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Creating the Brand of a University

Zarządzanie. Teoria i Praktyka nr 1 (7), 43-59

2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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CREATING THE BRAND OF A UNIVERSITY

The brand of a university in the contemporary world

In a material sense, a brand is a graphical sign, a name-symbol created to distinguish the offered product from the others on the market. The brand guarantees the quality of the offered goods and services. The brand is supposed to ensure the consumers that they made the right decision to use the branded goods and services.

The brand is synonymous with the success of a company. At the same time it constitutes the best evidence of the quality of work (or good) of a company, for example car, food or educational one. The notion “brand” can be understood in two ways:

“In a narrow sense the term *brand* emphasizes mostly its elements (name, graphical sign, symbols and their combinations), the goal of which is to identify the offer of a given entity and distinguishing it in comparison to the offers of competition.

If a brand is present in the buyer's consciousness, which means acquiring some knowledge about it and adopting a positive attitude towards it, then his reaction to the product is different than the reaction to a similar product (service), which does not have this brand”².

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² J. Kall, *Zarządzanie marką instytucji badawczej w oparciu o model „Góry lodowej*, [in:] *Marketing Instytucji Naukowych i Badawczych, multiple authors, edited by W. Łukowski, Wydawnictwa Naukowe Instytutu Lotnictwa, Warszawa 2010, p. 33.*

The existence of a brand is determined by its presence in a customer's subconsciousness. This makes the purchase of a good or a service an emotional decision in which the price does not matter.

For a customer a brand is synonymous with luxury, emphasizing a certain economic status, the key to be a part of a given social circle.

From the marketing point of view, the customer buying a branded product becomes a marketing tool, reinforcing the advertisement of a product or service. He convinces others that the product is good and increases the number of people who speak positively of a product (service).

Creating a brand – regardless of the type of a company – is a long process supported by good marketing. Currently in every economic and educational area there are companies which created their brands, for example: Rolls Royce, Jaguar in the car industry, McDonald's, Coca Cola in the food industry, universities Harvard and Cambridge in educational industry.

At the beginning one should decide if the notion “brand” functions in the education's field. If so, does it concern the whole university, a department, faculty, teacher or subject? The question should be answered positively, at least in relation to the whole university or department. In fact, educational institutions have become brands. A brand carries positive connotations, so the academic setting does not oppose to such terminology. It seems that one can use the terms “positive image” or “prestige” interchangeably.

How to create the brand of a university? It is obviously a long process, which requires constant work. In the educational area creating the brands of institutions is conducted by a small number of commonly-known people³.

Other factors of creating the university's brand are:

- a very good academic staff – active in science and didactic fields – the most important factor;
- participation in popular science events, for example: The Days of Science, The Festivals of Science;
- taking care of so called *publicity* – articles about the university in opinion making press. The texts should not be sponsored, they should inform about the important achievements and events from the life of the university, which may be interesting for people outside the academic field;
- providing good conditions for studying; lecture rooms with the possibility to conduct multimedia lectures; workshop rooms, a well-equipped library available from the morning to the night with a big number of publications and books – following the task-oriented, appropriate policy of purchasing (buying new books, textbooks recommended by specialists on teaching);

³ A. Ries, L. Ries, *Upadek reklamy i wzrost public relations (The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR)*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 2004, p. 180.

computer laboratories open all day, designed for the independent work of students;

- organizing information days and open lectures;
- cooperation with the domestic and foreign partners – universities and companies (which enables practicing and sometimes meeting a new employer);
- guarantee of thorough education – related to greater chances of finding a job by the graduates.

The brand of a university is confirmed by the high positions in rankings. One can talk also about a feedback – a high place in rankings which take various criteria into consideration strengthens the brand of a university.

The brand of a department is created almost by the same actions. The attractiveness of the faculties is crucial, as it influences directly the number of candidates and “quality” of the students.

The goal of this article is to consider the possibility to build a brand on a more basic level: of the academic teacher and his subject. Obviously, all employees at a university work for its brand. Creating the brand depends on the attitudes of all of them.

Brand and marketing

Reaching the contemporary customer gets more and more sophisticated, therefore the role of marketing has become more important in recent years. Almost every product – if it is introduced to the market – requires marketing actions. Contemporary marketing does not only fulfill the expectations of customers through detecting their needs, dreams, expectations, but it also raises awareness, stimulates and even creates them. The most important issue in marketing is the awareness of the fact that the customer is most important – meeting his expectations provides the company profits and the future functioning. Therefore the important components of marketing are: analyzing the market, shaping the product, influencing the market, establishing the price of sales.

