

THE NEED OF RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: *This paper is about research conducted in order to find the graduates' perceptions regarding their opportunities to find a job after the 1st cycle of study. The main aim was to find their intentions to look for a job in the study field and how they perceive the easiness to find such a job. The outcomes have revealed that the respondents want a job in the study field, but they are anxious about a good integration on the labour market. In this respect, the higher education institutions have to communicate better with their students and other stakeholders in order to implement the relationship marketing in the organisation.*

Key words: *1st cycle graduates, labour market, relationship marketing.*

1. Introduction

One of the main challenges of the 21st century has been the increase in quality in the educational system at all levels, starting from the hypothesis that the quality of people who leave a certain educational level will have a high influence on the quality of the processes at a higher level.

In our country, higher education has passed through a restructuring process meant to increase the quality of the educational process at all levels. The declared mission of the educational process in the Romanian law has quality as the core value, education being focused on the graduates' competences.

Taking into accounts these statements, we conducted a research study among the students in the last year of the 1st cycle of study, within *Transilvania* University. The main goal was to find the intentions of the researched population regarding the future

jobs and the attitudes regarding the probability to find a job in the study field.

Based on the outcomes of the research, we proposed relationship marketing strategies as useful tools to increase the competitiveness of the higher education institutions.

2. Literature review

A review of the literature reveals that the relationships between universities and various stakeholders are gaining an increasing importance in the development and sustainability of higher education institutions. Such a goal could be achieved through a relationship marketing orientation.

Relationship marketing describes a specific marketing approach that is a subset or a specific focus of marketing. However, given the rate at which practitioners and scholars are embracing the core beliefs of relationship marketing for directing marketing practice and

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research, it has the potential to become the dominant paradigm and orientation of marketing [1].

Relationship marketing has a significant importance in the new context of economic development, as a result of needs diversification and sophistication of customer requirements [2]. All organizations have to establish strong relationships with their customers, to maintain them and to create a basis of mutual cooperation on the long term. Such relationships overpass the boundaries of traditional business-to-business market, being increasingly present on consumer market or public services.

Trying to find a model for long term business sustainability, companies and public institutions should assume a holistic marketing vision which takes into consideration all the interested parts in the process of value creation (company + clients + collaborators + community). This type of management ensures the relations between the company and all the actors interested in its activity [3].

As regards higher education, most of these organizations face increasing demand to change and improve. The dramatic rise in the number of universities and their study programs, a more democratic access to information (via the Internet), the decrease in the number of young population combined with the economic instability, all have posed universities with the need to redesign their educational offer [4].

This challenge for higher education can be also found in other opinions, the specialists considering that this century will be characterized to a large extent by our collective success or failure in addressing the many critical scientific challenges that humankind is facing worldwide [5].

The importance of quality in higher-education is also included in “EUROPE

2020 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”. This one aims to help member states to overcome the effect of economic crisis and to improve the level of employment, social cohesion and productivity [6].

According to the above mentioned strategy, better educational levels contribute to an increase in employability and to reducing poverty. A greater capacity for research and development, as well as innovation across all sectors of the economy, combined with increased resource efficiency will improve competitiveness and foster job creation.

In the European Commission’s vision, smart growth means strengthening knowledge and innovation as drivers of future growth. This requires improving the quality of education, strengthening the research performance, promoting innovation and knowledge transfer throughout the Union, making full use of information and communication technologies and ensuring that innovative ideas can be turned into new products and services that create growth, quality jobs and help address European and global societal challenges [7].

The initiatives regarding the improvement of higher education could be supported by the government, but the universities have to involve themselves in the increase of their performance and relationships with the target segments.

One of the strategic tools that universities can use is marketing communication. The communication policy is a way building and maintaining a position given the competitive conditions of the university education market. In order to have a better communication with its customers, a university has to use different communication tools in different situations. These ones include personal visits to headmasters, educational counsellors and students of secondary

schools with proposals for further education [8].

All the above mentioned contributions tend to converge to the same target, which can be achieved using relationship marketing strategies.

3 Research objectives and methodology

Our research started from a problem identified at the level of the 1st cycle graduates who tend to meet critical problems on the labour market. On the one hand, they have only minimal competences that have to be developed in the 2nd cycle and, on the other hand, employers often tend to ask for experience when hiring an employee.

Starting from the above mentioned issues, we have tried to find the graduates' opinions and attitudes regarding their employability after the 1st cycle of study. The main objectives of our research were:

- To find the proportion of graduates who have a current job and the fields comprising these jobs;
- To identify the graduates' attitudes regarding the future jobs;
- To find the graduates' opinions regarding the determinant factors in finding a job.

