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Building an image of a higher education institution as an instrument of Mega Marketing

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BUILDING AN IMAGE OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF MEGA MARKETING

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Introduction

The image of a higher education institution is regarded by the author as a fundamental factor of competitive advantage in the modern education marketplace.

A specific character of the modern education market is shaped by a range of rather negative for higher education trends, including first of all the declining birth rates and high unemployment among university graduates with employers seemingly less and less interested in offering jobs to them. This situation poses a real threat to the existence and development of higher education, particularly for private universities. Also, it forces universities to seek competitive advantage in the education market.

A fundamental question arises: what represents competitive advantage for higher education institutions? In general, competitive advantage occurs when an organization creates values that are not created by other organizations within the same sector or when these values are created in a better or more attractive manner.

Undoubtedly, a type of competitive advantage depends on a number of social and economic conditions. In poorer societies, competitive advantage may be represented by lower costs of studying i.e. lower entrance fees, tuition fees, charges for resitting exams etc. Competitive advantage may be also built by offering scholarships for academic achievements, social benefits or accommodation in a dormitory. In more prosperous societies characterised by high levels of social awareness and development, competitive advantage is created by factors associated with intellectual and personal development of students and their creativity.

An important element of competitive advantage in the times of prosperity is providing opportunities for physical and cultural development by offering access to a range of facilities allowing students to follow their interests. Such facilities will include for example a swimming pool, a sports hall or a gym. Cultural life will be enhanced by a school which promotes initiatives such as student song and dance groups, cabarets, nature admirers clubs etc.

Regardless of the economic conditions, however, it is the quality of teaching that has always been the most important element of competitive advantage. The quality of education offered depends first

and foremost on the programmes of studies and academic staff, who represent one of the most important groups of university stakeholders. Also, Social Responsibility principles dictate that a vital competitive asset of a higher education institution is its capabilities of encouraging academic curiosity, promoting students' co-participation in initiating and conducting scientific research as well as inspiring their creativity in the area of launching and undertaking a variety of entrepreneurial projects.

As Corporate Social Responsibility is becoming increasingly important in the context of management, the CSR principles have come to determine both the identity and the image of an organization. The CSR principles can be adopted also by higher education institutions too to strengthen their competitive advantage in the education market.

The question arises: what elements build the image of a higher education institution?

Image of a higher education institution; its essence and definition

A university's image is its perception by the environment, in the education market in particular. More precisely, image is an entirety of subjective ideas and knowledge formed as a result of exposition to messages transmitted by media. Of key importance for building an image is identity understood as a system of qualities defining a particular higher education institution. A university's identity embraces its programmes of studies, plans, methods of teaching, mission and its realisation alongside issues such as organizational culture and dedication to the CSR principles. A university's identity gives an answer to the question: what is the university? What does it represent? A university's identity is a set of values that pervade the school and are emanated into its environment. As such, identity is fully controlled by a university. A university's image, on the other hand, gives an answer to the question: How is the university perceived internally and externally? Image of a higher education institution can be thus described as an entirety of ideas and knowledge about it formed by means of communication channels used by the university to interact with its environment. It is even possible to claim that a university's competitive advantage in the education market depends on its image. Likewise, creating and enhancing the image involves two major processes of the enhancement of a university's identity and a selection and refinement of suitable communication channels which transmit a clear and persuasive message to easily target the school's stakeholders. Image enhancement should be based on an answer to the question: what is the desired image a school wants to project? It is reasonable to accept that the desired image means that of a school which offers an innovative, attractive and student-friendly model of studying based on the honest and open communication and rapport building with students.

A desired image of a higher education institution should be built from the following components:

- existing and planned degree courses and the character of curricula;
- academic staff and plans for raising their qualifications;
- on-going and future research projects;
- present-day and future collaboration with science entities including domestic and foreign higher education institutions;

- current and planned facilities to further scientific, cultural and physical development of students;
- paying special attention to fostering good relations among student community, administration and library staff;
- active adherence to social responsibility principles.

The assessment of a university's current image should be executed according to the above criteria complemented by brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty. The latter is easily identifiable by whisper marketing or family traditions of studying at a given university.

Another factor determining a university's image is a system of visual information composed of such elements as a logo, trademark, university's colours, architecture and décor as well as facilities in lecture rooms and the library.

