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ANALYSIS OF MODERN DEVELOPMENTAL TRENDS OF POSITIONING STRATEGIES OF LEADING UNIVERSITIES IN THE INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION SPACE

ABSTRACT

The scientific research is devoted to a relevant issue, namely the current trends in the development of positioning strategies of leading universities in the international information space. University positioning strategies in the international information space are aimed at the leadership at the market of educational services. University activities should be noticed and evoke a «positive image». To achieve this goal PR-managers develop sets of special measures, forms and tools in order to make a positive impression on the minds of the target audience. The author of the scientific research has firstly analyzed the essence of the concept «trends» in general and then in education in particular. In the conditions of competitive processes in the field of higher education, demographic crisis, fewer number of applicants, introduction of corporate governance principles in state universities, a wider range of researches, administration and PR-managers of higher education institutions should apply modern forms and methods of positioning their own activity and educational products. On the grounds of the comparative analysis conducted in the previous researches on positioning strategies of the leading Western European and Ukrainian universities in the international information space the following trends of this process have been identified: positioning the leading (research and corporatized) university in the international information space; focusing the university positioning strategy on the target market segment; positioning cross-border cooperation and internationalization of the university in the context of increasing international competition between individual universities; promoting the positioned brand as a guarantee of the quality of university education in the international information space; changing the ratio of traditional and modern types of advertising.

Keywords: *trends, development, positioning strategies, top universities, international information space.*

АНОТАЦІЯ

Наукове дослідження присвячене актуальній проблемі, а саме сучасним тенденціям розвитку стратегій позиціонування провідних університетів у міжнародному інформаційному просторі. Метою стратегій позиціонування університетів у міжнародному інформаційному просторі є лідерство на ринку освітніх послуг. Для того, щоб діяльність університету була поміченою та визивала «positive image» PR-менеджери розробляють комплекси спеціальних заходів, форм і засобів із метою справити позитивне враження на свідомість цільової аудиторії.

Для цього автором наукової роботи спочатку проаналізовано сутність поняття «тенденції» загалом та зокрема в освіті. В умовах конкурентних процесів у сфері вищої освіти, демографічної кризи, зменшення кількості абітурієнтів, упровадження принципів корпоративного управління в діяльність державних університетів, збільшення кількості проведених досліджень, адміністрації та PR-менеджерам закладів вищої освіти необхідно застосовувати сучасні форми та методи позиціонування власної діяльності, наданих освітніх послуг і освітніх продуктів. На підставі проведеного компаративного аналізу в попередніх дослідженнях стратегій позиціонування провідних університетів країн Західної Європи та України в міжнародному інформаційному просторі були визначені наступні тенденції цього процесу: тенденція позиціонування провідного (дослідницького та корпоратизованого) університету в міжнародному інформаційному просторі, направленість стратегії позиціонування університету на цільовий сегмент ринку, позиціонування транскордонного співробітництва та інтернаціоналізації діяльності університету в умовах посилення міжнародної конкуренції між окремими університетами, тенденція просування позиціонованого бренду як гарантія якості освіти університету в міжнародному інформаційному просторі, зміна співвідношення традиційних і сучасних видів реклами.

Ключові слова*: тенденції, розвиток, стратегії позиціонування, провідні університети, міжнародний інформаційний простір.*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the system of education is developing quicker and quicker. It is important for higher education institutions (HEI) to be constantly in trend, to have good prospects for students, to use the latest positioning strategies to be included in university top lists. To strengthen these positions, universities have to take into account positioning strategy trends of leading European universities in the global markets for educational services, which today can be traced in the international information space (IIS).

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The research is aimed at determining modern trends in positioning strategies of top universities in the international information space.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

Trends in the development of higher education in the information society have been studied by such scientists as E. Bielozertsev, N. Cloete, P. Maassen, O. Meshchaninov, L. Panchenko, V. Radaiev, O. Ruzanova, P. Scott, E. Khrykov and P. Uetela. N. Avsheniuk, K. Binytska, A. Havryliuk, D. Ilnytskyi, W. Jacob, J. Knight, D. Kucherenko, A. Kharkivska, O. Martyniuk, and others have researched the positioning strategies of leading universities today. The set goal was achieved applying general and special methods of scientific research: theoretical, comparative, monumental and problem-based analysis of philosophical, scientific pedagogical, special literature, Internet resources.

