

COMMUNICATION POLICY OF SELECTED EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF ANALYSIS OF FAMILIARITY AND FAVOURABLE ATTITUDES

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Abstract: The article discusses the communication policy of the selected educational institutions in the region of Eastern Slovakia in the context of the analysis of potential customers' - secondary school students' familiarity with the institutions and favourable attitudes towards them. It monitors the attitudes of the above mentioned subjects towards the faculties of the selected higher education institutions putting the emphasis on finding and meeting their needs for information. It also focuses its attention on defining further target segments and meeting their needs for information resources by means of selecting tools of communication policy and their appropriate combination.

Keywords: Marketing communication, information resources, analysis of familiarity and favourable attitudes, educational institutions

Introduction

Communication policy of businesses and organisations can be characterised as a combination of global strategy and local tactics aimed at creating a desired image of their products and brands. The aforementioned aim, target segments and modes of communication differ on particular markets depending upon business's culture and social environment [cf 1]. The communication policy of public, state or commercial educational institutions can be characterised correspondingly.

The contribution pays attention to the communication policy of educational institutions in the context of information resources influencing the familiarity and favourable attitudes of secondary school students towards faculties of economics located in Košice and Prešov region and to the use of information resources in terms of the selected target group (secondary school students). Moreover it deals with comparison of currently used tools of communication policy of the selected educational resources considering the possibilities of communication policy development.

In general educational institutions start from the basic concept of promotion and where appropriate they adapt individual communication mix tools, content and the way of promotional activities to the target audience inside a concrete, geographically determined region and outside it. A balanced combination of marketing communication tools (in terms of integrated marketing communication) enables the flow of information between the educational institution and the target

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audience. And it is aimed at informing, familiarising it with products offers, and influencing the interest of target segments in the institution and its products.

The aim and method

The aim of the survey is to identify the position of faculties of economics located in the territory of Košice and Prešov region drawing on the analysis of familiarity and favourable attitudes of secondary school students towards the faculties of economics at higher education institutions. Emphasis is given on the used information resources. The results of interview carried out by means of a questionnaire were evaluated and interpreted by applying the method of measuring familiarity and favourable attitudes towards the educational institution [For more details, 12]. For the purpose of interviewing, the secondary schools – grammar schools in the geographically determined territory of Košice district, at the total number of 22 secondary schools (grammar schools) forming the basic set were addressed.

The whole basic set was addressed. 40. 90 per cent of the approached secondary schools (grammar schools) agreed to co-operate, and the survey was conducted at 9 secondary schools (grammar schools). The students in the fourth grade of their study representing the most numerous group of applicants accepted by higher education institutions were respondents [13]. The research sample was selected on the basis of easy availability. 290 respondents took part in the survey. The research was carried out in the course of two months in 2010.

The investigation was also oriented to currently used tools of communication policy at the subject educational institutions, which are represented by four faculties of economics at higher education institutions in conditions of Eastern Slovak region. These were selected by taking into consideration their geographical location (Eastern Slovakia) and provision of higher education in the fields of study classified into group 3 Social science, business and law and into subgroup 3.3 Economics and management.

Results and discussion

In this part we deal with the analysis of familiarity and favourable attitudes and the possibilities of using communication policy tools at the selected higher education institutions in practice.

Analysis of familiarity and favourable attitudes

The research results showed the degree of the secondary school students' familiarity with the selected faculties of economics at higher education institutions in the region of Eastern Slovakia. The Faculty of Economics, at the Technical University in Košice (EF TUKE) was the best-known. The Faculty of Management, at the University of Prešov (FM PO) was the second best-known. The Faculty of Business Economics with seat in Košice, the University of

Economics in Bratislava (PHF EUBA) was ranked as the third best-known. The International School of Management ISM Slovakia in Prešov (ISM PO) was the least-known.

The respondents who said to be familiar with the institution had an opportunity to express their attitude towards the higher education institutions (how favourably they were disposed to the given faculties of economics at the higher education institutions). The students were most favourably disposed to the Faculty of Management, University of Prešov in Prešov then to the Faculty of Management at the Technical University in Košice after which followed The Faculty of Business Economics with seat in Košice, and the International School of Management ISM Slovakia in Prešov.

Graph 1 depicts familiarity with the faculty of economics of the higher education institution and secondary school students' attitude towards it.

