IMAGE AS AN IMPORTANT TOOL IN THE WORK OF MANAGERS OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to present the results of a survey focused on the image of an educational institution - a public university in the Czech Republic, which provides study programs for future teachers of vocational subjects at secondary schools. The image of an educational institution is an integral part of the management of educational institutions and at the same time, it should be a part of its regular self-evaluation. An image consists of objective and subjective, correct and incorrect ideas, attitudes and experiences of an individual or a certain group of people about a certain object or subject. Image affects opinions and behaviour and significantly influences them [1]. Each educational institution creates a certain image, through which it can be perceived not only by its surroundings or social partners, but mainly by current and future students. Particularly, the students were the respondents to this survey. The method of semantic differential (polarity profile), which is one of the most frequently used methods for image measurement, was used for data collection.

Keywords: *image, educational institution, evaluation, teacher, management*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is one of the oldest professions, perhaps even a mission, in the world. The role and position of teachers in society have been accompanied by many changes in recent years. The prestige of this profession shows a slightly declining tendency, however, it still appears in the leading positions in the ranking of the prestige of the profession [2]. It is very important that there are enough motivated and convinced candidates to join university teaching programs. However, universities that train future teachers must offer these applicants quality and attractive study programs. For many people, the idea of the school as a commercial entity is at least inappropriate, a comparison of a school with a company is unacceptable. However, in a deeper examination and comparison, many analogies of the problems of educational institutions with the problems of companies can be found. In a competitive environment, it is not only a question of prestige for educational institutions, but mainly a question of existence itself, so that there is a constant and even rising interest in its quality educational products. For this reason, it is important to pay attention to coordinated and systematic marketing, communication with practice, presentation of the educational offer and also the image of the school. No educational institution lives in isolation, but in its activities, it is influenced by the environment in which it

operates [3]. In the literature related to the topic of an image, we may encounter different conceptual definitions and ways of using this expression. In connection with its use, it can be stated that it emphasizes the image of reality, but it is also an empirical term that has measurable dimensions. Image has the nature of a generalized and simplified symbol based on a set of ideas, attitudes, opinions and experiences of a person in relation to a certain object [1]. It is usually stated that the first works dealing with images come from Gardner and Levy [4] or Boulding [5]. In these works, dealing with public awareness of the company, brand, product, institution claim that at a certain time they have their personality or image in public opinion, which is characterized by certain ideas, emotions, ideas or associations. Image is therefore the result of the interaction of individual elements of a corporate identity - design, communication, behaviour and product. In connection with the focus of this paper on the image of an educational institution, it is possible to mention the publication of Kotler and Andreasen [6], where the authors define the image as a summary of faith, ideas and impressions that a person has about a particular object. Bártová [7]) then characterizes the image as a multi-component concept based on attitudes and divides it into three parts: cognitive (product knowledge and their intellectual processing), affective (emotional elements that are related to the brand) and conative (tendency to behaviour - to purchase, use, etc.).

IMAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

Based on demographic developments, it can be assumed that competition in the education market will increase in the future. For example, building an image as a factor that influences the behaviour of "consumers" can help it to ensure that the university does not have to make significant efforts to attract quality students. Image is created and maintained by all activities by which the organization manifests itself internally and externally, for example, it is influenced by the degree of knowledge of the organization, success, tradition and professionalism, performance, behaviour, level of service, approach to customers or external presentation.

It is important for educational institutions to know how the public and the clients view it, what ideas they have about it and what expectations are associated with its educational program and other offered services. The positive image of an educational institution is of great importance and it is also true that it has a relatively stable character and change is not easy and fast. Especially for secondary and higher education institutions, it is important to realize that by analyzing the image of the school, we can also determine the market position of the school when comparing the image of competing schools or the position the school occupies in the minds of its potential customers. The prestige of the school is one of the decisive factors for the decision-making of those interested in studying. A sufficient number of applicants is then a prerequisite for obtaining financial resources for the institution [8] [1].

Depending on the scope or prevalence, we usually divide the image into a *universal* one, valid basically all over the world without significant differences in individual countries or target groups, and *specific* emphasizing local peculiarities or specifics of individual target groups. Foret [9] also mentions three other types of image, namely the *internal* image, which creates the object about itself or about its product, the *external* image, by which the object resp. its producers strive to act on the public, a *real* image, shaped in the public consciousness. Image is affected by a number of factors. Kotler and Armstrong [10] consider the product (or service) and its features, marketing communication in all its forms, price, etc. to be the influencing factors. Image is also influenced by customer support, distribution and service. In addition to behaviour towards customers, the image is also influenced by the attitude and behaviour of the company (in this case educational institutions) to the environment - acting towards various partners, relationship with employees, willingness to participate in public projects (the so-called third role). There is also a very close relationship between the image and the strategy of the company (or educational institution). Factors influencing the company's image are summarized in, for example, Dowling [11]. To sum up, image is, therefore, an important communication tool with which we address the surrounding world or our target groups and which tells us who we are or who we want to be. For this reason, it is important for management to keep their institutions organized in terms of priorities and values, their sharing across the company, in understanding the impact of each action, etc.