As already mentioned, image results to a certain extent from how identity is communicated to and understood by a university's stakeholders. Hence building the identity communication system is, alongside building identity itself, of key importance for a positive perception of a university by its internal stakeholders and the environment. It is worth noting that this perception will depend on stakeholders' awareness of the conditions of the functioning of higher education institutions in general and the values they promote, coupled with stakeholders' expectations regarding the satisfaction of their needs by particular universities. One has to bear in mind that a higher education institution should be exclusive in the intellectual sense while egalitarian in the sense of being open to its environment. Higher education institutions should continue to act as role models, as well as shape the future market by adjusting programmes of studies to the present-day market as emphasised by the National Framework for Qualifications, a document designed by the Polish Ministry of Education to provide a common reference for qualifications obtained from various schools in Poland.

The role of higher education institutions is changing in the context of building innovative economy. A closer cooperation between agents active in the area of knowledge development is taking place. Increasing internationalisation necessitates establishing contacts with researchers all over the world. Hence the need to build advanced relations between knowledge producers and users.

This evolution may favourably affect the image of higher education institutions provided enough determination and care is put into disseminating its ideals.

Image building must be preceded by an analysis of previous efforts in this area including image shaping factors. Such an analysis should give an answer to the question: what factors have shaped the image so far and what steps should be taken to improve it?

Image building can be understood in terms of four main stages:

- Forming the mission, goals and strategy;
- Defining major stakeholders, both external and internal;
- Developing effective marketing tools;
- Defining the manner of implementing the developed system of marketing tools.

The mission and the goals of a higher education institution

Development and improvement of the image of a higher education institution is subordinate to its mission. The mission of a university encapsulates its *raison d'être* and serves as the foundation for developing the structural division into departments, faculties and specializations with a corresponding system of general, leading and specialization subjects. Mission should determine the scope of scientific research and provide a starting point for selecting cooperation partners. The mission statement succinctly articulates a super synthesis of the school's purpose of existence and operation. For centuries, a university's mission has been to train, educate and do research. Assuming that these traditional values are non-negotiable, a contemporary mission can still build up upon them. The traditional mission statement can be extended by placing emphasis on meeting the practical needs, introducing elements of sound administration, developing public-private partnerships and, in connection with the above, by applying modern methods of management. The innovative economy poses new challenges for universities. These challenges include¹: encouraging creativity among the university staff and students and promoting the spirit of entrepreneurship, developing knowledge about technological and organizational solutions, market-oriented and pro-active management, and the initiation of partnerships and networking relationships with local authorities, business and social community.

The mission of a school of management may be developing human resources for the purposes of innovative economy while the mission of the management department of such a school may be training highly-qualified executives for innovative economy.

By including in the mission statement the words for innovative economy an emphasis is placed on a future-oriented approach and a sensitivity to social and economic growth. Such a mission statement necessitates adjusting curricula to the characteristics of the innovative economy while obviously fulfilling the requirements imposed by The National Framework for Qualifications. A university's mission statement does not need to expressly use the word *responsibility* as following the mission by definition requires commitment to social responsibility.

The aims of a university result from its mission and as such are a continuation and a refinement of the mission and an exemplification of the vision, which in itself may outline directions of national and international growth including opening new departments, faculties and specializations. As a university's strategy defines the ways of achieving its vision and aims, it should contain elements of image building and its enhancement. This implicates the necessity to define and embrace desired values, attitudes and ways of distinguishing oneself on the education market by emphasising the school's unique character.

Mission and its realisation are subject to change in consequence of radical changes of the conditions in which a university functions. For example, in the present-day market, educational institutions are competing not only for students but also for sources of funding. This creates new conditions for building image.

¹ K. Matusiak, *Budowa powiązań nauki i biznesu w gospodarce opartej na wiedzy*, Wyd. SGH, 2010, p.171.

The mission, aims and strategy of a university tell about its offering. It is reasonable to confront this offering with the expectations of the school's stakeholders as it is their expectations that to a large extent determine a number of factors crucial for building the university's image.

The key external and internal stakeholders of a higher education institution

Sometimes a university's educational offering implies that the school is a prestigious institution of substantial intellectual, personal and material potential with extensive scientific, business and regional contacts, although this might not be necessarily true. The discrepancy between a university's identity and the marketing message it communicates is likely to backfire on the school. The situation when a university's image does not measure up to its identity is bound to adversely affect the enrolment levels. This is why it is reasonable to first identify a university's stakeholders and their expectations and then modify the educational offering accordingly. Table 1 shows selected groups of stakeholders and their possible expectations. Generally, we can distinguish between external and internal stakeholders. Each of the expectations listed should be further specified and detailed while the grouping of stakeholders is of course open to question and bound to change in time.

