

## EDUCATIONAL MARKETING MIX IN ROMANIAN MILITARY HIGHER EDUCATION

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*Abstract: Marketing mix is the subject of numerous theoretical approaches and studies in different fields, including higher education, while the application of the concept in the practices of higher education institutions brings into notice aspects which influence the elaboration of marketing strategies.*

*A marketing mix in the formula which contains four elements: product, price, promotion, place, was proved insufficient, thus, in the literature regarding the field of educational services, established authors and many other authors added three more elements, such as: people, process and physical evidence.*

*This study analyzes the opportunities offered by military higher education institutions through the environment in which they evolve and the consumers by using elements of the marketing mix. Military higher education institutions entered the educational services market with attractive offers for the public, in a competitive environment in which there are plenty of educational offers from prestigious universities, thus the formulation of an educational marketing strategy which combines efficiently elements of the marketing mix will adapt the offer of the military higher education system to the needs, demands and expectations of the target audience, consumers of such services.*

*Keywords: military, higher education, Romania, marketing mix, educational marketing*

### Introduction

The education market is changing at a fast pace today and not only that the market is changing, but also the technologies which help it, thus being necessary that universities in general and particularly military higher education institutions should analyze the effects produced by these changes, opportunities created but also the risks generated by the globalization of education. The Internet, technology and globalization permitted the creation of an environment in which access to information is permitted both to the consumers and to the educational services providers. The consumers offer information about their needs, demands and expectations, search for information about the universities which promote offers according to these needs, but at the same time they can block the access of promotional messages which do not correspond to these needs and demands (Kotler, Jain and Maesincee, 2009).

The integration of marketing in the academia appeared as a consequence of certain changes happening lately through the massive growth of the number of universities and students, the opening of the national borders, consumers having the possibility to opt for university

studies in other states, the legislative changes in the field of education, especially those regarding the funding of universities, the intensification of competition between higher education institutions, even the appearance of virtual universities (Avram, 2014).

The market is changing faster than the marketing of institution acts, thus the adaptation of the traditional model of marketing is imposed. The military higher education institutions must satisfy the needs of the customers in the most convenient manner, trying to reduce to an acceptable minimum their time and effort to search for educational offers which correspond to the needs, the time for option and registration (Kotler, Jain and Maesincee, 2009).

Marketing mix is the subject of numerous theoretical approaches and also studies in various fields, including the field of higher education, the trends manifested of the higher education institutions market needing the approach of marketing and its instruments, the application of the concept in the practices of higher education institutions bringing into attention aspects which influence the elaboration of marketing strategies.

The integration of marketing in the field of higher education is the path to a more profound understanding of the needs of the consumers and for the identification of the correct position on the market of the higher education institution, for the development of study programs which offer the graduates the necessary abilities to responde successfully to the demands of the labor market, the correct information of the public regarding the educational offer and the benefits of obtaining and academic diploma, for the consolidaton of the academic image and market reputation of the institution (Avram, 2014).

Gherguț (2007, p.115) emphasises that there is no established formula for the elaboration of a strategy, in the formulaton and implementation of an educational marketing strategy there must be taken into account its visibility and there must be indicated unitary directions for the higher education institutions in the terms of operational objectives.

### **Literature review**

Kotler and Armstrong (2008, p.12) define marketing mix as the set of marketing instruments which the company uses to implement its marketing strategy, anything it can do to influence the demand for products offered on the market, to produce the desired answer from the public, a set of marketing instruments which work together to satisfy the needs of the customers and to construct relations with the clients (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008, p.5).

Marketing mix is one of the dominant ideas in modern marketing. Marketing mix is defined as a set of controllable marketing instruments, combined in a way which produces the desired answer on the target market. Marketing mix consists of anything the company can do to influence the demand for its product. The combined variables are the product, its price, place and promotion (Kotler et al., 1999).

Marketing mix is the product of the evolution of marketing, it represents the program developed to face the problems which the education institutions constantly meet on an ever changing market, always challenging, in which the competitors come with new products, with aggressive promotion, price changes. The maintenance of efficient information channels regarding their own market operations, consumers' and also competitors' behavior becomes necessary (Borden, 1984).

