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INSTRUMENTS AND PROMOTION ACTIVITIES OF THE UNIVERSITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN ACCORDING TO THE STUDENTS' OPINIONS.

HANNA HALL, KAMILA PESZKO

Abstract:

The purpose of this article is the analysis of the elements of the recruitment process used by the selected Polish and foreign universities, with particular emphasis on promotional instruments and ongoing activities used by them. The key role in the article on the undertaken topic will be played by the students' opinions, the addressees of the Universities' promotional activities.

The starting point for discussion will be presenting the conditions of the functioning of modern universities (including demographic, legal and international conditions), market trends of higher education and its structure of entities.

Furthermore, attention will be also paid to the directional offer of the Polish universities, preferences and other selected aspects in the candidates' decision-making process in relation to the expectations of the employers towards universities and graduates.

The discussed issues will be the basis of the analysis of cover recruitment promotional campaigns with special deference to the instruments and measures used in the promotion, but also in relation to their content and forms of promotional media.

This article will present the students' opinions of two Universities obtained thanks to the application of the qualitative research method - FGI (Focus Group Interview).

Four student groups (two groups of students of the I and II degree studies - of the University of Szczecin and Rzeszow University of Technology) will take part in the research. National and foreign secondary sources and professional experience of the authors of this article will also be used in the paper.

Keywords:

Education, Promotion, High Education, Focus Group Interview,

JEL Classification: I23, M39, I29

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyze students' perception of recruitment campaigns conducted by Polish universities, with particular emphasis on promotional tools, resources and content, as well as learning assessments and opinions of students and their proposals of changes in this regard.

Intense and unpredictable changes and resulting challenges for the higher education market operators mean the need for continuous market monitoring, shaping the institutions of learning, adjusting to the needs of employers and candidates and the design and implementation of effective promotional campaigns. This effectiveness, affecting the size of recruitment for studies and a positive university image, depends in turn on the perception and evaluation of the tools used in the campaigns, the resources and the content of the promotional message. Their reception should be verified after every promotional campaign in order to avoid any future mistakes, some necessary modifications for the intended purposes should be implemented.

The article consists of 4 parts.

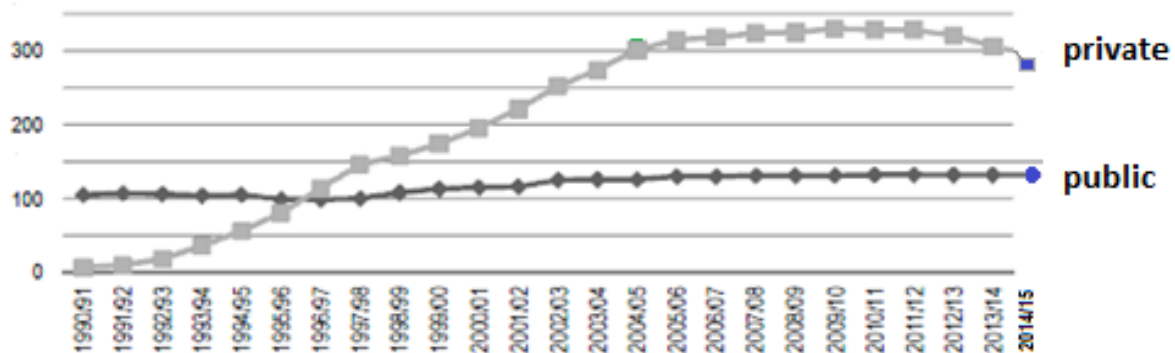
In the first part conditions and changes in the functioning of modern university have been presented, and especially the key segments of their macro-environment, among them demographic environment, legal and international one. Changes in the further university environment determine the "shape" of the closer universities microenvironment, including the behavior of candidates and the expectations of employers with respect to the graduates. These issues, combined with the offer of the university addressed to candidates, have been discussed in another part of the article. The issues have become the basis of analysis of the title recruitment campaigns from the point of view of their recipients. For this purpose, *focus group interviews* among 8 groups of respondents from with two Polish universities have been created. On the third part of article are presented research's result carried out on polish and foreign universities in 2012-2014 on the promotion instruments.

In the article, in addition to primary sources, the domestic and foreign secondary sources and the professional experience of the authors have been used.

1.The Polish Higher Education Market - subjective structure und determinants

By the end of the 1980s there were only state universities (public) in Poland¹. The introduction of Higher Education Act on 12 September 1990 enabled the creation of private universities (Geryk, 2007) and contributed to a thorough change in the situation on the Polish market for higher education. It has become a source of educational boom lasting until 2002, driven by further growing educational aspirations of Polish society, the growing number of students and the demand of employers for workers with higher education. The consequence of these factors was an increase of 370% in the number of students (from the academic year 1990/1991 to 2004/2005) - to more than 1.92 million students (Socrates Institute, 2011). Currently (the academic year 2014/2015) in Poland, the higher education sector comprises 429 universities (Rejestr Polon, Access date 20.05.2015). In recent years, the number of universities (mostly private ones) decreased as a result of a demographic change (in the 2012/2013 academic year the number was 453 (Universities and their finances in 2013, 2014)) (Figure 1).

