

CREATING THE IMAGE OF THE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract. The main objective of this study is to present the impact of the Erasmus student exchange programme on the university image building. The first part of the paper, describes forms of promotion which are most commonly used by universities, namely: advertising, sponsorship, personal selling, online promotion and engagement marketing. The impact of the Erasmus programme on the university image building is exemplified by the Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW. The paper presents the history, the strengths and the promotional potential of the SGGW. In addition, the paper offers results of a survey, conducted among grantees participating in the Erasmus programme, which aimed at examining the familiarity and effectiveness of applied forms of promotion.

Key words: university image, forms of promotion, promotional potential, effectiveness of promotional programmes, Erasmus programme

INTRODUCTION

The current situation on the market of Polish universities is significantly different from that of a decade ago. The realities are as follows: growing educational aspirations, expansion of mass-education, and demographic low and increasing number of private universities. All these factors affect the level of market saturation with educational services. In order to beat the competition, the university should conduct a series of informational and promotional activities aimed at persuading the prospective students to select its educational offer. In times of internationalisation of human capital, promotion of the university on an international scale is definitely worth considering. Participation of the university in student exchange programmes is one of the methods of such promotion. Established over 25 years ago, the Erasmus programme enjoys a growing popularity and interest both among grantees and host universities. It contributes to increasing

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the mobility of young people, improving the quality of knowledge and the attractiveness of education. Participation in the programme is of mutual benefit: young people have the chance to study outside their home country; they receive the opportunity to study in a foreign language and broaden their horizons. The university, in turn, gains a good reputation, extends its educational offer, and most importantly, enhances its public image.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was based on a survey conducted among students who have studied under the Erasmus programme in Poland for one semester or one whole year. The survey comprised 25 questions and was drawn up in English.

The purpose of the survey was to learn the opinions of the grantees about the Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW, the positive and the negative aspects related to their participation in the Erasmus programme, and most of all, to examine the impact of the Erasmus programme on the University image building.

The target group were the participants of the Erasmus programme who were trained at the WULS-SGGW in the academic year 2013/2014.

Among the respondents there were 29 students (18 female, 11 male). This proves that the Erasmus programme is equally popular with women and men. The age of all the respondents ranged from 21 to 33. From the total: 62% of students, participated in the survey, came for a term study, 31% of them for two terms and 7% of them came for long-term studies. The reasons for such statistics are most probably financial considerations, the grant under the programme is guaranteed for one semester, and students wishing to spend two semesters at the host university usually cannot count on the financial support of their parent university.

PROMOTION INSTRUMENTS USED IN THE EDUCATION MARKET

University promotion is based primarily on providing information about its educational offer, presenting its strengths and creating a positive opinion about it. The university should introduce a series of comprehensive measures in order to cope with increasing competition and convince the potential candidate to select its offer. The most popular forms of university promotion are: advertising, sponsorship, personal selling, public relations and the Internet [Zeller 2006].

Universities usually promote themselves through advertisements in printed form or outdoor advertising (mainly billboards). “Print Ads” include all kinds of information guides, leaflets, brochures, catalogues or advertisements appearing in the press, both general and thematic.

Another instrument applied in the promotion of universities is public relations. The term “public relations” is derived from English and means relations of a company with its environment. Activities in the field of public relations include a formula for creating public confidence in, and a positive image of, the company. The environment of the company is composed of various opinion-forming entities, such as: consumers, companies

supporting marketing activities, institutions supervising the activities of the company, and political circles [Szwacka-Mokrzycka 2012].

The process of establishment of relations of the company with its broadly understood environments should involve a number of rigidly planned activities with clearly predetermined objectives. Thus, public relations are a series of long-term activities which should help to reduce the gap in the relationship between the company and its environment as a result of increasing confidence in its operations.

In the process of establishment of relations with the environment, the company has to fulfil a number of functions, among which the following are worth noting [Sznajder 1994]:

- Creation and popularisation of the company image;
- Dissemination of information which characterises the operations of the company in its internal and external environments;
- Establishment of contacts and maintaining ties with all the elements of the environment which are of essence from the point of view of the objectives of the company;
- Harmonisation of social relations within and outside the company;
- Strengthening and fixing the position of the company, and mitigating risks.

