

## STUDENT SATISFACTION, RESULTANT OF MARKETING ORIENTATION OF UNIVERSITY UNDER CURRENT CONDITIONS

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***Abstract:** The purpose of this work is to present a relevant aspect of marketing approach of the activities carried by universities, respectively knowing, understanding and satisfying students' needs, the main consumer category of the university product, in the conditions of current market of high education institutions. The universities are put in the position to find solutions to the problems caused by the stakeholders' characteristics and by the existing competition on the educational market. The approach of marketing orientation in the university implies adapting the educational and scientific research step to create for the institution a brand image as a warranty of its sustainability on a competitive market by considering the needs and expectations of students. The conclusion is that there is a wide specialized literature that shows models that allow an adequate quantification of the students' satisfaction as a resultant of concerning the insurance of high education quality by using university marketing tools. Starting from the specialized literature, in the work was handled the quantification of the students' satisfaction that have completed Bachelor and Master cycle in order to improve the activity of the university.*

***Keywords:** university marketing, student's satisfaction, the education quality, the university's image*

**JEL Classification Codes:** A23, I21, M31

### 1. INTRODUCTION. THE ROLE OF MARKETING IN THE UNIVERSITY ACTIVITY

The growth of competition in the academic environment has determined the universities to think marketing strategies designed to lead to the growth of student's satisfaction. Considering the students expectations and their perceptions regarding the quality of the activities conducted in the university represent an important step that leads to the growth of the university's notoriety. „The universities, as any other organization, exist to meet consumer needs of high education. That's why their main purpose is to provide consumers satisfaction by the offered products and activities” (Maringe, 2006, p.130). In this context, the university marketing has the primary role in the mission undertaken by the university, that of knowledge provider. In the field of high education, the need to analyze the demands and desires of knowledge existent in the society to meet these and to satisfy them at high quality standards both by the education process and scientific production is even more acute. Ever since medieval times, „the university was perceived as a source of science/high quality knowledge and advanced practice, useful for the members of the community, regardless the level of their welfare.” (Korka, 2009, p10)

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High education turned from an education orientated to teaching-learning into an education orientated to the consumer given that it is increasingly speaking about the need of promoting the student-centered learning.

According to OCDE (2008, p.13), high education contributes to the economic and social development by:

- human capital formation through teaching;
- building a solid base of knowledge through research;
- dissemination of knowledge in order to incorporate it into practice;
- transfer knowledge to new generations by training specialists.

All these activities can be in as many university marketing objectives that contribute to the fulfillment of the university's mission into a more and more complex competitive market.

The implementation of marketing orientation in the universities was determined by the growth of the number of universities, the opening of national borders, the legislative changes in the education field, the increased competition. The marketing activities started to be treated by university management as being as important as financial aspects and the aspects related to the quality of the activity. The correct appliance of marketing in the academic field can bring significant benefits also to the entire society because it creates the adequate frame for a more profound understanding of the consumers needs, for the position occupied by the high education institution in the competition, to a better management of resources and a better understanding of the market's trend on which operates.

The concept of marketing acquires in the academic fields the same valences as in the business environment and contributes substantially to the institutional development.

The university marketing strategy is in relationship with the high education strategy because directs the efforts and resources to accomplish the mission and strategic objectives, it facilitates the decision making on the components of marketing mix.

*"It is considered a successful strategy that step by which there are identified the target groups and their needs by using the marketing research, followed by the conceiving and implementing a balanced marketing mix. The strategies by which is aimed to obtain the competitive advantage are those who take into account the variables: quality, material and human support used in the process of education and research, the price and facilities in the price."* (Diaconu, Pandelică, 2010, p.100)

University marketing strategic objectives refer to:

- image development and academic reputation among stakeholders;
- promoting professionally the educational offer and facilities for students;
- development of an interactive communication with students;
- the intensification of the collaboration with other universities and business environment.