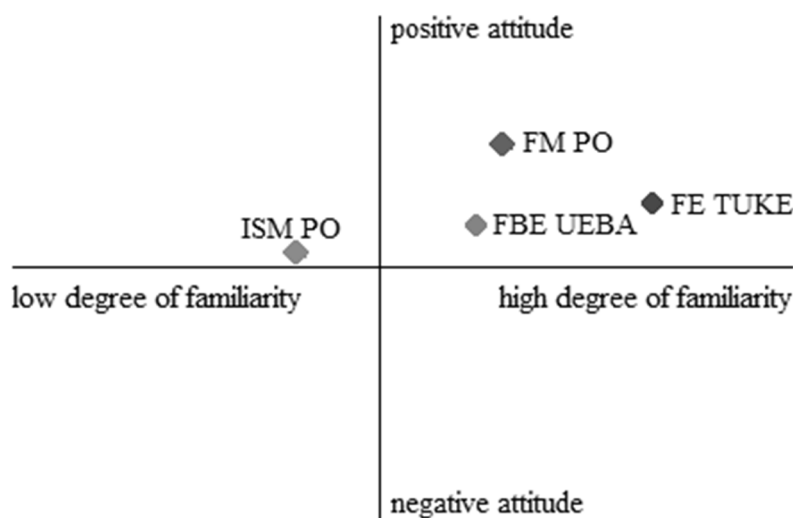


Figure 1. Graph analysing familiarity and positive attitude towards universities of economics

Source: own source

The degree of familiarity was studied in the context of communication policy information resources used by secondary school students in order to gain various information related to the selected faculties. On the basis of the research results we ranked the information resources used by individual faculties of economics at higher education institutions from the most to the least preferred ones. They are shown on Graph 2.

Acquaintances and friends were the most preferred information resources and they were ranked as first with three faculties (EF TUKE, FM PO, PHF EUBA). Websites of the faculties and a book on the higher education institution were ranked as second and third respectively. As to PHF EUBA the secondary school

students preferred the book on the higher education institution to the faculty website. Less preferred information resources used for gaining information about the selected faculties included open door days, leaflets, secondary school educational advisers, a headmaster, teachers and others. These included information on TV, information provided by a psychologist and a higher education institution visit.

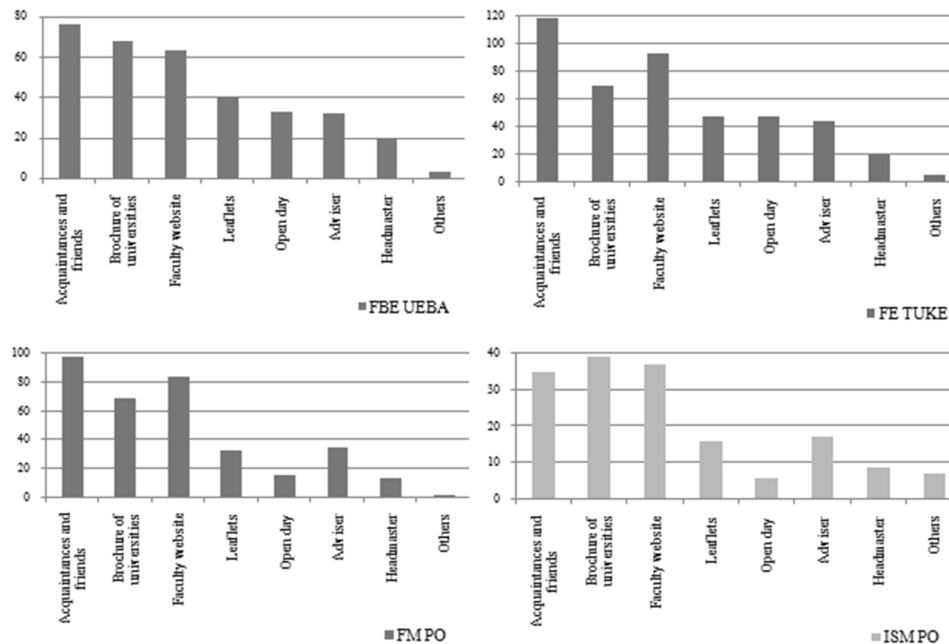


Figure 2. Typology of information resources used to gain information about a particular faculty

Source: own source

All in all the most commonly used information resources by secondary school students to search for the information about faculties of economics at higher education institutions, disregarding individual faculty, were acquaintances and friends, the website of the faculty and the book on higher education institutions. In case of the examined higher education institutions their activities in the area of communication policy with secondary school students seem to be relevant in relation to the familiarity of the school as well as students' attitude towards them. The survey proved that the students use the selected information resources related to the higher education institution actively.