Another material function in public relations is performed by “sponsorship”, as one of the fastest growing forms of promotion, which consists in the investment of funds or property in a certain activity while using the activity to build a positive image of the sponsor. This form of promotion plays a significant role in enhancing the image of the university as it contributes to increasing its popularity and recognisability.

For this reason, universities usually sponsor scientific, cultural and sporting events or invest in the activities of scientific clubs. In university practice, this form of promotion is not a large-scale phenomenon due to limited budget resources.

“Personal selling” is the oldest form of promotion, and even in countries where modern sales techniques are quite widespread, it still plays quite an important role. Personal selling is a crucial form of promotion, involving direct presentation of a product or service to a potential customer.

The efficiency of personal selling originates mainly from its individualised nature, and thus, the possibility to adapt to the requirements of specific buyers and to respond to their needs, in a flexible manner, during negotiations. When it comes to universities, personal selling is an immensely effective tool. It may take on various forms, such as participation in educational fairs, symposia, scientific or training conferences, exhibitions, “open days” or competitions.

Nowadays, advertisements which are placed on the Internet become increasingly important in the promotional process of the university. “Online advertising” is a form of paid, impersonal promotion, making use of the global Internet network, affecting the attitudes, motivations and the manner of conduct of its recipients [Sznajder 2002].

Today, finding a university without its own website is not an easy task. What is more, schools place their advertisements and information on various thematic portals, and offer all types of online competitions. Universities gradually introduce distance learning, and e-learning has become an additional asset to traditional educational forms. These measures are taken in order to ensure that a specific university is associated with modernity.

Websites are composed of many essential elements, such as: content (text), graphic and visual design, video animations, sound, hyperlinks to related websites, contact forms, and many others.

As a form of promotion “engagement marketing”, also known as participation marketing or experiential marketing, has not gained much popularity yet. It is a form of marketing activity which supplements the traditional marketing offer with powerful experience, positive memories and emotions. It combines elements of various scientific disciplines – psychology, philosophy and art. Engagement marketing does not involve the sale of services, but the sale of sensations. The consumers of today are more and more demanding. They do not want the mere service any more, but a service which is accompanied by a package of positive emotions, experiences and feelings. The same applies to students who take this aspect of services into account when choosing the university. Not only do they want to acquire knowledge and develop, but they also wish to learn in a student-friendly place, offering plenty of attractions and a considerable dose of colourful student life.

To a large extent, satisfaction of the student affects the image of the educational facility through his/her recommendation and the sharing of positive opinions with friends. It is the current and former students of the university who shape its reputation. Word-of-mouth plays an invaluable role in creating the image of the university. Therefore, the university authorities should aim to provide their students with as many sensations, especially those unique, surprising and memorable, as possible. Pine and Gilmore created the following 3-S model.

Figure 1 shows the assumptions of 3-S, i.e. satisfaction, sacrifice and surprise. At the top of the pyramid, its creators placed surprise, which requires the service provider, in this particular case the university, to deliver surprising sensations, exceeding all the possible expectations of the customer. Satisfaction, as the foundation of the pyramid, must be continuously increased, whereas sacrifice, placed in the middle, must be gradually reduced. The satisfaction level can only be achieved if the other stages have been successfully completed.



Fig. 1. Model 3-S
Source: Skowronek [2012].

CREATING THE IMAGE OF THE UNIVERSITY

Image can be defined as the representation of a given item in the consciousness of persons from its surroundings. It is not a static concept and is prone to changes resulting from a shift in such persons' tastes and views.

Image is the result of a long-term creation strategy, aiming to consolidate or change the attitudes, beliefs and decisions of the addressees of the entity's marketing operations. The following are the basic components of the university image:

- name of the university,
- its age, tradition, size and scope of operations,
- its financial strength and prospects for the future,
- its mission,
- its product offer,
- marketing strategy applied by it.

The image of the university [Łazorko and Niedzielska 2011] is very often the reason behind choosing it as a place of study and acquiring knowledge. It is created in the minds of all those who have had a direct or an indirect association with the university, and as such it is very complex and multidimensional. This is due to the different tasks performed by universities: provision of education to a large number of students, scientific discoveries or scientific research. The image of the university may be viewed from the perspective of the student, employee, entrepreneur or state administration. In other words, the image of the university is the summary of the following components: science creator, entity supported financially, moral authority, educator, investor and employer. It is of utmost importance that all of these components should integrate with one another and supplement each other to create a complementary image of the university.

