

DEVELOPING A SEVEN METAPHORS MODEL OF MARKETING FOR UNIVERSITIES

Coita Dorin-Cristian

Management-Marketing Department, Faculty of Economics, University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania

dcoita@uoradea.ro

Abstract: *The concept of marketing applied in education offers a lot of possibilities of social innovation. It is a tool helping educational organization to acquire resources and to provide value. In this article presented a model of seven metaphors to be used by a universities in order to acquire resources and to provide value to its stakeholders and applied it in the case of a Romanian university called The University. The aim of the paper is to identify sources of social innovations by using this model in the field of educational marketing.*

Keywords: educational marketing, Romanian higher education, marketing metaphors, seven metaphors model, social innovation.

JEL classification: M390

1. Introduction

In 2012 in Romania were 107 higher education institutions. 88 of them are accredited by The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). All these universities competed for a market of 464 592 enrolled students (INSSE 2012), including an estimated number of 10 000 foreign students in Romania and about 30-50 000 of Romanian students abroad. The number of the enrolled students in Romania in 2012 was the lowest number from 2000. Five years ago the number of the student was almost double as it is seen in the following table.

Table 1: Evolution of the number of the students enrolled in Romania from 2000 to 2012

Year	Number of the students enrolled
2000	533.152
2001	582.221
2002	596.297
2003	620.785
2004	650.335
2005	716.464
2006	785.506
2007	907.353
2008	891.098
2009	775.319
2010	673.001

Year	Number of the students enrolled
2011	539.852
2012	464.592

Source: INSSE (2014) Romanian National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies-INSSE, Tempo Online Database on www.insse.ro

Due to the huge decrease of the number of enrolled students, Romanian universities are forced to consider marketing as a function to acquire resources and to provide value. Therefore it is not random the increasing of literature on higher education marketing, especially after 2007.

In this paper we developed a model for understanding marketing in higher institutions and presented its potential for the case of a Romanian university.

1. Literature review on marketing higher education in Romania.

There has been a consistent literature on the educational marketing and in particular on higher education (HE) marketing. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka reviewed literature on HE marketing and concluded that there is a need of theoretical models to reflect the particular context of HE and the nature of their services (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006).

In Romania there is a growing interest in the marketing academic education, particularly in higher education marketing. Analyzing the literature on higher education marketing in Romania, we found that there has been a promising literature on marketing orientation, especially after 2007 (Nicolescu, 2009, Enache 2011, Diaconu and Pandelică 2011, Filip 2012, Gordan and Pop, 2013), on using marketing research (Dumitru, 2013), on relational marketing in higher education (Iordache-Platiș, 2010), on students' behavior (Băcilă et al., 2009), on quality of educational services (Bunda et. al, 2010), on marketing strategies of universities (Micu 2009, Munteanu, 2010, Gorun, 2010, Tanțău et al, 2011, Popescu 2012).

All of the authors in the field consider the necessity of marketing to be important for universities given to its potential in acquiring resources (students, researchers, professors, public funds and public recognition) and providing value (quality of education, position in rankings, prestige to stakeholders) .

Education is very important to society and its importance increases as world become more complex and integrated. As important actors in education and in society, universities always looking for ways to continuously improve their business. Even if some universities tend to adopt behavioral elements of public institutions and of great inertia in terms of innovation, increasingly powerful forces environmental factors force them to innovate, to seek and attain excellence. Universities, on the one hand, must keep up with the increasing competition for home based and overseas students, with changing generations of students, with developments in the field of education, with globalization, with the influence of technology, with the changing needs of society, with changing the way public resources are allocated, and also with the shift paradigm in understanding of market orientation, e.g. marketisation.

2. A metaphorical approach

We consider marketing to have two major tasks for any organization, (1) to acquire resources for the organization and (2) to provide value to its stakeholders (Coita, 2008). Due to the complexity of the universities as organizations, it is a challenging endeavor to

describe how the model is functioning, how do universities acquire resources, what kind of resources they need, to whom they provide value and what is exactly value for every category of stakeholders. We share the opinion that it is absolutely wrong to consider higher education as commodity traded to the interaction of many suppliers and many buyers at a variable price but instead, as a concept that respects the benefits of social and economic capital (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009).