¹ The exception is Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski.

Figure 1: Number of public and private universities in Poland (in thousands)

Source: Own study based on *Universities and their finances in 2013*, CSO, Warsaw 2014, s. 31.

From year to year the number of students also decreases. In the academic year 2005/2006 number of students achieved a highest record of over 1.95 million of students in year. In the eight years since then, number of students decreased by 20.7%. These changes are associated not only with an ever decreasing number of population in age 19-24 years, but also in changes in the Law on Higher Education, which introduced the fees collected from students studying at the second and subsequent fields of study (*Szkoły Wyższe i ich finanse w 2013*, 2013).

Today's macro-environment of higher education is characterized by unpredictability and complexity. They comprise independent variables from organizations that are not affected. No effect doesn't mean, however, that their recognition can be missed. Tracking the changes makes it possible to identify the opportunities and threats that may occur in the future, and thus, the formulation of realistic objectives and strategies.

The variables of the macro-environment as a priority for the situation of universities in Poland and other EU countries are: environment demographic, economic, political and legal, socio-cultural, technological and international (Hall, 2007).

Setting demographics, whose importance for the higher education sector are shown at the beginning of this article point, plays a particularly important role in the market for higher education institutions, thus determining the structure of the demand and supply side.

The economic environment affects the capacity and the absorption of markets served by the university. The economic situation of the state shapes the purchasing power of the population, determines the amount of revenue and expenditure of the population and the amount of subsidy for public education and tuition at private schools. It affects the situation on the labor market, the ability of the investment and the development of academic staff.

Science and higher education are now a priority of the Polish budget. In accordance with the commitments made by Poland to the European Union spending on universities and science in Poland will increase in the coming years. In the current year (2015) outlays on education will increase by 690 million PLN (ie. an increase of 10% more in 2014), to universities 900 million PLN (ie. an increase of 6% more vs last year) (*Resort Nauki w 2015*, 4.09.2014). Poland in terms of spending on higher

education does not deviate from the average in OECD countries. On average, for higher education (private and public) is allocated amount corresponding to 1,6% GDP. In our country, the share of these expenditures is 1.5% (Sedlak & Sedlak, 2013).

Polish political and legal environment shapes university regulations contained in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, including the right to free education at public universities and their autonomy. Nevertheless, in practice, in Polish schools, most students pay for college (about 60%) in the form of tuition. Whereas the autonomy is lower than in other EU and OECD countries. Polish universities are strongly associated with the laws and regulations of the Ministers (Ernst & Young, 2010). Legal environment of Polish universities also designates the European Union regulations and the law on higher education law of 27 July 2005 (Dz. U. Nr 164, poz. 1365). And from 18 March 2011 (Dz. U. Nr 84 poz. 455) these laws significantly modify the legal environment of Polish universities, resulting from the continuing need for harmonization of Polish higher education system with the solutions implemented in the European Higher Education Area (Hall, 2013).

Analysing the socio-cultural conditions of modern universities, particular attention should be paid to the motives for studying and educational aspirations of young people. In recent years, weakened belief that academic education makes sense. However, most Poles still believe that it is worthwhile to learn and that people are better educated it is easier to have a better life (82%). University diploma is already somewhat devalued, though it is still good desired (CBOS, 2013). The vast majority of respondents by Opinion Research Centre (CBOS¹) adult Poles believe that a university degree today has little value for employers. Believe in that especially those respondents with higher education. They believe that greater chance of employment gives technical education than the Humanities, and that the better off are graduates of public universities than private (CBOS², 2013). The main factor limiting the educational aspirations of young people and assessment of the value of higher education is certainly a high unemployment rate of universities graduates (at the end of 2013 among of persons registered in labor offices as unemployed was 12% with higher education) (www.mpips.gov.pl, 2014).

Technological environment implies the necessary changes faced by higher education institutions to adapt to civilization challenges of technological development. They cover both of the changes in the educational offer (it will be referred to in the second part of the article) and the infrastructure of universities and the means and methods of education (including e-learning).

The factors of an international character, determining the level of internationalization of Polish universities, include, among others (Nowaczyk, Kolasiński, 2008):

- the accession of Polish Universities to the Erasmus program and the ensuing international mobility of students and teachers,
- the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), allowing comparison of grades and academic performance in different countries and at different universities,
- Polish accession to the European Union and the ensuing need to train personnel in accordance with the adopted standards,
- international competition between universities for attracting research personnel, students and European funds.
- international scientific cooperation between universities.

