

OPPORTUNITIES ON THE EDUCATIONAL MARKET

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ABSTRACT: *THIS ARTICLE ASSUMES THAT NO SCHOOL CAN SATISFY EVERYONE AT ALL. WHILE EDUCATION AND LEARNING ARE CONTINUOUS HUMAN ACTIVITIES, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CAN APPEAR AND DISAPPEAR. THE OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY MARKETING TO SCHOOLS AIM TO CREATE A BETTER IMAGE OF THEM AMONG THE POTENTIAL BENEFICIARIES OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES.*

EDUCATIONAL MARKETING MUST BE ADOPTED AS AN ESSENTIAL STRATEGIC ASPECT OF INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT. AS A PROCESS OF BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON TRUST BETWEEN THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.

THE CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS IS HOW TO BECOME PERFORMANCE AND AT THE SAME TIME DIFFERENT, UNIQUE, WELL POSITIONED ON THE MARKET.

STRATEGIC POSITIONING IS BEST ACHIEVED WHEN THE INSTITUTION HAS A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THE MARKET IT WANTS TO SERVE. SEGMENTATION IS A PROCESS THAT PROVIDES SUCH AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE TARGET MARKETS.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE IMAGE THEY PROJECT ON THE COMMUNITY IS THE SAME AS WHAT THE SCHOOL WANTS TO ACHIEVE.

KEYWORDS: *POSITIONING, MARKETING, SCHOOL, EDUCATION, SEGMENTATION, STRATEGY.*

The need for differentiation between educational institutions

The essence of the choice of school among the students is given by the set of information made available to the families. If the institution's choice creates an incentive to attract educators, we would expect schools to differentiate their offer, both in terms of quality (vertical differentiation) and facilities (horizontal differentiation). As a result, it is crucial to provide updated information to families, but the ability to process this type of information varies depending on the level of education of the parents. In addition, if parents have risk aversion and the degree of aversion is the opposite of family well-being, then we expect families from poorer backgrounds to prefer standardized courses to the detriment of differentiated ones, as they are unable to choose between the alternatives available. Thus, the less educated parents are not interested in the efficiency gains resulting from the school competition, they show a reduced demand for the differentiation of the school or the increase of the number of schools. When the possibility of school choice was raised by parents under public funding conditions, there was a debate on school

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vouchers, namely the introduction of public grants (partial or total) covering tuition fees in the private sector².

What differentiates complex processes from one another are mainly the decision criteria used in evaluating alternatives. Thus, when choosing a college, high school students will be asked if they can afford to meet their food and housing needs; others will consider moving away from home; others will be concerned about finding new friends or rejecting new colleagues; others will pursue self-esteem and personal development. A school cannot pay attention to all these needs. Some pay attention to the need for social belonging, others, personal development, through counseling and career support, others aim at self-esteem, as well-known schools do. In general, the selection criteria can be grouped into four major categories which can be found in different forms in the choice made by any candidate³:

- The quality of the school preparation includes elements related to the quality and the scientific level of the training, the professionalism of the teachers, equipment and didactic facilities.

- The social life includes elements related to the accommodation assistance on campus, the socio-cultural level of the area, the sports and artistic life, the possibilities for spending free time.

- The position, the distance from the parents' home and the possibility of getting there quickly from one point to another are very important.

- The cost includes several elements: study fees, registration, registration, the cost of housing and food, daily expenses, etc.

The entire chain of satisfaction of the candidate has as a basic need the professional achievement, detailed in the following specific objectives:

- Obtaining the necessary knowledge to activate in the labor market;

- Choosing a required specialization in the labor market;

- Obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for career success;

- Better satisfaction of the basic needs during the studies.

The real satisfaction of the consumer of education is measurable after graduating from school. This is the moment when the usefulness of the knowledge and skills acquired following the decision made in choosing the school becomes an indicator of satisfaction.

The accumulation of knowledge and skills that prevent the student from finding a job will cause profound dissatisfaction.

Creating or maintaining specialties that are not found between the demands made by the labor market and attracting candidates to them are basically acts of deception, by which future graduates are promised an uncertain future and funds are diverted from other social uses for the maintenance of structures. socially useless educational, even unemployed creators.

² T. Levitt, T. (2004) *Innovative imitation*, Harvard Business Review, 44(5), p.71.

