
Marketing Communication of a Public University

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the article is to determine the sources of adopting marketing orientation in communication by public universities and to identify its manifestations in the areas: communication participants, message, communication channels, disturbances, feedback and the context of communication.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Several research methods were applied: literature review, desk research and audit of university websites and social media.

Findings: The research clearly shows that universities have undergone a transformation from the classical model to the entrepreneurial model. It was conditioned by many factors, such as the massification and marketization of education, increased competition in the education market, as well as the ubiquitous globalization, internationalization of education processes, reforms in education and the digitization of economic and social life. In these new realities, universities began to function as enterprises. Public universities, though with some delay, have also followed this trend. As a result, universities had to develop functions specific to the enterprise, especially marketing.

Practical Implications: The conclusions of the study and observations contributed to the creation of a catalog of university marketing communication tools.

Originality/Value: The article develops the university's marketing theory, as the author attempts to characterize other than promotion-mix components of marketing communication.

Keywords: Marketing communication, university, public university, university marketing.

JEL classification: I23, M31.

Paper Type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

The transformation that has taken place in the field of higher education clearly shows that today universities are withdrawing from the classical model that has been in force in Europe for over 200 years, based on the concept of the Wilhelm von Humboldt University. According to it, universities focused on scientific, research and teaching activities, they acted for higher ideas, but not necessarily utilitarian (Celoch, 2015). Criticism of this concept is mainly argued by the need to develop a model of university functioning that, while respecting traditional cultural and ethical values, allows universities to keep up with the challenges of the 21st century and the progress of knowledge, and provides flexibility in terms of their organization and management (Woźnicki, 2007).

In other words, universities from elite institutions, representing lofty ideas, formalized should transform into "entrepreneurial universities" that combine academic and market aspects. Therefore, universities should not only be institutions detached from reality, but function like any other enterprise.

In this publication, the author discusses the development of marketing communication, especially in public universities, which came to the entrepreneurial model with a certain delay. The author defines the basic elements of marketing communication in a public university due to such elements as: communication participants, message, communication channels, disturbances, feedback and the context of communication. The characteristics of these elements was recognized as a result of a desk research study on the content of websites and social media of public universities, the aim of which was to identify forms and means of marketing communication of public universities. The article can be treated as an attempt to develop the university's marketing theory, as the author attempts to characterize other than promotion-mix components of marketing communication.

2. Conditions for Applying the Marketing Approach in Public Universities

It would seem that public universities, being financed mainly from the state budget, may remain more in the Humboltian trend. However, also these universities were forced to market themselves, which was mainly due to the massification of education and the fact that a huge number of private universities appeared, which became a significant competition for public universities.

As a result of globalization and internationalization affecting all spheres of life, there has also been an internationalization of universities and educational processes as a result of not only knowledge transfer, joint inter-university research, participation in international research projects, the possibility of working and studying in any country of the Community market, e.g., European or even temporary exchange of students related to the Erasmus program, etc. Moreover, as is the case in every

market, also in the educational market, there is a large variation in the expectations and interests of students, as well as a reduction in interest in theoretical studies in favor of gaining actual experience. The fact of the demographic decline is not without significance for the increase in competition between universities. New needs and requirements for graduates are also reported from the labor market.

In the case of public universities, it is also important that financing from the state budget is limited, sometimes as a result of reducing subsidies, even insufficient to cover the costs of the university's core activities. Moreover, changes in state authorities were related to the implementation of numerous reforms in higher education. Thus, public universities had to switch to the mode of entrepreneurial activity in order to obtain funds from other sources. Therefore, public universities began to expand cooperation with the environment, hence increasing the scope of the influence of its entities on the activities of universities - e.g., entrepreneurs, local governments (Seredocha, 2007; Celoch, 2015; Wolski, 2015). Public universities in this environment have also learned to build relationships and create strategic alliances.

