

## FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF MARKETING ACTIVITIES AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN THE CONTEXT OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

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**Purpose:** The purpose of the paper is to identify factors influencing marketing activities undertaken in the context of postgraduate studies. It addresses issues of undertaking marketing activities in this respect.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Objectives were achieved by the use of surveys, which were carried out at a public and private higher education institution among the managers of postgraduate studies in the field of management sciences.

**Findings:** The authors identified factors that could affect the choice of marketing activities, as well as assessed their significance based on interviews and surveys.

**Originality/value:** The authors identify factors influencing the marketing activities undertaken in the context of postgraduate studies.

**Keywords:** marketing activities, postgraduate studies, higher education.

**Category of the paper:** Surveys.

### 1. Introduction

An operational environment of higher education institutions may influence their marketing activities. Factors of the (external and internal) environment and their impact on a higher education institution may, indirectly and directly, contribute to the perception of marketing activities and the way they are undertaken. The type of the institution, which may influence the impact of a specific factor on the choice and type of undertaken marketing activities, may also be of significance. The authors of the paper believe that factors influencing the choice of marketing activities may be interrelated, and their proper combination may create a correlation

network, allowing for the identification and differentiation of higher education institutions based on these factors.

The purpose of the paper is to identify factors influencing marketing activities undertaken in the context of postgraduate studies. The purpose has been served based on literature analysis and surveys carried out at two higher education institutions (public and private). The paper proposes a hypothesis that factors influencing the choice of marketing activities, undertaken by higher education institutions, vary depending on the type of entity. It was also pointed out, that each factor might have a different degree of significance between different entities.

## **2. Determinants of the choice of marketing activities at a higher education institution in the context of postgraduate studies – literature analysis**

Educational services in postgraduate studies in Poland (Orczykowska, 2006) undergo dynamic development as a result of the understanding that graduation is only the first step of acquiring knowledge, which needs to be expanded and updated. A. Orczykowska draws attention to the problem faced by future students, i.e. the choice of their future higher education institution. There are two popular approaches here. On the one hand, it is believed that studying at a prestigious higher education institution is a value by itself. The second approach suggests that the very fact of graduating from a prestigious institution does not guarantee a high level of education – self-awareness and self-education are more important.

The choice of the right institution may be determined by various factors, including tuition fees, teaching staff's competence, location, duration of studies, prospects for exchanging experiences and creating friendships, as well as many others. The offer of competitive training institutions may also influence interest in the offer of postgraduate studies. Students participating only in the selected courses can educate themselves in any field they find useful. Training institutions are more flexible than postgraduate units, i.e. higher education institutions (Poteralski, 2013). This flexibility covers both the offer, as well as the duration of courses or the form of classes.

