutuality, Attitude, and Word of Mouth (WOM). To assess the reliability of these instruments, the data was collected using SPSS software, and the results showed that all data met the necessary requirements. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha values were between .75 and .95, indicating good internal consistency. Based on these findings, we can conclude that the data is reliable.

**Table 5**

*Reliability statistics of each variable*

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Trust	.891	6
Satisfaction	.900	5
Commitment	.883	5
Control Mutuality	.852	4
Attitude	.767	10
WOM	.907	7

#### **4.4 Correlations Test**

During the research of the studies, we conducted a Pearson's correlation analysis to examine the relationship between trust and attitude, satisfaction and attitude, commitment and attitude, control mutuality and attitude, attitude and WOM, attitude and academic performance.

All the relationships are supported, except attitude and academic performance. The Pearson Correlation (r) of attitude and academic performance is -.062, therefore, there is no relationship between these two. Besides, the relationship between trust and attitude, satisfaction and attitude, commitment and attitude, control mutuality and

attitude, attitude and WOM shows a significant and positive relationship.

**Table 6**

*Correlations statistics*

Hypothesis	Relationship	Pearson Correlation (r)	Result
1	Trust - Attitude	.585**	Supported
2	Satisfaction - Attitude	.678**	Supported
3	Commitment - Attitude	.657**	Supported
4	Control Mutuality - Attitude	.627**	Supported
5	Attitude - WOM	.677**	Supported
6	Attitude – Academic Performance	-.062	Not supported

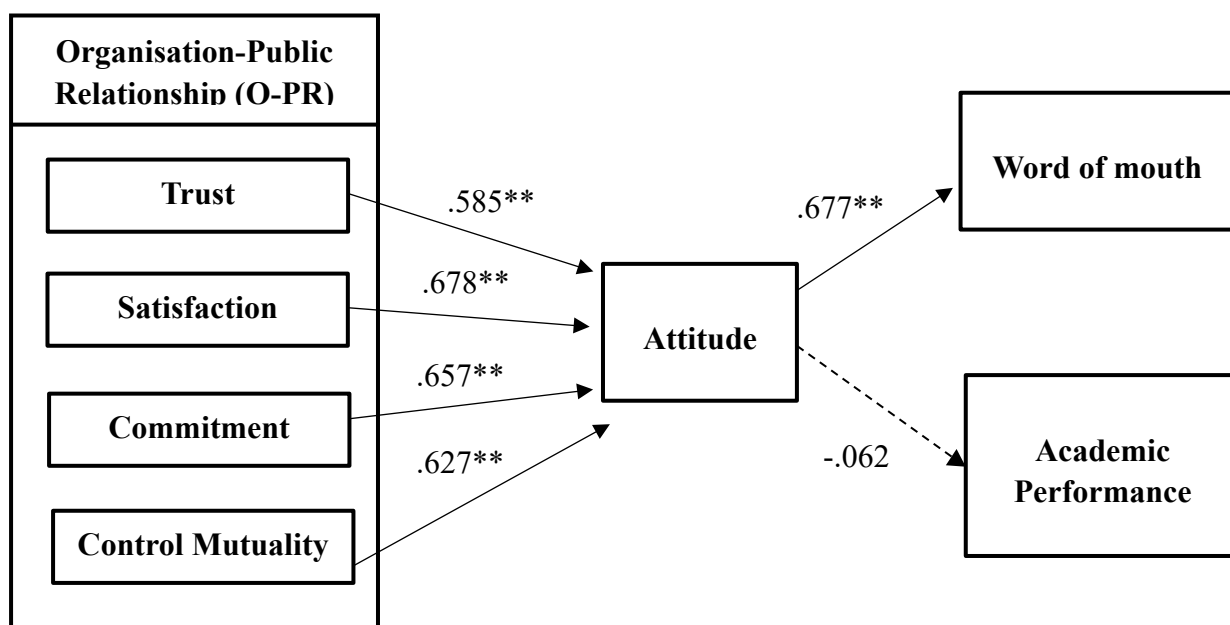


Figure 2: Theoretical framework

#### 4.5 Summary

The objective of this study was to investigate the link between university-student relationships and students' attitudes toward the university, as well as the relationships between attitude and word-of-mouth (WOM) and academic performance. The following chapter will include a discussion of the research findings, implications, limitations, and recommendations.