The message communicated by a university to different groups of stakeholders presented in Table 1 may be modified to meet the exigencies of the moment. If a university is, for example, interested in a more intensive dialog with business entities regarding research cooperation, its marketing communications will focus on the scientific achievements, international cooperation, membership in clusters or innovative networks collaborating to solve specific problems.

Of great importance for forming the image though often underappreciated are internal stakeholders, including current students. They greatly contribute to forming a university's reputation simply by being faithful (or not) to the oath taken at the beginning of each academic year, which obliges students to honour certain values also outside the university. It seems that today both students and teachers attach too little importance to the wording of this oath during the education process.

When formulating marketing messages for stakeholders marketers should remember to respect differences in the language used by the world of science and that of the business sphere. The same concerns different mentalities of the representatives of these two spheres and different levels of entrepreneurial skills.

One needs to remember that relations with particular stakeholders are based on gaining mutual benefits. Particular stakeholders offer specific resources and capabilities. Each group of stakeholders brings in specific resources and capabilities that can be used to obtain benefits. To maintain and develop good relations, it is necessary to achieve a balance between resources and capabilities, which means a balance between what is offered and what is obtained as a benefit. Table 2 presents offers and benefits for three groups of stakeholders, the co-called triangle of economy and knowledge in an educational institution model.

Table 1. University stakeholder groups and their expectations.

Stakeholder Group	Selected stakeholder expectations with respect to university
Current students (on undergraduate courses, master degree courses, postgraduate courses, PhD studies)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to win an education permitting active participation in the growth of society; 2. to be professionally trained to be able to function in the global labour market; 3. to obtain a university degree; 4. to be treated with respect; 5. to be offered different learning opportunities including all-life learning options – postgraduate studies in particular; 6. to participate in the academic life and a university's external environment.
Prospective students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. attractive programmes of studies; 2. to acquire knowledge that opens access to a variety of professions and permits finding employment; 3. to be able to study several subjects; 4. to be offered the possibility of long-distance learning; 5. to be able to raise qualifications on postgraduate studies.
Prospective employers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. well-educated and creative employees capable of introducing change to the company; 2. professionals capable of transforming a traditional company into an innovative organization; 3. research aimed at enhancing growth of companies; 4. specialists capable of establishing international contacts.
Lecturers, scientists, administration staff including the recruitment department, the dean, the library and the social services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the university ethos; 2. good work conditions; 3. protection of freedom of research and other academic freedoms; 4. ability to cooperate with students under research projects; 5. opportunities for professional growth; 6. possibility to participate in the management decisions; 7. to serve as an expert for the university management; 8. friendly atmosphere at work, job security and growth opportunities; 9. good rapport between students and lecturers and other university staff; 10. encouraging initiative, independence and commitment through emphasising the mission of the university.
Media	interesting science events aimed at presenting different types of research.
Local authorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. cooperation with local institutions; 2. provision of highly-qualified personnel; 3. engagement of the academia in solving problems of local community; 4. social support for the initiatives of local government.
State authorities – Ministry of Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. preparation of creative graduates for the needs of the labour market; 2. development and dissemination of advanced knowledge; 3. preparing graduates for taking an active part in the democratic society in the home country and abroad; 4. personal growth of students and graduates.
Society	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. adequate quality of education provided; 2. being competitive in the European and world market; 3. shaping civil attitudes; 4. university functions as a depository of values and cultural role models – as a knowledge and culture emanating centre.

Source: Author's own elaboration on the ideas contained in: K. Kowalska, *Społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni*, Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Ekonomicznej in Tarnów, no. 2, 2009, vol. 1.