Keeping up with the challenges of the 21st century also means for universities to follow technological progress, of course, apart from the scientific and research sphere, also in the didactic sphere. The development of technology intensifies the changes in the conditions of the university's functioning - not only new standards of education, but also communication are emerging.

Finally, the catalog of factors causing transformations in the educational market, which have already been clearly noticed and identified, should also include previously unforeseen factors. One of the factors that had a significant impact on the education market, also in the sphere of higher education, was the Covid-19 pandemic, the effects of which were visible in every area of economic and social life. At the same time keeping up with technological progress and widespread digitization, universities began to implement their basic functions in a completely new area - remote. The strategy for the development of education had never indicated the replacement of classroom activities with those online. As it turned out, the environment forced universities to completely change the paradigm of academic education, based on mutual contact, exchange of views or direct discussion (Pabian, 2022). The pandemic was therefore a phenomenon that caused turbulence also in the education market.

Therefore, it can be concluded that as a result of the change of the model of higher education from classical to entrepreneurial, and transformations on the educational market and its surroundings, a public university, apart from serving as an educational and research institution, also finds itself as:

1. an enterprise,
2. an entity in the economic environment,

3. a business partner.

By fulfilling the above-mentioned roles and meeting the changes on the educational market described above, one of the functions of a classic enterprise that is dynamically developing in public universities is the marketing function. In the boom phase for private universities, when education was becoming popular, and relatively many young people decided to pursue higher education, because studying was still in vogue, marketing functions of public universities were still in their initial stages. It seemed that marketing activities were unnecessary, that there would be no shortage of candidates for a public university with a long tradition, where full-time studies are free. In the face of changes in the education market, and above all, the expectations of young people considering further education, this view had to be revised quickly.

Private universities, although paid, offered a completely different range of educational services and a different approach to the student, so they quickly gained a competitive advantage. Public universities quickly realized that they had to seek candidates. With some delay, they also began to notice the role of marketing in their activities and marketing communication with the environment. There are units in public universities that deal with marketing activities more and more professionally. Almost every form of marketing activities practiced in the business world is being adapted at universities, including public ones.

3. Manifestations of Marketing Communication in Public Universities

The need for marketing activities has been noticed in higher education because they support:

- achieving customer satisfaction,
- increasing the share of universities in the market,
- increasing university revenues,
- obtaining social approval by the university,
- increasing the university's reputation.

Public universities are increasingly keeping up with private entities in carrying out their marketing functions. It is manifested by the use of broadly understood marketing communication in higher education.

Marketing communication is an integral part of your marketing strategy. It is defined as a process of interaction and dialogue between the company and the target market. Its purpose is to provide the environment with information about the company and its products / services, to shape the needs of buyers, to target demand and to reduce its price flexibility. Narrow approach to marketing communication identifies it with a set of basic components, the so-called promotion-mix or communication-mix, i.e., advertising, sales promotion, personal sales and public relations. In terms of communication, an assumption may be made that indicates its unidirectional nature,

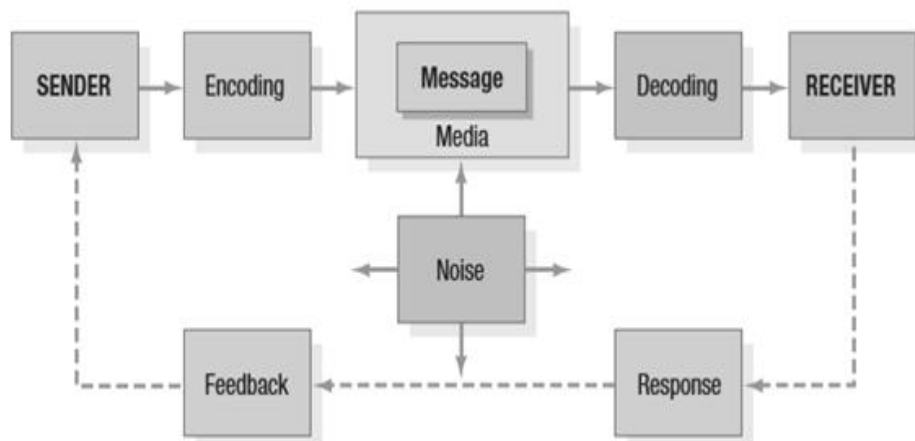
which is based on the sales (distribution) orientation of the company. Meanwhile, in communicating, and thus establishing a dialogue, feedback is also important, as is the acquisition of information by the company from the environment and listening to signals coming from the market. Thanks to this, the company can observe the main trends on the market, its transformations or changes in the needs and preferences of buyers (Wiktor, 2013).

