

MOTIVATIONS OF OPTING FOR THE PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL PEDAGOGY MAJOR IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS. BENCHMARKS FOR A STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN THE PROMOTION OF THE SPECIALIZATION

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ABSTRACT. The present study is an attempt to highlight the main reference points for a marketing program focused on the promotion of the pedagogical higher education majors, by taking into consideration of the main reasons and information sources that the present students used in their decision process that lead to the selection of these majors. After analyzing the essential constructs of the educational marketing, by contrasting them with the ones specific to general marketing, we reported the results of a qualitative investigation carried on through a questionnaire and a focus group. Both information sources and data contributed to the foregrounding of a possible personalized marketing plan.

Key words: *educational marketing, marketing strategy, vocational specialization, pedagogical major*

1. General vs. educational marketing

In 1985, Kotler and Fox defined educational marketing in “Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions” as a process of analysis, planning, implementation and control over programs designed to assure a voluntary

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exchange of values with the target market to ensure that all the objectives have been met. In their opinion, the marketing of educational institutions implies the design and management of the entire institution so as to meet the needs and expectations of the target group, potential students, parents and professors. These needs and expectations are being discovered through processes of gathering and analysis of data. Furthermore, having these starting points, the marketing of educational institutions implies searching and applying efficient means of capitalization, communication and public distribution of educational products and services offered by the institution, to inform, motivate and help the community. Kotler, Ph, Fox, K. (1985)

While analyzing the way by which institutional management thinks and acts in order to attain the set objectives referring to the attraction of potential clients, we can sketch a possible course of action that should be followed to design a strategy of educational marketing. The place to start is the renown, reputation of the institution. From this point of view, the building of a strong reputation and image which resonates with the academic community and socially through all the means necessary, is essential. This is followed by the marketing of the educational offer. This includes the announcement of the offer by the two available means, the digital way (current, much more penetrating, perfect for generations Z and Alpha) – through web sites, social networks, blogs, vlogs, e-mail, mass media advertising and the traditional way – post, flyers, posters, published on the radio-tv, published by the media, printed, direct marketing (face to face meetings with potential customers). The third stage is the admittance stage, with all that it represents. From the ex-ante exploration of the market and training needs of potential clients for the challenges and criteria of admittance, to the acquisition of desired students, according to the model/prototype of expected students (Fig. 1).

Efficient marketing strategies do not represent an issue of intuition or instinct, but a conscious process as part of the educational policy and management of the institution. An efficient managerial educational plan must include marketing strategies, by their meaning as a cyclic process of gathering and distribution of information form and to the target market, and by their capacity to modify the educational offer and educational policy of the institution, responding to the information thus provided, achieving what general marketing calls "market feedback". The market feedback causes educational change/innovation (in terms of marketing).

It is the creation of products and services according to the requests of the consumers of education, requests that are continually changing (Mariange, F., Gibbs, P, (2009). The social dynamic, the changes of the labor market, the new jobs that are coming up and the jobs that are disappearing, due to robotization or them being anachronistic, shape the trends that will be shaping the education (Trends shaping education) in the future, on a macro scale.