All of these environmental changes and related challenges for contemporary universities, mean a necessity of rigorous university management, based on constant market monitoring, and forecasting its changes. Shaping the educational offer, adapted to the requirements of the labor market and candidates' expectations belongs to key strategic decisions. Another point of the article is devoted to them.

2 University offer, employers' expectations, motives of candidates

Changes in the university macro-environment shape their microenvironment by influencing the nature of competition between universities, including their offer, reasons for choosing the university by the candidates, employers' expectations with respect to the graduates.

Candidates now have a huge choice of universities offering them attractive courses of study, representing the foreground source of competitive advantage. Universities offer both "fashionable" courses (i.e. Internal Security), in line with current or forecasted expectations of the labor market (which is discussed later), as well as original, distinctive course like (e.g. Animal Physiotherapy, whether Military Studies and Oligophrenopedagogy of Art Therapy).

As it results from numerous studies, there are various motives why candidates choose different universities. Among them the most popular are: field of study, career prospects, costs of studies, university prestige, location, quality of education. These factors are mentioned in the individual studies in a different order, but still the primary factors are: interests in the education major, and prospects of finding a job after completion of a course of study. Polish high school graduates choose more and more rational studies; they choose responsibly, with a view to their future - jobs and income. An expression of this fact is the greatest number of candidates on the direction of "information technology" (more than 30 thousand candidates in the academic year 2014/2015) among all study programs offered by Polish universities. It is a conscious response of candidates to the Polish economy demand for IT specialists, programmers, computer graphics. The top ten "besieged" directions are also three other engineering courses: construction engineering, mechanical engineering and automation and robotics(www.nauka.gov.pl; publication date 20.11.2014).

The need to adapt different types of qualifications and skills to the expectations of university graduates in the labor market implies the intensification of implementation of national and international specialist research. The subject of this research are employers' expectations with respect to graduates. For example, according to the report of the EU-US Study for the European Commission "*Emerging Skills and Competences - a transatlantic study*" the key competencies expected by employers include adaptability, international competences in the form of, among others, ability to work in a culturally-diversified environment, including language and communication skill, innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as organizational skills(Danish Technological Institute, 2011). In the World Bank report on the Polish labor market it is stated that, in addition to professional skills employers expect soft skills such as responsibility, loyalty, honesty, self-discipline(Arnhold, Kapl, Goldberg, Piątkowski, Rutkowski, 2011). Despite the differences between the studies in the area of employers' expectations associated with other methods of sampling, a variety of sample sizes, different ranges of research and data collection methods, one can draw some consistent conclusions on the key universal competence and skills of graduates (except the professional ones). They should include in the first place: the skills associated with the use of modern technologies and IT tools, the knowledge of at least

one foreign language (mostly English). Successively, also soft skills such as self-discipline, integrity and commitment, organizational skills and work in teams, and the willingness and ability of continuous self-improvement are necessary(Hall, 11/2014).

Adaptation of qualifications and skills of graduates to labor market needs, and thus increasing their chances of finding a job, requires effort both from them as well as universities and employers. Universities should monitor constantly the labor market, predict its changes and adapt to them its educational offer, including directions, specialties, methods of education. They should also encourage business representatives to engage actively in the practical side of the learning process of students. Employers, in turn, should cooperate with the university, not just communicate their expectations for graduates but realistically affect the curricula and be involved actively in their implementation.

3. Communications marketing tools in the light of the secondary research

For many years the author has examined changes in the evolution of communication marketing activities in university education. In the academic year 2012/2013 extensive primary and secondary research was implemented, which aimed to get to know an answer how the tools of communication marketing are shaped in university education. Studies were also carried out by means of a monographic method in selected foreign universities^{2 3}.

As a part of the national research surveys were carried out among representatives of promotion and information, as well as among students⁴. International studies were preceded by direct visits at the premises of the universities surveyed, after hearing from their informers and promotional material⁵. The aim of the study was in the field of international competitors activities analysis tools of communication marketing and learning based on the analysis of their mistakes (Szczepanik, 2010) and therefore did not refer to them as research generalizing the entire form in different countries, but focused on best universities of the country.

National research resulted that the promotional activities of universities in Poland are concentrated on such forms as fairs and handed out leaflets (90.9%), advertising in newspapers (89,9%), advertising on the Internet (fallback), trips to secondary schools (84,8%) - the main target groups and campaign activities in social media (81,8 %).

²A study on the need for a doctoral thesis was realized from June 2012 to February 2013

³ More information about the monographic method Michalski T., *Statistics*, Publisher HarperCollins Publishers, Warsaw 2004, s. 24.