It is worth noticing that by using the simplest definition of marketing – the actions the goals of which are: searching for, stimulating and fulfilling the needs of economic entities – one sees no information on brand or quality. This means that it is possible to promote a low-quality product though the expansive marketing.

Marketing actions are characterized by the following elements: people, material certificate, set, package, process, consent, recommendation, positioning, publicizing, the distinguishing factor.

According to Java Abraham⁴ - a marketing strategist – there are three methods of raising the profitability of the company as a result of marketing actions:

- winning new customers,
- making the customers buy more,
- making the customers buy more often.

The elements above determine the dynamic development of a company.

In case of educational market the notion of brand and marketing actions are of special significance.

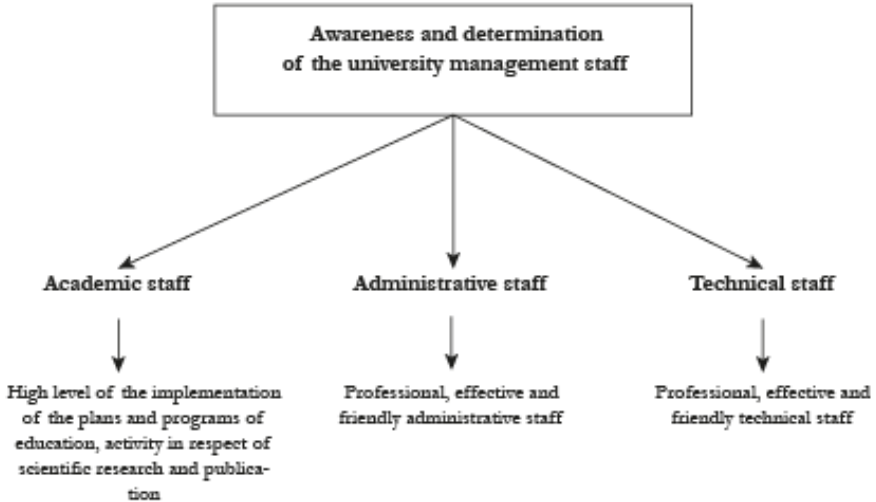
A brand – in case of a university – does not refer to one product, but to the whole process of educating, consisting of, among others:

- scientific and didactic staff,
- plans, programs and methods of educating,
- administrative staff,
- technical services,
- conditions of education.

Working on creating a university's brand does not encompass only promoting one of the elements above. It is not enough to place information about the employed scientific and didactic staff or the conditions of education in promotional materials. The candidate analyzes the university as one organism, hence the effect of the work of all elements, which together form a well-functioning whole.

⁴ www.eneror.ntn.pl/strategia-marketingowa-iaya-abrahama/2.12.2012.

Picture 1. Elements of a university involved in creating its brand and their tasks



In the process of creating a brand the most important element is the customer's satisfaction. In case of universities it is possible to distinguish two stages of satisfaction:

1. of a student in the process of education,
2. of a graduate after getting a job which meets his expectations.

The first stage of satisfaction is reached (or not) by the student in the process of education. All elements presented in picture 1 are involved in this stage. Therefore the awareness and determination of the management staff are crucial. Both factors are immensely important, as they constitute the basis for the actions of management staff aiming to create a professional employees' team. Professionalism leads to mutual trust in relations:

- management staff – employee,
- employee – employee,
- employees' team – another employees' team,
- employee – student.

The result of professionalism and mutual trust is a friendly atmosphere at a university.

All above mentioned elements create a mechanism which forms a basis for creating a brand.

The diploma is a result of the knowledge acquired in the process of education, skills and student's competences, which are verified on the job market.

There is a strong relation between the brand of a university and the job market. The better knowledge, skills and social competences the students acquire at the university, the more competitive they are on the job market.

The diploma is the key to the better future for the receiver of the educational service – for example to getting a job or a promotion. It is a necessary step in the life plan. Therefore the second step – the satisfaction of a graduate – is also important in creating the brand. It determines creating the brand of a university.