It follows that it will be necessary for higher education institution to pay closer attention to information resources listed after the first three most commonly used ones (acquaintances and friends, the faculty website, and the book on higher education institutions). These include open door days, leaflets, but also educational

advisers, headmasters and secondary school teachers. There are several proposals for making the use of these information resources more effective [For more details 6,7].

Apart from the previously mentioned information resources it is necessary to mention those ones which form the integral part of the communication mix of educational institutions but which were not subject to our survey. As the selection of the used information resources was made on the basis of a personal interview with headmasters, educational advisers, secondary school teachers and students and it did not encompass all available information resources, or more precisely marketing communication tools with target audience.

Possibilities of a practical application of communication policy tools at educational institutions

Educational institutions, faculties of economics at higher education institutions in our article, play first and foremost an educational role. Education provided by particular faculties at higher education institutions could be regarded as one of its products. Implementation of marketing communication into the management of educational institutions is a prerequisite for success in competitive struggle on the higher education market.

In order to make the communication policy of higher education institutions effective it is necessary to identify target groups on which the institutions will focus their effort. In this case not only secondary school students – potential customers of higher education institutions (we paid our attention to them in our survey and evaluation of its results) are being concerned but also their parents, acquaintances and friends, educational advisers, and secondary school headmasters and teachers (who greatly affect purchasing behaviour of potential customers). Neither the mass media, representatives of state administration, and local self-government, managers, partners, friends and supporters, in some case sponsors can be ignored.

Furthermore it is important to set aims of communication policy – e.g. improving knowledge, skills and competences for personal, social and professional purposes of customers (applicable after graduation), but also of other relevant subjects when it comes to using educational services in terms of socially responsible marketing; [For more details 5]. It is necessary to set the budget for promotion and the cost in terms of indicated relations. This is apart from other factors influenced by promotional strategy, the way of selling a product, services (e.g. face-to-face education), types of services (in the case of educational institutions the so-called complementary services such as a library, sports centres, provision of accommodation and catering etc. are essential), the familiarity with educational services and their attractiveness among target segments. If service consumers, customers, partners or clients are not provided with sufficient information about everything that the higher educational institution can offer, the communication policy cannot be effective and communication with target audience but also with

the public (especially in the region in which the higher educational institution offers its educational services) is problematic. A combination and an appropriate sequence of individual communication policy tools, as well as determination of a percentage of individual communication tools in the total budget could change the state of insufficient awareness in a significant way.

On the basis of the information about the faculties of economics located in the territory of Košice and Prešov region (FM PU, the EF TUKE, PHF EUBA, ISM PO) collected by means of the survey and analysis of data published on the websites of corresponding faculties at higher education institutions we could state that they offer their potential and real customers several attractive products using various tools of promotion. In order to make the marketing communication of the selected higher education institutions with target groups using their educational services and with partners, friends and supporters, in some case with random visitors more effective, we could suggest several proposals and recommendations for using marketing communication tools in the future.

As far as advertising (paid form of extensive and impersonal presentation of products in the media) is concerned we examined the printed materials on the premises of individual higher education institutions and also presentation materials on the websites. All surveyed higher education institutions apart from ISM in Prešov had them in a printed version (most often at the rectorate and in university libraries), but also in a written form on the website (the Internet advertisement). The Faculty of Business Economics with the seat in Košice had them in the form of the text entitled Presentation Material (<http://www.euke.sk/?q=200&p=857>), the Faculty of Management in the form of Publication on the Faculty, PowerPoint presentation about the faculty, publications from the latest scientific conferences displayed on the main web page, but also in the form of the text entitled Why to Study at the Faculty of Management (<http://www.unipo.sk/fakulta-manazmentu/odkazy/oznamy/preco-studovat>) and the text Success of the Faculty of Management. Apart from printed materials in the form of brochures, leaflets, press releases in the Slovak and English language, the Technical University in Košice created also a photo and video gallery (<http://www.tuke.sk/video/>), University of Prešov a photo gallery (<http://www.unipo.sk/odkazy/fotogaleria/pro-educo>) and the International School of Management ISM Slovakia in Prešov likewise (<http://www.ismpo.sk/taxonomy/term/37>). The Faculty of Business Economics with the seat in Košice has its own photo gallery (www.euke.sk/?q=200&p=5180) and the Faculty of Management at the University of Prešov in Prešov displays the film about faculty on its website (<http://www.unipo.sk/zahranicne-vztahy/marketing/propagacne-materialy/10700>).