Marketing mix is a combination of variables used by the company to commercialize goods and services. After identifying the market and collecting basic information about them, the next step is to decide about the instruments and strategies necessary to satisfy the needs of the customers and to challenge the competitors on the market. Marketing mix offers an optimal

combination of all marketing ingredients, thus companies may accomplish the objectives which have been chosen, a set of controllable variables used to influence the behaviour of consumers (Singh, 2012).

Higher education is a field specific to services, its characteristics being intangibility, inseparability, variability, perishability, although higher education services are intangible activities, they are realised with tangible elements, here being included all the facilities the university disposes and which may be used by the students, professors and the administrative personnel, its marketing mix will include the 7Ps specific to the services, product, price, place, promotion, to which are added other 3Ps specific to the field of services: people, process and physical evidence, and the use of marketing in this field will contribute to the identification of its implications in industrial development (Avram, 2014).

Marketing mix includes a certain product, offered at a certain price, with a certain promotion which makes the product known to the potential customers and a way for the product to reach the customer. Knowing and selecting the markets on which to promote the products and services became a necessity for the education institutions. Marketing strategies specify certain targeted customers. This approach is called targete marketing, adapted to match specific clients. Also, mass marketing regards vaguely the whole population, approached through the same marketing mix, it assumes that the whole population is likewise and considers the whole population is a potential customer (Perreault, Cannon and McCarthy, 2012).

According to Perreault, Cannon and McCarthy (2012), the customer is not a part of the marketing mix, but he or she should be the target of all the marketing efforts made by an education institution. The needs of a target market practically determine the nature of an adequate marketing mix. Thus, potential target markets must be carefully analyzed, the attractive market opportunities must be identified and there must be elaborated adequate strategies through the efficient combination of the elements of the marketing mix.

When referring to the physical evidence of the university, the literature (Rodić Lukić and Lukić, 2016) identifies the influence of tradition over the image of a higher education institution, students becoming aware of the traditions of the university following their experience in the environment behind the doors of the faculty and the exterior facade of the institution. Faculties may use their tradition to design the interior of the buildings. Students' impressions during their stay in such an environment can further enhance the reputation of these institutions.

### **Main findings of the research**

In Romanian higher education system, the educational offer, represented by the number of admission places at the exams, is approved annually through government normative acts, at the universities' proposal, based on the estimation of the number of graduates of secondary education with a baccalaureate diploma from the current year, but also of the anterior promotions, the scholarization capacity of the education institutions and the fields of study demanded on the market. The military higher education system approaches the educational offer based on the same principles, but it is characteristic for them the fact that in this educational system the demand for labor expressed by final beneficiaries, institutions from the field of defence and public order, influences the educational offer and the educational products contained in this offer.

The university product has similar characteristics to the marketing of services, thus being inseparable from the student, all the specific study programs specific to different faculties

of the universities, optional courses, teaching materials, etc., being oriented towards the students, consumers of educational products (Avram, 2014).

Taking into account the fact that the educational product has the same characteristics as a service (intangibility, inseparability, variability, perishability), the adequate marketing for this field is the marketing of services, thus imposing the use, besides the four traditional marketing instruments (product, price, place, promotion), of other three available options: people, process and physical evidence. These three instruments, through the promoted marketing policies, are able to offer relevant information regarding the educational product and they constitute useful instruments for developing successful marketing strategies (Enache, 2011).

According to the approach of Saginova and Belyansky (2008), the educational product which is offered to students is represented by a higher education study program, defined as a combination of educational services and support services which regard the raising or changing of the level and/or educational field of the client and assuring the adequate resources for these.

Targeted consumers are placed in the center of the marketing strategies elaborated by universities, while the education institution must identify the total market, divide it into smaller segments, a process named segmentation, then it must select the most promising segments and concentrate to serve them (Kotler et al., 1999).