The task of a contemporary university is to prepare the student to function on a job market. The reform of the higher education sanctioned by the amendment of the 18th of March 2011 of the *Higher Education Act* (Journal of Laws of 2012 r. item 572 and 742) promotes adjusting the plans and programs of education to the job market. The actions of the universities in the academic year 2011/12 were focused, among others, on adjusting the education plans and programs to National Qualifications Framework. Intensification of work concerning the cooperation with the employers manifests itself in creating convents consisting of the representatives of employers. The convents serve to create a possibility of a constant cooperation of the universities and employers in this area.

The reform foresees implementing the marketing actions into creating the educational process at the universities. The provisions of this act of law introduced the obligation to monitor the careers of the university graduates. The survey is conducted among the students who graduated from the university three and five years before. It provides a university with information on the level of satisfaction with graduating from the university and on to which extent the faculty prepared the graduate for work.

The results of surveys are analyzed and taken into account in the process of education through opening new faculties and specializations, as well as verification of the plans and programs of education.

The reform of higher education encourages the universities to create a brand through searching for elements which could distinguish them on the educational market.

The scientific literature provides various methods to try to be distinguished on the market. Some of them are included in the book “Blue Ocean Strategy”⁵ by Kim and Mauborgne in which the following actions are presented:

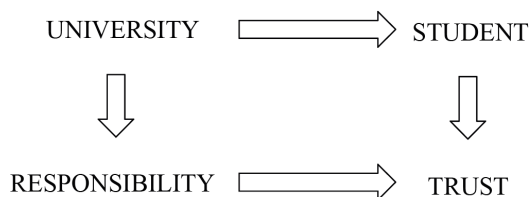
1. the verification of the present offer,
2. the current market offer which aims to reduce the level offered by the industry and at the same time to sustain the level of the customer's satisfaction,
3. diagnosing the elements of the current offer with which the customers are not satisfied in order to reinforce them,
4. diagnosing the faults of the offer in the analyzed industry in order to complete the offer by adding a distinguishing feature.

This method may seem easy, but it is worth thinking if adding one minor element, such as giving a laptop as a present for choosing a given university, is enough. It is only a good marketing strategy aiming to increase the number of students and not creating the brand of a university.

The brand of a product is inseparably related to the customer's trust in product. In case of an educational service, the final effect of which is the university's diploma, the graduate (client) trusts that the diploma will be useful for him in the following years. Therefore, it should bring a constant satisfaction to a graduate.

Such an attitude towards the method described above complicates the situation, especially taking into consideration the fact that the permanent feature of the contemporary world is its changeability. The university has limited possibilities to foresee the future, including the knowledge on which faculties will ensure that the graduates will have a satisfying job. The verifiability of a diploma on the job market is crucial in creating the brand of a university. The diploma may be useful for many years after graduating from the university. While trying to create the brand of a university it is worth remembering about the responsibility for the product given to a graduate.