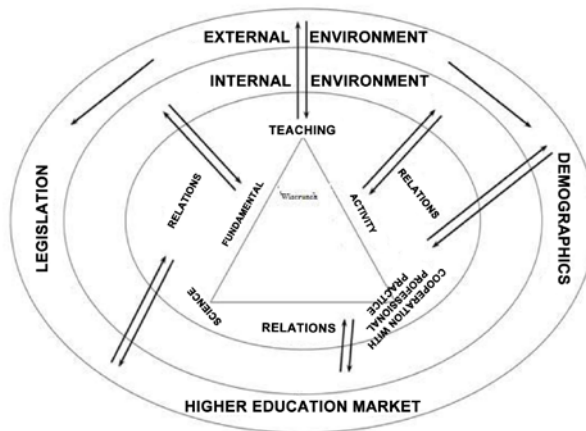
The image model, just like stakeholders, is subject to change in time. Only the assumptions for the image building model can be constant. As previously stated, a desired image of a higher education institution is that of a university which promotes an innovative, attractive and student-friendly mode of studying based on the communication style and the manner of relation building that value honesty and stress the importance of delivering on promises concerning the education process and the quality of teaching. Picture 1 shows a simplified model of these assumptions.

Table 2. Offered and the expected benefits of the relationship between the different stakeholders.

Stakeholders	Capabilities offered	Expected benefits
Science organizations: universities, institutes, laboratories and other	Knowledge, new technologies, creative environment, laboratories and facilities	Profitable sales of research results, contracts for services and expertise, research funding, jobs for graduates
Local and regional authorities	Initiating and co-ordinating growth enhancing activities, statutory financing, public procurement, aid programmes, public services	Increased dynamics of growth processes, increased tax revenues New places of work. Enhanced position of competitive, Enhanced image of the region
Business – small, medium and large enterprises	Capability to take risks, markets for products and services, distribution channels, investment	New products and technologies, Qualified personnel, Improved infrastructure

Source: Own's elaboration on the basis of K. Matusiak, op. cit., pp. 210-211.

Picture 1. Image of a higher education institution in relation to external and internal stakeholders.



Source: Author's own materials.

Of vital importance for the image building are relations between a university and its internal stakeholders on the one hand and those with a closer and a more distant environments.

The arrows in the figure inform of the relations between the school and its stakeholders including the labour market i.e. didactics, science. The space inside the triangle is the image.

Target stakeholders are prospective students, which is of special significance given the situation on the present-day education market. Despite their being undoubtedly the most important group of stakeholders, other groups of external stakeholders mustn't be underappreciated since their opinions strongly affect the target group's behaviour. As more and more attention is being paid to human capital development social responsibility principles are acquiring more importance, not only with reference to society as a whole but also to an organisation's employees. Good work conditions and a friendly atmosphere are conducive to creativity and staff effectiveness and promote loyalty to the university enhancing its image. Nowadays, human behaviour is a factor fundamental for the effective accomplishment of the strategic goals and as such it plays an important role in pursuing social responsibilities policy. Another important group of stakeholders are graduates who should be expected to speak well of their alma mater. The university ought to care about good relations with its alumni by, for example, inviting them to conferences and organising meetings with current students.

The structure of stakeholders expectations is varied and alters in time. New groups of stakeholders may appear, e.g. foreign students, or new legal regulations may affect the way in which a university functions. The question arises whether a university can meet all expectations of its stakeholders and whether it is aware of its responsibility towards society. Although the scope of this responsibility is defined by law, its interpretations may vary.

Social responsibility of an educational institution

Commitment to social responsibility precepts is increasingly important for building competitive advantage and image of a higher education institution. All organisations including educational institutions while fulfilling their core activities should honestly try and meet the social expectations relating to them. It should be noted that honesty in meeting social expectations should be a norm rather than an exception. The scope of social expectations referring to higher education is defined by the Act on Higher Education of 27 July 2005 (Journal of Law of 30 August 2005, chapter 1, article 4, paragraphs 3 and 4), which states that universities ought to pursue the mission of exploring and disseminating truth through conducting research and the training of students and that they ought to cooperate with the business environment in particular by selling or free transfer of the research and developmental work outcomes to entrepreneurs and by encouraging the spirit of entrepreneurship in the academia.

Today, social expectations regarding higher education institutions are escalating. In order to really-function in the social awareness, educational institutions must communicate with and actively shape its environment by identifying and minimising its weaknesses.

In the long term, following social responsibility principles builds and authenticates both a university's

identity and image. A key concept associated with corporate social responsibility is that of stakeholders. Each university has numerous stakeholders (see Tab. 1). The scope of its responsibilities depends on stakeholders' expectations, which are quite general (Tab. 1) and as such they make it impossible to define a university's responsibilities strictly. *Publico bono* delivered by universities has enormous value for society both in the short and the long-time range. A higher education institution is responsible for its impact on society across all its actual and potential functions².