Obtaining a positive reaction from the target market is conditioned by building the vision of the education market from the perspective of the university. In this respect, it is necessary to build the marketing mix, respectively **the five P (Product, Price, Placement, Promotion, Personnel)**, to establish marketing tactical tools that high education can combine and control. Kotler recommends that in building the marketing mix to start from the client, respectively the student with his needs and wishes, the acquisition convenience and the communication activity.

## 2. THE STUDENT'S SATISFACTION – THE RESULTANT OF MARKETING APPROACH

*"The universities as any other organizations exist to serve the consumers' needs, and a first objective of this mission would be to deliver satisfaction to the consumer by the products and services specific to the academic environment."* (Mariange, 2006, p.130).

In the literature of marketing, the concept of satisfaction gained a special significance. The satisfaction is defined in Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language as *a feeling of contentment, pleasure*. Kotler et al. (2009, p.120) defines satisfaction as *"a feeling of pleasure of a person, resulted from comparing the perceived performance with the individual waiting."*

By the deeper knowledge of the student's expectations and by building the adequate university marketing strategy, the university will gain a positive image as a result of their satisfaction.

In the academic field, satisfaction is the consequence of the effectiveness, and the laborious effort of identifying the values, attitudes and students expectations, it is necessary for the insurance of quality in the high education, and, implicitly, the growth of student's satisfaction.

According to Korca M. (2009, p.17) *"the education quality is defined as a set of characteristics of a study program and of its supplier who satisfies the beneficiaries expectations."*

Starting from this definition, we can affirm that there is a casual relationship between education quality, student's satisfaction and the individual performance of the student, respectively the performance of education supplier.

The high education quality is dimensioned as is shown in the model developed by Al-Alak Basheer A., Alnaser Ahmad Salih Mheidi (2012, p.159) by: tangibility, empathy, responsiveness, ensuring trust, fairness. Ahmed Ishfaq, et al. (2010, p.2528) studied the impact of quality over the satisfaction and motivation of students and affirmed that satisfaction in education is the most important goal to which the education has to tend because *"the students satisfaction represents the source of all competitive advantages and the source of communication by word of mouth of the image of education institutions."*

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ENQA consider as being strategic elements of the assurance of high education quality the following ( Gvaramadze, 2008, p.444):

- assuming the responsibility by universities in terms of internal quality assurance;
- the development of an internal culture;
- the improvement of organizational structures;
- ensuring transparency;
- access to public and private funds;
- considering the education beneficiaries interests in the quality systems of high education;
- continuous improvement of the quality assurance system.

Among recent Romanian studies referring to the quality of high education and the satisfaction of education beneficiaries it is included that made by Raboca Horia Mihai and Solomon Adina (2010, p.127).

In the conditions of international market development of high education, the positive image of the university is conditioned by the preoccupation for ensuring the quality to confer credibility to the students and competitive advantage. It is more and more necessary that the universities to know which are the student's perceptions about the university due to the experience acquired therein.

