

The analysis of determinants of higher education faculties online reputation building of in terms of the domestic internet market

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to describe specific aspects of management-economic faculties' online reputation on domestic Internet market. The article summarizes the theoretical basis of marketing problems experienced by educational institutions as well as online public relations in the process of assessing the future of the given problem. Based on the analysis the article describes the current status of the selected market area of higher education. Another aim of the article is to identify online market position of the Faculty of Management University of Prešov in Prešov using a methodology based on Academic Ranking and Rating Agency - ARRA.

Key words Reputation, Image, Public relations, E-marketing, Faculty, University.

1. INTRODUCTION

Development of technology and means of communications pushes marketing into new areas, especially the Internet, which integrates communication with the public: advertising, marketing, public relations (Svoboda 2009). Online marketing is becoming more important, as we can observe changes in the way people communicate and also how they spend their leisure time. The advantage of the Internet as a communication medium is that it allows us to target transmitted information on the specified segment of the audience (Phillips, 2003).

There are also new and modern rules that the Internet has brought to the marketing being it a new communication dimension between organizations and consumers by forming direct and effective relations affecting the image and reputation of the organization.

These facts appear to be significant in terms of their possible use for public relations activities not only in the business field but also in the academic environment. Since most educational institutions in the domestic market still weight in the use of modern marketing forms, we have therefore decided to focus

our attention on the possibility of using new instruments and techniques of internet marketing for the purpose of building a positive image and reputation of these organizations.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS

Educational institutions marketing is becoming increasingly debated issue. It is possible to meet with the notion that marketing does not belong to this field, since comparing educational institutions to profit-seeking organizations is, at least, unethical. On the other hand there is an opinion that has explicitly positive attitude and argues in favor of marketing management of organizations. The development of the society and the development of management and marketing training of organizations caused greater awareness about the marketing among private and also public educational institutions (Eger et al. 2010).

Chance of success in the market of educational services is reserved for those institutions that have applied marketing at all levels, where all school staff are in contact with the customers and influence their relationship with the organization. This approach brings about the assumption that all subjects will be in long run satisfied with services provided by the educational institution. Subsequently, this satisfaction creates a good image, leading to higher loyalty of students and employees of educational institutions. Loyalty and satisfaction improve the climate inside the institution and lower costs of acquiring new staff and students and also support building a network of relationships with parents, practice and public (Světlik 2006).

Reputation and image of the educational institution is influenced by objective and subjective characteristics of the institution. In case of objective characteristics (eg. buildings and their surroundings, facilities, etc.), the change is very difficult, or requires a substantial financial costs. The subjective perception of institutions means the perception of the institution by different groups of respondents. The current image of the institutions (especially in education) is most often based on previous reputation and shows a relative stability. It follows that changes in some factors requires long-term patient work (Světlik 2009).

Public relations core is shifting to the virtual world where it tries to communicate with a wide, otherwise difficult-to-reach public (Dimová 2010). In this regard, Scott (2010) claims that after a long period of exclusive focus on traditional media, public relations became real public relations thanks to the Internet, where different forms of online content allow organizations to communicate directly with customers.

Public relations in the online environment are all about convincing the public to positively comment on organizations' products or services through this medium. Nature of the Internet, in contrast to off-line environment, connects people that are interested in discussing the organization and its components without any geographical limitations (Watson - Noble 2007). Scott (2010) amends formulated principles and states that it is necessary to pay close attention to the published content, as quality content in any form helps to shape positive public opinion on the organization. "Giving content a place that rightfully belongs to it is the most important component of successful marketing and PR strategy" (Scott 2010, p. 104).

Based on the above definitions, it can be concluded that e-marketing is not only the implementation of marketing activities in the online environment or other digital media. These are the activities associated with the knowledge of the target groups and then adjusting marketing activities online. The essence of e-marketing lies also in improving and enhancing the effectiveness of advertising and marketing activities (Madleňák et al. 2007).

3. CURRENT STATUS OF THE PROBLEM

At present (2014), Slovak higher education market has 36 educational institutions with over 150 faculties, including institutes and field offices. It is worth noting that in 1996 there were 14 higher education institutions, in 2002 nearly double that number - 24 universities. The period that was characterized by a quantitative growth of higher education in Slovakia was also accompanied by a growing interest in higher education, which reached its peak in 2006-2007 (see Chart 1).