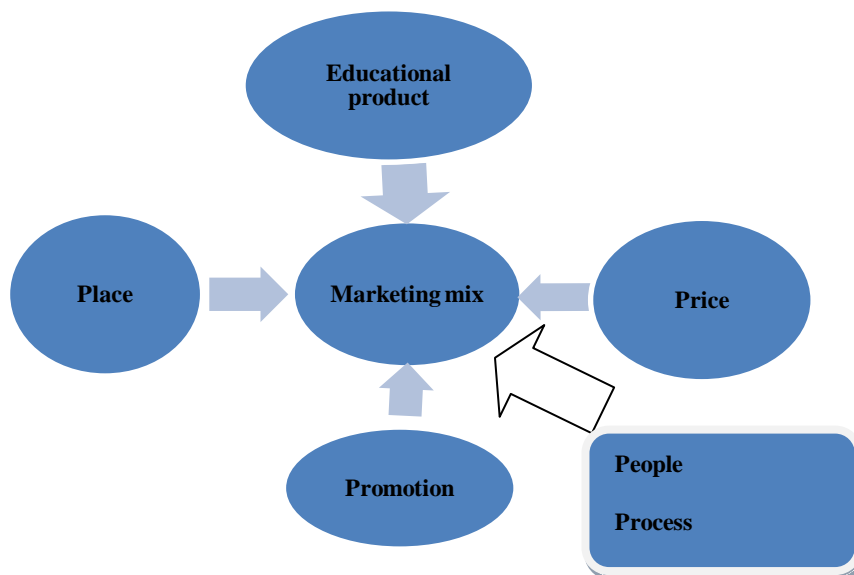
The success of a study programme, product of higher education institutions, is measured through the number of graduates, the quality of these graduates which guarantee the occupation of some jobs in the field in which they have prepared for a short period of time, the level of the salary earned by graduates, positive evaluations of the employers and professional satisfaction of the graduates (Saginova and Belyansky, 2008).

While analyzing the marketing orientation of the universities, Domański(2014) identifies differences between public education institutions and private ones, regarding the adaptation to the market changes, the expectations of the customers, the price of public education products. The marketing orientation of a public higher education institution depends mostly on its personnel. The personnel of the universities should be able to combine managerial qualities and scientific achievements.

Universities confront with the need to validate the previous education and experience of the students and offer various options of obtaining the higher level in education. Individualization of educational models, the individual responsibility of the students for their results, the student-centred education and the development of transferable universal abilities are the main demands of modern economy (Saginova și Belyansky, 2008).

Marketing mix in the field of education contains four elements: educational product, product price, place and promotion, the combination of these four elements defining the success rate of an education institution (Enache, Brezoi and Crișan, 2013, p.52).

**Figure 1. Educational marketing mix**



Source: Enache, Brezoi, Crişan, Marketing educaţional, 2013, p.52

The price of educational products refers to issues such as tuition fees, scholarships and payment conditions for tuition fees. Place is the distribution method, be it face-to-face or distance education. The marketing mix promotion element consists of a package of tools such as advertising, public relations and face-to-face sales, which could take place on an open day (Ivy and Naudé, 2004).

The correct selection of the market segments on which the higher education institution concentrate their efforts, which they address with the right educational products/services, in the right area, at a convenient price for both parties, all followed by an adequate promotion, which leads to the realization of the set objectives, represent the market strategy (Balaure et al., 2002).

Kotler (2005) reveals that the product is a key element of the market offer, the planification of the marketing mix beginning with the formulation of an offer which satisfies the needs and demands of the target market, thus analyzing the offer depending on the characteristic attributes and the quality of the product, mix and the quality of services, as well as price.

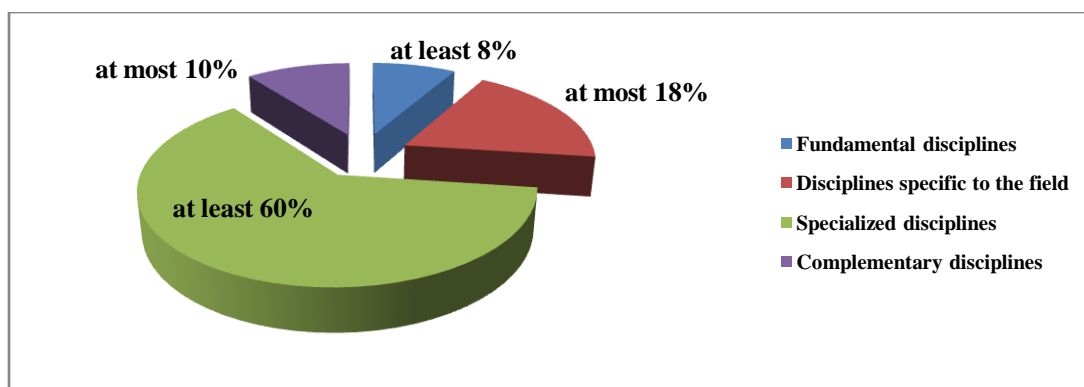
The concept of product refers to what is offered to potential consumers, the ensemble of elements which can launch the market demand, the product being created and analyzed through the advantages or utility the customer expects from it. The decisions in the field of product policy determines all the other marketing actions, which is the most adequate price policy, what distribution channels will be used, which are the most appropriate promotional channels (Nedelea, 2009).