³ Ayoubi, R.M. and Massoud H.K. (2007) *The strategy of internationalization in universities: a quantitative evaluation of the intent and implementation in UK universities*, International Journal of Educational Management

Differentiation between schools

The key to the opportunities for the school lies in the distinct competences that they form. The distinct competences are those resources and skills in which the school is particularly strong. If a school has, for example, a very good marketing specialization, then the school may have the opportunity to offer "low frequency" or distance (online) study programs for business people. Managers feel that it is easier to highlight strengths than to raise a weak point at the middle level of a strong one. At the same time, a distinct competence may not be sufficient if most competitors consider it their strength⁴. Therefore, schools must pay attention to those strengths that offer the advantage of differentiation - the one where it can be better compared to the competition. In assessing the strengths and weaknesses, the institution should not rely solely on its own perceptions. He must go out and study the image of how he is perceived by the public. The manager should study how markets and audiences differ - students, students, parents, companies - in assessing strengths and weaknesses.

The strengths of a school are the basis of the advantage of differentiation and must be found in the marketing mix. There are several ways in which the school can approach the advantage of differentiation from its competitors⁵.

Schools can try, for example, to gain or maintain their position through the complexity of the product offered. Currently, some schools see an opportunity for differentiation in offering a narrow specialization that is required in the market; other schools are developed on the basis of offering a general product, which will satisfy every student. However, the differences between schools in terms of educational experiences are minimal. This is especially the case for schools of the same type (for example, secondary education). For an outside eye, the difference is hard to recognize. In such situations, schools can gain an advantage through the variety of educational techniques adopted.

For example, a school might choose to extend the adaptation period and classes with different abilities. Other schools might opt for early-oriented classes and a shorter adaptation period. Other differentiation strategies to gain advantages are: carrying out homework at school, a greater variety of extracurricular activities, international exchange programs. The problem is that these strategies can be copied by rival schools. The customer notices the added value, but considers it a guarantee only for a while. The initial advantage is thus lost.

Another way to build advantages may not start with the educational techniques, but with the subjective value of the product, which, for the client, takes the form of the way education is made. This strategy is based on the idea that the student does not participate in the education process for his/her current satisfaction, but for the benefits he expects to receive in the future. What are the benefits, what needs to be fulfilled by the person through education depend on each one and are quite different.

⁴ P. Doyle, P. Stern, (2006) *Marketing Management and Strategy*, London, Financial Times/Prentice Hall.

⁵ F. Maringe, (2006) *University and course choice: implications for positioning, recruitment and marketing*, International Journal of Educational Management

For a student, education can be an opportunity for development, for another it is the chance to prove self-respect or to gain the respect of others.

The subjective feelings and ideas attributed by the client to the education can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic emotional values can be; security, safety, familiarity, protection, pleasure, satisfaction. The extrinsic ones are generally related to the aspiration for a valuable position in the relations with others. For example, the needs related to the feeling of prestige, status, differentiation from others, acceptance and valorization.

The art of differentiation is determined by the set of subjective values chosen by the school in order to construct its profile and to express these values in the different educational aspects of the school. This means that the school can adapt the client's subjective perceptions and values, to match those of the school. For example, a school can be distinguished by placing the need for safety and security on the foreground, and then thinking about the atmosphere, the educational package or community services.

In such a school, great attention must be paid to monitoring students' achievements and to tracking their experiences, as the school that regularly presents students and parents with the progress of their studies gives them relevant feedback for its mode of action⁶.

Another example may be a school that bases its profile on the benefit the children gain through the educational values that the school offers. A school may present itself as emphasizing the development of personality traits such as independence, self-confidence. The curriculum and learning methods will be built for this purpose. Also, the involvement techniques and the rules of the school will be thought based on this idea. The effort to achieve a compelling advantage based on a set of subjective values requires a high level of consensus in the school and a good integration policy.

The school would make a mistake if they only used the promotion to express their distinct advantages and ignore the other marketing tools. The marketing mix can contribute to a credible profile. The atmosphere, culture and mentality must be imbued with the philosophy of the school. The added value thus seems to be not "what the school does" but "how it works" and confidence in this working method.

Segmentation of the educational market

The starting point in the realization of the market segmentation is to identify the natural segments within the market. Obviously, within these broad groups of students there are a variety of subgroups or segments that can be achieved by identifying the factors that make them distinct and unique from the other segments. However, because segments can be defined by several variables, it is important to consider the factors that affect the feasibility of segmentation.