## **Chapter 5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will provide a discussion of the research findings, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and recommendations. Each hypothesis will be examined to provide a better understanding of the results.

### **5.2 Discussion**

In this study, the relationship between trust and student attitude toward university was examined. Our study suggested that trust is positively related to student attitude toward university (H1). The result shown the relationship between trust and student attitude toward university was significant and positive. This result indicates that H1 was supported as the higher trust the students have, the more positive the student's attitude toward the university. From previous research, trust has been proven can direct influence attitude (Aghdaie et al., 2011). This suggests that students who have higher trust in the university are more likely to generate a positive attitude toward the university.

This study examined the relationship between satisfaction and student attitude toward the university. In our study, it proposed that satisfaction is related to student attitude toward university (H2). The result shown the relationship between trust and student attitude toward university was significant and positive. This result indicates that H2 was supported. In other words, there is a relationship between satisfaction and student attitude toward the university. This suggests that the more satisfaction student have, the more positive the attitude they have toward the university. This finding is



consistent with the result of past studies which satisfaction is one of the elements that related to student attitude toward university (Hong et al., 2020).

Furthermore, this study included the relationship between commitment and students' attitudes toward the university. Our study suggested that commitment is positively related to students' attitudes toward the university in our research (H3). The result shown the relationship between commitment and student attitude toward university was significant and positive. This indicates that H3 was supported since the higher the commitment, the more positive the students' attitudes toward the university. In similar research, Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) suggest high organizational commitment toward an organisation will generate positive employees' attitudes toward the organisation.

This study investigated the relationship between control mutuality and student's attitude towards the university. Our study hypothesized that control mutuality would be positively related to students' attitudes towards the university (H4). The results showed that H4 was supported as there was a significant positive relationship between control mutuality and student's attitude toward the university. The findings suggested that when an organization practices control mutuality, students are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards the university. This finding is consistent with previous research that has demonstrated the positive impact of control mutuality on attitude formation (Jo, 2018). Therefore, our study supports the notion that control mutuality plays an important role in shaping students' attitudes toward the university.

This study examined the relationship between attitudes toward word of mouth. Our

study stated that attitude is positively related to students' word of mouth (H5). The results show that there is a significant positive relationship between attitude towards university and word of mouth. The findings indicated that H5 was supported as the higher the students' attitudes towards the university, the more positively they spoke about it, demonstrating a strong correlation between positive attitudes and favorable word-of-mouth. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown that positive attitudes towards an organization can lead to positive word of mouth (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Therefore, our study supports the notion that attitude toward the university plays an important role in shaping students' word of mouth communication about the university.

In this study, the relationship between attitude and academic performance was examined. Our study proposed that attitude is positively related to academic performance (H6). The results of this study show that there is no significant relationship between academic performance and attitude. This indicates that H6 was not supported as students' attitudes toward the university do not have a significant impact on their academic performance. The non-significant finding is consistent with some previous research that has found no relationship between attitude and academic performance (Judge et al., 2010), but contradicts other studies that have reported a positive relationship between attitude and performance (Laroche et al., 2004). Other elements, such as study habits, motivation, or external circumstances outside the university's control, might have a larger effect on students' academic performance (Judge et al., 2010).

