

THE PARTICULARITIES OF ACADEMIC MARKETING IN THE KNOWLEDGE – BASED SOCIETY

Lecturer Costel Negricea Ph.D

Romanian-American University
1B, Expoziției Avenue, Sector 1, Bucharest
negricea@yahoo.com

Lecturer Tudor EDU, Ph.D

Romanian –American University
1B, Expoziției Avenue, Sector 1, Bucharest
tudoredu@yahoo.com

Assistant Lecturer Emanuela Maria AVRAM, PhD Candidate

Romanian –American University
1B, Expoziției Avenue, Sector 1, Bucharest
emanuela.maria@yahoo.it

Abstract:

The present research paper points out the major role that Academic Marketing plays in attracting students to universities focusing on quality and satisfaction, a role based on research development, on offering educational services at high standards of performance and thorough knowledge. In the knowledge-based society, Academic Marketing is becoming more and more important because “higher education guarantees the one who has benefited from it a higher salary, a long activity on the labour market, an increased carrier mobility and a high quality of life. (Demetris Vrontis, Alkis Thrassou, Yioula Melanthiou , 2007, p. 980)

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Jel Classification: I21, I23

Introduction:

A knowledge-based economy can be defined as “an economy in which the production, distribution and utilization of knowledge represents the main engine of economic growth and of guaranteeing the necessary labour force in all fields of activity”. (Andrews, 2004, p. 4, op. cit. Heather Davis, Terry Evans and Christopher Hickey, 2006, p. 231), and “adapting to such a society supposes a change of thinking at governmental, academic, corporative but also at personal level.” (Heather Davis, Terry Evans and Christopher Hickey, 2006, p. 231) The impact of globalization on higher education offers new perspectives as regards the enhancement of the importance of knowledge in

developing the intellectual capacities of the individuals, and Salmi (2002) affirmed that “higher education must play a central role in preparing the societies for the new times.”

1. Specific characteristics of the knowledge-based society from a Marketing perspective

Defining marketing as “*a process of creating, promoting and distributing goods and services to consumers and enterprises*” (Kotler, 2003, p. 5) reflects the concept of *knowledge-based society*, since in the course of its development, Marketing has progressed in a manner specific to its field of activity. Therefore, its coverage area has been continuously improving, explaining thus its development as science. „Viewed from the perspective of the evolution of marketing, on a world scale, the new economy has its origins in the second half of the last century, the period when the concept of marketing came into being”, (Olteanu V. 2006, p. 28) and the evolution of the knowledge-based society, which occurred in the second half of the last century, left its mark in a significant way on Marketing, which also developed as science in that period of time.

The cornerstone of a knowledge-based society is knowledge, but also the new information acquired in the education system. Hence, knowledge involves several aspects:

- **Know-what** – refers to acquiring some knowledge about facts, but nowadays its relevance is diminished.
- **Know-why** – comprises knowledge about the natural world, society and human mind.
- **Know-who** – comprises knowledge regarding the social world, relationships in the society, knowledge about who is able to do something and what can that person do, knowledge about some key-characters, because knowledge has often proved to be more important than innovation.
- **Know-where** – knowledge about a certain place.
- **Know-when** – knowledge about a certain period of time – this is becoming more and more important in a flexible and dynamic economy.
- **Know-how** – comprises knowledge about skills – the ability of doing something concretely. (The Knowledge Economy - a submission to the New Zealand Government by the Minister for Information Technology’s IT Advisory Group, August 1999, p.5)

However, one can wonder, how it is possible for an economy or a society to base on something so volatile like knowledge? Nowadays, knowledge has become the main resource of any human activity in the same way the land represents the main resource in agriculture or the coal or the labour force represented the primary resources in the industrial age. Knowledge is considered to be the most important resource, capable of moulding inter-human relations and of ensuring economic prosperity, but at the same time it is a product that can be commercialized. It is precisely the intensive use of knowledge that makes the difference between present economies and past economies. (Marcel Hoogenboom, Willem Trommel, Duco Bannink, 2008, p. 359)

We are witnessing an extremely accelerated rhythm of knowledge production which gives the *knowledge-based society* certain specific characteristics:

- Building high-performance organizations

- Markets functioning in high-efficiency conditions
- Improving social welfare
- Guaranteeing people a better life
- Increasing labour productivity
- Information and communication technologies enable market globalization
- An unprecedented increase in the number of people that have higher education studies
- An outburst of scientific and specialized publications
- An increase in the number of the firms that offer legal, economic, technological, marketing and other types of counselling
- Developing the sources used for disseminating information, such as virtual libraries, on-line books, specialized websites and information stored on electronic devices
- Developing the concept of lifelong learning

The knowledge-based society *places the learning process on a different level*. Thus, acquiring knowledge does not exclusively pertain to the education institutions, but also to the companies or organizations that have employees, because these also offer specialized trainings for ensuring the acquirement of new knowledge that is useful for the production process.

