

## **MARKETING APPROACHES OF THE MILITARY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

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*Abstract: The changes of the environment in which the military higher education institutions evolve impose them a marketing approach of education.*

*The military higher education institutions will have to redefine their mission and be more active on the educational services market. Our study will seek to identify the framework in which this would happen, the strategic options which the decision-makers of those institutions can consider and last but not least, the impact on the performances of the institutions.*

*The evaluation of the general context of the marketing environment in which the military higher education institutions evolve, the identification of the main opportunities and threats, of the main strong and weak points, allows the creation of a framework which channels the marketing decision-making process toward the elaboration of marketing strategies and in the same time imposing the precise identification of the position on the educational market.*

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

### **Introduction**

Marketing is defined by Balaure et al. (2002) as a new vision of the market and, at the same time, as an authentic instrument in preparing for the confrontation with the free market mechanism, a way of getting involved in the market mechanism so that, by addressing it, institutions to take full advantage of the opportunities offered and to avoid risks or at least put them within acceptable limits.

The marketing of higher education institutions is directed to an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions and expectations by adopting a focus on students and their needs through marketing activities and strategies to attract and retain students, as competition between universities on the education market intensified (Hussin, Soon and Sidin, 2000).

In the field of higher education, the role of marketing is to attract students and to increase their satisfaction and, implicitly, to increase the attractiveness of the university. This is also related to the quality of teaching, the advantages offered by the field of study, but also to the university's facilities, reputation and extracurricular offer (Dumitrașcu and Hila, 2014).

Stachowski (2011) states that marketing is part of all aspects of higher education, from designing the curriculum to measuring institutional performance, educational marketing being positioned to develop and deliver quality educational experiences for both students and staff of the institution as well as future students, a complete marketing plan for student and staff satisfaction, curriculum development, educational processes, benefits, the marketing mix which includes the 7P (product, price, place, promotion, plus new components: people, process and physical evidence).

Consistent with the approaches of Keller and Staelin (1987), Curtis, Abratt and Minor (2009) have shown that the decisions of potential consumers regarding the offered educational products and services are affected by the quality and amount of information

available about the educational institution, both the potential students and families, their circle of friends which influences the consumer choice of educational services, compare the marks and characteristics of educational institutions whose educational offers meet the expectations, needs and desires manifested and assign a level of importance to each alternative, using for this purpose information available in various environments, the virtual environment having an increasingly larger share.

### **Literature review**

For the development of market strategies, appropriate criteria and options have been identified. Thus, Florescu and others (1992), Diaconescu (2005), show that depending on the potential of the educational market, we have: the strategy to increase the activity, to maintain the activity, and to restrain the activity; depending on the degree of segmentation of the educational market, there are: the undifferentiated market strategy, differentiated or concentrated; depending on the pace of change on the educational market, we have the: active (innovative), adaptive and passive strategy; depending on the requirements of the educational market we have: the strategy of high, medium and low exigencies; depending on the level of competition in the education market, we have the: offensive strategy, defensive strategy with maintaining market share, defensive strategy with a decrease in market share.

The product strategy can be formulated in relation to (Balaure et al., 2002): the size and structure of the product range (the variants of strategy being diversification of product range, stability and assortment selection); the quality level of the products (the strategy variants being a qualitative adaptation to the market requirements, qualitative differentiation and qualitative stability) and the degree of renewal of the products (the strategy variants being the maintenance of the novelty, the improvement of the products and the assimilation of the new products).

Florescu et al. (1992) identified three criteria according to which price strategies are differentiated: level, diversity and price stability. Thus, depending on the price level, the options for the price strategy are: high, moderate or low prices; depending on the diversity of the price, the options for the price strategy are: the price range equivalent to the product range, the price range narrower than the product range; depending on price stability, the options for the price strategy are: high, medium and low mobility prices.

Regarding the place element, several criteria have been identified on which variants of the place strategy can be formulated, namely: the number of distribution channels used; distribution channel dimensions; the extent of distribution; the degree of participation of the company in the distribution activity; the degree of control over distribution and the degree of elasticity of the distribution; logistics of goods (Balaure et al., 2002). Cruceru (2006) adds the criterion of the life cycle stage of the product.

Considering these elements, depending on the number of distribution channels used, the variants of the place strategy are: single channel and multichannel distribution; depending on the size of the distribution channel, the variants of the place strategy are: direct distribution through short and long channels; depending on the extent of the distribution, the variants of the place strategy are: extensive, selective and exclusive; depending on the degree of participation of the company, the variants of the place strategy are: through its own device and through third parties; depending on the degree of control, the variants of the place strategy are: total distribution control, high distribution control, medium, low and nonexistent; depending on the degree of elasticity, the variants of the place strategy are: high, medium and low flexibility; depending on the life cycle of the product, the variants of the place strategy are: the strategy of using special distribution channels, the strategy of using more distribution channels, the strategy of using low cost distribution channels and very low costs (Balaure et al., 2002; Cruceru, 2006).