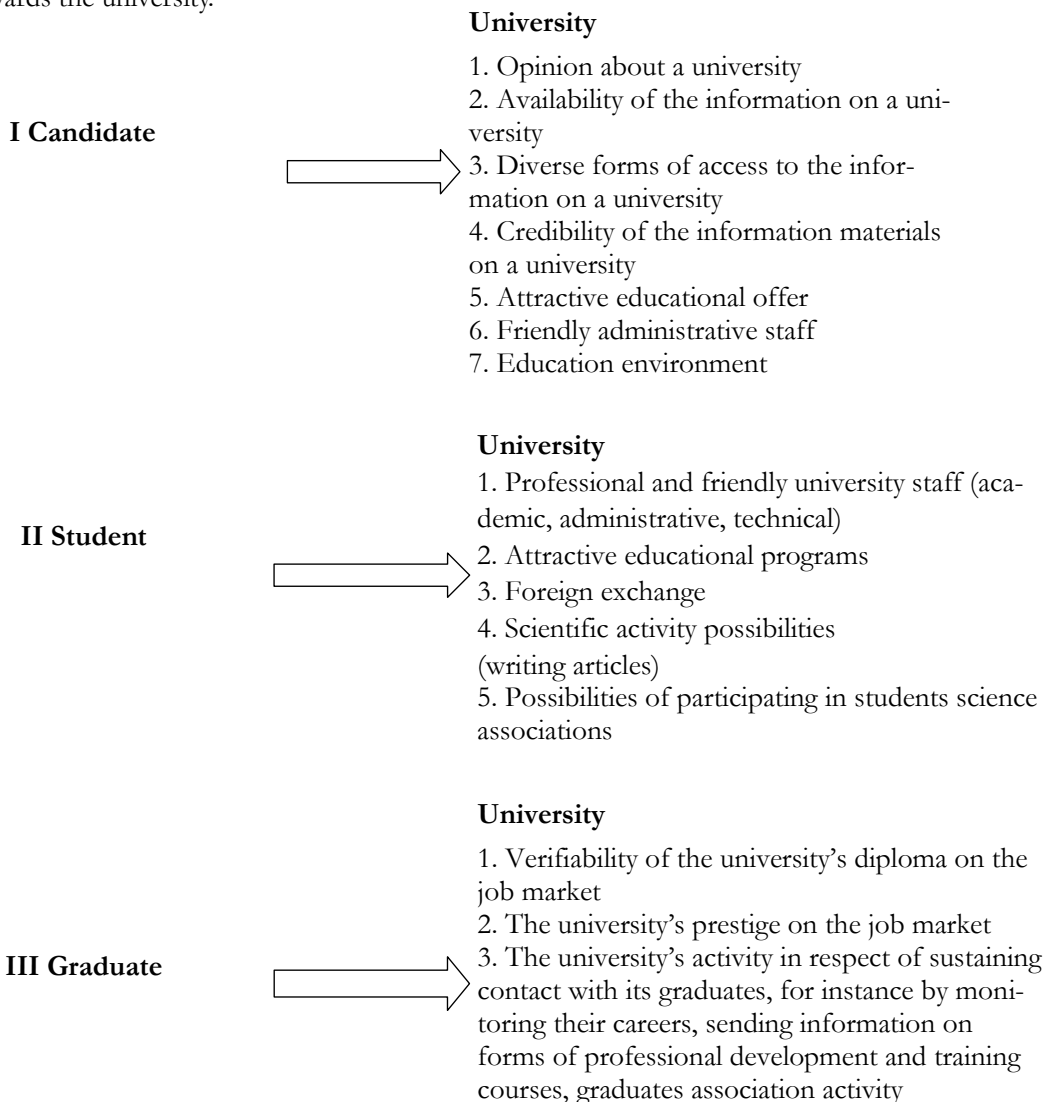
Picture 2. Relations between a university and a student necessary to create the brand of a university.



⁵ J. Kall, *Zarządzanie marką instytucji badawczej w oparciu o model „Góry lodowej”* [in:] *Marketing Instytucji Naukowych i Badawczych*, multiple authors, edited by W. Łukowski, Wydawnictwa Naukowe Instytutu Lotnictwa, Warszawa 2010, pp. 37-38.

Taking the information above into consideration, the exaggerated promises made to a student do not contribute to create the relations presented in picture 2 and as a consequence, to create the brand of a university. L.L. Berry and A. Parasuraman emphasized that “the trust in the relations between the client and the company is necessary”⁶.

Picture 3. Selected elements creating the trust of a candidate/student/graduate towards the university.



⁶ L.L. Berty, A. Parasuraman, *Marketing Services: Completing through Quality*, W. Furtak, *Marketing partnerski na rynku usług*, PWE, Warszawa 2003, p. 164.

The picture above presents the long process of the relations between a service provider and a customer. During this period a customer might change the opinions concerning the university. It is worth remembering that in the process of education the expectations of a customer might increase and the knowledge he acquires influences his assessment of the university.

The level of satisfaction with the educational service is inseparably related to the quality of the service: the quality of the educational process. According to Rogozińska, the satisfaction with the service occurs if it at least meets the students' expectations⁷. The assessment of quality is the result of confronting the student's expectations with the level of providing the service. The assessment includes the criteria such as thoroughness, flexibility in reacting to change, the stability of a university on the educational market, the competences of the staff, availability, trust.

Trust is the basic element of the process of selecting a university by a candidate; therefore this element must be taken into consideration in creating the marketing strategy. Creating the image of a trustworthy university is especially significant in today's world of uncertainty. The conscious, consistent and long term management of trust, both in the relation with a student and in the university's staff. The intentions of a university are expressed by mission. It should place the university among other universities on the educational market. The mission should include the distinguishing feature of the university. Statements about the "high-skilled staff" are not a distinguishing feature among many universities in the country. At the same time, mission is related to many different addressees: the candidates, students, management staff of the university, the employees. They are in charge of the mission, so they should know it, understand and identify themselves with it. The mission is a kind of obligation to students, which will be verified during and after his studies. The mission is also an element of building the trust and at the same time the brand of a university.