⁴ Survey questionnaires were used, which were directed to the representatives and information promotion centres of 414 universities in Poland under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and students coming from different parts of Poland. On the basis of the calculation of the minimum specified test at the level of the 199 centres representatives of promotion and information in higher education institutions received maneuverability at 152. Research test of students has been determined on the basis of data obtained from tables of CSO, of the current number of students in Poland. The minimum size is calculated from the formula for the sample size for a finite population of 1 739 807 (no foreigners), which stood at 600. Method for the selection of the sample were used in a non-random impacts. The quota allocation was adopted at 800 units. Properly completed questionnaires and received in return a large 603 students, which allowed to preserve the minimum sample size.

⁵ Universities have been selected from among the higher education institutions located in the rankings prepared in individual EU countries^[4] and combined with the results of the top two in the world rankings-QS World University Rankings and Shanghai Ranking 2012. Selected for testing after two universities from 9 countries (Belgium, Slovakia, Slovenia, Luxembourg, Budapest, Vienna, Great Britain, France) falling on the first or other items according to national rankings compared with global schedules and statistics schools. Assume for obtaining at least one of acceptance of a country on to learn about the specifics of the particular University. The return has been received from 8 countries.

Another group of initiatives, which is worth mentioning, are activities based on leaflets, this time handed out during the ceremony university (78,8%), guides university (76.8%) and advertising on the radio (72,7%). A group of unconventional forms or others than the previously mentioned, used only by selected units, included: outdoor cinema, sports competitions for candidates, cultural events, theatres, shows, pundits in the media, participation in promotional productions on the outside institutions, night ads, hosting prestigious events and open days, which are generally common. According to the respondents leaflets distributed at fairs, advertisements in newspapers or posted on the Internet as well as visits to schools and information on social media are currently the most effective tools of marketing communication. This, however, only partially reflected in the opinions of the candidates, as demonstrated by research among this group. Most often perceived actions in the opinion students are university guidebooks(78,3%) then leaflets distributed during the educational fairs (62,2%), advertising on the Internet (58,4%) and outdoor advertising (56,1 %). In the second area of visibility there is advertising in the newspaper (47,8%) and actions on social networks (40,5%). A small percentage of students met with no form (0,2%).

Among the most commonly used tools of marketing communication in European higher education institutions were, as in Poland, leaflets distributed at trade fairs and other events, as well as university guidebooks. The next most popular media of marketing communication in university education are social media.

Following years of the analysis show the severity of university communication activities aimed at social media.. In 2012, 68% of public universities had a Facebook profile. In 2014 100% public universities and private universities (95%) had a Facebook profile. Twitter is a tool interesting for 58% public and 15% private universities, whereas in 2012, they were mainly public universities which accounted for 14%. In the University in the United States in 2013, 100% universities had an active account on Facebook and 84% on Twitter(www.adweek.com, 25.05.2015). In 2014 in Poland You Tube active account had 75% of the public and 47% private universities (Socjomania, 29.05.2015). In comparison to 2012 in the US 79% of universities used social media as a primary marketing channel (Social media& the Advancement, 29.5.2015).

These results show the transformation in terms of how university communicates with a potential candidate and a current student.

4. Tools, resources and the content of a university promotion during the studies admission period – based upon students' opinions with an application of FGI method

4.1. Assumptions of primary research

The aim of the research was to get students' opinions about the tools used by universities, resources and promotional content during the enrollment period and their proposals in this regard. To achieve this goal, it was decided to focus on three interrelated groups of research subjects.

The aim of the first group, the most general one, which introduced (implemented) students to research the topic, was to learn about their attitudes towards the promotion tools, selected ways and means of communication of contemporary organizations with clients, preferences in this area and the role of the analyzed tools in the purchasing process. As a part of this thematic group the following questions were asked:

1. Which tools of promotion (among: advertising, public relations, direct marketing,

personal sales and complementary promotion⁶⁾ students pay particular attention to and why?

2. Which of these influence the most on purchasing decisions of young people⁷⁾?

3. What advertising (in terms of the form) respondents like the most?

4. How do they perceive the importance of personal contact with a company representative (dealer) during the purchase decision?

5. What is the current role of the Internet as a source of information for consumers in decision-making, in comparison to other media?

The second group of questions referred to the tools and the content of messages within the recruitment promotional campaign students encountered. Special attention was drawn to the students' assessment and changes offers within this subject. The following questions were asked:

1. What promotional tools used by Polish and foreign universities students encounter the most often?

2. What form and/or content of promotion have they remembered the best and why?

3. According to students what content should be included in the university promotional communicates?

4. What promotional tools should be applied and why?

Students within this thematic group were supposed to choose the best and the worst billboard (as a promotional tool used the most intensively) and comment on their choice.

