

**OPPORTUNITIES OF INTEGRATION AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF
EDUCATIONAL MARKETING IN THE CURRENT ACTIVITIES OF THE
MILITARY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

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Abstract: The expansion of globalization and the fierce competition in all markets have effects on the Romanian economy and society as a whole. These are also noticeable in the field of higher education in whichover the higher education institutions are exerted demographic, technological, economic, social and political factors influences.

The emerging opportunities have determined new marketing behaviors demanding not only for its integration, but also for its operationalization. The increased competitiveness in the educational services' market imposed a different approach from that of the previous periods, upon the military higher education institutions, oriented toward the consumers of the educational products/services and the results of the educational process expressing the needs and demands of their beneficiaries. The study identifies the opportunities to integrate the educational marketing in the military higher education system, characterized mainly by resistance to change, rigor and hierarchy.

Keywords: military, higher education, Romania, marketing opportunities, educational marketing

The expansion of globalization and the fierce competition in educational market have determined for the military higher education institutions new marketing behaviors. The increased competitiveness in the educational services' market imposed a different approach from that of the previous periods, upon the military higher education institutions, oriented toward the consumers of the educational products/services and the results of the educational process expressing the needs and demands of their beneficiaries.

Technological progress, competition becoming more and more intense and the level of development of the organizations, motivates orientation mainly towards the market and the full integration of marketing, by offering quality services through the entire activity and by building organizational

structures that promote optimal efficiency market relations in line with the expectations and needs of customers (Niculescu, 2010).

The current economical context grants quality the role of key determinant of competitiveness, more and more organizations are concerned to use techniques and tools applied in quality management that are designed to facilitate continuous improvement in performance so as to meet the needs of the customer in terms of efficiency and effectiveness (Nemeş, 2011).

In recent years, the service sector is one of the areas where there were major changes caused on the one hand the intensification of liberalization and reform of the Romanian society as a whole, the growth of the role of the market as an essential mechanism for allocating resources, and on the other hand, the development of information technology and communications, which grew more and more significantly the role of services in the national economy (Bobîrcă et al., 2006).

Services are those activities separately identifiable, basically intangible assets, education being mainly oriented toward the consumer market with dominant intangible characteristics impossible to be touched or seen or felt (Raj et al., 2013).

The dynamism of the educational services market induced the tendency to amplify the character of the entrepreneurial field, thus it became necessary a careful and continuous analysis of the functioning of higher education institutions, knowing the operating principles specific to the institutions, the approach requiring firm orientation towards the market, consumers, strategy formulation and the establishment of appropriate organizational structures (Popescu, 2004).

Among the market characteristics of services provided by educational institutions, educational services, we remark, first, state intervention, which is performed at microeconomic (eg by setting taxes, rates, granting subsidies) and macroeconomic (through public policies, such as tax), thereby adjusting the work done in the educational market (Barbu, 2011).

Education must convey effectively and also on a widespread that volume of knowledge and information adapted to the new civilization of globalization that does not overwhelm through quantity, but contributes to the development of the individual and society as a whole, tracing changes and providing consumers guidance tools that help them identify opportunities for asserting and continuous development (Cosma, 2004).

The integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, although this occurred at a considerable time after the Romanian society began to reform all areas, was an opportune time for a different approach of customers by military institutions of higher education.

The transition from mandatory military service to voluntary, the adequacy selection process of candidates for the entrance examination in the military educational institutions to the new profile of the graduate, military leader, activating in a common market with other institutions of higher

education in Romania, admission of girls in the formation process of officers, integration into the North Atlantic alliance and the European Union, have imposed the need to change the way to inform the public, promotion, recruitment and selection of candidates, addressing military career in marketing vision (Tramontini, 2006).

The year 1990 marked the beginning of changes for the military education system, reforms and adaptations to the new social context, the educational services market. Higher education in Romania experienced major changes, registering slow pace of growth in the number of higher education institutions, faculties and teaching staff.

Starting with the academic year 1991-1992, military schools of officers were converted to military institutes, institutions of higher education integrated into the national university-level long-term education system, with the mission to ensure basic fundamental scientific training of future officers, this certainly representing the time for military higher education institutions to meet the needs and wishes of future students through specific marketing activities.

In the next period, the military higher education institutions have covered the legal steps for recognition as military-universities, obtaining provisional authorization and accreditation of study programs, in this regard the reports of the National Council for Academic Assessment and Accreditation being favorable (Baboş, 2005).