In the field of education, applied marketing, educational marketing, takes into account the development and promotion of a product or service, according to the necessities and expectations of the target market, of the society in general, as well as the objectives of the education institutions, while it is characteristic to the product in this field is the immaterial character (Grigoruţ et al., 2011).

The product of the military higher education institutions is generally represented by the higher education study programs offered on the market, in various fields of study, comprising all the cycles according to the Bologna Process.

The curricula developed by the military higher education institutions contain fundamental disciplines, disciplines specific to the field, specialized and complementary, with the highest share being the specialty disciplines.

**Figure 2. The ratio of study subjects in military higher education institutions by the formative category**



Source: ARACIS, Standarde, 2016

Military higher education institutions provide study subjects with a logical succession in order to contribute to the development of skills specific to qualifications and to ensure compatibility with the National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education and Classification of Occupations in Romania.

The price of the educational products offered by military higher education institutions may influence the acceptance on the market of the product because it is the base of the perception of their value (Vrânceanu, 2006).

Communicating the existence of a new educational product to consumers increases the demand for that product, and the public is always interested in the new one. Advertising, first, communicates about the product, then about a possible affordable price, which accelerates the distribution of supply to the mass of consumers at a slower pace (Sutherland and Sylvester, 2008).

The military higher education institutions promote the educational offer to a specific category of public—secondary education graduates, future graduates, their parents, people interested in pursuing another faculty and those interested in continuous training in military sciences, military engineering, the message being made up of all admission specifics: detailed study programs by study area, faculty, admission modalities, budget-funded and fee-based places, exams, etc.

The target audience is the public that meets the skills and motivational requirements imposed by the military profession in general and those of military education, the actions of military higher education institutions targeting two segments of the public, the potential candidates and the segment that can influence the decisions of potential candidates to opt for military higher education.

According to Birth et al. (2008), Enache, Brezoi and Crişan (2013), the communication objectives of the educational institutions mainly focus on three aspects:

- strengthening and improving the image and reputation of the institution;
- differentiating educational products / services on the educational market;
- the loyalty of the consumers of the offered educational products / services so as to opt for the same higher education institution in order to continue university studies as well as the recommendation of the higher education institution to potential clients.

According to the literature (Schüller and Rašticová, 2011), the military higher education institutions have created official pages on the social networks Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, thus responding to the needs of communication and transmission of information to the consumer, the choice of social networks is related to the development of the respective networks, the number of members, options, as well as the presence in the networks of those categories of public of interest to the military institution. The forms of marketing communication include social networks, primarily Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as well as other web applications, direct contact with potential students being also another type of marketing communication.

Schüller and Rašticová (2011) show that the recommendations made by friends and relatives of potential students are very important in obtaining information on studies at one university or another, at a civil or military institution, the overall picture of a faculty, of the students and personal experience of graduates and, more importantly, the quality of education offered, attests to the quality of each university and can influence the choice of the university.

According to Băcilă (2013, p.64), distribution in the field of education is the way in which educational products / services come from the educational institution to their beneficiaries via a distribution channel, directly or indirectly, characterized by one or more intermediaries.

Regarding distribution, we can state that the system of military higher education institutions has proved to be a transparent, open system to the social environment, providing the higher education consumer public and its dialogue partners with all the information about the activities they carry out, on-going programs and the results obtained in various fields. Moreover, military higher education institutions have proved to be a viable and credible partner, capable of outstanding performance both in relationships with local, national and international partners.

The main areas of the promotion activity were public information, by establishing, maintaining and developing beneficial links between the military education system and society, local communities, the media, as well as streamlining communication within the military higher education institutions by disseminating correct and timely information.