**Table 1. Dimensions of quality perceived in high education institutions**

<b>Nr</b>	<b>Dimensions of quality perceived in high education institutions</b>	<b>Author</b>
1.	Personal attitude, aspect, objectives of training and evaluation, seriousness, sustained effort	Casanueva, Peribanez and Rufino (1997)
2.	Study programmes, institution reputation, tuition costs, career opportunities, location, time,	Joseph and Joseph (1997)
3.	Communicating with the teaching staff, reputation, material base, communication with administrative staff, syllabus, ease of access	LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997)
4.	Tangibility, credibility, security, empathy, response capacity.	Li and Kaye (1998)
5.	Office environment, staff outfit, availability to help, availability program.	Galloway (1998)
6.	Attitude, content, academic resources, competence.	Owlia and Kaye (1998)
7.	Staff, functional size of the teaching staff, accessibility and teaching methods of teachers, staff outfit and other services.	Camisón, Gill and Roca (1999)
8.	The content of the course, different facilities, evaluation, offering counseling services, communication in the university, concern shown by teachers towards students, social activities.	Kwan and Ng (1999)
9.	Offering base activities, wanted activities and some functional elements	Oldfi Eld and Baron (2000)
10.	Tangibility, security credibility empathy, feed-back.	Bigne, Moliner and Sánchez (2001)
11.	The attitude and behavior of teachers, teaching abilities, the content of education plans, offered facilities and equipment.	Campelleras and Vicianá (2001)
12.	Implying top management, the way of transmitting the information, facilities offered in campus, respect, feedback offered to students, the capacity of improving the university activities,	Sakthivel and Rajendran (2005)
13.	The content of courses, offering marketing courses, recruitment system of students, the way of teaching, the evaluation and monitoring system, different offered services.	Telford and Masson (2005)
14.	The abilities of the teaching staff, IT facilities, providing additional training materials, the quality and coherence in teaching, the facility of approach of teachers.	Douglas and Barnes (2006)
15.	Functionality, socialization, motivation, friendship, accessibility, receptivity, communication, teamwork, credibility, flexibility, comfort, competence, security, implication, integrity.	Douglas, McClelland and Davies (2008)
16.	Syllabus, educational effectiveness, material equipment and provided facilities.	Raboca and Solomon (2009)

*Source: Raboca Horia Mihai, Solomon Adina, Measuring the Quality of a Master's Program Course in Public Administration, Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences, No. 29E/2010, p. 129, in Emanuela Maria Avram, "Marketing universitar - abordare din perspectiva consumatorului de educație superioară", PhD thesis, ASE, Marketing Faculty, 2012*

The specialized literature offers models that catch the consumers' perceptions related to the quality of the activities which they beneficiate of. Cronin and Taylor developed in 1992 the SERVPERF model which, in their opinion, has the capacity to supply a representative score of quality by considering the 22 items of the SERVQUAL model, validated by Parasuraman et al (1985) who evaluates the quality as the result of the comparison between perceptions and expectations. In 2005 Firdaus proposed the HEdPERF (Higher Education Performance-only), an authentic model of determining the quality in the academic environment created by considering those two models already mentioned to which have been added six

dimensions: *non-academic aspects, academic aspects, reputation, access, programme issues, understanding*<sup>‡</sup> (Firdaus, 2006, p.33).

All the perceptions that the students form, related to the university where they have studied, shape the notion of image, positioning tool that influences the attitude of students and graduates over the high education institution. The universities are more and more preoccupied about the image improvement with the purpose of attracting students and to transform them in opinion makers.

From the marketing point of view, the image represents “*a set of meanings or realistic, affective, symbolic opinions, with which are perceived the products, brand or firm by the consumers.*” (Papuc, 2007, p.26). The image of the university is (Diaconu, Pandelică, 2011, p.104) „*a strategic component because university marketing operates especially with the intangible aspects whose mental representation is essential*”. The mission of the university, the pursued objectives, the functionality of the organizational structure are aspects taken into account by the stakeholders in building the image. All thoughts, perceptions, attitudes that result from the educational services consuming experience are often associated with the notion of brand, defined by the American Association of Marketing as a „*name, term, design, symbol, or any other characteristic by which a good or service is identified as being different from those of other sellers*”. In high education there is a series of general determinants of the university brand and also many factors that influence the university brand. These are given in the above table:

**Table 2. Determinants of high education brand**

<b>General determinants of brand</b>	<b>Determinant factors of high education brand</b>	<b>Source</b>
Consumer-university staff relationship	Academic and non-academic performances Support for students	Cheng & Tam, 1997; Davies & Ellison, 1997; Kent, Lian, Khan & Anene, 1993; Smith & Ennew, 2000
Size of university	Positive influence over the reputation and market classification	Ferris & Stallings, 1988; Hagstrom, 1971; Kent et al., 1993; Oromaner, 1970; Temple, 2006; Chen, 2008
Availability of information	University curriculum Extra-curriculum Posters Magazines Local media Regional media National media Radio, TV Golden Pages Press Releases, Web	Davies & Ellison, 1997
The quality of university activities	Academic services Curriculum structure Academic facilities Library General facilities	Cheng & Tam, 1997 Davies & Ellison, 1997 Kent et al., 1993 Smith & Ennew, 2000

<sup>‡</sup> Firdaus A., *Measuring service quality in higher education: HEdPERF versus SERVPERF*, Marketing Intelligence & Planning Vol. 24 No. 1, 2006, p. 33

	Accommodation for students The modernity of the building Sports facility Laboratories The availability of courses Availability for consulting the program	
Study fee	Study fee represents the main source of income for the private universities and exerts a major influence over the students and their families. In the level of university taxes the quality of supplied services is reflected.	Davies & Ellison, 1997 Kotler & Fox, 1995
Personality and style	General environment of the university	Cheng & Tam, 1997

Source: Mourad M., Ennew C., Kortam W., *Descriptive Evidence on the Role of Corporate Brands in Marketing Higher Education Services*, *Service Science*, 2(3), 2010, p. 160, in Emanuela Maria Avram - "Marketing universitar - abordare din perspectiva consumatorului de educație superioară", PhD thesis, ASE, Marketing Faculty, 2012

It is important that universities work to continuously improve the image by modernising the tangible elements and by building a durable relationship of the university staff with stakeholders.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We started from the size of quality perceived in high education as it was identified by Campelleras and Viciano (2001), respectively, the attitude and behavior of the teachers, the teaching abilities, the content of education plans, the offered facilities and equipments and we made a qualitative analysis using focus group to collect information regarding the senior students' experiences, perceptions and opinions of a economic master program of the university to establish how satisfied they are about the global educational product that they have consumed and if the university has a positive image on the educational market.

The topics proposed for discussion were the dimensions of quality perceived in high education mentioned above. In the discussion attended 11 master terminal year from the economic masters.

### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions that appear from the horizontal and vertical analysis are the following:

- the attitude and behaviour of teaching staff was appreciated as being properly, the well professional training and experience of the teaching staff contributing mainly to the design of a positive image of the faculty and university towards students;
- there is a good communication with the teaching staff, but some of them do not take into account students point of view;
- are perceived as being more efficient the oral final examinations than those written;
- seminar activities are perceived by students as interactive and it is desirable that the time for these to be bigger than the time for the lectures;
- students highlighted the fact that there should exist much more preoccupation from the teaching staff to increase the share of practical examples in the presented lectures;

- although most of them are pleased by the offered facilities and equipments, the students appreciate that there is not the same level of comfort in all buildings where they operate ;
- the direct relationship with the students cultivated by the non-teaching staff must be substantially improved also as the vertical communication in the institution to offer clear and comprehensive information;
- hospitality services and those of leisure offered in the university campus, although they have been improved comparing with the stage where they were at the beginning of their license cycle, these services are still far of the perception that the students have about it;
- the services offered by the library are perceived as being inappropriate from the perspective of the new book fund;
- the relationship between the university and the labour market is perceived as being a less intense one, especially regarding the openness that the potential employers manifest for high education graduates; from this perspective, the university's image is positive, especially for the students from technical faculties;
- the stage of practical training is perceived as a tool that should be substantially improves, especially by growing the involvement in the student's tutorial.
- the university is perceived by students as a university that ensures a medium level of satisfaction in accordance with students expectations; the image can be substantially improved if they think of awareness strategies of business environment in accordance with the educational and scientific offer of the study curriculum from the university and internal marketing strategy with strict reference to motivating the staff.

This study can be seen as a starting point in the development of new studies concerning the marketing policy of the university with an impact over the quality of formative process of students.

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