Although corporate social responsibility has never been sanctioned by law, the CSR philosophy motivates organisations to implement its policies because of the evident benefits they bring.

Over a long period of time, the image of a higher education institution may deteriorate largely due to two reasons: when a university's identity has suffered or because of competition from other universities or its own stakeholders (also when this competition is unfair).

On 1 November 2010 the International Organization for Standardization published ISO 26000, an international standard which helps to clarify knowledge about Corporate Social Responsibility. The document interprets CSR as first and foremost:

- contributing to the accomplishment of sustainable development;
- respecting expectations of stakeholders;
- complying with legal regulations and being consistent with international standards of corporate behaviour.

ISO 26000 presents 6 core subjects of corporate operations, applicable also to higher education institutions: fair operating practices, human rights, labour practices, environment, consumer issues and community involvement and development.

ISO 26000 puts special emphasis on fair operating practices respecting social welfare, stakeholders' needs and ethical issues.

Although this standard concerns business organisations, its principles may as well apply to higher education institutions, for which observing ethical norms is of vital importance. In this area, higher education needs to fulfil at least two obligations. Firstly, universities should propagate ethical standards by incorporating them in the curricula. Secondly, universities should follow ethical norms in practice with relation to external and internal stakeholders. This is of particular significance in relation to the educational process as a university ought to deliver values guaranteed by its statutes and promised in the marketing communications. That's what students expect of the university and what they pay for when paying tuition fees. The infringement of ethical standards may seriously degrade the identity and image of a university.³ The focus on ethical principles and standards has never been more timely. The perception of ethical norms is directly connected with the quality of education, which nowadays seems to be increasingly jeopardized. This is a consequence of a combination of factors including financial difficulties of educational institutions,

² cf. K. Kowalska, *Spoleczna odpowiedzialność uczelni*, *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Ekonomicznej w Tarnowie*, no. 2, 2009, Vol. 1, p. 291.

³ cf. A. Czubała, *Marketingowe instrumenty budowania wizerunku firmy społecznie odpowiedzialnej [in:] Tożsamość i wizerunek marketingu*, ed. R. Niestrój, PTE, 2009, p. 222.

high numbers of students within classes and declining salaries of teachers. As a result, teachers' commitment to work with individual students is waning. In this context, Social Responsibility means resisting the temptation to "facilitate" acquiring knowledge by means of lowering teaching standards.

The second core subject highlighted by ISO 26000 is human rights. It is stressed that an organization should operate while fully respecting human rights and dignity, including in particular civil, political, social and cultural rights as well as counteracting all forms of discrimination. These ethical standards are of special importance in the whole environment of higher education, where it is expected of students to respect human rights and continue to do so also in their later professional life. With a growing number of foreign students, respecting human rights is becoming increasingly important. Besides recognizing the importance of human rights in a general sense, all organizations including educational institutions need to respect **human rights** also at the level of face-to-face contacts with individual people. The university staff in particular are obliged to respect human rights in these both dimensions, as it often happens that students are humiliated by teachers, administrators or library staff. The most complaints on the part of students concern bad treatment by the dean's office staff.

Universities must acknowledge students' rights to:

- use university facilities such as the Internet, library, car park, swimming pool and other sports facilities,
- choose teachers, courses and diploma work supervisors, and, most importantly, to be free.

On their part, students should regard academic teachers as fellow human beings and treat them in a respectful manner.

The third core subject concerns **labour practices of an organization**, which according to ISO 26000 should extend beyond the employer-employee relations. It is necessary to maintain continuous dialog with the community and build good working relationships with local authorities and, importantly, with other departments of a particular educational sector. Also, universities need to enter a dialog with secondary schools, whose pupils are likely to become future university students, and with employers, who might offer jobs to university graduates.

Labour practices can be considered from the point of view of innovation and, more specifically, in the area of cooperation with other science entities. Practices conducive to innovation will involve mobility of scientists and constructive management of research facilities. This will lead to building relations between researchers and business practitioners, collaboration opportunities through innovation networks and, as a consequence of globalization, establishing contacts with scientists all over the world. The area defined by ISO 26000 with reference to higher education is a global marketplace where a vital role is played by an entrepreneurial university. The above range of issues should be taken into account in communicating a university's identity.