We further propose a model of understanding of marketing based on the use of seven metaphors. Metaphors are widely used in marketing to deliver content and facilitate understanding of customer benefits (Bremer and Lee, 1997). In addition, metaphors in marketing theory help when business environment and market conditions are in a state of ambiguity and needs both critical and creative thinking (Fillis, 2008)

The model we propose aims to facilitate understanding the benefits of marketing and also its functionality to universities. It is supposed to be adopted by both managers and the ones who want to broaden their understanding of marketing in higher education. The model is based on the assumption that marketing has a complex role for organizations in modern world and is inappropriate to transpose the classical marketing concept in the higher education market. The model opens up the possibility of its use for social innovation.

3. Seven-metaphors-model of marketing higher education.

We further propose a model of understanding marketing. Each of the seven metaphors describes how a university can use marketing to fulfill its mission and accomplish its goals.

3.1 Marketing as a magnet of an organization.

The main function of a magnet is that produces a magnetic field to attract certain objects. We believe that a university may use marketing to be responsible for producing that kind of field that is a medium of attraction resources and opportunities: for example, to attract people (students, staff, faculty, partners, and sponsors), to attract money (funding, projects, longer payments terms, research funding, endowments, investments, funds for scholarships, loan funds and even students to attract loans to bear the costs of education), to attract projects (as main applicant or as a partner organization) and also other elements creating good reputation (positive references from the media, positive reports made by supervisory authorities and regulators, willingness and support of the authorities, parents, public attention, participants to discussions, visitors to the campus, visitors to Internet site, alumni, Likes on Facebook etc.)

Once the magnet position was understood, the management and all those responsible for marketing should ask questions such as: "What are the constituencies of the magnetic field that we have to produce?" "What are the other conditions that we have to fulfil in order to attract many of the items above?", "What else should we do to attract more of the above?", "What draws all these?"

3.2 Marketing as an arrow of the organization.

An arrow could be used as a projectile or as a carrier. As a projectile, the arrow is the main element to reach target. As a carrier, the arrow is the vehicle for delivering certain elements, for instance, messages, answers to questions, announces of new opportunities, type-reactions to specific stimulus or situations etc. In addition, the use of arrows implies the need to identify one or more targets and the bow – the mechanism to send the arrow to the target.

Arrow function of marketing involves the organization identifies its targets, then use different mechanisms to send different elements in their direction. There are different targets for marketing: target markets, target results, target opportunities. Towards these goals the organization sends its products and its offer, its promotional messages, its marketing activities, resources and attention.

Considering marketing as an arrow leads people to ask questions such as: Whom we

offer our products? Who we are aiming our product / service? Whom shall reach / who we are aiming to reach with our messages? Which carrier (which promotional vehicle) can be used to send messages, items of value to customers? What else can we target customer attention and money? What targets (customer - target, market, or results) should we determine?

3.3. Marketing as a hook of the organization.

The main function of a hook is to catch, to grasp, to cling, to bring objects close to the user or to his attention. By marketing universities must bring its public closer, must close resources and grasp opportunities.

Another function of a hook is that it provides stability as an anchor. Marketing can be understood as an anchor which provides safety and stability to organization. Marketing helps school organization to "anchor" itself in its mission, in the area of knowledge, culture and values of civilization and community.

3.4. Marketing as a window of the organization.

Windows (and doors, as well) are communication interfaces; they provide access and communication with the external environment. They also provide exposure of results or performance of the university, presenting them to the public. They allow those inside to look out and find out what's happening in the business environment. They also allow outsiders who are interested to look within the organization to know what is happening and even get involved encouraging them to providing value.

Having in mind all the possible windows universities could use, we mention (1) the Internet site and (2) tools of online access via computers or mobile devices, e.g. e-learning platforms, (3) utilizing Social Media for communicating, (4) open days and other academic events, (5) the responsiveness of the university to different requests of the outsiders, (6) newsletter and any academic journal, (7) any other means to communicate relevant things about the activities and the performances of university, participants to projects, conferences, round tables, problems debated and solutions found.

3.5. Marketing as an organization binoculars.

A pair of binoculars is a tool with which the viewer can look away, can scan the horizon. Marketing acts as binoculars for organization that helps to look carefully and see the exterior and interior environment, the changes, the opportunities and the threats. The binoculars should empower organizations to know the trends and future developments. Through activities such as marketing research, scanning the marketing environment, marketing forecasts, the university can more clearly see the outside and its future.