The purpose of the third, the most professional group of questions was to discover the knowledge, opinion and assessment of students on their university promotional campaign, with special attention to the tools, resources and the content of messages. Students were asked to give answers to the following questions:

1. What promotional tools and the content did students encounter during the promotional recruitment meetings of the university (and/or faculty) they are studying at?

2. Did they have any influence as for the choice of the university/ faculty?

3. Do they think that the promotional campaign of their university was competitive compared with other universities from the region?

4. How, according to students, the recruitment campaign of the university and/or faculty should look like, i.e. what tools should be applied and what content the messages for the candidates should contain?

Students of the second-degree studies (1 semester) and potential candidates for these studies (students of the third form of the first-degree studies) were asked additional 3 questions:

1. Have they met with the actions of their university directed specifically to them (as a segment choosing the second- degree studies)?

2. If so, what were the actions, tools of promotion and the content?

⁶⁾ At the beginning of this group of questions students were explained the essence and the components of the tools were discussed.

⁷⁾ The question was asked in a direct form due to the lack of respondents' awareness about the influence of the analyzed tools on their own purchasing decisions.

3. Do they think that it should be a separate campaign for candidates for the first and second- degree studies?

The study used qualitative research method Focus Group Interview (FGI). The reason for the choosing this method was to encourage students to interact with each other, stimulation of expression and a spontaneous discussion on the promotion of modern university.

The study involved 8 mini groups of management students from two universities, University of Szczecin (USZ) and Rzeszow University of Technology (RUT), management, from the first year of bachelor's studies and the first year of the second-degree studies, just after the choice of the university and direction and the third year of bachelor's studies just before the choice of the second-degree studies. They were students of both stationary and non-stationary directions. They consisted of 4-5 people. The size was related to a need for greater deepening of the subject than the more numerous classic interviews and participation in them people involved in the subject.

The measuring tool was the script of an interview at a medium level of standardization. The research was carried out among students of the first term of the first and the second-degree studies in the winter semester 2014/2015 year (due to the short period of time after the selection of study), whereas among the third-year students of the first-degree studies in the summer semester 2014/2015 (due to a short period before making a choice of study). The research was carried out in the focus studio of University of Szczecin and Rzeszow University of Technology lecture hall.

4.2 Research results

At the beginning of every interview, participants were informed about research confidentiality of their information, their use for scientific purposes (scientific publication) and the practical ones (improvement of promotional campaigns of authors' universities, including modification of the composition of marketing instruments, measures and targeted promotional messages to candidates), the time span of interviews and their recording. The purpose of the study was also explained to them, as well as the structure of the interview and key concepts that will be used during the interview.

Then the participants were asked to answer questions about their attitudes and preferences in relation to promotion instruments and the role of these instruments in the procurement process.

All the questioned students spontaneously and easily pointed the promotional instruments attracting their attention (Question no. 1 of the research problem). While answering this question and stating their opinion in the area of advertising as a means of promoting they also gave the examples of particularly popular advertisements (question no. 3 of the research problem). Every group identified commercials – particularly TV ones, as the most conspicuous instrument to promote advertising. Commercials based on humor turned out to be the most eye-catching and enjoyable form of it. One of the participants of the study called the most eye-catching and memorable humorous ads as "*slightly silly or evenirritating*", another one as "*totally abstract*" and another one as - "*empty-headed*". The respondents gave several specific examples of brands that humorous ads particularly drew their attention. The advertisements based on humor by telecommunications companies and mobile operators were mentioned as positive examples, inter alia: Plus Operator – the commercial "plush" (with plush teddy bear as a "figure" of the ad), Play Operator – with well-known actors and singers, Nju Mobile Operator (animated commercial).

Some participants also pointed to online advertising. This answer, however, aroused a fierce debate immediately. Most of the interviewed participants "*cannot stand*" this form of advertising. The following opinion repeated: "*everyone now has Adblock, advertisements do not display then*". Students only accept advertising banners on the side of the website, because it does not interfere them in navigating through the pages and they may decide whether to open it (by clicking) or not. Nevertheless, students expressed positive opinions about advertising in the social media, they observe it and "*react quite often*".

Participants in four out of the questioned groups, drew attention to the important role of non-conventional forms of advertising, especially illiteral messages, suggestive content, based on a "*play on words*" for which the recipient must guess himself what is the meaning of the message. Some students emphasize the importance of music in advertising.

According to the participants, radio ads belong to advertisements that draw our attention as well, on stations with music directed to this group of people (students mention here the most popular youth radio station – ESKA). According to the participants, radio advertising draws attention when the reader has an interesting voice; sexual themes emerge too.

Other instruments drawing attention and especially liked by respondents are public relations, with particular emphasis on events (concerts too), aimed at young people.