The new approach of education in the military system allowed military higher education institutions to participate in university life, to be represented in advisory organizations held at national level: the National Council of Rectors; National Council for Academic Assessment and Accreditation; National Council for Attesting Titles, Diplomas and Certificates and also benefit from a wide international opening, participating in international relations activities: visits of information and documentation, training courses, congresses, exhibitions etc. Meanwhile, a large number of students and teachers have benefited from research grants or training programs in specialized institutions of higher education from abroad.

The conjuncture of the developing educational market after 1990 was the first opportunity for military higher education institutions to realize the fact that it is necessary to use tools and techniques of marketing for analyzing the environment in which they operate so as to increase the flow of consumers for the offered educational services. Previously, military education institutions did not approach at all the market, the educational offer and information on study programs were made known to the public before entries for the entrance examination, by military structures unrelated to education system. These were performing a first selection of candidates, while those who met the criteria and scales set had to attend the entrance examination, so this was the first contact of potential customers with military educational institutions.

Romania's integration into NATO and European Union has exerted a significant, systematic and steady influence on human resources in the military, so the whole approach to training and human resource management has in mind the special requirements laid down by the two organizations, taking into account the development, adoption and implementation of appropriate strategies (Duțu, 2005).

In the context of major changes in the operating environment, increasing competitiveness and awareness of the multitude of messages to which the consumers are exposed from bidders, even the lack of time and the permanent sense of haste, which can be a specific feature of the XXI century, the integration of marketing and marketing communications acquires a special importance for higher education institutions in general, particularly for those in the military system (Ivanov, 2012). The dedicated literature in the field has accumulated numerous definitions of marketing, the changes over time demonstrating the evolution of the concept and the generalization in almost all areas of social life (Petrescu, 2008).

Defined in the early stages as a set of activities that guides the flow of assets and services from manufacturer to consumer/end user (The American Marketing Association, 1960), in the 90s, marketing is seen as a social process by which consumers get what they need and want (Kotler, 1997; Kotler and Armstrong, 1999), as art of creating a value for the consumer (Kotler, 2003).

In higher education, marketing knows a broad global perspective, the increased competition in this developing field, together with the increasing number of higher education institutions, products and services offered in the educational market, are drivers for marketing integration in the university field (Starck and Zadeh, 2013).

The educational services marketing can be defined as an activity of knowledge and services transfer to customers of educational institutions to achieve their full satisfaction by obtaining an economic and personal development opportunity and making them more capable to face worldwide competition (Jadhav, 2007).

Integration is the act of incorporation, merger of several parts into a whole. When the marketing of a company is integrated, all the company compartments participate to the achievement of marketing actions and not only the marketing department. Each entity of the company participates in joint effort to satisfy the needs of consumers to get maximum profit (Sasu, 2005).

The consumer is the central element reference of educational marketing. Basically, marketing, by the whole complex of activities that are specific to it, aims to provide the goods and services which consumers require, respectively right merchandise, in the right amounts, at the right price, at the right place and at the right time. So marketing appears as an entire system of economic activities,

referring to the programming, pricing, promotion and distribution of products and services designed to satisfy the current and potential consumer requirements (Sasu, 2008).

The higher education institution can be regarded as an organization that develops its activity on a competitive market of services offers (education, research, consulting). Regarding this aspect, the competitiveness of the higher education institution is given by its ability of adapting to the constant changing needs of the social-economical environment, to the needs of education consumers. The pressure on public higher education institutions to achieve a competitive activity is increased also by the arrival on the market of private universities, which do not have budgetary resources, are constrained to develop a dynamic and efficient activity in order to survive on the market and even draw in powerful segments from the potential clients (Popescu, 2004).

Kotler and Fox (1995) and also recent studies identify a significant number of clients from higher education institutions: students, their families, employers, society and employees of higher education institutions, the approach focusing especially on students (Roșca, 2015).

Mazzarol (1998) identifies in the field of education the characteristics of services: intangibility, inseparability, disparity and perishability, initially described by Zeithaml (1985), each characteristic needing the approach in marketing vision in order to restrict eventual problems such as educational oversupply. Education is a market targeted service, described mainly by intangibility, the knowledge supplied being impossible to touch, visualise or feel, the production and their consumption happening simultaneous, having no option for storage (Raj et al., 2013).

Taking into consideration the characteristics of educational services, the educational institutions that want to obtain success on the market have to undertake a series of activities that aim to attract future students, for more students and their families, the decision of studying in one institution or another represents one of the most important initiatives they will ever undertake (Mazzarol, 1998).

