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Conditions, Contemporary Importance and Prospects of Higher Education Marketing on the Example of Polish Universities

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to present selected aspects of contemporary marketing of Polish universities. Particular attention was paid to determinants of functioning of universities as a part of the European Higher Education Area, their marketing activities, the modern sense of marketing of these market actors, and the perspectives of its development. The purpose of the article was realized based on the analysis of secondary sources and primary research of authors. Research carried out for the purpose of this article are qualitative in nature and was carried out by *In-Depth Interviews* among about 14 representatives of Polish universities.

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1. Introduction

The dynamic changes in the environment of contemporary universities mean that they are concentrated on the expectations and needs of their stakeholders, and especially candidates and students. Due to this focus the university management process has the marketing character. Marketing orientation of the university, as in the case of enterprises, is continually evolving. The main determinants of the direction of this evolution is the development of

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information technologies, the growth of the Internet penetration rate and its priority role as an important source of message in the segment of young consumers.

The purpose of this article is to present the specificity and marketing perspectives of Polish universities against the key changes in their environment. In the article Polish and foreign secondary sources were used, including publications of Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the Central Statistical Office, acts and development programs, Polish and foreign book publications, press releases and websites associated with the development of modern marketing trends in higher education. There were also presented the results of qualitative primary research of the author carried out with an application of In Depth Interview method among representatives of 14 Polish universities (both public and private in 7 provincial cities), regarding the specificity and marketing perspectives of the university. The article can be a useful source of information for all those interested in marketing management aspects of modern universities on the directions of changes in marketing at universities, the importance of modern marketing concepts for students, candidates and university marketing practices of Polish universities and perspectives in this regard.

2. Conditions of Polish universities functioning

Turbulent macro and microenvironment of Polish higher education determine intensive changes and constant challenges in this sector. Segments of university macro-environment which affect their situation consist in legal, demographic, international, technological, economic and socio-cultural environments. The article draws attention to the role of the selected segments of the environment. This part focuses on the image of Polish higher education, its legal and demographic environment, which has been shaping clearly in recent decades. The next parts of the article one emphasized the key influence of the technological environment on the ongoing very dynamic changes in the evolution of higher education marketing.

The legal environment of Polish universities is shaped by the normalization in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland and the bill of Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education. Especially important for Polish higher education sector was the Act of 12 September 1990 on higher education, which allowed the formation of private universities. It influenced (among other factors such as an increase in educational aspirations of young people and a baby boom which lasted until 2002.) on the so-called educational boom which reflected in the increased number of students and the universities. The number of students in Poland increased from 404 thousand in 1990/1991 to 1 941 thousand in the peak year 2006/2007 (Higher Education Institutions and their Finances in 2012, 2013), (an increase by 370%). Since then the number has been constantly decreasing.

In the academic year 2013/2014 at 438 universities of all types (public 132 - 74.3% of all students and 306 private) 1 550 thousand students were educated (Higher Education Institutions and their Finances in 2013, 2014). The gross enrollment rate, which is a measure of the popularity of education, was rising gradually from 12.9% in the academic year 1990/1991 to 53.8% in the academic year 2010/2011, then fell to 49.2% in the academic year 2013/2014 (net enrollment rates increased respectively from 9.8% in 1990/1991 to 40.8% in 2010/2011, and then decreased to 38.6% in 2013/2014) (Higher Education Institutions and their Finances in 2013, 2014). By subsequent laws there were established state vocational universities whose task was to prepare students to perform certain professions (1997). Polish educational system started being adapted to European standards (2005) and then it was harmonized with the solutions implemented in the European Higher Education Area (2011)[†]. Polish universities were to become an attractive place to acquire knowledge for foreign students and research scholars from abroad[‡] (Higher Education Institutions and their Finances in 2013, 2014; Higher Education Institutions and their Finances in 2012, 2013). The last Act of 2014 focused in turn, among others, on increasing opportunities for adults to supplement education, diversification of the offer of studies and support in entering the labor market.

[†] The Act of 18 March 2011 Amending the Act of Law on Higher Education, the Law on Academic Degrees and Titles and on Degrees and Title in the Art and amending certain other laws; Journal of Law No. 84 item. 455.

[‡] In the academic year 2013/2014 the number of foreign students studying at Polish universities amounted to 36 thousand persons to 21,5 thousand in 2010/2011 and 6,6 thousand in the year 2000/2001, which reflects a major improvement in the area of internationalization of Polish universities.

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