To sum up, marketing communication is a process that involves the emission of information about the company to the environment with the use of various tools, as well as the process of collecting them. According to Wiktor (2013), marketing communication consists of six basic elements:

- 1) communication participants - senders and recipients,
- 2) the message, i.e., the right message,
- 3) communication channels,
- 4) noise or interference,
- 5) feedback,
- 6) the context of communication.

The elements of marketing communication proposed by Wiktor are in line with macromodel with nine key factors in effective communication presented by Kotler and Keller (2022) – (Figure 1). However, the macromodel lacks the context of communication, which is important according to Wiktor.

Figure 1. Elements in the Communication Process



Source: Kotler and Keller, 2022, p. 480.

Taking into account the above J. Wiktor's elements of communication, methods of implementing marketing communication will be presented on the example of public universities.

3.1 Marketing Communication of the University and Members of Communication

The sender of the message is a public university, which broadcasts it through various channels and using various means of communication. When it comes to the recipients of messages, in the classic approach to marketing communication, internal and external audiences may be distinguished. The first group consists of employees, university students, parents of students, life partners of employees, graduates.

The external audience, on the other hand, includes business entities, institutions, associations, e.g., professionals, journalists (media), politicians, government and local government administration, but also supporters of universities and, as a future target group, students of high school and their parents (Wiścicka, 2011; Wierenko, 2015). What is important in communication is that both sides - the sender and the recipient, are connected by a certain kind of community of needs and interests.

3.2 Marketing Communication of the University and the Transmission of Messages

The sender, i.e., the university, creates messages presenting certain usefulness that may be a response to the preferences, needs or expectations of the target audience. The messages are mainly characterized by:

- a specific form,
- having content with a specific meaning,
- placing symbols in them.

University messages differ depending on who their addressee is. Messages to the external environment may take various forms - e.g., to the sphere of business, politics, they will be more formalized, official. For candidates - more informal, direct. Among internal recipients, the direct form also dominates, formalism is used in connection with maintaining business relations and in situations where it is necessary to emphasize hierarchy or subordination. The content can also be varied and communicated for different purposes. Usually, in marketing communication, the sender presents his goals and intentions. Hence the variation in messages.

A message from universities is directed to business partners in order to attract them to cooperation for mutual benefit or to obtain additional funds. In the messages addressed to the candidates - the educational offer is presented through the prism of the benefits obtained related to self-development and building a bright future career. The messages for employees and current students are dominated by messages aimed

at developing existing relations, informing about what is happening at the university and what is the organization of the education process.

Of course, there is a certain symbolism in the university's communications. In printed or visual materials, there are logos, symbols, and specific colors referring to the company's colors. Additionally, slogans are used in verbal messages.

However, the most important thing in communication is that the addressee reads the message (receives it), understands it and reacts to it properly. In the case of marketing communication, the primary goals are to inform, remind and impose to take advantage of the offer. Then the message can be considered effective.

3.3 Marketing Communication of the University and Communication Channels

It can be seen that public universities use the "360° communication model", understood as the possibility of full use of available communication channels in marketing communication - both traditional (offline) and Internet (online) (Pluta-Olearnik, 2018). Table 1 summarizes the traditional and online forms of marketing communication, mainly in promotional and advertising messages.