### **Table 1.**

#### *Factors influencing marketing activities undertaken in the context of postgraduate studies*

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Factors influencing marketing activities undertaken in the context of postgraduate studies</li> <li>- atmosphere at the higher education institution,</li> <li>- marketing budget of the higher education institution,</li> <li>- the need to build social relations between students,</li> <li>- form of communication between students and teaching staff,</li> <li>- form of communication between students and administrative staff,</li> <li>- participation of trainers-practitioners in the didactics of postgraduate studies,</li> <li>- location of the higher education institution,</li> </ul> |
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- cooperation with certification organisations,
- complexity of internal procedures,
- communication difficulties between the units of the higher education institution,
- conviction that marketing activities are not necessary,
- negative attitude of employees to conducting marketing activities,
- the obligation of undertaking marketing activities shared by numerous sub-units of the higher education institution,
- lack of clear marketing guidelines,
- unclear division of responsibilities regarding performed activities,
- lack of coordination of marketing activities undertaken by various higher education institution departments,
- tuition fees for postgraduate studies,
- duration of postgraduate studies,
- the opportunity to participate in extracurricular lectures and conferences,
- CKU's support,
- access to e-learning resources,
- form of classes,
- qualifications of teaching staff,
- attractive postgraduate studies,
- number of classmates,
- teaching infrastructure of the higher education institution,
- offer of foreign language postgraduate studies,
- high quality of teaching services,
- providing students with practical knowledge,
- foreign language lecturers,
- teaching offer adapted to students' expectations,
- position of the higher education institution in rankings,
- image of the higher education institution,
- demand for offered educational services,
- accommodation in the city,
- quality of offered courses adapted to students' market expectations,
- financing studies by an employer,
- local infrastructure of the city,
- opportunities to establish business contacts during postgraduate studies,
- loyalty of candidates to the higher education institution,
- the opportunity to get a job in the acquired profession after completing postgraduate studies,
- secondment by an employer,
- change in the legal environment of the higher education institution,
- transport connections to a place of residence,
- market demand for highly-qualified employees,
- the need for candidates to obtain specialist qualifications,
- professional profile of graduates,
- age structure of students to whom the offer is addressed,
- visa regulations applicable to foreign students,
- opinion on postgraduate studies among graduates,
- level of unemployment in the region,
- opinion of employers on postgraduate studies,
- demographic decline in the market of educational services,
- labour market requirements in relation to graduates' qualifications,
- structure of remunerations of graduates of postgraduate studies,
- the possibility of financing postgraduate studies by students,
- changes in social values in relation to education,
- specifics of adults' private life,
- competition on the market of educational services.

Source: own elaboration based on: A. Zimny, 2009, C. Veloutsou, J.W. Lewis, R.A. Paton, 2004, T. Mazzarol, 1998, C. Brown, P. Varley, J. Pal 2009, L. Białoń, 2012, T. Rashid, R. Raj, 2006, T. Domański, 2012, G.N. Soutar, J.P. Turner, 2002, M. Shah, C.S. Nair, L. Bennett, 2013, J. Nafari, S. Ghaffari, 2017, V. Kalenskaya, 2015, G. Sarkane, B. Sloka, RISEBA, 2015, G. Sarkane, B. Sloka, RISEBA, 2015, R. Ryńca, R. Miśko, 2016, H. Ho, C. Hung, 2008, R. Rudzki, 1995.

Higher education institutions, being aware of the competition on the market of educational services, should choose promotional and marketing activities, taking into account factors influencing that choice (Zimny, 2009). In order to identify factors influencing the choice of marketing activities, the literature was reviewed and a list of factors, which was later used to create a questionnaire, was developed. Numerous determinants included a higher education institution's reputation, campus, the city's cultural offer, living costs and possibilities of international exchanges.

In the opinion of C. Veloutsou, J. W. Lewis and R. A. Paton (2004) the offer of courses and fields of study, foreign students' environment and marketing budget are also significant. However, Mazzarol (Mazzarol, 1998) stresses the importance of open days and the size of the city, where a higher education institution is located, as well as recruitment requirements.

C. Brown, P. Varley and J. Pal point to the need for taking into account, among others, international prospects, demographic changes and the political environment when undertaking marketing activities (Brown et al., 2009). When choosing marketing activities, the image of a higher education institution, including its teaching staff, scientific research, cooperation with other units, infrastructure for cultural and physical development, internal relations and social responsibility, may also be important (Thomas, 2007).

The authors of the paper are aware that some of the presented factors not only condition the selection of specific marketing activities in the context of postgraduate studies, but also can be considered in a broader context as the competitive potential of a higher education institution.

One example may be teaching staff speaking foreign languages and their competence. On the one hand, this factor may condition the selection of promotional activities, starting with accentuating strengths in advertising campaigns through their form, territorial (including international) scope, or the profile of advertisement recipients. On the other hand, there is also the aspect of building the competitive potential of a higher education institution. It builds its prestige and competitive position by raising its teaching staff's competence.

### **3. Research results**

The relevant literature studies were analyzed, in order to identify factors influencing the selection of marketing activities at a higher education institution. This research stage involved developing an initial list of factors, which was later verified based on interviews of managers responsible for marketing activities at a public and private higher education institution. As a result of the interviews, factors that could influence a higher education institution's promotional activity in the context of postgraduate studies were selected.