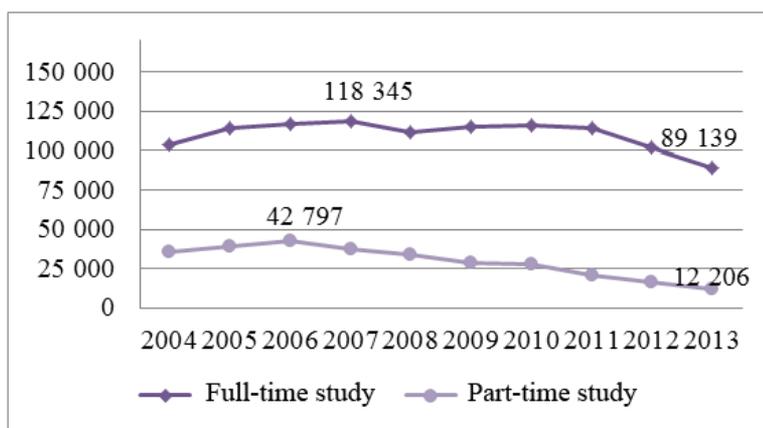


Figure 1 The development of filed university applications in Slovakia in total
Source: Own processing based on Uips.sk 2014

The domestic market of economics and management faculties, including FM PU in Prešov, can be characterized as strongly competitive. Specifically, FM PU in Prešov finds itself in a competitive environment of 33 economic and management faculties (including institutes, etc.) in terms of domestic market. Within the group identified by the study program similar to that of FM PU Prešov, we have identified 12 faculties (including institutes, etc.) of private higher education institutions, representing 36%.

It is not necessary to emphasize that higher education institutions, whether public or private, constantly fight for potential students - customers. In this context, we should point at downward trend in students searching for higher education, which follows the power of baby booms after 1990, where the decline culminated in 2002. The annual rate of decline of all applications filed in the period from 2012 to 2013 in the case of full-time study amounted to 12%. In the case of an external study we recorded a decrease to 24% within the same period. The trend confirms the decline of 23% in total applications filed for full time education when compared to the period 2013-2010. When comparing external form of study, we recorded a decrease of 56% (Uips.sk 2014).

After a detailed examination of the structure of prospective students in both types of studies (filed applications) for the year 2013, Social Sciences (social studies and services) dominated with a share of 54,50% (55,255 filed applications). Economic Sciences, as part of the social sciences under which FM

PU in Prešov falls, dominate this group with a share of 32%, which represents 17,606 prospective students or, more precisely, filed applications (Uips.sk 2014).

The above-described facts such as a large number of operators on the market, the downward trend of applicants for higher education and, on the other hand, high interest in economic sciences position FM PU in Prešov in fierce competitive environment.

In this environment the aim is to gain and maintain a strong competitive position within the market and the resulting interest of "quality" students in the institution, who, consequently, are prerequisites for building a quality institution. It is marketing carried out in the right way that is an instrument through which one can achieve this goal.

It is marketing in online Internet environment, represented by tools of e-marketing, which in our view represents appropriate way in which higher education institutions can show the target audience its internal and external quality with respect to the above objectives. In this context it should be noted that up to 93,70% of the entire population of the age group 16-24 years use the Internet every day or almost every day (data for 2013), for the age group 25-34 years it is 88 70% (Statistical Office 2013). The significant fact is that young people in Slovakia aged 12-26 years spend on the Internet an average of 4 hours per day (data for 2013, TNS Slovakia - Millennials 2014), which further confirms the importance of the Internet as a relevant channel of communication (media) for FM PU in Prešov and its target audience.

4. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of identifying online market position of FM PU in Prešov on the basis of websites analysis and the use of new tools of internet marketing we used the methodology of Academic Ranking and Rating Agency - ARRA (2011). This methodology was used in 2011 for the purpose of evaluating web pages of Slovak universities and their faculties in terms of relevance to prospective students. Primary data consisted of own analysis findings based on the offer of related study programs of domestic faculties (economic and management orientation) using the prescribed methodology for data collection by Academic Ranking and Rating Agency. It should be stressed that the methodology does not focus on quantity, ie the amount of information that institutions publish about themselves, but it is primarily about the information that inform the prospective students about:

- the quality of education provided by the faculty;
- the prospect of success in the field after graduating and
- practical aspects that will help prospective students to imagine studies and student life at the Faculty.