Regarding the communication element, several criteria have been identified in order to formulate communication strategies, namely: the objectives pursued by the promotional activity, the way in which it has been carried out, the role assigned to the promotional activity, the position occupied by the organization within the market, the headquarters of the promotional activity organization (Balaure et al., 2002). Petrescu (2008) added the criteria regarding motivating and addressing local preferences.

Thus, depending on the overall objectives of the promotional activity, the variants of the communication strategy are: promoting the overall image of the higher education institution, exclusive promotion of educational products, enlarging the image of the institution; depending on how the promotional activity takes place in time, the variants of the communication strategy are: permanent and intermittent promotion; depending on the role of the promotional activity, the variants of the communication strategy are: offensive and defensive promotion; depending on their position on market structures, the variants of the communication strategy are: concentrated, differentiated and undifferentiated promotion; depending on the location of the promotional activity, the variants of the communication strategy are: promotion through own forces and through specialized institutions; depending on the motivation, the communication strategy is to increase the degree of involvement in promotion; depending on how to approach local preferences, the variants of the communication strategy are: standardization, adaptation to local preferences (Balaure et al., 2002; Petrescu, 2008).

Cetină et al. (2009) set out variants of the people strategy in terms of recruitment, selection and employment of staff, level of staff training, number of employees, qualitative dimension of human resources.

According to Rao (2011), the physical evidence strategy must have a clear connection with the organization's overall goals and mission, the mode of operation, the target market.

Military higher education institutions provide students with facilities and services to use both in and outside the educational process, university and leisure facilities are available to students at all times, teaching staff being involved in providing consultations and support to achieve academic performance.

Processes can be described in two ways, namely, depending on the steps and sequences that constitute the process, as well as the latitude or variability of execution of those steps and sequences, the first factor defining the complexity of the process, and the second one defining the divergence. Deviation, a real-time operating factor, can be considered as an inadequacy of any process model and standards set for the first two factors (Shostack, 1987).

Any service process is a combination of both complexity and divergence (Shanker, 2002). Given the Shostack approach (1987), Shanker (2002) described the three-step process: (1) a process can be divided into logical steps to facilitate analysis and control, (2) there are several process options available where efficiency can be different, and (3) each system includes the concept of deviation from standards, considering that processes are phenomena that occur in real time, do not have a set pattern and function within a norm.

Cetină et al. (2009) identified two criteria according to which process strategies are differentiated: the degree of divergence and complexity of processes. Thus, depending on the degree of process divergence, the variants of the process strategy are: reducing or increasing the divergence. Thus, depending on the complexity of the processes, the variants of the process strategy are respectively reducing or increasing the complexity.

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

The marketing strategy that military higher education institutions could develop and implement would be centered on a market strategy and would include components specific to

the expanded marketing mix - product strategy, price strategy, place strategy, promotion strategy, people strategy, physical evidence strategy and process strategy.

As illustrated in the literature, a complete marketing strategy includes eight components: market, product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence and process, and must necessarily consider all these variables. Even though the price and place components have a lower impact, military higher education institutions giving them by nature less importance, they should consider the market, product, promotion, people, physical evidence and process components in the development of the marketing strategy, which, according to the marketing vision, add the elements regarding the price and place.

Considering the criterion regarding the dynamics of the educational market potential, the market strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is to maintain the activity. Regarding the number of military staff, the national defense, public order and national security system falls within the limits imposed by the military organizations of which Romania is a part, and the military higher education institutions cover the training needs specific to it. The less favorable evolution of the Romanian population also pleads for the maintenance of the educational offer and of the specific activities carried out in the context of a constantly diminishing target audience, and the same descending trend is also the number of high school graduates who promote the baccalaureate exam.

The strategic option of maintaining the activity implies an efficient use of the available resources, the revenues being channeled towards expenditure on infrastructure, teaching materials corresponding to the new technologies subject to study subjects, staff costs for new teaching positions. The way of financing the military higher education institutions, entirely from their own income, gives a greater degree of freedom of management in the direction of the expenditures towards the increase of the quality of the educational act, under constant and reasonable limits for the other categories of expenditures.

Depending on the degree of segmentation of the educational market, the recommended strategy is the differentiated strategy, taking into account of the profile of the military higher education institutions, they place on the market study programs with different content from those of the civil universities, study programs that address a different public, with different education needs, with different expectations.

Depending on the pace of change on the education market, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is the active (innovative) strategy. Challenges in the politico-military and security environment and the intensification of the use of advanced technologies in conflicts in nearby areas have also led to the adaptation of the educational field to ensure information security, thus requiring new educational products.