The notion of the university's prestige, which is present in picture 3, occurs only after graduating. The candidate often chooses the studies because it is easy to pass exams and because of the opinions that his friends shared with him.

⁷ K. Rogozińska, *Nonny marketing usług*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej w Poznań, Poznań 2000, p. 205.

Tab. 1. The reasons for choosing the master studies

Reason	Total	Place			Universities (I place)	
		I	II	III	public	private
Natural consequence of the bachelor studies	44	31,8	7,1	5,1	25,8	42,9
Prestige	50	26,7	16,4	6,9	34,8	10,2
Easiness of studying	34,5	8,1	14,6	11,8	6,3	8,1
Place in rankings	17,5	2,5	5,9	9,1	3	6,4
The number of	2 305					

Source: The results of a survey conducted by the Warsaw Management Academy in 2011.

The brand of a subject

The brand of a subject is often a result of its specificity, but its creation is supported by the efforts of a given subject's teacher.

The students consider important the courses with lectures, which end with an exam; in their opinion the subjects without lectures and exams are less important. In order to make the subjects more prestigious the teachers decide to end the course with an exam. An exam has to be on a proper level if it is to build the brand of a subject. If it is too easy, it is usually neglected by the students. The similar results are brought by allowing the students not to take the exam if they worked on a good level during the workshops. It applies especially if different teachers have the individualized styles of teaching and grading. The question remains in what way the lecturer should control the quality of workshops conducted by other teachers simultaneously to his lecture. In this case the support of the head of the faculty or institute seems vital.

A subject is assessed positively when the following questions are answered affirmatively: will the knowledge acquired during this course be really useful in a job or other classes; does the subject require independent thinking; does the subject support the versatile development?

If a subject ends with an exam, it is important that the workshops prepare well to the exam. This is highly appreciated by the students.

The “position” of a subject in a timetable also has some influence on its brand. A subject one has to attend always at the inconvenient times of a day, with violation of the rule *first the lecture, then the workshops* has the worst reputation among students.

The brand of a teacher

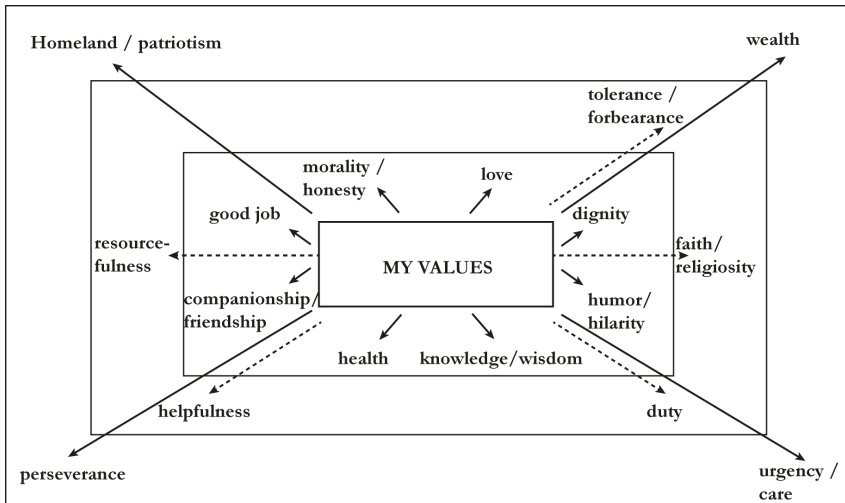
Creating the brand of a teacher as a supplier of an educational service is a process different from creating the brand of another service, as the number of receivers is limited. The teacher often has an assigned group of students, unfortunately even if he has not created his brand. Most universities do not offer the possibility to choose the workshop teachers, especially if the subject is compulsory.

At the universities, much less attention is paid to the educational goals than on the earlier levels of education. However, they should not be neglected. Young people who are students at the university have their hierarchies of values. I. Kujawska-Wawrowska based her “map of values” on the studies concerning high school students⁸. This map can help teachers, as it shows which values are important for the students. The knowledge and wisdom is very high in this hierarchy, which indicates the enormous importance of the thorough knowledge of a teacher. Morality, honesty and dignity were also selected by many students. It is worth noticing that the sense of humor was seen as very important. Knowing the hierarchy of values of future students will certainly make the work easier for a teacher for whom the didactic process is a calling and who creates the brand of his subject and himself in everyday work.