RESULTS

Identification of current trends in the positioning strategies of leading universities requires considering the essence of the concept «trends» in terms of education and in general.

The trend in education is treated as the leading direction of its development, which is determined by historical, political, socio-cultural, socio-economic factors (Avsheniuk, 2016).

L. Panchenko believes that trends are understood as «the possibility of certain actions to develop in this direction; this concept includes a wide range of conditions, criteria, principles and other phenomena, the emergence, change, manifestation or

disappearance of which significantly affects the development of world and domestic higher education» (Panchenko, 2011).

O. Voronkin states that «the trend is characterized by qualitative features (essential properties), which are revealed as a result of a detailed study of the current state of the process (phenomenon) and the conditions of this process» (Voronkin, 2016).

The pedagogical dictionary defines the general scientific concept «trend» (from the Latin tendo – direct, aspire) as the possibility of certain events to develop in a given direction (Kodzhaspirova, 2005).

According to I. Isaiev, the trend is «a predicted potential regularity or law, i.e. a certain connection between phenomena and processes, states and properties, which under certain circumstances may pass into the category of regularities» (Isaiev, 2002).

Description of development trends of the positioning strategies of leading universities in the international information contributes to deeper and more diversified comprehension of qualitative signs of this process not only in real time, but also in terms of future prospects.

On the grounds of the comparative analysis conducted in the previous researches on positioning strategies of the leading Western European and Ukrainian universities in the international information space the following trends of this process have been identified.

The trend of positioning the leading (research and corporatized) university in the IIS.

The positioning strategies of universities in the IIS should be aimed at leadership in the market of educational services. It is achieved by PR-managers developing a set of special measures, forms and tools in order to make a positive impression on the minds of the target audience.

According to J. Trout and E. Rice and their work «Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind»: «Leadership is the best «differentiator». This is a guarantee of brand success» (Zakharov, 2013).

In the conditions of competitive processes in the field of higher education, demographic crisis, fewer number of applicants, introduction of corporate governance principles in state universities, a wider range of researches, administration and PR-managers of HEIs should apply modern forms and methods of positioning their own activity and educational products. Under such requirements, one of the current trends in the positioning strategies of higher education institutions in the IIS is the positioning of the leading (research and corporatized) university in the IIS.

According to international rankings the first places in the field of higher education on the world market are currently occupied by powerful leading universities, which include educational, research departments, as well as structures that carry out innovative activities of HEIs. Therefore, research and corporatized universities are mostly competitive in the world educational space today.

G. Steck believes that a corporatized university is «an institution characterized by processes, decision-making criteria, expectations, organizational culture and corporate practices that relate to a modern business corporation and originate in it. It acts in market relations and applies market strategies in the decision-making process at the university» [Steck, 2003].

Thus, corporatized universities are higher education institutions that have a high level of their own (non-budgetary) income, cooperate with public and private institutions, enterprises, companies, etc., actively compete with other universities in the market of educational and other services and apply the principles of marketing strategies when making management decisions.

Ukrainian universities are noticeably inferior to the world leading counterparts. The low level of interaction of HEIs with business companies, professional community, barriers between science and education, application of traditional approaches to HEI management are some of the most serious problems. Therefore, the corporatization of universities and their positioning in the IIS can be an effective mechanism to address the issues mentioned above.

Focusing the university positioning strategy on the target market segment is the next trend we single out.

Analyzing the trends in the development of positioning strategies of universities in the international information space, we stress on the fact that we live in an era of superactive communication. Universities should use a selective advertising background aimed at a specific target audience in order for their activities to be noticed and evoke a «positive image».