Educational institutions have the intention of becoming a popular brand, but the promotion, publicity and growth in the number of places in the admission contest is not enough (Sankaran and Kannan, 2016).

Marketing of educational services properly undertaken can build the brand image of institution having a great influence to the improvement of the quality of the educational services, infrastructure, facility, curriculum. All of these this will bring the satisfaction of customers (Jadhav, 2007).

Comparing the business environment to the educational one, especially that of higher education, it can be concluded, relating to marketing implementation, that in both sectors the marketing processes can be evaluated only in association to the way they are perceived by customers. The effectiveness of educational activities carried in universities can be improved by infliction of

marketing principles. Marketing in higher education can be defined as a response to needs and wishes of customers, those being pupils, parents, graduates, employers and financial supporters of educational processes and finishing with the larger community (Motekaitienė and Juščius, 2008).

Military institutions of higher education should first understand what it is and what it does educational marketing, starting from the need to approach marketing in the field of military education, given to the tight competition between all institutions of higher education on the Romanian market of educational services.

Integration of marketing in higher education requires analysis and comparison between colleges and universities with what is happening in the business sector. In higher education, as in business, it is possible to see the characteristics of the exchange process (Motekaitienė and Juščius, 2008).

Military institutions of higher education should integrate educational marketing on an operational basis, first with actions of small spread (such as creation or update of the web sites of military institutions of higher education or participation in educational fairs), switching to the design and implementation of a marketing communication strategy.

Running campaigns to promote the educational military system, the educational offer, in all media, has not generated any effect of increasing the demand for educational services provided by military institutions of higher education to a level that ensures a customer segment with a powerful motivation for the military career.

Integrated and in relation with the environment in which they activate, educational institutions provide educational services and scientific research, the product offered consists of abilities gained by the students, as a result of involvement from the academic and research community. The product must satisfy the requirements and expectations of customers, being at the same time consistent with the requirements of the society (Buzărnescu, 2004).

Educational marketing relies on a completely different approach towards traditional marketing principles, thus, educational institutions need in order to achieve the performance of satisfying target customer needs from the market segment where they operate, in the context of globalisation, having to apply attractive and diversified educational programs. Representing a fundamental part of the educational policy and educational management of educational institutions, the educational marketing policy should be developed through the study of motivation and symbolic representations of consumers according to their specific behaviour. Educational marketing explores the possibilities of satisfying cultural and educational needs of educational institutions customers, education relying on values that are connected to human needs. As a marketing approach, the main concern of educational institutions is focused on delivering products and educational services, according to the educational requirements of customers, in constant change, in the context of current economic

reality. The global challenges of educational marketing are based on an advanced technology and on high speed communications towards the satisfaction of educational needs of customers (Birău, 2014).

The concept of smart defense was introduced by the general secretary of the NATO in 2011 and adopted during the Chicago summit in May 2012, a solution of maintaining the ability of fulfilling the assumed missions, as a response from the allies to the growth in complexity of the international security environment (Ene, 2015), increases the role and importance of military institutions of higher education in forming specialists for military and civil structures. The establishment of new priorities in the field of defense, forced by the evolution of the budget assigned, as well as the introduction of a system of financing military institutions of higher education, based mostly on own revenues, represent opportunities for applying marketing principles. Educational marketing proves a necessary instrument for approaching the market and the target customers, the quality of future students, of students and graduates of military institutions of higher education sustaining the fulfillment of missions and objectives set by educational institutions and the Romanian military system.

The marketing strategy of military institutions of higher education must answer to rapid changes in the marketing environment, to the rapid growth of competition, on national and international grounds, due to globalization (Pistol, 2015).

Although the reformed curricula based on the requirements and needs of consumers, employers, organizing campaigns of promoting the educational offer to the target audience, we appreciate that the military institutions of higher education do not have a culture of marketing sufficiently developed, especially in the educational marketing. The favorable image of the Army, the favorable positioning of the military system among public confidence, attractive benefits granted during school attendance and opportunities for career advancement, creates a somewhat dormant state and waiting the military institutions of higher education in relation to the educational market, customers and potential customers.

The approach of organizational integration of marketing in the military institutions of higher education requires, in our view, the establishment of structures of marketing at the Ministry of National Defence and in each military higher education institutions, which, having a position in the institutional flowcharts, which can foster effective decisions, resource allocation, personnel, technology and sufficient information that could begin to integrate the educational marketing on the basis of strategies, marketing plans and programs.

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