The relevant surveys covered a group of respondents from the administrative staff, namely the managers of postgraduate studies (at a public and private higher education institution). The purpose of the survey carried out among the managers was to select key factors that could influence a higher education institution's marketing activities and to attempt to answer the following questions:

- can external, internal and competitive potential factors influence marketing activities undertaken by higher education institutions?
- which factors have the most significant impact on the choice of marketing activities?
- does the impact of factors differ between different types of higher education institutions?

The research results are presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4. The questionnaire evaluates the factors based on a five-grade scale:

- 1 – no impact,
- 2 – rather no impact,
- 3 – hard to say,
- 4 – possible impact,
- 5 – huge impact.

The most important internal factors for both higher education institutions that can influence the undertaking and selection of marketing activities for postgraduate studies are: atmosphere at the higher education institution, the need to build social relations between the students, the form of communication between students and teaching staff, the form of communication between students and administrative staff, the participation of trainers-practitioners in the didactics of postgraduate studies, cooperation with certification organizations.

The most important external factors for both higher education institutions that can influence the undertaking and selection of marketing activities for postgraduate studies are: the quality of the offered courses adapted to students' market expectations and the financing of studies by an employer. The local infrastructure of the city, opportunities to establish business contacts during postgraduate studies, the loyalty of candidates to the higher education institution and the opportunity to get a job in the acquired profession after completing postgraduate studies are also important. Transport connections to a place of residence, market demand for highly-qualified employees, the need for candidates to obtain specialist qualifications, the professional profile of graduates and visa regulations applicable to foreign students are important as well, so are the opinions on postgraduate studies among the graduates and employers, labour market requirements in relation to graduates' qualifications and competition in the market of educational services.

**Table 2.**

*Level of impact of internal factors on marketing activities undertaken in the context of postgraduate studies*

No.	INTERNAL FACTORS	Grade of a public higher education institution	Grade of a private higher education institution
1	Atmosphere at a higher education institution	4	3
2	Marketing budget of a higher education institution	4	1
3	The need to build social relations between the students	4	5
4	The form of communication between students and teaching staff	5	4
5	The form of communication between students and administrative staff	5	4
6	Participation of trainers-practitioners in the didactics of postgraduate studies	5	5
7	Location of a higher education institution	3	5
8	Cooperation with certification organisations	4	5
9	Complexity of internal procedures	4	3
10	Communication difficulties between the units of a higher education institution	3	2
11	Conviction that marketing activities are not necessary	2	1
12	Negative attitude of employees towards conducting marketing activities	2	1
13	The obligation of undertaking marketing activities shared by numerous sub-units of a higher education institution	3	1
14	Lack of clear marketing guidelines	2	1
15	Unclear division of responsibilities regarding the performed activities	2	1
16	Lack of coordination of marketing activities undertaken by various higher education institution departments	2	1

Source: own elaboration based on the performed survey.

**Table 3.**

*Level of impact of external factors on marketing activities undertaken in the context of postgraduate studies*

No.	EXTERNAL FACTORS	Grade of a public higher education institution	Grade of a private higher education institution
1	Demand for offered educational services	5	3
2	Accommodation in the city	3	4
3	Quality of the offered courses adapted to students' market expectations	5	5
4	Financing of studies by an employer	5	5
5	Local infrastructure of the city	4	4
6	Opportunities to establish business contacts during postgraduate studies	5	4
7	Loyalty of candidates to a higher education institution	5	4
8	The opportunity to get a job in the acquired profession after completing postgraduate studies	4	5
9	Secondment by an employer	3	4
10	Change in the legal environment of a higher education institution	1	3
11	Transport connections to a place of residence	5	4
12	Market demand for highly-qualified employees	5	4
13	The need for candidates to obtain specialist qualifications	4	4
14	Professional profile of graduates	5	4
15	Age structure of students to whom the offer is addressed	1	3
16	Visa regulations applicable to foreign students	4	4
17	Opinion on postgraduate studies among graduates	5	5
18	Level of unemployment in the region	2	4
19	Opinion of employers on postgraduate studies	4	5