Table 1. Marketing communication channels in promotional and advertising campaigns of public universities

Traditional (offline)	Internet (online)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press advertising, • Radio advertising, • Ads in shopping centers, • Advertising in means of communication, • Billboards (outdoor), • Neon signs, flags • Educational fairs, • Open days and classes, • Bulletins, leaflets, printed information, • Advertising gadgets signed with the company logo, • Press conferences, • PR activities, • Parties, events, • Competitions, • Patronage over events, • Word of mouth marketing, • Company outfits (dress code), e.g., uniform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website, • Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and other social media or content media, • Advertising posts on social networks, • Banners in news portals, • Advertising in educational portals - presentation of the offer, e.g., in portals for high school graduates, • Sponsored articles on information and education portals, • Ad words, i.e., sponsored links in search engines, • Online events (webinars, open online days), • Chats in messengers, • E-mailing, • New forms of Internet communication - alternative / controversial, e.g., TikTok, promotional videos in less common formats, e.g., Lip-dub, videos shot by hand-held phones by e.g., students, etc.

Source: Based on the results of own research.

It was predicted that as the orientation of public universities evolved towards a more entrepreneurial one, the Internet would become a natural tool through which universities would communicate with the environment (Domański, 2011). After all, today, people from the Z generation (referred to as post-millennials), i.e., people born after 1995, are recruited to universities. They don't know life without the Internet and social media. They are open-minded and creative, but it is not easy for them to focus on one task. Their main features are mobility and quick reaction to changes. Digital communication is normal for them.

The dynamic development of digital marketing communication was also aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Shankar *et al.*, 2022), which forced the transition to the Internet with almost all activities, including educational ones. However, it is clearly visible that the Internet trend in the marketing communication of public universities is clearly advanced.

A website, and a fanpage on Facebook, Instagram, and a YouTube channel are common. Applications for e-learning and in connection with the pandemic also remote, turned out to be in possession. Public universities are up to date with the media - they are more and more active in social media, developing and perfecting communication in this area (Peruta and Shields, 2018). They are also starting to act boldly on Snapchat or TikTok - that is, in the media that might seem too alternative or controversial to the seriousness, authority, majesty, often resulting from over a hundred years of tradition of operation, or conservatism, which is frequent at universities, especially public ones. It turns out that universities, including public ones, follow technological innovations.

As a result of the specificity of social media, universities also allow students to co-create content. Students usually provide photos for publication, record videos - and thanks to this, innovative solutions appear in the university's communication, such as popular filming with smartphones or shooting professional music videos in the lip-dub technique. A lip-dub film is a film most often in the style of a dynamic music video, where participants (students and employees) implement the assumed scenario referring to, for example, the specificity of the university's offer, moving their lips to the text of the song, which serves as background music. Therefore, universities cannot be accused of being conservative and delayed when it comes to progress in digital marketing communication.

3.4 Marketing Communication of the University and Disruptions

Communication noises are all disturbances that hinder or prevent the correct understanding and perception of a message. Wiktor (2013) points out that the disturbances can have a different nature and causes, hence the noise is referred to as:

- semantic - consisting in maladjustment of the language and form of the message or its style to the individual conditions of the recipient (e.g., a complicated, incomprehensible advertising slogan),
- external - in the form of disturbances from the immediate environment of the sender and recipient, over which they have no influence (e.g., noise, error in printing on leaflets),
- internal - related to the personal characteristics of communication participants (e.g., fatigue and stress of the press spokesman, stereotypes prevailing at the university).

It is obvious that these noises should be eliminated. It is the function of marketing units to anticipate and eliminate such disturbances. For this purpose, the situation should be monitored from the moment of planning the message, through its production, to its implementation.

3.5 Marketing Communication of the University and Feedback

Feedback is a response, the recipient's reaction to the message. It may be delayed, especially when using traditional channels, or immediate, as in some forms of communication using the Internet. Feedback confirms the effectiveness of marketing communication. As a result of the feedback, the university may achieve the goals set for individual recipients, which were described in the section devoted to the message of communication.

