STRATEGY FOR CREATING AND MANAGING A UNIVERSITY IMAGE AS A KEY FACTOR IN ENHANCING LEARNERS CONFIDENCE IN THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

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Abstract

The 21st century is the century of steadily increasing volumes of free information, knowledge and various social technologies, a century of strengthening interregional and global competition. In this context, the role and importance of universities outweigh the immediate tasks that are solved by the higher school. The key institutions are the universities, which today represent information, scientific and cultural organisations as centres of theoretical and applied knowledge. The timeliness and the need to develop strategies and mechanisms for creating the image of educational institutions is determined by the role and place of education in the contemporarily world. The need to implement new approaches and methods to enhance the prestige of the university is evident by the fact that relations with society affect conditions for the functioning of universities and determine not only the level and quality of education, but also the development of the country both nationally and on an international level.

The article presents the importance of university image as a factor for increasing the trust and motivation of students and PhD students. Properly created university image is the most effective way to work with the learners and potential learners which reflects on the key positions which can trigger automatic responses among the target audience. The strategy for creating and managing the image is an integral part of the effective functioning of the educational organisation.

Keywords: education, image, trust, university, students, communication.

1 INTRODUCTION

Creating the image of an organization is a long and painstaking process that requires step-by-step implementation. The stages of image formation of the organization are carried out consecutively, each subsequent stage being based on data obtained or presented in the previous one. The importance of developing a strategy and mechanisms for creating the image of a university is the need to synthesize knowledge of the organizational culture of a university, and to develop a generalizing model of relationships between higher education and society.

2 METHODOLOGY

For achieving the results are used complex of scientific research methods: theoretical: comparative, methodological analysis of the subject of research, management documentation, theoretical generalization, forecasting. The study was based on a unified methodological basis - the system analysis of the subject.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Research is the first step in shaping the image of the university institution

In the process of performing the initial stage, the following steps can be distinguished:

1 Selection of priority target audiences that will focus on the core activities of the university. In this case, basis for defining the target groups are the founding documents and the Statute of the organization, on the basis of which its external environment is analyzed.

2 Overall survey of the target groups. Each of the selected target groups requires a careful study. Such studies can be conducted with the assistance of specialized agencies as well as on their own, based on the available open information and on information obtained through independent
studies and observations. As a result of this study a complete portrait of the target group is created which includes: particular socio-demographic group they belong to, e.g. average age, level of education, male/female ratio in the group, type of activity; and the second is interests and needs.

3 Determining the mission and the objectives of the university institution. Based on data obtained from the conducted analysis, the organization proceeds to formulate the mission, objectives and activities that are attractive to the target groups, meet their needs and define those services that make them a unique university.

4 Creating a model of the institution's image.

3.2 Strategy development is the second stage in shaping the university's image

As a part of the implementation of the strategy, the peculiarities in providing information about the organization, the tools, channels and methods of interaction of the organization with the elements of the external environment are reviewed. In addition to the issues under consideration, the degree of risk associated with the implementation of the strategy is determined, as well as the future prospects of the advertising campaign. Such activities are carried out in order to form a positive opinion about the organization among the target audience.

It should be noted that the second stage is the most difficult and carries most responsibility since it depends on the success of the promotion of the produced goods or services on the market and on the level of attention and trust of the users in the organization. At this stage, the maximum costs for labour and materials should be applied.

3.3 Implementation. At this stage the strategy that has been developed is directly implemented

The success of this implementation depends on the credibility of the research conducted at the initial stage, as the concept of image formation develops on its basis. The concept is realized through the publication of promotional materials provided to the media as well as through the integrated implementation of the activities carried out within the framework of the organization's image building policy.

The implementation process can often be accompanied by a number of issues that require immediate response and correction by the organization's governing body. Key examples of such issues are: improperly developed strategy, e.g. due to poorly conducted research at the early stage; budget constraints (inconsistency between the budget and the task); selection of advertising media that do not meet the preferences of the target audience.

3.4 Monitoring

At the fourth stage there is a constant monitoring and analysis of information about the university, its activity and the goals it has achieved. For the successful implementation of this stage, it is necessary to establish a working mode with each and every source of information. For example, monitoring of publications is done once a week, network resources are monitored once every few days, etc. It is especially important to pay attention to the opinions posted by visitors to the university website and other specialized forums. It should be noted that it is necessary to react quickly to everything, including to negative feedback, with honesty and courtesy in the responses, as well as to the manifestation of professional competence, which is extremely important.

3.5 Maintaining and managing.

In the course of this stage it is necessary to develop, adapt and maintain the image of the university at the level it has already reached. Maintaining the positive image of the institution is achieved through various activities such as:

1 rebranding;
2 updating popular products or services;
3 introducing additional options;
introducing new products or services on the market.

Thus, when shaping the image of the organization, it is necessary to stick to all stages of its creation. Otherwise, the creation of the image may be ineffective. Ignoring the fourth and the fifth stage of image formation, in turn, leads to its gradual destruction due to the processes taking place in the external environment without the control exerted by the organization.

The image of the organization, particularly that of the university, is the fundamental basis for its public assessment and reflects the effectiveness of its activities. The success of the organization is largely determined by its public perception. The image of the educational institution is shaped as a reflection of its main activity, its results, as well as a result of purposeful information work. We can maintain that each organization, including the university, has a certain image structure. The image of the university differs for the different groups of the public. The educational institution forms an image for a particular group and manages it in line with its strategic objectives and the current situation in the educational services market and the economic situation.

The image of one and the same organization may be a little bit different for the different groups of the public as the desired behaviour of individual groups of the public with respect to the organization may vary. In other words, the same organization may be perceived differently (or aspire to a particular perception) by investors, government agencies, the local and the international community. An organization’s high competitive position is important for the partners. Moreover, there is an internal image of the organization related to the vision of their staff regarding their organization.

Contemporary economic conditions compel educational institutions to use the full range of measures to ensure the effectiveness of their activities, including the formation of their image.

Creating a positive image of a higher education institution plays a very important role in attracting candidates and increasing the competitiveness of the university. It is a generalized image that forms an emotional connection with the higher education institution in the public or in the individual consciousness.

The image of the educational institution is shaped as a reflection of its main activity, its results, and targeted information work. It is different for the different groups of the public. The educational institution creates an image for a particular group and manages it in line with its strategic objectives and the current situation in the educational services market and the economic situation. Some of its basic groups are:

3.6 Internal Image

1. image for university students who complete their first degree in higher education.
2. image of the university for students who acquire additional education, retraining or continue in an MA program.
3. image of the university for the university's academic and administrative staff

3.7 External Image

1. image of the university for the international community.
2. image of universities for state structures.
3. image of the university for public organizations.
4. image of the university for partner companies of the university.
5. image of the university for the academic community in the country.

4 Conclusions

The role and importance of universities go beyond the immediate tasks solved by the higher school. In today’s society, not only the flow of information and knowledge, but also the ability to understand, create and effectively use symbols and meanings are decisive. The key institutions are universities, which today represent information, scientific and cultural organizations as centres of theoretical and applied knowledge. The need to develop strategies and mechanisms for the formation of the image of educational institutions is determined by the current situation at the 21st century of changing the role and place of education. The need to use new approaches and methods to improve the prestige of
universities has become obvious, due to the fact that public relations affect the conditions of functioning of universities and determine not only the level and quality of education, but also the development of the country, both in the national and in the global context.

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