Another core subject highlighted by ISO 26000 is the **protection of natural environment** interpreted as efforts to minimise harm to the environment, respecting proprietary rights and the promotion of corporate social responsibility. In the area of environmental protection universities serve a range

of roles including educating about environmental protection, conducting research to assess the condition of the environment and how to ameliorate it, participating in the campaigns to protect the environment (e.g. by collecting garbage). Some Polish universities have incorporated environmental protection in their very names. Many technical universities have environmental protection departments while higher schools of management often offer degree or optional courses in environmental protection management. In the field of research, major milestones have been accomplished by technical universities and at pharmacy departments of medical academies. Higher schools of management conduct research into the management of various aspects of environmental protection and financing projects in this area. There are also numerous diploma works. Universities participate in the campaigns to protect the environment and cooperate with secondary schools in this field. All these efforts on the part of the higher education sector shape the environmental awareness of society.

The fifth core subject defined in ISO 26000 is **consumer issues**, which is essentially an expectation of business transparency and honesty. Each organisation should be committed to health protection of its direct consumers by showing concern for service quality. This area is also important for the higher education environment which should promote a student-friendly approach to foster students' personal and intellectual development. Attention to the quality of service is vital right from the very first contact of prospective students with a university to the recruitment process, dean's office, library and, most importantly, the educational process. This problem is presented in detail with reference to other two core subjects of ISO 26000 – fair operating practices and human rights.

The last core subject is **community involvement and development**, interpreted as offering active support to local community and launching a social dialog regarding various social projects in the areas such as education, culture, health and access to technology. A higher education institution can and should become active in any of the above fields. It may for example initiate a blood donation action to support health care or aid other organizations in conducting social campaigns such as fighting against physical violence to children.

By complying with guidelines presented in ISO 26000 a university may strengthen its image and at the same time achieve competitive advantage. What also counts in the context of today's educational market and higher education in particular, is a chance to raise enrolment levels and attract superior teaching staff and, last but not least, more opportunities to obtain funding for research. A university which operates in a socially responsible manner is likely to improve or consolidate its relationships with partner organisations and communities with which it cooperates e.g. local authorities or media. Other benefits include achieving rational growth, refining organisational culture and strengthening commitment, loyalty and identification with the university of both staff and students. To conclude, commitment to social responsibility is likely to enhance identity and authenticity of a university.

These key elements of competitive advantage in the higher education sector bring unquestionable value to students and society. But do they contribute to building image of a higher education institution?

Marketing tools articulating the image of a higher education institution and their implementation

As mentioned above, image of a higher education institution depends on its identity and ways of communicating this identity to the stakeholders. Consequently, the main objectives of marketing tools deployed to identify and shape a university's image are as follows:

Making prospective students decide to choose a particular school by:

- offering unique knowledge and skills;
- offering opportunities to participate in the educational, sports, musical and other types of events;
- engaging students in projects aimed at winning entrepreneurial skills;
- engaging students in social responsibility campaigns;
- offering financial incentives (reduced tuition fees, awards for academic achievements, scholarships, social benefits etc.)

Establishing research and educational cooperation with other entities with a stake in science;

Obtaining funding for the university operations (research, education, social responsibility campaigns);

Drawing in sponsors to finance a variety of enterprises – e.g. publishing activities, conferences etc.).

In terms of communication style, there are two major areas of concern: the formulating of marketing tools and communication channels through which these tools are conveyed to stakeholders.

When formulating marketing tools for identifying and shaping a university's image it is important to:

- use marketing based on know-how and wisdom, which implicates adjusting the tools to the stakeholders' intellectual needs;
- respect the requirements of relationship marketing, which means maintaining a balance between different groups of stakeholders;
- aim at the integration of education, research and social responsibility;
- to allow for time needed to see the effects of the marketing tools after they have been implemented;
- to formulate marketing tools in a way that highlights benefits for their recipients - stakeholders, mainly prospective students (The 4 Cs of Marketing);
- to aim at bridging science and economy. Transfer of knowledge to the practice of social and economic life corresponds to the concept of transforming the traditional university into the entrepreneurial university characterised by attributes typical of a business organization. It is necessary to achieve a good working balance between a university's prestige and its egalitarian approach.