“Marketing has the ability to promote itself to the public so that people can know and understand who it is as science and what it does.” (Maringe, Felix, 2006, p. 136) In the knowledge-based society, the universities include the established marketing practices, by focusing, however, on certain marketing dimensions that are specific to their mission, due to the fact that the higher education institutions play a major role in producing and transmitting knowledge – *knowledge* being the main product of the university. Knowledge is seen as a process that supposes both the creation and the transmission of it to the students – the main stakeholders of the higher education institution, but also of other categories of consumers. “Knowledge in itself also appears as main product for other groups of stakeholders, such as the local communities and the business world which often depend on its orientation towards the business world, but also towards the social science.” (Steven A. Taylor, 1996, p. 207) Therefore, Academic Marketing meets this desideratum of transmitting knowledge by focusing on the consumer behavior of higher education, on his/her needs, aspirations and desires in order to generate him/her maximum satisfaction in the higher education process. For a better understanding of the consumer behavior of higher education, each university establishes marketing strategies according to its mission and objectives, by taking into account the fact that „the consumer’s decision-making process includes small steps, both at mental and physical level, until exactly outlining the desired characteristics of a product and identifying the satisfaction produced by its consumption,” ,” (Demetris Vrontis, Alkis Thrassou, Yioula Melanthiou , 2007, p. 982) In Figure No. 1 below we can observe the consumer’s decision-making chain, a chain that underlies the consumer’s decision to invest in his/her own higher education and which, for universities, represents the key to understanding the consumer behavior of higher education.

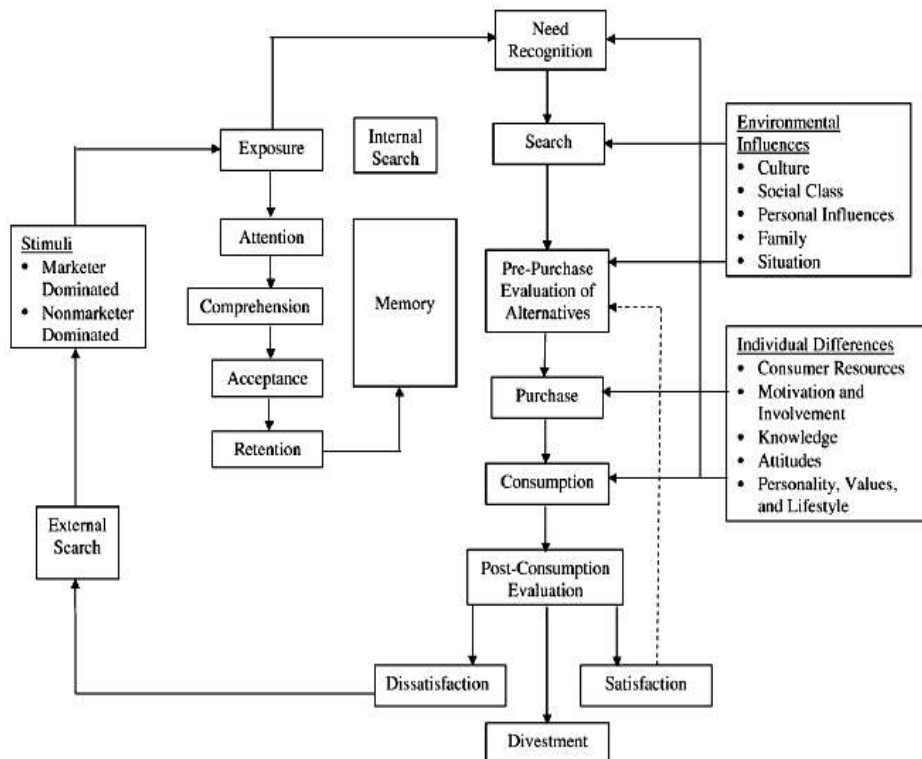


Fig. 1: The consumer's decision making process (Source: Blackwell et al., 2001, op. cit - Demetris Vrontis, Alkis Thrassou, Yioula Melanthiou , 2007, p. 983)