A key role in the university image strategy is played by public relations, and within its framework, a good relationship with the press and opinions formed by students. The students are a key link in the process of university image building – through their opinions, they convey the contents of the image. They are the first recipients of the mission, the vision and the values recognised by the university. Thus, the most important stage of university image building is to develop a positive image of the university among its students and employees.

In recent years, the number of public and private universities, institutes, academies both in Poland and individual countries is rapidly growing. The reason of this matter brought by globalization is that the secondary school students studying anywhere in the world are able to reach potential students studying in other countries. For this reason, one of the most important issues facing every university in the 21st century is to win the competition and to attract potential, smart students with R&D skills to their universities from the country and throughout the world. Thus, one of the most important issues for university is to have image and the image formation. In general, what is the image?

An image (from Latin: *imago*) is an artifact that depicts or records of visual perception, for example a two-dimensional picture, that has a similar appearance to some subject – usually a physical object or a person, thus providing depiction of it.

Also the image is a drawing or a symbol that comes to mind, embedding in mind, creating positive or negative thoughts. For example, what is understood by the people while

saying America's universities, the UK universities or the Polish universities and how they accept it? The concept of corporate image having importance in regard of increasing the corporate success, competitive advantage and corporate value has an important place for the universities as for all institutions. The university's image and how the image is perceived is an important concept for to the corporate success. Corporate commitment may develop in relation with the corporate image or the high corporate commitment may cause the improvement of the corporate's image.

FACTORS AFFECTING IMAGE

Shaping the image of the university should be approached comprehensively. There are a number of positive and negative factors affecting the image. Let's list some of these factors:

1. Universities having old and well-established traditions. Universities such as Harvard, Oxford are able to protect their image and are the most preferred universities in many areas at present as they have very old and well-established traditions, and hosted different students.
2. Universities benefiting from the image of the developed countries. Developed countries such as the UK, the USA, Australia, Germany and so on can be given as example. While asking the people preferring this category where they want to study, they directly say the UK or the USA etc. The first preference for these people is to study in these countries. Of course, the university is also of importance, but they mostly emphasize the country. Every university in these countries has a greater opportunities.
3. Universities having Nobel prizes, which did inventions, innovations in the world at the expense of their own success. This type of universities can be proper for the first category. However, there may be a number of new universities soon gained a high profile because of the success in any field and people, who want to have serious speciality, prefer this type of universities. As it is not easy to study and graduate this type of universities.
4. The existence of a well-known professors in the university. It may happen that the university is not well-known in the world, but the existence of the professors famous in certain fields (for example, the existence of the professor well-known in genetics, marketing or law etc. in the university) will lead to the formation of the image of that chair and to the increase of the number of the students.
5. The strong universities in the underdeveloped countries. There is different way of approach to this type of universities. Here, cheapness factor may play a role as a positive factor. Perhaps, the factors such as not fully developed infrastructure in the country and so on cause a decline in the university's image. If these universities were in the developed countries, their image might be well formed.
6. Economic, political and social conditions in the country. These factors are also play an important role. Social and political situation in the country impacts the image of the university. For example, the University of Cairo in Egypt has always had a distinctive image. However, the current political situation in the country not only affected the preference of the foreign students to study there, but also it has become a risk

factor for the local students. Factors, such as human rights issues, unsafe/unsecure places and places under pressure, limited freedom, “tight and challenging prisons”, “solid and severe laws”, “repressive police states”, “state of the army”, “female-male inequality” and so on, are recognized as risk factors. The opposite is known as a great opportunity.

IDENTITY OF THE UNIVERSITY

Identity is the sum of the elements which identify the entity and distinguish it from other entities (expressed in visual form) [Szwacka-Mokrzycka 2011]. These elements include the following: mission, objective and forms of action distinguishing the entity from other entities. Identity defines what makes the entity recognisable. Identity is a certain set of attributes which are communicated by the entity to its environment.

The attributes which are most frequently mentioned as the ones building market attractiveness of the university include a high ranking place of the university, based on criteria, such as: prestige, innovativeness, scientific potential, student conditions or the internationalisation of the university. Such rankings are used to convince oneself of the rightness of one’s choice, rather than determine the choice in the first place.