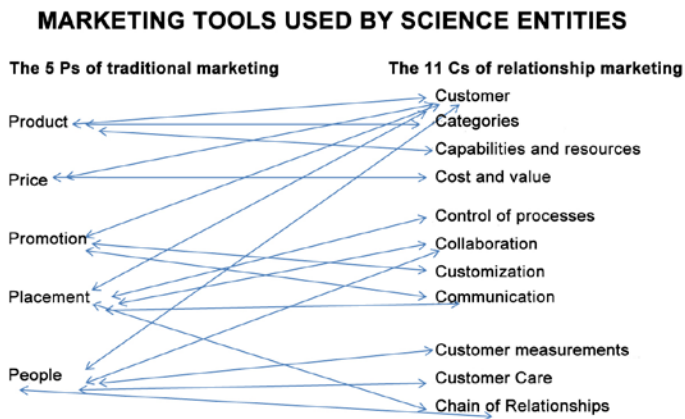
Both the purposes for which we design marketing tools and the rules according to which they are designed must flow from a university's mission and the vision of its growth. Obviously, marketing tools are a component of a university's strategy and should be formulated as a consequence of a methodical approach to image building.

We can accept for the sake of the present paper that a systematised set of marketing tools constitutes the mega tools of innovation marketing, which means that an analysis of the entire educational process as opposed to its selected phases must be taken into account before a set of marketing tools is formulated.

The systematization of the marketing tools that shape a university's image is based on the marketing

mix concept and its further elaboration – relationship marketing.

Picture 2. Marketing tools used by science organization.



Source: Author's own materials.

The traditional marketing tools are static while tools of relationship marketing are dynamic as they focus on relationships which to a large extent are interpersonal. According to the concept of 11 Cs, of utmost importance is the customer, who in the present discussion is primarily represented by a prospective or current student, but also by other university stakeholders.

Categories of products should be presented as a sum of benefits to be obtained by the student during the educational process. Of importance would be the promise of providing knowledge, skills and other competencies that facilitate successful performance in the labour market. The message communicating the benefits to be gained thanks to the product offered should accentuate a university's resources and capabilities – the teaching staff, the library etc. - as giving credibility to the marketing promise.

It should be emphasized that products offered by a higher education institution are created in cooperation with students in the sense of a certain degree of democracy of management and students' participation in solving a university's problems.

Another option to consider is forming a chain of relationships joining individual actors in the education market, especially where the profile of education offered and research conducted may be complementary, e.g. cooperation between medical and natural sciences departments, which could possibly lead to interesting research outcomes, joint publications, patents or new expertise. An important category of products is diploma theses. The outcomes presented in diploma theses may well be used as sources of product, process, organization or marketing innovation.

When offering a product or categories of various products a university should emphasize how they are created and, more importantly, what is their practical value to the stakeholders or prospective clients. Stakeholders need to be encouraged to cooperate with a university either as sponsors or donors or perhaps in solving practical problems beyond the scope of science. A university offers society products in the area of social responsibility (discussed earlier).

The presented elements of the category of products that validate a university's identity are brought to the attention of stakeholders by means of another marketing tool, namely marketing communications.

Marketing communications plays an important role largely due to the fact that a university's image depends on using an adequate selection of media to communicate marketing messages. The question arises whether a university's identity has more value than its image or whether a university's image can present a university's teaching standards as higher than they are in reality. The author of this paper believes that the second case is possible with skilful and intense promotional activity (as in the saying according to which a lie, when repeated fifty times, still remains a lie, but when it is repeated a hundred times it turns into truth).

It is fair to formulate the thesis that a prerequisite for equating identity with image is communicating identity to both external and internal stakeholders in the way that is honest, truthful, interesting and clear. A marketing message like this is constructed by elements such as seminars open to appropriate groups of stakeholders including media, educational fairs to display a university's achievements and planned enterprises, open-door events, open lectures, national and international conferences. It is also important to organize conferences of scientific circles and alumni reunions. Many events including those organized in cooperation with other universities to mark various anniversaries such as the opening of a new faculty or founding of the school may serve the role of marketing tools. Other opportunities for marketing communications include diploma awarding ceremonies and publishing activities.

Marketing tools also communicate a university's achievements and planned enterprises in the area of social responsibility.

The most popular forms of marketing communications are universal and social advertising as two of the most general forms of communication. This type of advertising lends itself well to building relationships between a university and its stakeholders. It serves as a signpost or a guideline for dialog interpretation, effectively minimizing risks inherent to some aspects of bilateral knowledge exchange. Social advertising points to the meaning of events taking place at university and reflects the academic life.