The aim of the above-described methodology was to identify the presence or lack of information given on the website of particular faculty, mainly the following general assessment principles (ARRA 2011):

- easy access / more logical location - information is at a maximum of three clicks distance from the main page (main menu), or a logical path/navigation leads to it, otherwise the evaluation is pushed one level below,
- up-to-date factor - given information is up-to-date, otherwise the evaluation is pushed one level below,
- faculty and university webpage – since some type of information is placed on the web of the faculty and some on the university web, we took into account (as in the given criterion stated otherwise) the location of information at the university webpage,
- penalties for confusion - if the information is contained at two places – the first one being correct and the second is insufficient or outdated, the better one was taken into account but due

to confusion the evaluation was pushed one level down. This also applies in the case of a missing link between faculty page (where, for example, information is insufficient) and university page (where information is sufficient).

The basic set of information for identifying market position of FM PU in Prešov using the analysis of websites' attributes and new internet marketing tools consisted of 33 websites of domestic faculties offering similar study programs (faculties with economic and management focus) (Figure 1). The research sample consisted of the basic set. When identifying the basic set in relation to the faculty, we did not take into account any other assessment criteria than those of relatedness of study programs. Study programs similar to those available at FM PU Prešov were identified on the basis of information from the internet portal Portalvs.sk operated with the support of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports under the central development projects.



Picture 1 Distribution of faculties from regional point of view

Source: Own work

In order to determine the market position of FM PU in Prešov within the group of similar study programs offered by other domestic higher education institutions and their faculties, and based on the analysis of websites' attributes and the use of new tools of internet marketing a scoring method was used. This method copied the acquired evaluation of individual examined criteria in the interval 4 (meets the criteria) - 1 (does not meet the criteria).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As reported in the table below, FM PU in Prešov ranked third within the group of domestic higher education institutions and their faculties offering similar study programs with a score of 35 points. Faculty of Economics, Matej Bel University scored the same number of points. In this context it should be emphasized that FM PU in Prešov got its 35 points out of total 52 points (67%), representing 2/3 of the total points, which is very positive with regard to other faculties. The mean value represented 28 points. The 50% limit has been passed by 18 faculties (54.50%), of which only 4 (33%) were private. The lowest score, 22 points, has been obtained by three faculties, namely the Faculty of Public Policy and Public Administration of the University of Danubius, Faculty of Business Management, University of Economics in Bratislava and Institute of economic and technical security of the University of Security Management in Košice.

Order	Faculty	Total points (Max.=52)
1.	Slovak Technical University, Bratislava: Faculty of Materials Science and Technology Trnava	39
2.	University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius - Faculty of Mass Media Communication	38
3.	Prešov University in Prešov: Faculty of Management	35
3.	Matej Bel University: Faculty of Economics	35
4.	College of Economics and Management in Public Administration in Bratislava - Management of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises	34
4.	University of Economics in Bratislava: Faculty of Commerce	34
5.	Alexander Dubček University in Trenčín – Faculty of social and economic relations	32
6.	University of Žilina - Faculty of Management and Informatics	31
7.	College of International Business ISM Slovakia in Prešov	30
8.	University of Economics in Bratislava - Faculty of International Relations	29

Table 1 10 best ranked faculties

Source: Own work

Quality of education	Perspective and employment in the field	The presence of selected information (practical aspects)
Pints: 10/16 (62,5 %)	Points: 12/16 (75 %)	Points: 13/20 (65 %)

**acquired points / total points*

Table2 Results of FM PU v Prešove in individual researched areas

Source: Own work

After detailed examination of various research areas (see the table above) you can also point out the shortcomings of FM PU's web presentation. When examining FM PU's website to assess education quality we noticed absent information about teachers, where in addition to information about the staff and their contact information the criterion also required information on publications, as well as professional CV. FM PU in Prešov in this case has Rather met the criterion, since in some cases, departments gave the information about the academic staff - PhD students. This indicator is based on the premise that quality teachers prepare quality graduates and the school cares about presenting the potential that the teachers represent. The criterion was generally fulfilled by only 3% of analyzed faculties. Lack of student satisfaction survey, where the minimum requirement was at least one research published in the last two academic years may be regarded as another deficiency. This indicator is based on the assumption that a good school is open to feedback and is "not afraid" to publish the results of the surveys. The criterion was generally met by only one of the analyzed faculties. Another drawback of FM