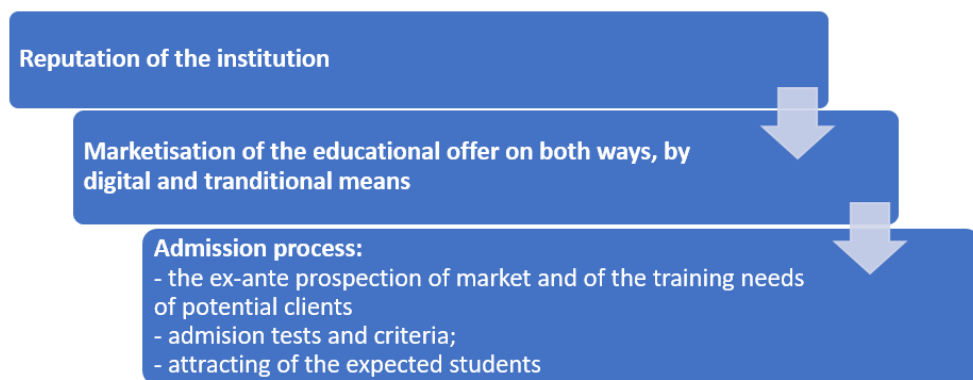


Fig. 1. Structure of the educational marketing process

The educational institution proposal, same as the offers form the sphere of general marketing, can be found in the educational products and services. The distinction between the two can be hard to find within educational marketing. The literature provides clashing opinions regarding the nature of the educational offer of school. Therefore, from the opinion that school cannot offer palpable products, because it is not a factory, but only educational services, to the opinion that the real achievements of the schools educational initiative would be represented by the "finite products", the young people that are being formed and trained, with an appropriate level of expertise according to the expectations of school and society.

Our opinion is that, given the research, we can assume that educational institutions offer both market elements, educational products as well as services. Consequently, we can assume that educational products

are essentially represented by the study programs, the specializations, the curriculum offer, the training programs, all the structured, systematic and coherent approaches, that lead to reaching the desired competency profile. On the other hand, educational services are activities provided for the benefit of the consumers of education, with or without their direct participation, with the purpose of fulfilling certain needs and providing intellectual satisfaction. Hence, educational counselling and consulting, partnership projects, tutoring, recoveries, extracurricular activities are some of the activities that are complementary to those who design the competency profile. In other words, educational marketing implies one human activity or a system of human activities geared to the satisfaction of the requirements of current and potential consumers of education.

The marketing arrangements come from the widely agreed upon concept that school must create and offer the educational market that which the market asks for. This means that it must guide its activity according to the expectations of the consumers of education. Marketing, in essence, is a scientific approach that implies not only the knowledge of consumer needs, but also their anticipation, the permanent adaption to consumer needs and, last but not least the request of educational needs. This complex approach implies an assembly of scientific ways and techniques that can support the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the phenomenon as well as the development of predictions regarding the evolution of the educational market. From this point of view, marketing becomes a fundamental function of management (Mazzarol,1998). Marketing is a science that implies the assimilation of educational action, of significant concepts from the educational field, on a theoretical level, the establishment of new concepts, theoretical generalization and continuous reflection over the ideas generated from practice, the experimentation with new ideas of investigation of cultural consumerism and the behavior of the consumer of education and the development of tools for predicting the educational market.

Starting from the idea that school must create and offer the educational market that which the market asks for, must guide its activity according to the expectations of the consumers of education, the educational marketing fulfills four fundamental functions. The first function is that of investigation of educational market, educational institutions that outline the market perspective, consumption of education and, last but not least,

the investigation of the specific competitive medium. The second function covers the adjustment of institutional and marketing policies to the explicit requirements of the educational environment. The third function requests the institution to resize the products and educational services in agreement to the needs, tastes, preferences, expectations, qualitative requirements of the consumers, along with the established targets at the level of educational policy of the institution. The fourth function implies the promotion of an efficient management of human resources that, together with material and informational resources would realize the proposed objectives.

2. The specific nature of educational marketing within the current Romanian context

Apparently, the relationship of natural communication that is established between the school and the community must be enough for the exchanging of information required for the presentation of the educational offer. Yet, the research that has been done in the educational marketing field proves otherwise. The school must undertake the task to systematically and consciously promote within the community information about its training offers. At the same time, the school will gather data from the public space regarding the needs, training interests, trend of society in general.

The analysis of the specific nature of the educational market in Romania highlights notable differences between the pre-university and university educational system, on one hand and, on the other hand, the differences between public and private school. Each system has individually developed, among its actors, different marketing strategies, given the major differences between the markets they are operating in.

The types of educational marketing that can be found on the educational offers market in Romania are the marketing centered around services/products and the marketing centered around the client.