HOW TO ANALYZE THE IMAGE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The analysis of the opinions and attitudes of the target groups towards the educational institution is then very important for determining the strategy of the subsequent communication with the target group or groups. Repeated analysis can then capture changes in the image of the institution and serves to evaluate the strategy used and determine any changes [8]. It is clear from the above-mentioned characteristics of the image as a complex, dynamic and multifaceted concept, its analysis is not simple. There is not even one standard method for measuring an image. Overviews of quantitative and qualitative research methods are sufficiently described in the literature. Typical methods include individual or group interviews, focus groups, various modifications of psychological methods and techniques - association procedures, projective tests, colour and shape tests, or scaling procedures, but most often it is a polarity profile (semantic differential).

We evaluate the image with a polarity profile using various items, using a bipolar rating scale. At the opposite poles of the scale, there are evaluation items that create a basic dichotomous profile. The spontaneous evaluation of individual items by the respondents is quantified and the resulting average of individual dichotomous pairs is connected for better graphic expression and comprehensibility by a vertical line. The choice of bipolar adjectives is

determined by the goal of the survey, and opposing pairs of terms are usually arranged on a seven-point or five-point scale.

Image is quite a permanent phenomenon and may not correspond to the current state. It is recommended to perform the analysis at certain predetermined periods. Stable periods give educational institutions the opportunity to compare previous analysis results, and to respond to them adequately and in the shortest possible time and to establish a specific remedy [12]. For large university-type schools, the image may not be valid for the entire school. In connection with the term image, for example, only one part of the school or one of the several products offered by the school can be connected [13].

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the following part of the paper is to present the results of a survey aimed at finding out the image of an educational institution that provides programs aimed at training future secondary school teachers. It is a part of a public university in the Czech Republic, which has a long tradition in this activity of about 50 years. To collect data in order to determine the current image of the educational institution, a method of questioning based on the method of polarity profile was chosen. Prior to the creation of the questionnaire, preliminary research was carried out in the form of personal interviews with students in order to obtain the attributes for its compilation. The results of these interviews implied a total of 22 attributes of the educational institution. The questionnaire was generally divided into two parts, where the first part was based on seven-point bipolar scales of specified attributes. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of questions focused on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and the preference for the study focus, resp. future profession. The respondents were students of all years of the bachelor's study program focused on teaching vocational subjects for secondary schools. The survey was conducted in May 2018. A total of 79 students out of a total of 153 submitted an electronic questionnaire. A more detailed structure of the respondents is given in Table 1 below. The data obtained through the questionnaires were processed using Microsoft Excel and the absolute / relative frequencies and average values of the answers were calculated. Due to the number of respondents, a nonparametric test (Mann-Whitney) in the IBM SPPS program was used to calculate statistically significant differences in average values between the groups (gender, form of study).

Table 1. *The Respondents´ Structure*

Gender	male	21	26,6 %
	female	58	73,4 %
Study form	full-time	32	40,5 %
	combined	47	59,5 %
Age	19-25 years	44	55,7 %
	26-35 years	15	19,0 %
	36 and more	20	25,3 %

Source: Own source

RESULTS

Table 2 below shows the average scores achieved. The closer the average rating is to 1, the more positive the rating is. An increasing average means a greater tendency of the respondent to a more negative evaluation (7). The data in Table 2 is sorted according to the average overall score and it also contains the evaluation according to gender or form of study. Those attributes for which statistically significant differences were found within the groups are marked in grey. For example, we can learn that for women and students in the full-time form of study, the institution is more credible than for men, etc.

The data in Table 3 shows that the image of the educational institution in the respondents' consciousness is mostly positive. Based on the obtained results, it can be stated that the highest scores were achieved by the educational institution (or its specific component) in the area of credibility, activity and reputation. The assessment of development or stability is also at a high level. Among the attributes that were not evaluated completely favourably, it is possible to indicate, for example, size or familiarity. Respondents also believed that the educational institution is not very well-known and generally known both in the Czech Republic and abroad. In the area of quality assessment, the inconsistencies of respondents' opinions and perceptions are evident. The data in Table 3 are displayed using the relative response rates within a seven-point scale (in %). At the same time, they are sorted according to the best-rated attributes.