As Figure No. 1 describes, the consumer's satisfaction or dissatisfaction decisively depend on the stages of the decision-making process, stages towards which any university should direct its attention in order to attract a large number of students eager to assimilate the knowledge transmitted in the higher education process. Numerous economic, social and psychological factors can lead to the emergence of certain needs of the individuals which evolve in time, change according to the acquired knowledge and the comprehended information. The marketing sources represent an optimal way of satisfying the need for information as regards the individual's decision to invest in his/her personal higher education, these sources being able to generate positive effects on the act of purchasing.

The knowledge-based society focuses especially on information technology and new technologies, and in this context, the internet *is no longer a trend but rather a necessity* that has radically changed the way in which people work, develop relationships, keep informed, communicate and develop socially and professionally. At the same time, the internet has considerably improved its instruments and this has led to its continuous evolution. Given the fact that the number of users is permanently increasing, the higher education institutions massively use the internet to communicate with the main stakeholders. As a result, *a university's success* highly depends on its presentation website, on using a successful *web design*, a large database, and that is because the internet represents a *strategic marketing tool* through which on-line communication is achieved. These days a large number of users have access to the internet, and due to the

accuracy of the transmitted information over the internet, the consumer behavior of higher education has been affected.

2. Academic Marketing – a new perspective on the academic field

In the post-modern society Academic Marketing has a great importance for ensuring the survival of the universities in a highly competitive environment. Therefore, the substantiation of the marketing actions in the academic field must start from the following premises: the entire activity and personnel must be orientated towards satisfying the needs of the current and potential consumers of higher education, by making the student the centre of the institution's preoccupations; the concrete strategies, tactics and tools through which the global marketing policy is realized must be unitarily coordinated, because the academic actions must be based on a good knowledge of the "clients", of their demands and preferences, of the labour market and the business environment challenges, with a view to achieving an optimal adaptation to the evolution of the external environment.

"Universities, like any other organisation, exist to satisfy the needs of their "clients", and their main objective is to guarantee satisfaction to the clients by providing them specific higher education products and services." (Maringe, Felix, 2006, p. 130)

The necessity of approaching higher education activity from a **marketing angle** is determined by the *similarities which this has with the economic activities in the field of service provision: the product is intangible*, but supported by other commercial products, such as course support materials, books, scientific papers, specialized magazines, various publications; the product is *inseparable from the provider*, because it is the teaching staff's duty to provide information for the student; the product *cannot be standardized*, because each student comprehends differently the transmitted information depending on the extent of his/her participation in the education process and on the knowledge accumulated until that moment; *the product can be continuously modified and improved* – the information transmitted to the students must be permanently updated. *The target public* is made of those categories of individuals that are holders of a Baccalaureate Diploma and that willingly choose to continue their studies for deepening their knowledge in their personal area of interest at a certain moment. The high quality of the provided educational services is another feature of Academic Marketing, because the purpose of any university is to serve the society's existing knowledge needs by preparing high qualified specialists that can match the continuously evolving demands of the labour market.

Consequently, Academic Marketing comprises the established Marketing practices, as we can see in Figure No. 2 below, but it pays a great deal of attention to the elements of the marketing mix, to the consumer behavior of higher education, to creativity, interactivity, innovation – introducing new methods of transmitting information in accordance with the latest scientific and technical advances represents the main preoccupation of a higher education institution. Another very important element of Academic Marketing is the university's reputation in its area of activity, in other words receiving brand recognition. Academic Marketing concentrates a lot on the quality and accuracy of the transmitted information, on the student's satisfaction, due to the fact that this will lead to the student's attachment and loyalty to the university.