The marketing centered around services/products seems to be characteristic for the self-sufficient school, a school that does not feel the need to market its educational offer, proposing what it thinks is for the best of potential clients, practicing the so called management of "impression".

The client (student, parent) is seen as the object of the educational action, the focus is on teaching, the exploration of the market is almost absent. This is primarily the case of public school and the pre-university level. With few exceptions, these schools have a secured human resource and marketing arrangements are useless. An exemption is given by the schools whose managerial structure is not contempt with clients which it would have had regardless, but is looking for solutions to attract certain quality students, all that consequently leading to the achievement of more ambitious objectives.

Client centered marketing – characteristic for private schools and vocational schools, sets off with the assumption that the client is the subject of the educational action and it answers the needs and requests of the market through actions of communication, information and market exploration. Client centered educational marketing is structured in two main action categories. *Mainstream marketing* is the type of marketing action that implies the mixing of potential clients, in other words, all the clients are potential clients, it is aimed at everyone (regardless of age, schooling level, economic resources), it is less expensive, easier to apply efficiently even when the potential clients have no other alternatives. *Targeted marketing*, preceded by the segmentation of the market, which means the identification and separation of groups of clients, according to criteria relevant to the institution (age, economical-social status, educational level, aptitudes, needs, specialties etc.), is based on the recognition of the interindividual differences. The targeted marketing is the primary marketing tool for higher education institutions and for private pre-university institutions. At the level of pre-university education in Romania, a distinct situation is represented by private education, where the marketing approaches of the educational offer are vital for the operation of the institution. For a private institution, the potential students and parents are not the only clients of the marketing process. It also addresses to faculty, local public authorities, business medium, and overall community. Therefore, the private educational institutions are much more present in various advertising strategies in the virtual space, digital multimedia and printed in the public space.

At university level, the marketing of the educational offer is also essential. Assuredly the chosen marketing strategies will present the educational offer of the institution, the number of students being directly

proportional to the growth of the financial resources needed for the institution to function optimally (Platis, Baban, 2010). Unlike the market segmentation mechanisms that are being used by pre-university institutions, universities will proceed to segment the market according to two fundamental elements: the educational level (the minimum level required for the completion of the offered curriculum: for the undergraduate level – the minimum level accepted is the baccalaureate, for masters studies – the minimum level accepted is the bachelors degree and so on) and the vocational orientation (the choosing of the major according to the clients preferences, needs, vocation, desires). These efforts of segmentation make the option of the potential clients much easier and more responsible, and the marketing action more precise, more targeted, also riskier for the institution.

We find relevant the fact that regardless of the type of educational institution, the employment on the consumers and offerors of education market imposes an extremely conscious, responsible, vital, action, and a correct and an honest presentation of the resources and profile of the institution can assure the success of the entire marketing endeavor.

3. The reasons for choosing the major and the information sources of the students from the majors Pedagogy and The Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-Primary Education. Qualitative analysis

Our intent was that of identifying the main reasons that formed the basis for taking the decision of following the mentioned majors by actual students, and the information sources regarding the chosen major. As we stated before, universities are strongly oriented towards targeted marketing, developing complex ways to segment the market, in order to more easily get to the desired target public. The purpose of our research was the identification of the most efficient strategy for the marketing of the majors Pedagogy and The Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-Primary Education in the light of gathered data.

The research instruments are specific to the qualitative investigation. We applied a single item questionnaire, with the question: Which were the reasons for the decision to follow the chosen specialty and which were the

information sources used to opt for this decision? The open question allowed us to use the method of contextual analysis. We went in depth with this analysis by using a focus group on the same topic.

Results and Discussion

Data regarding the intrinsic and extrinsic reasons involved in the decision of following a pedagogical major

A general analysis of the data revealed that the prestige of Babeş-Bolyai University was a general reason for the decision with regard to the academic studies. The respondents mentioned that the good reputation and visibility of the institution played an important role in the decision for a specific academic institution.