Another important attribute of the university listed by students is the length of its existence – the longer and more complex the history of the university, the more established reputation it enjoys and the greater attachment to its tradition [Marek 2013].

A significant attribute is the professional experience of the faculty – the availability of employees with high level of competence and specialised knowledge. In this regard, universities often quote the number of professors with scientific achievements valued all over the world.

The availability of new technologies in the educational process – such as classes conducted with the use of computers, the Internet, multimedia projectors or the increasingly popular e-learning – is also perceived as an attribute.

Another important element is a good infrastructure of the university, including: a library, well-maintained campus, spacious rooms, comfortable chairs, air-conditioning, WiFi access, proximity of facilities, such as Xerox, buffets, cafes or dormitories of high standard.

Other frequently listed advantages include: grants and scholarships offered by the university, assistance in finding accommodation and proposed student placement opportunities – the availability of the “career services”. While building the identity of the university, its authorities should be consistent in their action. At this stage, they should answer a few basic questions:

- Tradition or modernity?
- A large number of students or elite studies?
- Partner relationship with the students, or rather a master and an apprentice relationship pattern?
- Focus on the acquisition of theoretical knowledge or classes centred on solving case studies?

DESCRIPTION OF THE WARSAW UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES

The Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW is one of the largest and most prestigious universities in Poland. It conducts research and educational activities, as well as work involving implementation of scientific research into the economy. Due to the “nature” profile of the University, the curriculum is dominated by natural sciences, supported by technical and economic sciences, as well as humanities.

The history of the SGGW dates back to 1816 and is associated with the establishment of the Institute of Agronomy in Marymont. The initiators of the Institute were Stanisław Staszic and Stanisław Potocki. In 1918, the Institute of Agronomy was renamed to the Royal – Polish Main School of Agriculture, and in 1919, the University was nationalised and changed its name to the Main School of Agriculture [official English name: The Warsaw University of Life Sciences].

SGGW is one of the largest educational centres in Poland. The University offers both first degree courses (licentiate or engineering – BSc), and second degree courses (MSc). After the successful completion of a BSc course, the student may continue his/her studies at the MSc level, at the same faculty or a different one. This enables the student to change his/her major after the first degree course and obtain two diplomas, from two different faculties. In addition, the SGGW conducts postgraduate and PhD courses at numerous faculties.

The educational process at the University is supported by the modernly managed Władysław Grabski Main Library. The library applies innovative technological solutions, offering access to the latest scientific publications and valuable fiction in Polish and English.

The University has a well developed infrastructure. The University campus is one of the best planned and equipped educational and research complexes in the country. The social facilities of the University are quite well developed as well, and include dormitories, canteens, a swimming pool, a tennis court and other sports facilities.

SGGW cooperates with app. 250 foreign partners from all continents. This enables the students and the staff to make numerous trips to partner universities, within the framework of internship or study. The number of foreign students, who come to Poland in order to study at the SGGW, is also systematically growing. As part of the cooperation, every year 500 students have the opportunity to receive training in the UK, Switzerland, Norway, the Netherlands and the USA.

The University has numerous science clubs and circles, as well as student organisations and institutions, such as Student Self-Government, the Academic Choir, PROMNI – A Folk Group, the Representative Orchestra, student clubs and all types of discussion clubs.

The University has been highly ranked among other Polish and foreign universities for many years. It was awarded the title of a “Student Friendly University” by its students. In 2010 and 2011, the SGGW took the first place in the competitions organised by the Academic Centre for Information as the “Most Innovative and Creative University in Poland”. Later on, in 2012 and 2013, the SGGW received the title of the “Most Innovative and Creative University in Poland in terms of creating career prospects”.

RESULTS

To the question “Are you satisfied with the time spent during the Erasmus?”, 76% of them answered “yes a lot”. Only 24% of them gave the answer “rather yes”. If we pay attention to these students we will see that most of them came from the country, the economy of which is more developed than in Poland (7% of students came from France, 3% of students came from Germany, 3% of students from Spain). Of course, this factor affects to what extent of their satisfaction.

To the question “Why did you choose Poland as a place to go?”, 72% of students (28% males, 44% females) answered as “economical reason: it is very cheap country”, 7% of students (females) answered as “I was interested in culture in Poland”, 21% of students answered as “My colleague recommended me this country”.

As it can be seen, mainly the economic and cultural factors have great role in the preference of Poland.