Table 2. *Average values of individual attributes according to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents*

	total	male	female	full-time study	combined study
Credibility	2,08	2,33	1,98	1,81	2,26
Quality	2,30	2,19	2,34	2,19	2,38
Reputation	2,32	2,95	2,09	2,00	2,53
Activity	2,35	2,48	2,31	2,34	2,36
Functionality	2,38	2,57	2,31	2,06	2,60
Development	2,47	2,86	2,33	2,25	2,62
Perspective	2,48	2,76	2,38	2,13	2,72
Personnel stability	2,49	2,33	2,55	2,31	2,62
Modernity	2,58	2,57	2,59	2,50	2,64
Organizational stability	2,72	2,52	2,79	2,31	3,00
Fun	2,73	3,05	2,62	2,50	2,89
Competitiveness	2,78	2,43	2,91	2,81	2,77
Attractiveness	2,85	2,95	2,81	2,44	3,13
Ambitiousness	3,03	2,81	3,10	3,16	2,94
Prestige	3,06	3,24	3,00	2,97	3,13
Flexibility	3,13	3,19	3,10	2,94	3,26
Recognition in the Czech Republic	3,48	3,57	3,45	3,56	3,43
Assertiveness	3,53	3,29	3,62	3,69	3,43
Dynamics	3,75	3,95	3,67	3,56	3,87
Recognition abroad	3,85	3,95	3,81	3,81	3,87
Acquaintance	3,99	4,00	3,98	4,75	3,47
Size	4,27	3,90	4,40	4,91	3,83

Source: Own source

Table 3. *Distribution of the frequency of answers of all respondents in %*

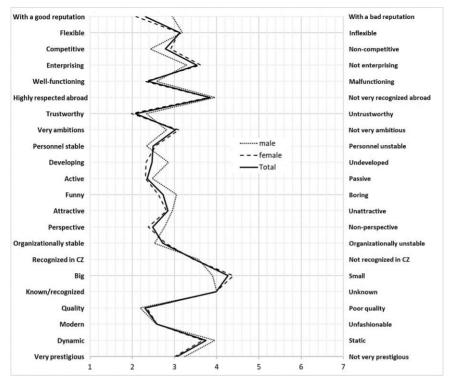|	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Trustworthy	33	43	13	9	0	3	0	Untrustworthy
Active	23	37	28	9	3	1	0	Passive
Perspective	22	30	32	14	1	0	1	Non-perspective
With a good reputation	30	34	20	6	6	3	0	With a bad reputation
Well-functioning	27	32	24	15	0	3	0	Malfunctioning
Developing	27	30	25	10	3	5	0	Undeveloped
Personnel stable	22	35	23	16	1	1	1	Personnel unstable
Modern	19	35	25	14	3	3	1	Unfashionable
Funny	18	29	29	14	8	1	1	Boring
Attractive	15	32	25	15	9	1	3	Unattractive
Competitive	20	29	23	13	10	5	0	Non-competitive
Organizationally stable	22	30	18	20	6	3	1	Organizationally unstable
Very ambitions	15	18	30	24	11	0	1	Not very ambitious
Very prestigious	14	25	23	22	13	3	1	Not very prestigious
Flexible	14	14	32	30	6	4	0	Inflexible
Recognized in CZ	8	20	22	28	15	5	3	Not recognized in CZ
Enterprising	9	14	25	28	16	6	1	Not enterprising
Quality	9	14	18	19	16	18	6	Poor quality
Known/recognized	9	14	18	19	16	18	6	Unknown
Dynamic	6	9	23	39	15	4	4	Static
Highly respected abroad	5	19	9	35	16	15	0	Not very recognized abroad
Big	11	4	15	20	20	24	5	Small

Source: Own source

Fig. 1. *Polarity profile image of and educational institution*

Source: Own source

Based on the research results, which are graphically represented in Chart 1, it can be said that the image of the educational institution is desirable with certain reserves in accordance with the image. The desired image of the educational institution in accordance with its strategic intention is to be attractive and prestigious both in the national and international context in the field of initial as well as further teacher education. The aim is to provide quality study programs based on a modern curriculum that relies on current results of science and research and at the same time responds to the requirements of practice. The aim is also to provide teaching by competent, erudite and positively motivated academic staff. Based on the values of average scores of perception of the image of our educational institution by students we can formulate strengths and weaknesses, while as strengths we can indicate the values with the lowest scores and as weaknesses the values with the highest scores.

CONCLUSION

Students are a group for which the image of an educational institution is of great importance and it is important to continuously address their views in this area, as it is related not only to their interest in studying at a particular school, passing on information and references to peers, but also the future and sustainability of study programs or study fields. An image is therefore a collection of assumptions, thoughts and impressions that a person has of a certain object or matter. The researcher, therefore, measures the extent to which the image of the institution is known and positive and how certain groups evaluate the corresponding characteristics of the institution. Once it is determined how the institution is perceived, management must decide whether this image is positive and appropriate or whether it would be appropriate for the institution to take steps to correct the negative or erroneous image and implement changes [14]. Priorities in a marketing-driven school include strategic management of an educational institution, application of internal personnel marketing, improvement of interpersonal relationships, motivation of teachers, support of team cooperation, positive climate, application of relational marketing, systematic evaluation of educational institutions, analysis of factors influencing results and development. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats can be read from the image evaluation results. It is important to respond to the results of image evaluation and at the same time compare them with the strategy of the educational institution, its mission and internal values. It is important to perform image analysis on regular basis. Therefore, a similar survey implementation is planned for the end of 2021.

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