## **5.3 Implications**

### **5.3.1 Theoretical Implications**

Prior study has mostly focused on evaluating O-PR in organisations and brands, but universities face distinct challenges and opportunities that require a customized O-PR approach. As a result, this study can give insights into the development of new O-PR models or theories that are tailored to the specific needs of universities. The research findings can explore the advantages of implementing O-PR in universities. Next, by examining the relationships between O-PR, attitudes toward university, WOM, and academic performance, this study can potentially reveal the mediating role of students' attitudes in these relationships. This would contribute to a better understanding of how attitudes towards university serve as a mechanism that links O-PR with both WOM and academic performance. This finding could prompt further investigation into other potential mediators in the relationship between O-PR and important outcomes in higher education. Lastly, the findings of this study reveal a conflict in the literature regarding the relationship between attitudes and academic performance, suggesting that these constructs may not be inherently interdependent. Specifically, our results indicate that attitude has no significant relationship with academic performance, thereby challenging the assumption that attitudes towards learning are the sole determinants of academic success. This highlights the need for future researchers to understand the complex nature of academic performance and for a comprehensive approach to promoting academic success.

### **5.3.2 Practical Implications**

Based on the findings regarding the importance of trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment in shaping students' attitudes, universities can implement strategies that enhance these dimensions of O-PR. Examples include transparent communication, fair decision-making, and actively seeking student input. Improving these aspects of O-PR can lead to a more positive student experience, ultimately affecting students' WOM. Understanding the importance of these factors can help university administrators develop targeted interventions to improve student satisfaction and engagement. Next, by understanding the relationship between students' attitudes and WOM, universities can create targeted marketing campaigns that leverage positive experiences shared by their students. Encouraging and facilitating the sharing of positive experiences can help universities attract more prospective students and enhance their reputation. Insights from this study can help universities identify specific aspects of their educational offerings and campus experience that contribute most to positive WOM, allowing them to strategically focus their marketing and recruitment efforts and enhance their O-PR. Lastly, this study has shown the significance of students' attitudes towards the university, universities can focus on creating an environment that fosters positive attitudes to improve student outcomes. This can involve providing academic and emotional support, fostering a sense of belonging, and creating opportunities for students to develop a strong connection to the university.

#### **5.4 Limitation**

There are three limitations in this study. First, this study is taking place in UTAR, and the result might not exactly apply to students in other universities. Students in

UTAR could not generalize to students from other universities. This is because the different students may have different points of view on the management of their universities. Other than that, the mediator for this study is limited to attitude alone. Somehow, this could not cover other factors related to O-PR. O-PR will not only affect respondent attitude but also will bring changes to other factors. Lastly, the questionnaire is implemented in our study. Respondents only have to answer questions from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The emotions and feelings of respondents could not be emphasized and focused during the study.

### **5.5 Recommendation**

For future studies, there are three recommendations to better understanding on the study. First and foremost, future research can include respondents from universities in different states including private universities and public universities. The result tends to be more acceptable when generalize to a bigger population. For the second recommendation, there is only one mediator in the research. In future studies, researcher can consider inserting extra mediators which is related to O-PR. For example, the researcher can include student stress as one of the mediators in this research since the situation of the respondent will affect the outcome. Lastly, future researchers may want to consider a mixed-methods approach that includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection. This approach can provide insight into both the respondent's emotional state and their rational data, which can help overcome the limitations of using a single method. By incorporating different methods, we may gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence O-PR.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

To conclude, this research has shown that the four factors of O-PR – trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality – have a relationship with attitude. Additionally, the relationship between attitude and word of mouth (WOM) has also been proven. However, the attitude has no significant relationship with academic performance. This research focuses on the application of O-PR in the university context and considers students' attitudes as the mediating role to link O-PR with WOM and academic performance. Moreover, it contributes to the study of how students' attitude does not affect their academic performance. This study provides new insights for universities to improve their strategies and marketing activities to get good word of mouth from students. It also reveals the importance of students' attitudes toward the university and suggests that universities should focus on building a positive environment. However, this research was only conducted at one university and the respondents were not allowed to express their feelings in greater detail. Furthermore, the study only considers one mediating role – attitude – whereas O-PR may affect more factors such as emotions and loyalty. These factors could be explored further in future studies.

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