⁸ I. Kujawska-Wawrowska, *Wartości preferowane przez młodzież licealną*, [in:] J. Minkiewicz-Najtowska (ed.), *Kompetencje wychowawcze nauczycieli*, Wydawnictwo AE in Poznań, Poznań 2003, pp. 123-137.

Picture 1 The map of the values preferred by the high school students

Values: — very important ----- partly important — less important



Source: I. Kujawska-Wawrowska, *Wartości preferowane przez młodzież licealną* [in: J. Minkiewicz Najtowska (ed.),

Kompetencje wychowawcze nauczycieli, Wydawnictwo AE in Poznań, Poznań 2003, p. 130.

According to science workers, the authority of an academic teacher is created mainly through⁹:

- broad knowledge and wide mental horizons,
- building new ways in thinking and actions,
- properly rich scientific experience,
- important achievements concerning creating the scientific knowledge,
- the ability to inspire others to start scientific research,
- perfect acquaintance with the scientific techniques,
- mastery of organizing the scientific activity,
- honesty and scientific thoroughness.

Students also pay attention to other features of authority, such as: thorough knowledge, methodological skills and personality traits.

The brand of a teacher consists mostly of the educational service, therefore the further part of this article is concerned with the factors described by the students as important without underestimating the scientific issues, the significance of which seems obvious.

⁹ M. Śnieżyński, *O autorytacie nauczyciela akademickiego*, Konspekt, no. 3, summer 2000 online version, <http://www.wsp.krakowj.pl/konspekt/kQrSDekt3/index.html>, 7.04 2005.

While teaching students, one should understand the significance of following ten universal principles of communication¹⁰ and applying them in practice. These are:

1. paying attention to the body language, which can be a sign of the interest in the interlocutor and encourage him to communicate;
2. expressing the attention;
3. adjusting to the rhythm and pace of the partner's utterances;
4. thinking over the intentions and content of the utterance;
5. adjusting to the natural style of listening to the interlocutor;
6. being aware of the acceptable border in case of a disagreement;
7. receiving the signals transmitted by the partner's body language;
8. using commonly accepted and understandable notions, explaining specialist terms;
9. asking additional questions, making sure if the content of a message was understood by the interlocutor;
10. ensuring that the content of the message will be remembered for a long time (presenting analogies, comparing facts).

Following these principles enables complete understanding in the relations between teachers and students. It is worth remembering that the non-verbal communication in interpersonal relations determines 50 % of the value of transmitted information.

What positively influences the image of an academic teacher?

The students perceive positively teachers who are competent. The competence is understood here as:

- responsibility, good preparation to the classes, interesting ways of teaching, a possibility to work individually with the students,
- appearing at the scheduled time on consultations. If a teacher is absent, another time of meeting should be set. The form of consultation: additional dates after arrangement should be followed, there should be an actual possibility to set another date of meeting if it is necessary. Consultations should be available not only for the students who currently participate in the course, but also for those who used to attend these classes.

¹⁰ L.J. Seiwert, 1997, [citing:] J. Minkiewicz-Najtowska (ed.), *Kompetencje wychowawcze nauczycieli*, Wydawnictwo AE in Poznań, Poznań 2003, p. 28.

The students can appreciate the effort put in the preparation of classes, illustrating them with interesting examples, enriching the content in the subsequent years of education.

Personality traits are equally important. The most significant are: good manners, sense of humor, politeness, sympathy, being kind to students and involvement in work.

Introducing the relaxing elements in the classes is also appreciated; an accurate digression or comment cause a special “bond” with the students. It is important to make breaks in classes – students have the right to them. During the breaks students often ask questions that they could not or did not want to ask in the presence of the rest of their group. It is also possible to discuss issues which are not related to classes, which positively influences the atmosphere and mutual contacts.

Clear and transparent system of grading allows the objectiveness and is a symbol of another important feature: justice.

Another characteristics concerns the pedagogical responsibility of a teacher – the willingness to succeed as far as the results of students' work is concerned. Students value a teacher whose classes prepare to the exam, provide them with useful knowledge which helps them to understand other classes or to acquire new skills.

One can state briefly that non-fulfillment of the conditions enumerated above influences the image of a teacher and his classes negatively. If the classes are not properly prepared, the students assess the teacher especially negatively. It seems impossible not to prepare a lecture, but a boring lecture, read aloud from some notes may discourage the students from the subject.