PU's web presentation was the absence of explicit and complete information about the achievements and / or excellence of the faculty. FM PU in Prešov in this case Rather met the criterion because the website presents only the general achievements of the faculty. This indicator is based on the assumption that the quality of schools should clearly define their place in the market and present their pros and advantages to their prospective students. The criterion was generally fulfilled by only 9% of analyzed faculties, 85% of faculties did not meet the criteria at all.

The area of the FM PU's website focused on the prospect of success in the field after graduating lacks profile information about alumni for each study program and level of study, including a breakdown of theoretical and practical skills. FM PU in Prešov in this case Rather does not meet the criteria since the website provide only superficial information. This indicator is based on the assumption that a good school should clearly define the personnel it creates. The criterion has been fulfilled by only 18% of the analyzed faculties. Another drawback has been the lack of coherent information about career counseling opportunities, including contact information (career counseling center), real job offers and internship opportunities. FM PU in Prešov in this case Rather does not fulfill the criterion, since the website only provides a link to an external site offering part-time jobs. The indicator is based on the premise that quality schools are trying to provide support to their students even after graduation and show it publicly. The criterion has been fulfilled by only 12% of the analyzed faculties and remaining 76% of them does not meet the criteria at all.

The area of the FM PU's website focused on the practical aspects that would help prospective students to imagine studies and student life at the faculty also showed insufficient information. Specifically, there was a lack of consistent and logically connected information on the study plans of individual study programs together with syllabi (or equivalent information). FM PU in Prešov in this case Rather does not fulfill the criterion, as the website only includes study plans without any annotation. This indicator is based on the premise that quality schools are trying to communicate openly about their opportunities for prospective students to bring them admission process as closely as possible, explain and thereby enable them to prepare well for this process. The criterion has been fulfilled by only 18% of the analyzed faculties, and 63% met the criterion only partially. Another shortcoming is the absence of complex information about the price of accommodation, meals and fees associated with the study. FM PU in Prešov in this case did not meet this criterion, as it only states tuition pricelist and fees related to the admission process and the study itself. This indicator is based on the assumption that a student is to be informed about the costs associated with the study as accurate as possible. The criterion was generally fulfilled only by 6% of analyzed faculties. Another shortcoming arising from the results of the analysis is lack of comprehensive information on a regular or one-off opportunity to participate in various sports or cultural events. FM PU in Prešov in this case does not meet the criterion, as the website does not provide such information. This indicator is based on the premise that quality schools care about their students' free-time options and openly report about such possibilities. The criterion has been fulfilled only by 12% of the analyzed faculties and 58% of faculties does not meet the criterion at all.

As mentioned above, despite the high ranking of FM PU's web among analyzed websites of domestic universities with related study programs, we have identified significant weaknesses of faculty's web presentation. It should be emphasized that in most cases these are easy to remove shortcomings. From a global perspective it can be said that the quality of websites of economic and management faculties is, based on the methodology used, insufficient for the target audience, as evidenced by the fact that none of the analyzed faculties did not receive more than 75%, and that only 55% of the assessed faculties received more than half of the total possible points. These facts shall be regarded as an opportunity to build a positive image of the organization and improve related public relations activities.

6. CONCLUSION

It is very frequent that the quality of faculties and universities is not sufficiently manifested in their marketing material, as is the case of the online environment. In this context, we agree with Štefko (2003) that many researches increasingly point to the fact that high quality and respected university is mainly the product of a good management that is not afraid to change established stereotypes and understands the school as an entity which has to be efficient and active in marketing. It should be emphasized that the issue of marketing in the Internet environment is a new field of knowledge that in the last decade has seen an enormous rise, as evidenced by the gradual retreat of the use of traditional media in reaching selected audiences. These facts shall be further regarded as significant from the scientific point of view.

Research plan, project

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