3.6. Marketing as a strap.

A strap is a rope with the role of flexible connecting element. With this tool universities link dynamically and flexibly to different situations, developments, trends and opportunities. For example they links to projects opportunities, to technologies, to local community and economy, to employers, to interests of local authorities and other partners.

The strap is a metaphor for intelligent and flexible relationships (Porumb, 2000), a tool to operationalize relational marketing of universities.

3.7. Marketing as a cobweb.

Cobweb is the symbol of a network of connections and interests consciously constructed and planned. Universities must develop their network connections and interests to ensure their access to resources and ability to deliver greater value to their audience categories. Like a spider, a university must initiate, establish and use links, partnerships, networks, relationships with various external entities (other universities, network of universities, network of research institutes, NGOs, employers, suppliers and more others). All these networks provide benefits to teachers, to students, to educational process, to school board, and to other partners, as well.

Besides the understanding of a network of partnerships we emphasize on informational integration, e.g. marketing research through the network.

In the networks, university could play roles as: the network maker, the network administrator, the feeder, the amplifier, the evaluator, the public-agenda- setter, the concentrator, the facilitator or the hub.

Using cobweb as a marketing model is not new, but in this seven-metaphoric-model, the concept of cobweb has nothing to do with the cobweb model (Dieci and Westerhoff 2009).

4. Social innovation potential of the seven metaphors model in the case of the University

Given the complexity of the higher education environment, the use of model could generate several innovations.

First of all, it will help academics to understand their role in marketing higher education which is not only the responsibility of the marketing department. The model promotes understanding of the broader situation of the university as a network node and leads them to engage in relationships and partnerships between universities and third parties. The model emphasis on the necessity for universities to create mechanisms for attracting funding, reputation, researchers, staff and other resources as a part of global marketing effort. It underlines, also, the necessity for universities to equip themselves with the necessary marketing tools, intelligence and information not only about the market of prospective students but also to identify and monitoring those areas where resources come from.

Increase the magnetism! Understanding marketing as a magnet suggests that universities and staff should consider a large range of possibilities to attract people, resources, opportunities and good reputation.

Without claiming to make an exhaustive list, we consider marketing tools to be diverse and also traditional.

Using brands

There are several entities to be branded within universities. The University itself should be branded as an umbrella brand for all the brands of its constituencies. Its faculties, departments, extensions and research centers could be branded, as well.

Open Windows

Market orientation of the University implies not the possibility of making visible what is happening within university but the obligation to become an open institution.

There are some situations that can be considered as windows such as Open Days, organizing campus visits, MOOC- Massive Open Online Courses, Webinars, and Open Workshops.

Social Media, also, helps the University to open the windows to several categories, empowering them to get closer to young minds, to prospects, to students and partners, to alumni and to their staff.

Organizing academic events

Universities could consider academic events to be a variety of reasons for different audiences to come, to stay, to participate, to research, to become acquainted with them and to become more preferable. From summer schools or summer camps, contests for students, professors, entrepreneurs, artists, from conferences or scientific reunions aiming to attract researchers.

Inviting contributors for academic journals

Contributions to academic journal attracting articles and scientific ideas, from services and benefits offered to community actors such as free access to libraries, access to universities facilities.

Another means for drawing attention of the public opinion are the universities sport

teams and their performances in sport championships. Universities attract also employers for the students and graduates through workshops, projects, job fairs and projects. Universities could attract resources, opportunities and money for the students and graduates being active contributors to mechanisms as loans for the students and jobs-getting facilitation. Understanding of marketing as a magnet for universities opens new and unexpected opportunities of using tools to attract resources and increase interest and involvement of stakeholders.

6. Conclusions

The benefits of using the seven-metaphors-model start with the profound understanding of the mission of marketing applied in modern universities. In this respect, the model allows management of the university to act as marketers, even they don't have the marketing formal training.

Using the seven-metaphors-model allows also the researchers and the faculty to understand themselves as marketers of the institutions, as they are responsible to acquire resource and deliver value in the name of the university they work for.

Having this model in mind could be useful for any marketing responsible of a university to answer to questions as: (1) Which are our current marketing targets; (2) Which should be our marketing targets? or (3) Which could be our marketing targets?. Further, it allows marketers to identify and also use an extended mix of marketing elements to be used for educational academic institution.

We consider that the seven-metaphors-model could be also applied in educational institutions, local authorities, nonprofit organizations and other social economy entities in order to stimulate social innovations to serve the public good.

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