Some students also pointed outdoor advertising, however, immediately notifying their objections to excessive number of billboards that reduce their effectiveness: "*People no longer look at it, unless it really stands out*". People moving by car or public transport argued that, paying particular attention to billboards promotes traffic jams. The research participants emphasized that they record just a single image, words or slogan out of the forms of outdoor advertising. Advertisements on bus stops which students read are also noticed while waiting for their means of transport. Several times during the interviews students gave opinions on the positive role of women in advertising. Such comments came from both women and men.

The most effective instruments for the promotion of the youth market, as it is evident from the statements of students, are: supplementary sale (additional), as an instrument offering buyers a variety of financial benefits, and together with the advertising (primarily on TV and on social networks), informing about the details of the "*special offer*". Students also emphasized the important role of advertising with an expert in the lead role, which is associated with the product, for example, a well-known Polish player Lukasz Piszczek or a strongman Mariusz Pudzianowski advertising diet supplements.

The role of personal contact with a seller in the purchasing decision-making process, respondents evaluated as high or very high (apart from the canvassing, which is assessed negatively). You can compare it to the role of the Internet, particularly in the context of informal contacts with other clients or users of the products. The Internet as a source of formal advertising messages was assessed lower. In statements relating to online advertising throughout the whole research process a lot of negative reviews appeared, mainly reflecting the annoyance with this form of communication.

The second group of questions referred to the opinion on the tools, means and content of the responses during university recruitment campaigns.

Among the answers to the question "*what promotional tools applied by Polish or foreign universities do students meet frequently,*" the most common were the following:

- in the area of advertising - mostly outdoor advertising, in the form of billboards, brochures and leaflets handed out mostly at fairs, advertising in various forms in public transport and at bus shelters, advertising on radio, e-mail advertising,
- in the field of personal sales - meetings at high schools with representatives of universities (including guest lectures or workshops),
- in the context of public relations - events, mainly – students' festival Juwenalia, university open days,
- educational fairs as an "interdisciplinary" tool combining features of various marketing tools.

As for the answer to the question about the form and / or content was the most memorable for students was e-mail advertising of non-public universities but because of their impudence. The most recognized form involving candidates were various events, especially "game days".

In terms of the university promotional content proposed by the students, they believed that the most important information is about:

- university offer - courses and specialties,
- professional benefits that result from the completion of a given direction, as it was expressed by one of the students "*what we can do after that direction, where, in what industries we can look for a job*",
- social assistance,
- mobility offers (students exchange) with other universities abroad,
- the number of candidates for a given direction,
- subjects they need to concentrate on in secondary school in order to be accepted for the course.

Students also drew attention to the form of communication, including the use of the right, attention- grabbing words. They suggested such words as "prestige", "quality", "best students".

During the interviews, there were some critical comments about slogans promoting universities. Students emphasized that the slogans should be created only by young people in order to avoid artificiality, ridicule and inadequacy of language (in the case when the slogan are made up by people from "another generation").

The most efficient university promotional tool according to students was "personal sales" in the form of personal presentation of the university offer in secondary schools. During such meetings candidates can ask about all matters of their interest (students of the universities are warmly welcome). Interviews participants remember their vague expectations of universities and directions (when they were students of secondary schools), and they proposed that the visits of the university representatives should take place in the first or at least second class of school so that they can focus on their education.

Students also emphasized the role of the website, which should be up to date, legible, easy to navigate, but mainly should contain all the previously mentioned important information for candidates. In this part of the research, students were shown 4 billboards of management faculties of various universities. Rzeszow students liked the most billboard of their own faculty due to the humorous slogan, image, and simplicity (except photos and the slogan only the logo and the name of the faculty). All other billboards were assessed negatively because of illegibility, lack of interesting, eye-catching elements (illustration), the excess of information, and they expressed it in the following way: "*an awful lot of it all*", "*I did not want to read it*," "*it is information more for brochures and not on a billboard*". Students were also not able to provide the names of any presented university (apart from their faculty – Faculty of Management at RUT).

Students of Szczecin University, in turn, did not express quite a positive opinion on any of the billboards; opinions in each group were divided, due to either too much or too little information (as in the case of FM RUT), lack of images of people on some billboards. However, the most eye-catching billboard of FM RUT, was not associated with university offer according to the students of Szczecin University. Its humorous, somewhat controversial picture turned out to be too distracting from the name of the university and the faculty.

At the beginning of the last part of the study, students were asked what instruments and forms of promotion they met with as part of the recruitment at universities (and / or departments), on which they study.

Students from Rzeszów first mentioned fair, organized in the area of the university. According to students from Rzeszów University of Technology, an organization of fair in the university causes that the university becomes "closer" to candidates, a result of the visit at the fair, therefore they are more likely to choose the one known to them longer than a "foreign" university. They emphasized at the same time a very important role of personal contact during such fairs as well as open days, with university employees, favoring "*getting closer to the university*". Equally important during such candidates' visits, according to the students, is the atmosphere of the university buildings and its surroundings, including the campus. In case of Rzeszów University of Technology, these were the factors very favorably evaluated by students and effective incentives to take up studies at this university.