The personal element of the educational marketing mix refers to university employees. Thus, all categories of staff, teaching and administrative staff, through which the educational service is delivered and the relationship with the client is consolidated (Kotler and Fox, 1995).

The marketing vision combines the adoption of a marketing philosophy at the level of the entire educational institution with the opportunity to meet its needs and needs of the educational services to the highest degree, so that the dynamics of the educational market determine the quality and content of the offer. The staff supports the quality and value of the offer of educational products/services through a relationship, interaction and effective communication with their beneficiaries (Gherguţ, 2007).

According to Enache, Brezoi and Crişan (2013) the staff of an educational institution is the key element in achieving a viable educational product or providing quality education services.

Physical evidence, is a tangible element in higher education, including the facilities offered to students in the university campus, the buildings of the higher education institutions, the facilities of the classrooms and the seminar rooms, laboratories, libraries, dining rooms, the facilities of the dormitories for students, sports halls and recreation areas (Avram, 2014).

The military higher education institutions have teaching rooms, teaching laboratories, simulators, laboratories, professional software and research centers, equipped with technical equipment for learning, teaching and communication that facilitates the teacher's activity and student receptivity, specialized libraries, studies, accommodation, providing students with enhanced facilities in these spaces as well as throughout the university campus, access to the Internet, nutrition and health care services, daily programs including extracurricular activities.

The process is another element specific to the marketing mix in higher education services that allows the consumer of educational services, i.e. the student, to benefit from university education, thus contributing to the formation of his experience with professionals through the knowledge provided by the study programs the student has chosen. In these processes there is a direct supplier-beneficiary relationship, university-student or more specifically teacher-student (Ratiu and Avram, 2013).

The process in military higher education institutions refers to activities such as educational management, enrollment of admission candidates, enrollment of students, teaching activities, learning processes, social activities and even sports and extracurricular activities (Soedijati and Pratminingsih, 2011).

## **Conclusions**

The continuously changing socio-economic and educational environment, affected by the globalization of society and the negative evolution of the population, requires the analysis of the educational needs and their manifestation on the education market, so that the decisions made at the level of the military higher education institutions respond to these needs through adapted offers (Enache, Brezoi and Crişan, 2013) and thus influence the behavior of potential consumers in their choice for university education.

Higher education consumer requirements, i.e. young graduates of secondary education or at the end of this training, must be known by military higher education institutions, educational marketing activities undertaken on the basis of meeting the needs and expectations of consumers, thus increasing the reputation of universities and creating a favorable image in the mind of the public.

Higher education institutions create study programs tailored to the needs of higher education existing in society at affordable prices for the general public, provide them and promote them effectively to attract valuable consumers in order to train specialists who have credibility in the labor market, fundamenting their actions having as a starting point the consumer and the market (Avram, 2014).

Transforming higher education, diminishing dependence on government funding, and especially the evolving education market, make universities compete for students. Motivating factors for educational service consumers, i.e. prospective students, in choosing a university have undergone changes and the role of marketing in recruiting students has become increasingly



important. University marketing is necessary to understand the needs and demands of its clients, for the military higher education institutions to remain competitive and to survive among high quality education providers (Kusumawati, Yanamandram and Perera, 2010).

The marketing approach of military higher education institutions focuses on the consumer of products and educational services offered, the activities based on analyzes of the market and consumer behavior, the objectives set, the segmentation of the market, the definition and identification of the target audience, the positioning of the institutions, the targeting by choosing an efficient combination of marketing tools (Bătinaş, 2015).

A marketing mix in the formula containing four elements: product, price, promotion, distribution, has proved to be insufficient; in the literature on the field of educational services, well-established authors, and not only, added three more elements: people, process and physical evidence. Military higher education institutions have entered the educational services market with attractive offers to the public in a competitive environment in which there are abundant educational offers of prestigious universities, thus formulating an educational marketing strategy that effectively combines elements of the marketing mix will adapt the offer of the military higher education system to the needs, requirements and expectations of the target audience, to consumers of services of this kind.

The opportunities offered to military higher education institutions by addressing the evolving environment and the consumer audience by using and combining the elements of the marketing mix: product, price, promotion, place, people, process and physical evidence, lead to the development of successful marketing strategies.

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