An important form of marketing communications is a university's prospectus, which should clearly present a university's assets representing its identity (resources, processes and effects), that is a university's departments, faculties, specializations, curricula, services and plans for the near future including the mission and vision.

A marketing tool which is most commonly present in today's higher education market is **price**. This tool is most widely used by private universities. The year 2012 even saw higher education schools exempt students from the enrolment fees and offer tuition discounts. Reducing student fees however may not

necessarily favourably affect a university's image. It is likely to raise enrolment levels over a short period of time but in the long run the price factor alone, unaccompanied by other image enhancing measures, will have no effect on either a university's identity or its image.

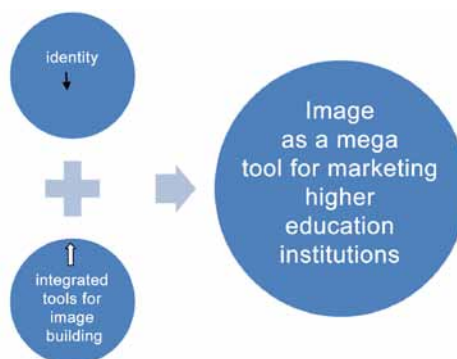
At the same time, high tuition fees and many additional expenses such as charges for resitting exams, that amount to unreasonably high costs of studying, will not always cause a university's image to deteriorate, although they temporarily do bring down the enrolment levels.

Price as a marketing tool also means a promise of scholarships for outstanding academic performance, social benefits, an offer of free courses or conference subsidies.

The marketing mix model also comprises **distribution**. In the higher education marketplace, distribution is understood as providing educational services by one school at different venues in the country or even abroad. Distribution is thus connected with location. It also entails such characteristics of the educational process as distance learning. Another form of distribution will be organizing professional training for example in hospitals for medical students, at business enterprises for technical students or at theatres or shooting sets for arts students. In general, this type of distribution of educational services favourably affects a university's identity and image. Both pricing strategy and distribution of educational services should be effectively communicated to stakeholders.

Personnel represents a marketing tool of utmost importance impacting a university's image in the most direct way. The relationships that serve as a basis for all image shaping activities are created by people. These people are the academic staff, researchers and administrators. Of critical importance are their qualifications and relations they build with students across the whole spectrum of academic life. A related problem concerns creating an atmosphere conducive to work and cooperation between academics and students. Finally, it is worth emphasizing that all marketing tools detailed above alongside some selected elements of relationship marketing are mutually integrated to promote benefits for stakeholders arising from a university's capabilities embedded in its identity.

Picture 3. Image as a tool of mega marketing in the higher education sector.



Source: Author's own materials.

The implementation process of the formulated marketing tools falls within the responsibilities of marketing departments or centres situated close to university authorities. This locality facilitates coordinating image enhancing activities in the scale of the entire university. If the school has off-site departments – initiatives aimed at strengthening the image should be undertaken by the management of these departments.

The implementation process requires certain preparatory works including creating appropriate organizational structures and conducting training mainly in the area of effectiveness of particular information channels used for the preparation and monitoring of this process.

According to the marketing concept of an organization's growth, the marketing department must cooperate in the area of image strengthening with all other functional departments, including a library.

To sum up, it should be noted that the implementation process of shaping and perfecting the image must be carefully prepared by competent marketers. Besides having marketing expertise, it is vital to know well the environment in which a given university functions. The marketing department should develop a marketing strategy as a basis for the marketing activities plan. Besides marketers, such a department should employ an economist and an expert in the area related to the university profile, e.g. an expert in medical schools at a medical university or an engineer at a technical university. The marketing department should have at its disposal a database of other universities and main stakeholders. This database should also include guidelines contained in ISO 26 000 on how to implement recommendations relating to each of its core subjects.

Conclusion

The situation in today's educational marketplace forces universities to seek competitive advantages. The sole status of a higher education institution, even in the case of a prestigious university, is no longer sufficient. Universities have to engage in the on-going process of building the image synonymous with building competitive advantage.

The image of a higher education institution should be based not only on the programmes of studies but also on a university's commitment to social responsibility principles.

Image building requires developing and utilizing a range of specific marketing tools. The mega image means an integrated mix of tools and a university's identity.

Successful image enhancement relies on the activities of highly-qualified specialists of a university's marketing department.

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