Institutions attempting to undertake market segmentation and positioning strategies require a solid understanding of the nature of their market. The key to this understanding is to conduct market segmentation research. Although the concept has been defined differently over the last 20

⁶ F. Huang, (2007), *Internationalization of higher education in the developing and emerging countries*, Journal of Studies in International Education

years, the market segmentation mainly starts from a fundamental hypothesis: buyers or consumers in a specified market are not a homogeneous entity. They differ in many respects and some of these differences are large enough to justify differentiated approaches in studying subgroups within the market.

Marketing should stop thinking of its customers as part of a massively homogenous market. He must begin to think of them as numerous small islands of distinctive character, each requiring its own unique strategies in product policy, promotion strategy, pricing, distribution methods and direct selling techniques.

Three major distinct groups are identified for the higher education licensing sector for which differentiated marketing strategies are required. The largest group is the local students segment, which includes, in principle, the local students entering for the first time in higher education. The second is the group of international students, a rapidly growing segment in many countries, especially in developed economies on the front line. The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand are the world's major importers of students in higher education. A third major segment is the mature age group, which consists of adults who do not come to higher education directly from the school. These three segments have very different motivations for joining higher education and may have inconsistent expectations about the gains that will be achieved through higher education.

Thus, differentiated marketing strategies will be needed at different levels of life cycles and higher education experience. In the context of this broad assumption regarding markets, segmentation was defined as⁷:

- the means of classifying potential clients into similar groups based on common characteristics;
- grouping of customers and non-customers with similar characteristics - in particular the purchasing behavior;
- dividing a market into different homogeneous groups of consumers.

In essence, market segmentation is the process of dividing a large group of consumers into smaller groups, where there are generally similar consumption patterns. The idea is to divide the group of heterogeneous consumers into more manageable parts from a strategic point of view, which can be better targeted and satisfied by properly involving the elements of the marketing mix.

From a marketing point of view, it is not efficient for a school to have the goal of fulfilling all desires at the same time. Trying to give everyone what they want leads to real dissatisfaction. Instead of trying to excel in all aspects, the school would do better if it focused on its specific qualities, which would make it the best school for a specific target group, even with the risk that other groups would prefer it. other schools.

Market segmentation is useful in market sharing. This means that the school divides its target groups into subgroups or segments whose members have the same educational needs or desires. Thus, the school can identify which is the most suitable target group, to offer education of

⁷ M. Bell, (2004) *Internationalising the Higher Education Curriculum: Do Academics Agree? Higher Education Research & Development Society of Australia*, University of Wollongong, Australia.

the best quality, according to the needs and wishes of this group. Segmentation is the starting point for the description and development of targeted education for certain groups and their specific approach. Once the market has been divided into sectors, a school can choose different particular strategies: market homogeneity, financial purpose, expertise, facilities available to the school, etc.

The competition's analysis

School management must take into account that with the advent of private schools and the reduction of financial resources, they can no longer ignore increasing competition in the following areas:

- for students - both the prestigious and the least selective schools compete for the same high school graduates.

- for specialists - attracting knowledge and specialists in any field is done in competition with private companies and schools, from the country and abroad;

- for funds - competition for budgetary allocations has become strong, as has the fight for grants and for funding of foundations abroad;

- for the attention of the public - informing future candidates about the institution's offer tends to become an increasingly important factor in determining the choice made by them.

In competition for resources, schools can use marketing tools: the quality of the programs offered, the uniqueness of the programs, the price, the availability, the reputation, the high level of preparation of the students and teachers. In order to study the competitors, the school must find the answer to the following questions:

- . With what institution do we compete for students and what success do we have?

- . What programs do they offer and how good are they?

- . What is her financial situation?

- . What are her criteria for admission?

- . What is her competition for admission? What is her tendency?

- . What are the opportunities and threats they face?

- . What are its strengths and weaknesses?

- . What kind of competitive strategy does he use?

- What is its competitive position (leader, follower, niche)?

Developing a positioning strategy involves the following steps: establishing the current position in the market, selecting the desired position, planning the strategy for, reaching this position, implementing.

Marketing planning

The marketing plan is an indispensable aid in stimulating and orienting the mentality and activity towards the market. The first step is to evaluate the current position and to develop future market trends. In order to carry out such an analysis, to discover future opportunities and threats, a school needs concrete information about internal and external factors. Internal information refers

to the strengths and weaknesses and the educational product⁸. External information refers to the market in which the school operates, the evolutions that take place on the market and to the evaluations of the target group about the education offered. The internal and external analysis of the marketing information leads to the evaluation of the current position and the future expectations.