To the question “How did you find this university?” – 10% of students (females) answered “from the website”, 14% of students (7% males, 7% females) answered “my college has recommended it to me”, 76% of students answered “from my school: this university was listed as a partner school”.

As it can be seen, the main factor for the students in choosing this university is mutual cooperation between universities. It is true that some universities still try not to open the doors to many universities (especially the poor image of the university), but this factor is important to provide the flow of smart students to the university. Of course, as it seemed the role of site is an undeniable. We live in a time when computer technology is well developed. People have the opportunity to choose what they want to study in a home. For this reason, the readability of the site, its attractiveness, simplicity is one of the very important issues in forming the image of the webpage.

To the question “Would you recommend this university to your colleges as a perfect to spend Erasmus?”, 86% of students (52% women, 34% men) gave the answer “yes”, 14% of students (10% women, 4% men) answered “no”. Here, a noticeable issue is that answering “no” these 14% of students are from prestigious European countries: 14% women are from Germany, Italy, Spain and 4% men from France.

To the question “Do you think that Warsaw University of Life Sciences is creating a positive image a part of Erasmus?”, 93% – 27 students (17 women, 10 men) answered “yes”. 7% of students (3.5% women and 3.5% men) gave the answer “no”. Those who gave the answer “no” were from France.

To the question “Which of listed promotion activities during Erasmus you liked the most”, 28% – 8 students (4 men and 4 women) gave the answer “Welcome day”, 31% of students (17% women, 14% men) answered “Food Party”, 55% of students (41% women, 14% men) answered “Well-organized trips”.

Students draw attention to the importance of the social activities in the campus. In the same manner, other university students put forward this kind of activity as an important feature of the university.

To the question “Basing on your own observations, please write which is creating more friendly image for a foreigner”, 38% of students (31% women, 7% men) answered

as “Warsaw University of Life Sciences”, 7% of students answered as “My home university”. At the same time 55% – 16 students (9 women, 7 men) said “the same”.

They think positive about the quality of education and the quality of faculty. They defined that there was not distance between the student and the teaching staff, teachers spared time for the students, they interested in students, and they were happy with this.

To the question “Please appoint the attitude of teachers to Erasmus student in Warsaw University of Life Sciences”, the most preferred section was “positive attitude” (59% – 10 women, 7 men) and 41% – 12 students (8 women, 4 men) said “rather positive attitude”.

As it can be seen it is more important issue to have such programs in the formation of the university image. However, one issue that should not be forgotten is that if students do not see what they wanted to see while coming to the university, they may cause not only formation of the image, but in contrary to the collapse of the image.

The answer “mostly positive but were some unpleasant incident” to the question “What was the attitude of Polish students to Erasmus people?”, chose 38% of students (28% women and 10% men), 28% – 8 students said “neutral”, 34% – 10 student answered “positive”.

As a result, it can be said that all of the factors shaping the image of the university should be approached comprehensively. Otherwise, the image may be negative.

CONCLUSIONS

The brand image has nowadays become a strategic tool allowing better positioning of the university on the market. The results of research allowed to determination of possibilities of implementation of brand image for marketing strategy on the educational market. In view of research results it can be concluded that the main factor for the students in choosing this university is mutual cooperation between universities. Warsaw University of Life Sciences is creating a positive image for 93% of Erasmus students. The crucial role in creating image of Warsaw University of Life Sciences plays promotion activities.

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KREOWANIE WIZERUNKU UCZELNI

Streszczenie. Celem głównym opracowania jest przedstawienie wpływu programu wymiany studenckiej Erasmus na budowanie wizerunku uczelni. W pierwszej części opracowania zostały opisane formy promocji najczęściej stosowane przez szkołę wyższą, czyli reklama, sponsoring, sprzedaż osobista, promocja internetowa oraz marketing doznań. Wpływ programu Erasmus na budowanie wizerunku uczelni przedstawiono na przykładzie Szkoły Głównej Gospodarstwa Wiejskiego w Warszawie. Zaprezentowano historię, atuty a także potencjał promocyjny SGGW. Ponadto zbadano opinie stypendystów biorących udział w programie Erasmus na temat znajomości i skuteczności zastosowanych form promocyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: wizerunek uczelni, formy promocji, potencjał promocyjny, efektywność programu promocyjnego, program Erasmus

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