We grouped the received answers in two categories: answers that reflect rather intrinsic motives, and answers that reflect rather external motives. As we consider the intrinsic reasons as more important, for their long-term impact, in the following we present an in-depth analysis of this category. Our assumption is that the decision for a certain academic major is a very complex one as it may impact the future existence of the person. Consequently, it must be a plurimotivated decision that articulates both extrinsic and intrinsic reasons. Yet, from the perspective of our intention of constructing an effective marketing strategy, we consider relevant to aim for instilling an intrinsic motivation in the targeted public.

In the order of the preferences expressed by the students, the idea of following a vocational major seems to me the most relevant intrinsic reason, together with the will of working with children. The fact that the respondents felt attracted by working with primary school or preschool students lead them to opting for this specialisation that they perceived as primarily vocational. In this respect, more answers highlighted the option offered by these majors to make use of personal skills and abilities to connect with preschoolers of primary school pupils.

An important category of intrinsic motives mentioned by the questioned students was the impact of the model offered by their own primary school teachers as well as parental model. In this sense, many

answers mentioned that the option was due to a family tradition of parents, grandparents or close relatives that followed the same career. Due to the force that an idealized model, in both the case of former teachers or of parents, may have, we consider that it becomes compulsory to include this reason in an academic marketing strategy for the didactic career.

The category of intrinsic reasons also includes the option for the above-mentioned majors as a second and later taken option. It is the case of the responding students that already graduated or partially followed another academic specialization. All these students mentioned that they were informed about the pedagogical specializations while being students at another program of study. They declare that they were attracted by the idea of changing their major by the way it was presented by fellow colleagues. This fact is very relevant in relation to our focus for an effective marketing, as the orally spread impression has a certain impact that may be used.

An interesting category of answers refer to the opportunity that the majors offer for shaping personalities and it implies the disposition of the candidates to undertake the major responsibility of impacting the lives of the educated. In correlation with this topic, there were answers that mentioned the will to change the society and the possibility to do that by working with the little ones.

A different category of answers were the ones that evoke an extrinsic motivation. We noticed in the case of many such responses the performance orientation given by the past experiences the respondents had as volunteers in the educational activities with primary school students.

The external reasons were generally exposed in the second part of the answers, usually the intrinsic reasons being presented as primary motives. Yet, the presence of both categories of reasons in the same developed answer confirm the idea that the decision for a didactic career is always plurimotivated and that the intrinsic reasons prevail in the logic of the respondents. Thus, the external reasons included, in the order of their frequency in the answers, the influence of friends, parents, society, influences that took the form of information regarding the advantages of the educational professions: the benefits of working with small children that are more responsive to formative inputs, the advantage of a relatively easier program with a lot of holiday time. The advice

of the close ones that presented the institution and specializations in a good perspective seems to be important in completing the motivations for this professional option.

Of a particular relevance for the perspective of structuring a marketing strategy for the two pedagogical majors are the answers that refer of the intention of some respondents to continue their initial specialization acquired through the high school studies as graduates of a vocational pedagogical high school. The existence of a vocational specialization on pedagogical field at the level of pre-university studies is clearly a national advantage that may be successfully used for increasing the attractiveness of the corresponding academic majors.

The attractiveness given by the annual existence of a steady number of work places that are put in competition for a permanent or temporary teaching position, the perspective of a secured future and the fact that Babeş-Bolyai University functions in a large city with many opportunities represented other extrinsic reasons present in the answers of students.

Data regarding the sources of information used in the decision process

The second focus of the open question used during the investigation was to identify the main sources of information on the specific and characteristics of the chosen pedagogical majors. The main source mentioned was the description and information existing of the institution website. Students were interested not only on the actual admission process, but they also opened and consulted the student guide, the pages presenting the expertise of the faculty, learning plans and students' timetables. Some of the answers mentioned that the prospective students were guided to institutional webpage by the posts existing on different social networks, and referred specifically of the posts of the institution itself. This underlines the importance of accurately promoting the specializations through the means of the on-line socialization spaces.