The marketing plan helps to clarify what the target group wants, how to differentiate the school plan from the competition and what marketing mix will be used to win the target group, before evaluating the current market position, it is important to know which is the mission of the school. The mission and goals of the school remain the benchmarks, the standards for which the manager is primarily responsible.

The school needs information about how it is perceived by students, school staff, parents, graduates to know what profile to achieve in the future. The old image may persist long after changes have taken place.

Marketing strategies

A marketing strategy is a description of how a school will use the benefits of a market opportunity or react to a threat in order to achieve the objectives set by its strategic mission and plans. The marketing strategy for an educational institution includes decisions regarding⁹:

- . Evaluation of the current offer;
- . Future programs and market opportunities;
- . Competitor analysis
- . Positioning against competition
- . Selecting target markets.

Market viability is a measure of the present and future of the study demand for a particular program. A program can be of very good quality, corresponding to the school's mission, but given the very low interest of potential students, the program will not survive unless the school is willing to allocate money from other programs to support it. Determining market viability involves examining previous experience such as the level of competition at admission, trends assessed by environmental analysis, studying consumer behavior of education or other market research.

When formulating a marketing strategy for the coming years, the school will have to answer the following questions¹⁰:

1. What kind of services does the school want to develop for each target group?
2. How can the school distinguish itself from the other schools in these markets and what particular advantages does the school want to achieve?
3. What marketing tactical goals does the school want to achieve?

⁸ G. Drummond, (2004), *Consumer confusion: reduction strategies in higher education*, International Journal of Educational Management, 18(5)

⁹ G. Niculescu (2015) *Marketing Synthesis*, Brâncuși Academic Publishing House, Târgu-Jiu

¹⁰ P.G. Cerny, (2003) *What next for the state?*, in E. Koffman and G. Young (eds) *Globalisation Theory and Practice*. London: Continuum International.

4. What are the elements of the mix marketing needed and what price, product, distribution, personnel and promotion policies will be used to achieve the objectives?

Strategic objectives are long-term goals for the entire organization. Tactical objectives are medium-term objectives and concern the combination of school services. Tactical objectives need to be as detailed as possible. A vocational college that wishes to introduce a new course could have the following objectives¹¹:

- the course will increase the market share of the college by 5% in the first two years;
- introduction of the course with "employment guarantee" after the completion and promotion of the course;
- The number of graduates who will promote the course and the college will be at least 50% after two years.

If the tactical objectives are set and written then the decisions are to be taken through the action plan. The action plan shows how the school hopes to use the resources to achieve the optimal marketing mix and achieve the tactical objectives. The action plan deals with the cohesion and coordination of the various marketing tools.

There are a number of questions to be answered:

- Where (the place) will the school offer education and what facilities will be offered to the participants?
- What requirements do the participants have to meet (price)?
- How can we attract the right people (personally) and what positions will they receive?
- What will be the distinct advantage for the participants in the course (profit) and how will the school look like outside (promotion)?

The action plan can distinguish between short-term measures and actions and changes that will be made in the medium term. The information on the action plan must be sufficiently detailed so that it is clear how things will be done, who should carry them out, when and with what resources. Where necessary, supervision, delegation of authority, deadlines and as far as possible the budget can be added. The plan also sets forth future developments and how feedback will be achieved to see if the goals have been achieved. Because the purpose of the marketing strategy is to influence the relationship between the school and the community, periodic evaluation and review is necessary. The experiences gained and the results from the previous planning can be used in a new planning round. In most cases it will take less time and energy than the first round of planning.

Building a positive image of the school

Marketing starts from the assumption that a school is not good by what it believes; a school is good if the world believes it. The impression about a school is based on a mixture of objective, observable factors and subjective interpretations / expectations of those outside the school. The image of the school has a strong influence on expectations, and these expectations influence the

¹¹ J. Helmsley-Brown, I. Oplatka, (2007) *Universities in a competitive global marketplace: a systematic review of the literature on higher education marketing*, International Journal of Public Sector Management

choice of clients. It is important that the image they project on the community is the same as what the school wants to achieve. Building and strengthening a positive image takes years of care, systematic communication and quality work.

Changing the image takes a long time. To change a modern image, only public relations is not enough. The negative image is unfortunately more persistent than the positive image. People tend to ignore information that is in line with expectations. The community will be convinced of the qualities of the school only if they are experienced by the clients. The school may try different ways of obtaining information about its image. To ask potential clients and other groups in the community, the school may use telephone or written assessment, personal interview, etc. The Director may call outside organizations for the application of investigations. Although they are costly, the objectivity of the investigation is increased and time is saved.

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