The main hypotheses of our research are that a low proportion of students have a current job before graduation and if this job exists, this is not in the field of their study. Also, many of them are concerned regarding the future job and the easiness to integrate on the labour market.

The research is based on a survey among students of *Transilvania* University, in the last year of study. The analyzed sample counts 262 randomly selected students. This sample includes students from the last year of the 1st cycle from various economic and engineering study programs. The proportions of the two groups inside the sample were 53.8% from engineering

programs and 46.2% from economic programs.

The data were collected in the last week of school, in the period prior to the graduates' final evaluation process for the bachelor's degree.

4 Previous research

This research follows another one with similar objectives, in which we tried to find the attitudes of graduates from economic studies regarding their employability on the labour market.

The outcomes of this research showed that the graduates are unhappy with the new Bologna system, being convinced that the old system was better.

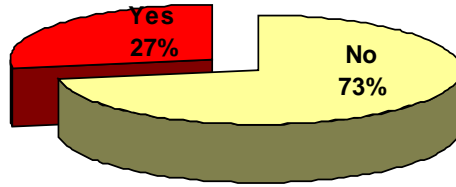
They consider that they are not enough prepared for a job, the employers often asking for previous experience. In this respect, the respondents perceive a gap between theory and real work activities, considering it necessary to include more hours of practical activities in the curriculum.

Starting from these results, obtained using a qualitative research method, we tried to develop the investigation at a general level, using a quantitative method, based on a representative sample.

5 Research outcomes

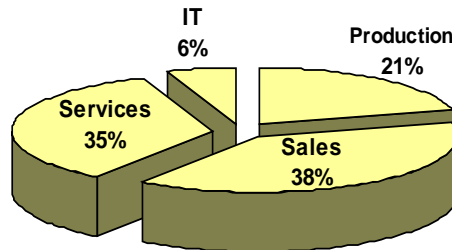
The collected data have been processed with the SPSS system. A synthesis of the most important results is presented in what follows.

First of all, we found that only 27% of the respondents have a current job, the rest being unemployed at the moment. This result is presented in Figure 1. It confirms one of our hypotheses regarding the existence of a low percentage of future graduates who are employed at the moment, irrespective the field of their activity.

Fig. 1. *Percentage of employed students*

Trying to find the field of activity in which the students who are employed activate, we obtained the following distribution. We notice that the majority of

jobs (73% of employed students) are in sales and services. Other 21% of jobs are counted in production and 6% in IT.

Fig. 2. *Job distribution on fields*

When we asked about the correspondence between the current job and the study program, only 46% of the employed students stated that they worked in the same field with their study program.

For this reason, we tried to find the relationship between the study program and the field in which the students activate.

Study field vs. job field

Table 1

	% within Studyfield		Total
	Economic	Engineering	
Production		44,1%	20,8%
Sales	50,0%	26,5%	38,9%
Services	50,0%	17,6%	34,7%
IT		11,8%	5,6%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

The students in the economic field are employed in sales and services to an equal extent, fields that are quite close to their specialisation. No student from this group works in production or IT.

In the case of students in engineering, we can find that 44.1% work in production and 11.8% work in the IT field. There are also more than 44 % of this group who

work in sales and services, fields that are different from their specialisation.

In conclusion, a large part of students from the last year work in other fields than their specialisation. This behaviour is found mainly in the case of students in engineering, as 44.1% work in sales or services.

On the other hand, the students in economics work in sales and services even

if some of them do not work in their specialisation. From a similar crosstab, we can find that 55.3% of the respondents who study economic sciences do not work in their specialisation, whereas the students in engineering declare in proportion of 52.9% that they work in other fields of activity.

Proportions of jobs in the study field

Table 2

		Study field		Total
		Economic	Engineering	
Current job in studied field	No	55,3%	52,9%	54,2%
	Yes	44,7%	47,1%	45,8%
Total		100,0%	100,0%	100%

Trying to find the graduates' attitudes regarding future jobs, in the questionnaire

we used some questions regarding the respondents' future plans.

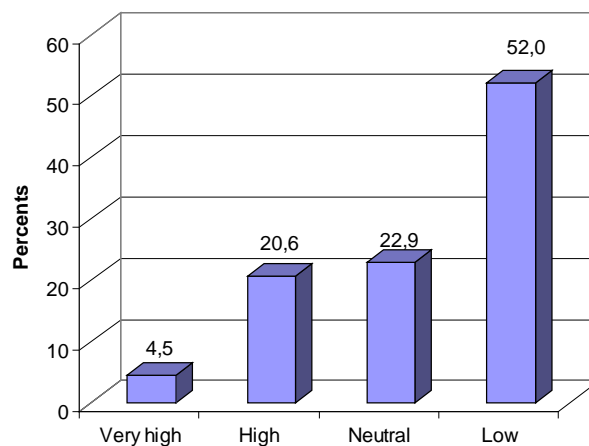


Fig. 3. *Intensity of intentions to continue studies without looking for a job*

We can see in figure 3 that only 25% of respondents intend to continue the studies in the 2nd cycle without looking for a job, their intentions in this respect being very

high or high on a 4-step scale. The majority of the students questioned are disposed to continue the studies without a job only to a small extent.