Displaying presentation materials on the websites of educational institutions (in the printed or audio-visual form – advertisement + the Internet, e-communication) could be considered as beneficial and effective. Thus the higher education institutions should systematically work on preparing them and regularly update them.

Concerning the area of developing relations with the public (establishing and developing good relations with the public by means of active publicity in the mass media) a regular presentation of marketing activities in the regional media, in some cases in the Slovak media, but also the organisation of press briefings at special occasions (anniversaries of university, higher education institution and faculty establishments etc.) are required. All higher education institutions devote themselves to the above mentioned activities but we did not find any information about systematic planning and monitoring of the activities (none of the faculties publish data about the plan of announcing marketing news in the regional or Slovak media). The University of Prešov in Prešov has the overview of the news on the university and its activities published in the media ([http://www.unipo.sk/zahranicne-vztahy/marketing/media-o-nas;PR+advertisement + the Internet](http://www.unipo.sk/zahranicne-vztahy/marketing/media-o-nas;PR+advertisement+the+Internet)) and ISM PO publishes the news within the media monitoring (<http://www.ismpo.sk/taxonomy/term/35>). A particular attention should be paid to presenting personalities of educational institutions in theme programmes of the public (Slovak radio, Slovak television), as well as in the commercial media (e.g. TA3). Such activities contribute to the creation of a good image of educational institutions and strengthen their position on the education market (advertisement + PR).

We cannot neglect the arrangement of staff training aimed at for example development of communication and IT- skills. Even though the information about these activities can be found on the websites of the selected higher educational institutions, the evaluation of these marketing activities in terms of real improvement in the area addressed is missing. It could be related to the fact that training sessions are not available for all the employees (they are often organised outside the work place and during working hours), in some case the information relating to the training is not sent to particular addresses (they are just published on the website in the news section) and it does not produce a desired effect. In this case it is worth considering the combination of providing information about PR activities by direct emails (PR + direct marketing + the Internet).

While searching the websites of the selected higher education institutions we were also looking for the so-called 'department of customer services, customer service'; however, we found it only at the Technical university in Košice in the form of responses to the most frequently asked questions by both students and teachers (<https://mais.tuke.sk/index.php>) as well as a helpdesk troubleshooting problems with settings (<https://nastavenia.tuke.sk/helpdesk>). We assume that the focus of the attention on finding out the communication problems existing at educational institutions and their subsequent solving by relevant subjects via services for students, pedagogic and non-pedagogic staff would make the internal and external communication more effective (PR + the Internet).

On the website of the Faculty of Business Economics our attention was caught by the information on quality policy (<http://www.euke.sk/?q=100&p=1468>) and we also found the information on quality management at TU in Košice

(<http://www.tuke.sk/tuke/riadenie-kvality>). Active presentation of quality policy of educational institutions significantly contributes to their good reputation and increases their competitiveness.

All the higher education institutions with the exception of the International School of Management ISM Slovakia in Prešov had apart from the Slovak also the English version of the website for communication with foreign partners and potential customers from foreign countries.

In the area of direct marketing (direct targeting of an addressee by means of specific instruments via databases created in advance) we suggest more active employment of databases. The TU in Košice has for example databases of graduates for the needs of future employers as well as for the activities within ALUMNI in co-operation with the faculties at TUKE. These are established and processed by the Centre of communication and relations with the public. ISM Prešov has a similar database (<http://www.ismpo.sk/alumni>). In this case it is civic association, the members of which are students, graduates, friends and supporters of the ISM PO and it is aimed at the support of students and mediation of work placements, consultation and organisation of formal and informal activities. Here we can talk about a combination of PR activities and direct marketing in collaboration with e-communication (PR + PM + e-communication). The Faculty of Management PU in Prešov is currently in the process of creating such a database (the University of Prešov regularly updates the database of graduates and it also presents interesting personalities in the special column of the university magazine Na pulze; <http://napulze.unipo.sk/>). It also sends the information about the events organised by educational institutions to customers in the form of direct emails. In this case it is also necessary to work with databases of the customers with whom the educational institution has long-term positive relationships (e.g. databases of partner institutions), with potential customers with whom it wants to establish relationships (e.g. selected secondary schools). There is no mention of these databases on the websites of the selected higher education institutions. However setting up e-shops is interesting (electronic purchasing – e.g. presentation materials, books and likewise). The one at the University of Prešov in Prešov (<http://shop.unipo.sk/>) offers customers the calendar of graduates for the year 2010 and publications published in 2009).