The second source in the order of frequency was the discussions they had in the family and other significant persons: close relatives and friends. The positive presentation of the institution and programs of

study guided their decisions. It is most probable that the perspective of the closed ones is regarded as credible and a source that cannot be suspected of immediate or direct hidden interests.

An interesting information source mentioned by the students that follow the pedagogical majors involved in the analysis as a second specialization was the opinion expressed by the students that were already involved in studying these specializations. Information regarding the specificity of specialization, the quality of professionalization, the opportunities following the graduation of undertaking an attractive teaching position represented relevant information for the academic reorientation of students following their second academic program of study. *The focus group* organized as a supplementary source of understanding the topic analyzed offered the advantage that certain initial ideas could be elaborated in depth through guided discussions. The focus group involved five students in the majors mentioned above. The discussions correlate with the opinions presented in the questionnaire. Yet, there was a tendency between the participants to focus on certain categories of reasons as: the employment opportunities and the high employment rate then on reasons related with the vocational attraction and preference.

4. Conclusions. Key elements of a possible marketisation project for the majors Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy and Pedagogy

The main objective of the present study was that of articulating a marketing strategy for promoting the above-mentioned specializations. The data was obtained through a qualitative study that involved an open question investigation and a focus group.

The structure of the marketing approach involves three elements. First is the reputation of the institution. It follows the marketisation of the educational offer, namely the placement of the educational services and products on the public space by using both digital and classical means. The third stage is the admission process that involves: the ex-ante prospecting of the market and of the training needs expressed by the prospective students, the admission requirements and tests, the selection of the future students.

The starting point must be the use of the image capital that university has at both national and international level, of the prestige and reputation of the faculties and specializations of this university, of the opportunities that both the academic context of the institution, and the city offer to the potential students.

Then, on a second point, what must be emphasized is the attractivity of the idea of following such a vocational specialization, in which the aptitudes and abilities to work with children become essential benchmarks in taking the decision to follow these specializations. Both majors, Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy and Pedagogy, have the advantage of being much more vocational than other majors from the psiho-pedagogical sphere. Thus, since it is frequent that students chose this motivational, vocational option, assuredly its placing in the marketing strategy is justifiable. Many of the interviewed students even affirmed that the option for the specialization that they have selected was a very responsible one, some of them following a second specialization, after choosing a personally not suitable academic option in the past, therefore the valorization of the vocational character of the specializations in their marketing becomes a convincing argument.

As there were many answers that underlined the importance of the models offered by the professors, this image capital that the specialization, faculty and university have at the level of these professors, can be exploited, on one hand, on the other hand, the impulse of following the model of a teacher can be valued. Appealing to models is a marketing tool that is frequently used in digital and audio-video media and online. These models of teachers can be real, thus emphasizing important personalities from the domain, but also, they can be imaginary, exploiting models that the Romanian and universal literature provide.

An essential element of the marketing strategy is the presentation of the advantages of following the aforementioned specializations and the advantages of choosing a teaching career, throughout all media, namely, the constant professional outlet, with many vacant posts and many possibilities of tenure, attractive work schedule, with much holiday time, with possibilities of completing wage income with after-school programs, the fact that the profession is appreciated on a social level.

Having in mind the fact that the primary source of information identified by the questioned students as being important for the decision making process was the on-line presentation of the specialization, the web site itself and the information on the social networks, we consider that the institutions web site and the social network accounts must be valued to the greatest extent. These online spaces must offer relevant information, not only in the classical format, written text, but also in multimedia formatting, audio-video, digital. The potential students of these two specializations come from the generation of the digital natives, and the predilection for multimedia content and online space is scientifically proven fact. This does not necessarily imply the abandonment of traditional marketing tools, all the more so that its sphere of influence encompasses parents and professor, both categories still being permeable to the traditional manner of advertising and text messages.

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