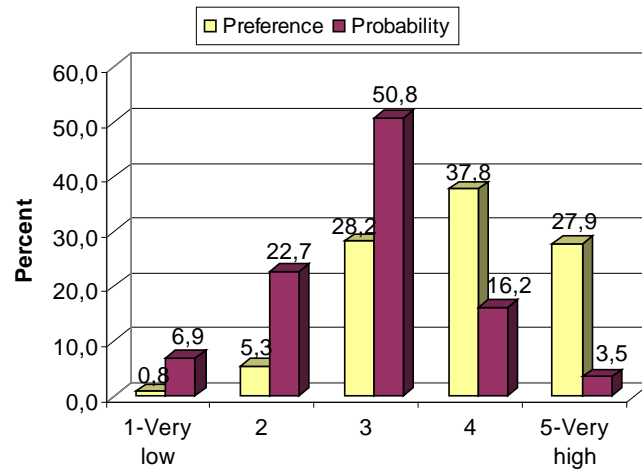


Fig. 4. Preference vs. probability to find a job in the study field

Regarding students' preferences to find a job in the study field, we can see that a large proportion of the respondents want to have such a job (65.7% have a high and very high preference for a job in the study field). Very small percentages do not want to work in the field they are prepared for and 28.2% are indifferent.

Talking about the probability to find a job in the study field, the respondents are more sceptic, 50.8% choosing a medium probability to find such a job and only 19.7% a high and very high level of probability.

Concluding the above results, we can state that the research objectives have been

fulfilled and the hypotheses have been confirmed to a large extent.

6. The need of relationship marketing

Trying to find solutions to the problems of the graduates from the 1st cycle, we appreciate that the relationship marketing strategies could be useful tools.

The relationship marketing is defined as building, maintaining and developing strong relationships with customers and other stakeholders in order to obtain a high profitability (Berry, 1983, Grönroos, 1989, 1994, 1996, Hunt, 1994, 1997, Mattsson, 1997) [9].

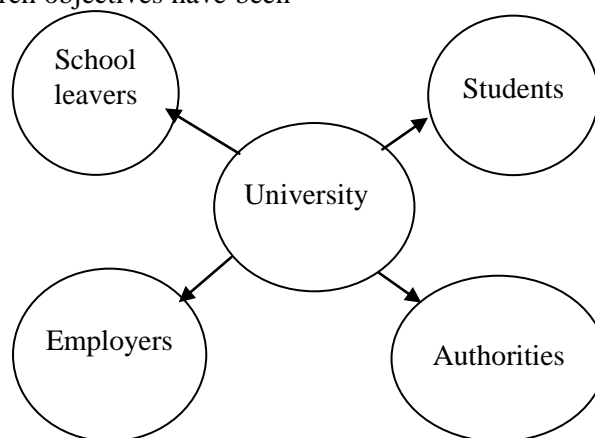


Fig. 5. The main stakeholders of a university

Building strong relationships with the stakeholders mentioned in the above figure can lead to a long term competitive advantage. These ones should be based on a strong communication and a smart use of the public relation techniques.

It has been empirically demonstrated that good communication could change the attitudes of an individual or group of people regarding a certain entity [10].

7. Conclusions and further researches

The results of our research show that the students who are to graduate the 1st cycle of higher education want to a great extent to find a job in their specialisation, but they are not so optimistic regarding the easiness to find such a job. In spite of this fact, they are determined to find a job. Only a small part of the respondents want to continue the studies in the 2nd cycle without looking for a job.

Considering these results, we can appreciate that the research objectives have been fulfilled and part of our stated hypotheses have been confirmed.

We should remark that a small part of the respondents are employed during the studies, but from these ones, only few work in their field of specialisation. Most of the students accept some jobs in order to obtain resources for their daily expenses.

Taking into account the above mentioned issues, we consider that the results of our research have implications both for researchers, academics, quality assessors and practitioners. Further researche should be focused on the proper ways to implement the relationship marketing in the activity of higher education institutions. In this respect, we will try to find these tools in our research in accordance with the results of the present research.

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