It is unacceptable when a teacher comes only for classes and leaves right after them (one can blame the fact that many academic teachers work in several places, but is it the only reason?). The teacher is unavailable for students after the classes (and not all the students decide to contact the teacher per e-mail).

Improper balance between classes and breaks – instead of planned three lesson periods with a proper number of breaks, the class often lasts two hours and fifteen minutes without any breaks, which makes the students tired and decreases the efficiency of teaching. Also, during this shortened time, the teachers usually decide to make a break anyway. In this situation the time of classes is shorter than required.

Other actions negatively perceived by students are: neglecting the needs and time of the students, changing the rules of credit during the semester, too strict discipline.

The brand of a teacher is proven by the faculties that students choose. They try to find out who the teacher of a given faculty is. It shows that the teacher is a guarantee of quality classes. His lectures and workshops can teach a lot.

When the students on the supplementary master studies¹¹ on the Faculty of Management and Economic at the Gdańsk University of Technology had to choose the specialization, 67 % of them were interested who the teacher is, 52,7 % took the opinion of students into consideration. It proves that the teacher is of crucial importance to the quality of education at a university. The brand of a teacher and subject is created and passed on to the following year groups. It is worth remembering that it is easy to lose reputation, but restoring it is extremely difficult.

The brand of a subject may be created if there is a person who will be responsible for a given subject and who will have impact on teachers. It may be done by someone from the board of a didactic unit, but with several dozens of subjects in a unit this seems rather impossible. The role of a unit head is taking care of a proper number of didactic hours adequate to the program and placing it properly in the timetable. If a subject is supervised by a permanent group of employees who can cooperate and who have high, but equal requirements there is a chance to create the brand of a subject.

It seems that creating the brand of a teacher as a guarantee of the quality education is more probable. The question remains: can one count on the willingness of the teachers to build their brands? Do they care?

Most of them do, but unfortunately not all of them. The next question arises: how to provide good quality of education in this situation? One of the ideas is conducting surveys among students – one must make sure that such surveys are commonly available. Answering questions must be compulsory after the end of semester for all students – if it is not, the survey may be filled only by unsatisfied people – the others will not feel like it. It is a big challenge to design a survey that would allow to assess the work of a teacher in a proper way by including various aspects of teaching.

At the end it is worth citing a maxim that sums up this article:

The highest value of the teaching ethics is to educate a clever person.

In order to efficiently help a student in becoming a clever person, the teacher must be one himself¹².

¹¹ Dąbrowski D., *Wybrane aspekty wyboru specjalności przez studentów kierunku Zarządzanie i Marketing*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Katedry Marketingu” no. 1, Gdańsk 2002, pp. 227-233.

¹² Szewczyk K., *Wychować człowieka mądrego*, Warszawa 1998, [citing:] J. Minkiewicz-Najtowska (ed.), *Kompetencje nychowanawcze nauczycieli*, Wydawnictwo AE in Poznań, Poznań 2003, p. 136.

Summary

Prestige is an important element of creating the brand of a university, both from the point of view of management staff and the students, especially the graduates.

Prestige is created by the didactic staff, program offer and the conditions of education. The educational programs constitute a feature distinguishing a given university on the educational market and therefore are a competitive element. Adjusting the university's programs to the job market is also crucial in the university's marketing

The complexity of the process of creating a brand, especially the brand of a university, including a private university is easy to notice. The oldest private universities in Poland are 19-21 years old and the oldest public university – the Jagiellonian University was founded in 1364. Creating the brand of a university requires time, which verifies the offer and creates trust. Analysis of contemporary legislative solutions within the reform brings the conclusion that not all of them support the higher education in Poland. It might seem that the period of functioning of the non-public schools in Poland allows the educational industry to draw conclusions concerning, among others, thoroughness and responsibility of the university towards students¹³.

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¹³ S. Dawidziuk, *Przedsiębiorczość białkiem rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego*, WSM, Warszawa 2011, p. 106, 129.

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CREATING THE BRAND OF A UNIVERSITY

Abstract

In this article the author discusses the factors which have both positive and negative impact on how the students assess the university and subject. The necessity of using incentives to increase the quality of classes and the need for controlling the didactic process is emphasized. At the end the author elaborates on the conditions in which the teacher's name or name of the department becomes a guarantee of high quality of lectures and workshops.

Key words: *engagement strategies, practice theory, condition branding, university as a brand*