Every day we perceive a lot of information from different types of media, social networks, by phone, when communicating with colleagues, etc. For example, today in Ukraine there are more than 500 cable and satellite TV channels. The National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting has announced the popularity rating of Ukrainian TV channels among users (the survey covered 232 thousand households connected to the service of OTT / IPTV operators Volya, Triolan and you tv.) [Rating of TV channels, 2020]. Having analyzed these data, we can conclude that most viewers watch mostly 3–5 channels.

According to the topic of our research the conclusion from the above data is the focus of the university positioning strategy on the target market segment, while PR activities are directed not only to the subjects of educational services and educational products (i.e. HEI and their structural units), but also for the subjects of demand (i.e. for consumers of educational services and educational products).

Therefore, under the conditions of increasing competition the effective positioning of the university in the IIS requires, first of all, determining the target market segment. The identified trend, in turn, has two main areas of segmentation.

The first direction is for potential consumers of educational services (high school students, higher education applicants, applicants' and students' parents, students, graduates, academic staff, employers, market participants in the field of research and innovation services, government, educational community, various funds, mass media) and increase of their social status.

The second direction concerns the diversity of educational services / educational products (licensed volume in accordance with the information on the implementation of educational activities of HEI; degrees, specialties and their specializations; terms and forms of education, the number of prominent scientists, educators who provide educational process in HEI), as mostly modern higher education seekers (including those with special educational needs), who are subjects of the educational process and at the same time consumers of educational services / products, want to get high-quality education and form or develop general and professional competencies.

A. Kharkivska points out that «one of the leading trends in educational policy is the implementation of inclusive education, which guarantees equal rights to access and get quality general, professional and higher education for people with special educational needs» [Kharkivska, 2018].

Thus, the segmentation processes in these areas are extremely important for the effective positioning of HEIs in the IIS as they contribute to overcoming fierce competition,

covering both traditional consumers of educational services and new target audience; achieving maximum efficiency of differentiated (according to the target market) PR-activity through the impact on the focus groups, taking into account the real needs and demands of the relevant market segment (diversity of educational services / educational products).

The next trend is the positioning of cross-border cooperation and internationalization of the university in the context of increasing international competition between individual universities.

The beginning of the XXI century is characterized by global integration in industry, culture, science and education, etc. Therefore, nowadays cross-border cooperation and internationalization are the priority areas of international activity in any university.

Cross-border cooperation and internationalization of the university belong to the key components of the competitiveness of HEIs. Universities with international educational backgrounds have strengthened their positioning strategies for international cooperation in response to global competition in education.

G. Patterson (Patterson, 2005) claims that in the conditions of globalization universities are linked not only by competition but also by cooperation.

There are several key directions of the PR-activity in HEIs concerning positioning their cross-border cooperation and internationalization. We single out the following ones: creation of strategic international alliances (association of HEIs for realization of common goals and tasks, which increases partnership efficiency, structures their activity on specific strategic directions, contributes to brand support, expanding spheres of influence and, as a consequence, increasing the international reputation of each partner HEI); academic mobility (to position the European approach to education quality, academic mobility of consumers of educational services, etc.); international project activities (positioning of received grants, scholarships, participation in international projects, etc.).

Cross-border cooperation and internationalization of the university activities lead to the establishment of reliable partnership between HEI aimed at effective interaction in the international educational space. Strategic international alliances can boost these processes.

Thus, the relevance of the trend of positioning cross-border cooperation and internationalization of the university results from the need to: increase and strengthen the prestige of HEI, the competitiveness of the university in the market of educational services; promote the university brand at the national and international levels; increase the number of foreign students; encourage prominent foreign scientists and educators to join the university academic staff; expand graduates' competencies in accordance with the demands in the global labour market; achieve official worldwide recognition; find new external sources of funding for the university by attracting foreign students, participating in international projects, promoting their own educational products on the international market; make a higher education institution more recognizable, attractive in the conditions of national and international competition due to the possibilities of academic mobility, etc.

The next trend concerns promoting the positioned brand as a guarantee of the quality of university education in the international information space.