Feedback is also a symptom of two-way marketing communication. However, it should not be construed solely as obtaining the desired recipient response to the message. As a result of the feedback, it is also possible to obtain valuable market information, e.g. from marketing research concerning the university's market environment, social and economic trends. As a result of the feedback, it is possible to obtain data collected in databases, which can be used in better planning of further marketing activities of the university or for the implementation of its other functions.

3.6 Marketing Communication of the University and the Context of Communication

Context is an element of communication defined by J. Wiktor as a set of conditions in which communication takes place. These conditions include, psychological, physical, historical, cultural and temporal (Wiktor, 2013).

Psychological conditions are related to the mutual perception of communication participants. For example, the parent of a candidate for studies may perceive the university as prestigious, the student may perceive his professors as outstanding educators, business representatives may identify the university as innovative in terms of research on implementation projects. It is important that the recipients' perception of the university is consistent with the communication message.

Physical determinants are the material, technical and environmental conditions in which communication takes place. Therefore, the appearance of the university building, its lecture halls, the condition and modernity of the teaching infrastructure, as well as the aesthetics and appearance of employees are important. This would seem to be superficial perception of the university and its surroundings by the recipients of the message, and it cannot be in opposition to the content of the messages emitted by the university.

The historical factor is a reference to all events or historical episodes to which the participants of the communication may refer in some way. For a candidate for studies, it may therefore be important to choose a university where his grandfather also studied. The entrepreneur will probably respond positively to the inquiry regarding the possibility of university students to pursue apprenticeships in a given company, if they are its graduates. The effectiveness of marketing communication may also depend on this historical context.

Cultural conditions are equated with the totality of values, beliefs, symbols as well as ways of conduct and behavior that are recognized and accepted in a given community. Communication is closely related to culture. Communication requires culture, on the other hand, culture also means communication skills (Kulczycki and Wendland, 2014). The university ennobles the representation of culture by its members, including the higher culture. Factors related to culture are of particular importance at the meeting point of different cultures and communities, i.e., in addressing messages to an international recipient, in relation to students from international exchange or employees from various universities forming an international research team.

Finally, the timing aspect can also play a role in your marketing communication. It shows the relationship between the course of the communication process itself, its form, intensity and quality, and the time in which it is carried out. The time factor may also be important for the effectiveness of communication, e.g. whether there is time pressure or rather excess time. This can be important for the process of transmitting the message as well as for the feedback issue. In communication at the international level, the time of day and time zone will be important.

Context is therefore a relevant aspect of marketing communication. The perception of the message will depend on the context, and whether the recipient will understand and interpret it properly. The context must be consistent with the information provided.

Marketing communication is not the message itself, consisting in the transmission of some information. Context is a common ground between the sender and the recipient. Along with it, in the case of universities, there is also the transfer of intentions or ideas, shaping relationships, building an image and identity.

4. Conclusions

Marketisation in higher education has become a widespread phenomenon across the world. This development has proceeded amidst much criticism related mainly to resistance towards what many refer to as the commercialisation or commoditisation of education, the erosion of traditional values of education and the ascendancy and dominance of consumerism in sectors. In this environment, students have become consumers or clients, and the practices of education have been turned into transactional exchanges based on the principles of payment for rendered services (Mogaji, Maringe, and Hinson, 2020).

But this is the price of marketization of the education market. Here, too, the fight for the client continues. Public universities will have to continue to invest in appropriate resources, competences and abilities to implement more and more advanced marketing functions in order to be able to achieve their goals and maintain their status in the conditions of increased competition, in difficult socio-economic conditions.

Therefore, university marketing at public universities, although it occurs with a certain delay, must evolve towards integrated marketing communication. For marketing communication to be effective, it is necessary to coordinate various tools and communication channels in such a way that the message sent by public universities is consistent for all recipients. Many universities already see the need to take marketing activities from the area of auxiliary activities to a strategic and holistic level, hence most often units dealing with university marketing are directly subordinate to the Rector. The activities of these cells are more and more coordinated, thought-out and integrated.

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