20	Demographic decline in the market of educational services	2	4
21	Labour market requirements in relation to graduates' qualifications	4	5
22	Structure of remunerations of the graduates of postgraduate studies	3	4
23	The possibility of financing postgraduate studies by students	2	4
24	Changes in social values in relation to education	3	3
25	Specifics of adults' private life	4	3
26	Competition in the market of educational services	5	4

Source: own elaboration based on the performed survey.

The most important external factors for both higher education institutions, that can influence the selection of marketing activities for postgraduate studies are: access to e-learning resources, the form of classes, qualifications of teaching staff and attractive postgraduate studies. The teaching infrastructure of a higher education institution, high quality of teaching services and providing students with practical knowledge are also relevant. The teaching offer adapted to students' expectations and the position of a higher education institution in rankings are important too.

**Table 4.**

*Level of impact of competitive potential factors on marketing activities undertaken in the context of postgraduate studies*

No.	COMPETITIVE POTENTIAL FACTORS	Grade of a public higher education institution	Grade of a private higher education institution
1	Tuition fees for postgraduate studies	3	3
2	Duration of postgraduate studies	4	2
3	The opportunity to participate in extracurricular lectures and conferences	2	3
4	CKU's support	3	3
5	Access to e-learning resources	5	4
6	Form of classes	5	4
7	Qualifications of teaching staff	4	4
8	Attractive postgraduate studies	4	5
9	Number of classmates	2	4
10	Teaching infrastructure of a higher education institution	4	4
11	Offer of foreign language postgraduate studies	3	4
12	High quality of teaching services	5	5
13	Providing students with practical knowledge	5	5
14	Foreign language lecturers	1	5
15	Teaching offer adapted to students' expectations	5	5
16	Position of a higher education institution in rankings	4	5
17	Image of a higher education institution	3	5

Source: own elaboration based on the performed survey.

To sum up the results of the first survey, carried out on the group of respondents, being the managers of postgraduate studies, it can be noted that public and private higher education institutions share some factors that shape marketing activities. Despite focusing on related specialisations, there were also some differences (factors important for one institution, that were irrelevant to the other).

The survey results lead to a conclusion that undertaking marketing activities is influenced by certain factors, the significance of which may differ between different types of higher education institutions. Factors graded in the questionnaire at 4-5 (respectively: possible impact, huge impact) should be considered as particularly important.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Changes taking place in the market of educational services, in particular postgraduate studies, require the marketing activities to be constantly monitored and modified. Changing needs of clients and a constantly extending offer of educational programs addressed to postgraduate students imply the need to identify activities and difficulties related to the implementation and coordination of marketing activities. Since higher education institutions can differ in both their internal potential and operational environment, it seems necessary to identify internal conditions of the undertaken marketing activities, and to adapt to the type and operational environment of such institutions. The purpose of the paper was to identify factors influencing marketing activities undertaken in the context of postgraduate studies. The study reveals that the factors influencing the choice of marketing activities at a public higher education institution include, in particular, its location, the duration of postgraduate studies, demand for a service or the specifics of adults' private life.

The factors influencing the choice of marketing activities at a private higher education institution include its atmosphere, marketing budget, the complexity of internal procedures, the level of unemployment in the region, demographic decline, the structure of remunerations of graduates and the possibility of financing postgraduate studies by students. The common factors, relevant to marketing activities at both public and private higher education institutions, include the need to build social relations between the students, the form of communication with teaching and administrative staff, the participation of trainers-practitioners in didactics, cooperation with certification organizations, access to e-learning resources, visa regulations for foreign students, the opinion on studies among graduates, the opinion of employers on postgraduate studies, labor market requirements and competition on the market of educational services.



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