Students also drew attention to the website, and departmental billboard, brochures and folders.

Particular attention was drawn by the students of the university in Szczecin to its billboard (due to the price of the semester put on it) and net advertisement on the building of the university (because of important information for candidates, such as: the price, the name of subject, date of recruitment and photographs of current students). Among other forms the students met were: advertising on public transport, visits to secondary schools, advertising on Juwenalia (students festival), advertising on monitors in the shopping centres and recruitment folders. Students of the first year of the second degree, also mentioned meetings with representatives of the university authorities and students, who told them about the offer of the Master's degree studies.

When asked what instruments had the greatest influence on their decisions about choosing the university and / or field of study all students emphasized the role of informal sources (friends, family, teachers), from formal sources as the most effective,

most students recognized university / faculty website and meetings in schools with representatives of the university.

Regarding the issue of competitiveness of universities promotional campaigns, students expressed a clear opinion about the greater visibility of the campaigns of private universities. Students from Rzeszów pointed out in this place interesting for them messages of these universities concerning student training, internships and discounts on tuition for the best students. As visible and effective promotional activities of other universities they also recognized competitions organized by some colleges and universities, which winning will even take you to the relevant course and not getting less desirable – material rewards.

Students were asked one by one how they think their university and / or department recruitment campaign should look like, i.e. what instruments should be used by them and what content should messages to candidates contain.

Among the proposals of marketing instruments emerged:

- Within personal selling and public relations at the same time: the candidates tours the university with visits to laboratories, participating in lectures and meetings with staff and students in secondary schools, events as open days and meetings with candidates to integrate them with the colleges academic environment, as a supplement form the distribution of printed promotional materials could be useful,
- Sale of materials in the form of promotional gifts, especially USB flash drives, key rings, pens, T-shirts,
- In the area of advertising - folders (with rich content, photos and a map), radio advertising, advertising in social media (primarily on Facebook and Instagram).

In the content of their university messages (apart from the items listed in the second group of questions) they would put extra information about the department staff, with particular emphasis on their practical knowledge, tuition fees for the paid study, "*good slogan*", web page address, strengths of the university and students' photos, with whom the candidate could identify.

As part of the questions concerning only second degree students and students of the 3 year first degree, regarding the activities of their university they directed specifically to them, its type and content, we achieved a response (from students of University of Szczecin) that the only form like that were meetings with representatives of the university authorities(mentioned earlier) and students who talked about the offer on the Master's degree studies. This form was rated as very useful. Students from Rzeszów University of Technology did not meet with any separate actions of the university, directed only to them. They believe, however, that most desirable form is a form of personal meetings with teachers and students of second degree of study (i.e., such as the ones that took place at University of Szczecin). During such a meeting, presentation of fields, specializations, subjects and their relationship with labor market needs would be particularly important for them. Students do not consider separate campaign as necessary, they only expect the above mentioned information meetings.

4.3. Findings

The first, most general group of questions asked students referred to their opinion with respect to tools and promotion measures used by companies. The purpose of these questions was to learn the attitudes and preferences of students in this regard.

Repeated views of respondents in all groups regarding the most popular promotion tools support the conclusion that it is television advertising based on humor. Students like abstract surprising, unusual, or even stupid sense of humor which is not usually associated with the product. They also positively say about ambiguous content, interesting melodic lines (for ads on radio and TV), and placing the image of women and the real experts as the main characters in the ads.

Particularly controversial type of advertising, according to the opinion of the respondents, is online advertising, which in it's the most popular form ("pop-up" windows covering the content of the website) is most noticeable, but the majority of respondents simultaneously annoy and even hate it. An acceptable form of online advertising is, however, is a banner ad on the side of websites, leaving the Internet users some kind of freedom of closer interest in the advertising as well as advertising on social networks.

Students also pay attention to the billboards (especially when stuck in traffic). Very popular are also all kinds of youth-oriented events (concerts, parties).

Comparing the impact of the selected, completely different tools on the surveyed students in the purchasing process - the Internet advertising and personal sales, the latter, as it turns out, plays a far greater role, however, comparable to informal contacts with consumers via the Internet - with other consumers. A particularly effective tool for the promotion due to the financial reasons considered seems to be supplementary promotion (all kinds of sales, "promotions").

Taking into account the noticeable tools and contents of universities promotion, they were located in the area of advertising (mainly outdoor advertising, publishing, radio, in public transport), personal sales (meetings with representatives of universities at schools), public relations (various kinds of events). Educational fairs also belonged to them. In the negative sense the most remembered by the students were intrusive advertising mail addresses of private universities.