In the area of sponsoring (investing financial resources into activities opening an access to commercially usable potential connected with the given activity) it would be beneficial to allocate space on the websites of educational institutions to sponsors and partners for example in the form of an individual block which would display their logos and if need be information on their orientation, activities, or their relation to educational institution. Contrary to the websites of other higher education institutions we noticed that the website of PHF EUBA displayed apart from the information for applicants, students and employees (like in the case of FM PU and TUKE) also the mentioned block for the sponsors (S+ PR + the Internet). The target groups under the heading of topical information include students, staff

and the public on the websites of ISM in Prešov (<http://www.ismpo.sk/oznamy>), while the website of EF TUKE displays only the information for students in this separate block. The Faculty of Business Economics in Košice (<http://www.euke.sk/?q=200&p=7>) contains several materials among which there are documents with data about the recipient, the Foundation of Prof. Július Pázman providing educational, language and professional courses, consultation for students as well as for the general public. The University of Prešov has a separate block for sponsors but it does not include any information.

In the area of the Internet and e-communication (communication with customers in an electronic form) the aforementioned e-shop could get the support of the target segments and the general public. There are also positive reactions to discussion forums for the visitors of the websites of the selected educational institutions who are able to express their opinion on selected topics (e-communication + PR). On the website of the Faculty of Economics of TUKE we found a debate club with the overview of the topics which have already been discussed (www.ekf.tuke.sk/index.php?id=debata). The website PHF includes the discussion forum of the Club of Economists of PHK Košice for registered members and also a twitter Aiesec Slovakia. The block on students' parliament mentions the organisation of face to face discussion forums (<http://www.spphf.sk/>). There are no discussion forums on the websites of the ISM and the FM. We could mention the creation of a group on Facebook for the purpose of presentation of activities at higher education institutions and topical events as well as the placement of Facebook Box on the introductory website for the group log-in. The surveyed websites of higher educational institutions still do not include them. We cannot omit the need for active and regular monitoring of web page traffic and the subsequent inclusion of the relevant data into PR articles, or more precisely reports on events at a certain periodicity (e-communication + PR + the Internet). Consideration of forwarding the relevant information via the Internet search engine Google [for more details 11] is worth mentioning too.

Summary

Using the information resources and marketing communication tools for reaching target markets, potential and real customers is an essential part of communication policy of modern educational institutions. In times of crisis when financial resources for promotion are insufficient [cf. 10] and introduction of modern communication technologies for the creation of customers' networks inevitable (to have contact with domestic and foreign educational markets) it is still possible to communicate effectively. However it is demanding to attract the attention, arouse the interest and achieve the desired behaviour of key segments because it calls for consistent examination of their needs and wishes and their prompt satisfaction in innovative ways, especially in the case of the young generation and education in developing regions.

The role of education for the development of Eastern Slovakia region lies in the creation of modern conditions for education, in motivating prospective and active young people to stay in this region, so that they could transform their surroundings, and also in providing a connection between research at the universities and faculties with economic orientation and practice in the form of commercial outputs. The educational institutions – the universities, higher education institutions, and faculties located in this region could disseminate education and knowledge more effectively by appropriate choice of communication policy tools (and their adaptation to changeable needs of their customers).

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POLITYKA KOMUNIKACYJNA WYBRANYCH INSTYTUCJI EDUKACYJNYCH W KONTEKŚCIE ANALIZY KORZYŚCI POSTAWY I ZNAJOMOŚCI

Streszczenie: W artykule omówiono politykę komunikacyjną wybranych instytucji edukacyjnych w regionie wschodniej Słowacji w kontekście analizy potencjalnych klientów - uczniów szkół średnich "znajomość instytucji i przyjaznego stosunku do nich. Monitoruje postawy wobec powyższych podmiotów wymienionych wydziałów wybranych instytucji szkolnictwa wyższego, kładąc nacisk na znalezienie i zaspokojenia ich potrzeb informacyjnych. Ponadto skupia swoją uwagę na określenie dalszych segmentów docelowych i zaspokojenia ich potrzeb w zakresie zasobów informacyjnych za pomocą wybierania narzędzi polityki komunikacyjnej i ich właściwej kombinacji.

在有利的熟悉程度和意见分析背景下选择教育机构

摘要：文章对在东斯洛伐克潜在选择区域范围内的客户教育机构交流政策进行了分析- 中学学生与院校熟悉度对他们有利影响。