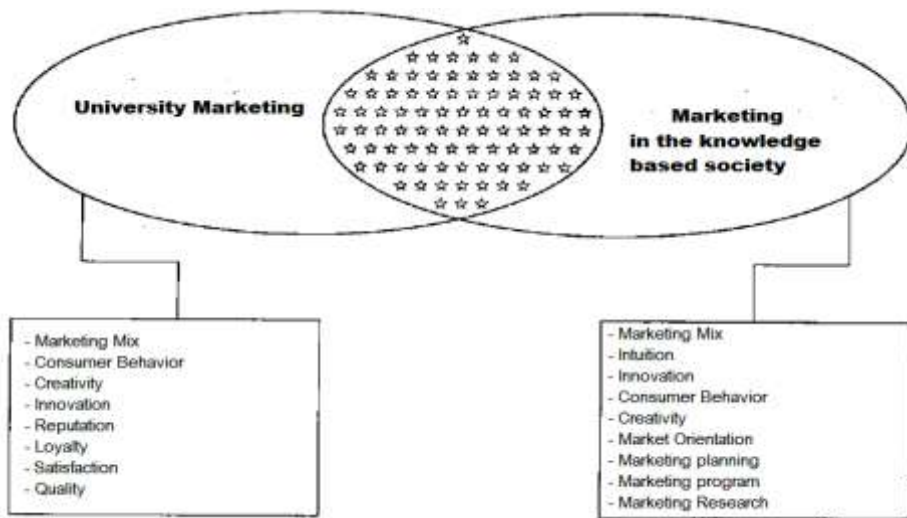


Fig. 2: Academic Marketing ~ Marketing in the knowledge-based society (Source: Adapted after – Wierenga Berend (2002) – *On Academic Marketing Knowledge and Marketing Knowledge that Marketing managers use for decision-making*, Vol. 2(4), p.355-362, p. 357)

Frederick Wirt and Michael Krist (1989) consider that academic marketing „is meant to establish a sound working relationship between the higher education institution and the community in which this develops its activity, with the purpose of increasing quality and performance. The essence of this relationship lies basically in the exchange of values and services between the “school” and the community”. Nowadays, when knowledge is expanding in an extraordinary way in all fields of activity, higher education institutions not only are considered to be the creators of knowledge, but also the transmitters of it. Consequently, in the knowledge-based society, universities confront themselves with several challenges:

- ☐ Increasing the demand for higher education
- ☐ Education and research internalization
- ☐ Developing an efficient collaboration between universities and the business environment
- ☐ Creating research departments for knowledge production
- ☐ Knowledge reorganization
- ☐ Increasing the external relations of the universities for enhancing international attractiveness
- ☐ *Excellence* consolidation in academic research and teaching, especially by means of modern networks
- ☐ Ensuring at academic level the necessary resources for the good and efficient development of the activity (European Commission, Directorate General Education and Culture – Projects in “ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION”, December 2004, vol 1, p.15)

For a higher education institution the students are the most important clients. In this context, the global competition among higher education institutions not only has determined universities to make efforts to attract and enrol them but also to maintain their students throughout the entire cycle of academic studies. (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Elliot & Healy, 2001)

The marketing strategies used by universities, in the knowledge-based society, do not encompass only those activities which aim to attract students and which concentrate on a detailed and thorough knowledge about the consumer behavior of higher education services, but also many other activities that have in view the assurance of the continuity of the higher education institution, which can be achieved by obtaining additional funds from commercial counselling, attracting research projects, sponsorships, merchandising academic research, organizing scientific conferences and training courses, facilitating a better access to libraries for those who are not enrolled in any academic programmes, as well as other activities that can guarantee it a competitive future on the market. By promoting in the academic field the dynamism of the technological advance by means of using on a large-scale the computer and the information technology specific to the knowledge-based society, knowledge and information are generated, and these will positively affect the region to which the higher education institution belongs to, and this will play a vital role in the establishment of a successful relation with the stakeholders with whom it interacts.

Conclusions:

As time passes the face of the world will surprisingly change. *The changes of the global economy brought by the transition towards the knowledge-based society* require an alignment of all countries of the world to the highest standards of knowledge, because this is a mirror of the welfare prestige and represents an essential criterion for increasing the wealth of every nation. In such a society the key of competitiveness will belong to the human factor because it represents the core of the knowledge production, and thus the investments in human capital will gradually grow. From this point of view, academic marketing has an extraordinary importance for any higher education institution, importance especially determined by the necessity of preparing the labour force so that it will be able to ensure a general “*health status*” in the society by making use of some innovative instruments of communicating the knowledge resources, through creativity and by satisfying the needs of the consumers at the highest standards of quality, leading thus to satisfaction and good reputation.

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