Students expect in the promotional messages of the university a wide range of information, mainly about the university offer (directions, majors, conducted subjects), as well as their connection with the need in the labor market about the possibilities of the social support.

All this information should be placed mainly on the key source of information - university website, which additionally should be legible, clear and simple.

Students very critically assessed many university promotional slogans and photos in the billboards, describing them as artificial.

With reference to their own university students remembered and appreciated a lot university fairs as the events which act positively. A positive role of this promotional tool resulted from the possibility of the personal contact with university, a decrease of the decisive risk, limitation of stress connected with the university choice and taking studies.

They also paid attention to the promotional tools as well as the billboards and other forms of outside advertising, commercials in the radio or on TV, meetings at schools with university representatives.

4.4. Results

As it is clear from the conducted studies, students before choosing the university followed the university activities as a part of its promotional campaigns. During intensive discussions and interviews students expressed and argued numerous ratings and reviews related to tools resources and content promotion used by individual universities. Paying attention to the behavior of institutions as a part of promotional campaigns as well as mature opinions and detailed proposals for change, tell of the rational nature of the students' decisions related to the choice of university, and as it results from the content of the discussions - of the awareness of its impact on the further life of respondents.

The conducted research can provide the basis for subsequent quantitative research in this subject, but even without a quantitative follow-up, the results can be treated as a relevant and useful source of recommendations. The opinions expressed in individual groups often repeated and the differences in statements between individual students and individual groups do not reflect conflicting views, but rather complement each other.

Special attention on the basis of the conducted research should be given to the most popular and eye-catching humor in advertising. This fact raises the question whether the use of humor in the university promotion is recommended, due to the nature of the decisions the candidates take when selecting a university and a direction. In vast majority this decision is rational and it affects the rest of the respondent's life, therefore humor should be used with great caution. This precaution is associated not only with the possibility of crossing the fine line in creating a positive image of the university but also with distracting of the recipient's attention from the essence of the message and pointing just at this humor, which may be the only remembered part of the ad (as in the case of the billboard of the Faculty of Management of RUT by students of Szczecin). Humor and vocabulary used by students are also completely different that this from the segment of a little older people, which may cause an impression of artificiality and ridiculous (in a negative sense) in the case when the humorous communication is created by people from another age range.

By using humor in advertising, the university needs also to take into account the short life cycle of its forms.

Definitely a recommended form of university advertising is advertising on the Internet - in social media and in the form of banners on selected websites, as well as in radio, using interesting melodic line, and in the form of billboards. When designed one should consider to place images of women (mostly current students) or a well-known expert associated with university environment.

The realization of tests before printing or emission (pre-testing) is necessary when using any of the above form of the university advertising, especially when it is based on the humor and contains the music motive. Both university students and young people who are potential candidates for studies from secondary schools should participate in the tests. They should also participate in testing of the priority source of information in the process of university choice the university (faculty) website. In the latter case the realization (in-house or outsourced to an external company) of eye-tracking studies will be useful the, which will allow identification of the sites on the web recipients (viewers) pay special attention to, the order in which they are analyzed and those that the viewers do not notice.

Testing should also apply to projects of billboards. Especially important in this case is their location. In the case of a decision to include more information on the billboard (more than the standard and appropriate for such forms of advertising slogan, image and brand) e.g. the names of courses, one needs to choose a location, enabling familiarization with the presented content, e.g. by urban roads where they are often traffic jams.

Due to the fact that students highly value personal contact with the salesperson in their purchase decision-making processes and events, and these forms also apply to higher education sector, universities should put emphasis on this form of communication both with the candidates for the first and the second degree studies. In case of the candidates of the first degree studies there should be in the form of: visits to schools, teachers and students, starting from the first, and the second form of the secondary school. They should organize open days and open lectures for candidates paying at the same time special attention to the preparation of the teaching staff (teachers and administrative staff) to the appropriate - "caring" approach to youth and creating a friendly atmosphere in the university buildings and on outside. This also applies to the fairs, which have a particularly positive effect for the university when they are organized at university.

As for the candidates for the second degree studies there should be organized meetings with university authorities, teachers and students of the last year of bachelor's studies. It is also important to involve students in creating advertising messages, both to create and test promotional messages (including slogans) and posing for pictures, and thereby avoid "artificiality".

As a result of the analysis of the carried out research the fundamental conclusion arises that despite domination of the contemporary forms of communication (modern information technologies), the priority role in communication between university and students seems to have personal sales which enable students not only to obtain information but, above all, give a possibility to ask questions and get answers that are missing in indirect forms of mass communications.

As it was put by one of the students "*we simply feel lost, there are a lot of specialties and their names tell us little*".

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