Changing vectors of strategic development of HEIs, increasing competition in the labour and educational services market, widespread use of digital technologies and means of communication in a smart-society encourage universities to find new ways to increase competitiveness and create competitive advantages. Every university strives to be more attractive to its target audience. The solution to this problem is primarily related to the

promotion of a positioned brand and image as a guarantee of the quality of university education. Thus, if we want the name of HEI to be associated with a brand in the mind of an individual, it is necessary to have a developed strategy of positioning – positioning – a general category, a brand – a specific one.

Scholars believe that university image is «an emotionally coloured image created in the mass consciousness determined by the relationship between different aspects of its activities and transmitted to the external environment» (Arbuzova, Rotan, 2014). University image is formed by the feedback of applicants, their parents, subjects of the educational process, stakeholders, management at various levels, the media, ranking positions of the HEI in national and international top lists, popularity in the country and worldwide. All components of university image (location, name, mission, corporate style, external attributes, history, legends, outstanding personalities) are used to support its image and are positioned as components of education quality.

Transfer from industrial to post-industrial (information) society has changed the market of educational services, and to be truly competitive universities have to meet several requirements, namely: availability of shared information space, introduction of information technologies, wider scope of e-learning tools and means of digital technologies, innovative forms of educational process (distance learning, open education, electronic libraries, virtual learning environments, etc.).

Creating information space for university students means giving them more opportunities for obtaining quality professional education based on access to resources of the global information and communication environment, forming their readiness to work in a changing world, developing abilities to make decisions and put them into action, skills to use new information technologies to solve specific tasks.

Thus, advertising background of the available information space promotes positioning of the university education quality in the international information space and positively affects the university image in the minds of society.

The next trend in the development of university positioning strategies in the IIS lies in changing the ratio of traditional and modern types of advertising.

Modern information and communication, digital, mobile means of information exchange are now becoming cheaper means of positioning HEIs in the IIS when compared to television, radio, periodicals and non-periodicals.

This trend is especially relevant in the context of modern market relations, competition between universities. Therefore, conducting professionally designed advertising campaigns becomes an important area of their activities.

According to the Law of Ukraine «On Advertising» «advertising is information about a person or product, disseminated in any form and in any way and intended to form or maintain consumers' awareness of advertising and their interest in such persons or goods» (Law of Ukraine «On Advertising», 2020).

Recently, there has been observed negative attitude in society, rejection of advertising, due to the increase in its volume and unlimited choice of goods that consumers can get on the Internet. The desired goals of a certain positioning strategy of HEIs in the IIS are achieved when different channels of communication are used, according to the possibilities of its perception by a specific target audience, thus changing the ratio of traditional and modern types of advertising.

Describing this trend, we should mention that at the present stage of the IIS development the Internet is gaining more and more popularity as an advertising platform. Banner and contextual advertising can also effectively segment the target audience.

We single out the following priority directions in the context of the trend on widening the range of Internet advertising of HEIs in the IIS:

1) Using social network platforms, as they have become a necessary routine for modern youth and stakeholders in their daily lives.

2) Active advertising of HEI activities on YouTube. The main content on YouTube is video content. It is known that most of the information is absorbed visually and audibly. A successful video ad on YouTube combines both of these features and can capture potential consumers of educational services and educational products so much that they will willingly share this information with others.

3) Developing HEI blogosphere. This type of advertising is one of the most promising in the near future, as the percentage of commercials in blog content is low compared to advertising in other media, which allows universities, following the principle of flexibility, to place their own advertising background cheaper, and therefore with a significant advantage over other higher education institutions.

CONCLUSIONS

The facts established in the course of the comparative pedagogical research allowed us to systematize and generalize them as well as to find out the main trends in the development of university positioning strategies in the international information space: positioning the leading (research and corporatized) university in the IIS; focusing the university positioning strategy on the target market segment; positioning cross-border cooperation and internationalization of the university in the context of increasing international competition between individual universities; promoting the positioned brand as a guarantee of the quality of university education in the international information space; changing the ratio of traditional and modern types of advertising.

The identified current trends are complementary and are the grounds for developing an effective strategy for positioning the university in the international information space.

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