Depending on the level of demand on the education market, the recommended strategy is that of high demands. The profile of the military higher education institution, the requirements of the final beneficiaries of education, the model of the graduate, require graduates to be trained at the end of their studies.

Competition on the education market determines the recommendation of a defensive marketing strategy with maintaining the market share.

Depending on the size and structure of the range of educational products, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is one of assortment stability. In this way, curricula, disciplines and syllabi are maintained, of course under the conditions of their regular updating in order to ensure the maintenance of quality standards. The educational offer includes programs of studies that have become traditional, which have been for a long time within it and have not changed significantly, while at the same time there have been products that have developed dynamically, along with the development of technology, by adapting the educational offer to consumer and labor market demands.

Considering the criterion of the qualitative level of educational products, the strategy recommended to the military higher education institutions is that of qualitative adaptation to the requirements of the market. The combination of ARACIS standards, the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Research and the feedback of the final beneficiaries of education in the military higher education institutions, require the preservation of the highest degree of exigency and a continuous adaptation to the requirements and expectations of the beneficiaries.

Depending on the degree of product renewal, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is to maintain the degree of novelty of educational products offered to the market. The implementation of the recommended product strategy will lead to strengthening the position of military higher education institutions within the market, increasing the attractiveness of study programs, attracting new consumers, differentiating study programs from those offered by civil universities, and last but not least, increase the market share of educational products and of the institutions as a whole.

Funded from the budget of the Ministry of National Defense, the military higher education institutions have added to the educational offers tuition fees starting with the academic year 2007/2008. Depending on the criterion of the price level or the price of the educational products and services offered, the recommended strategy for military higher education institutions is to set moderate tariffs. The amounts received from study fees constitute additional funding income for institutions, the beneficiaries of these curricula conducting educational activities at the same time and space with those whose studies are funded from the budget.

Considering the price diversity criterion, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is to establish a range of prices or tariffs equivalent to the range of educational products offered to the public. In this way, separate prices or tariffs for tuition fees are set for bachelor, master and doctoral degree programs in military higher education institutions.

Depending on the criterion of price stability, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is to establish prices with average mobility. The stability of the price over time is a factor driving incentives for potential consumers of toll products and services offered on the market. The change in time of study fees, with a small amplitude due to the action of external factors to the institution, ensures the maintenance of a reasonable number of consumers for study programs.

The place strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is elaborated taking into account the criteria mentioned in the literature, namely: the number of distribution channels used, the size of the distribution channel, the extent of the distribution, the degree of participation in the activities specific to the distribution, distribution, the degree of elasticity of the distribution and the life cycle of the product / service being the subject of distribution.

The strategy recommended by the military higher education institutions according to the number of distribution channels used is the single channel distribution strategy, the most suitable variant of the educational services related to the student-teacher relationship, which is a direct one between the beneficiary and the provider of these services.

Depending on the size of the distribution channel, the recommended strategy for military higher education institutions is that of direct distribution, no intermediate link being included between the educational service provider and its beneficiary. The activities carried out within the military higher education institutions involve a direct relationship between the service provider and their beneficiary, the relations with the clients being immediate, without intermediaries.



Depending on the extent of distribution, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is that of exclusive distribution, which maintains control over the level of quality of products and services offered, and improves the reputation and image of the educational products and services of the institution and its institutions overall.

Considering the criterion of participation in distribution activities, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is distribution through its own apparatus, best adapted to the direct teacher-student relationship, specific to the academic environment, which does not require the introduction of intermediaries or the use of other elements to support the distribution activities.

Depending on the degree of control over distribution, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is that of total control over distribution. Educational services involve, in the process of transmitting knowledge to consumers - students of the military education institution, the service provider, a total control of the teaching staff on distribution. As a provider, therefore, a provider of educational services offered to students, the teacher is present at the time of consumption, thus exercising full control over the process. Also, this variation of strategy is consistent with the previously recommended variants, especially with regard to the scale of the distribution and the degree of participation through its own apparatus in the distribution activities.

Depending on the degree of elasticity of the distribution, the recommended strategy for military higher education institutions is that of an average flexibility of distribution, which is supported by the need to adapt the distribution to the changes made in the educational environment of the educational institution, predominantly in the micro-environment (in relation to the clients or competitors), but also in the macro-environment (in relation to the components of the economic environment and the political environment) or imposed by the influence of various factors more or less controllable by it.

Depending on the life cycle stage of the product, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is to use low-cost distribution channels. Military higher education institutions must opt for a variant that will ensure that their operating costs are maintained at a level that ensures their financial sustainability without leading to an impairment of the quality of the educational products and services offered.

The choices of the military higher education institutions in formulating the distribution strategy must favor the development of the educational process, the channel of distribution used to connect the teachers and students, to involve and motivate the parties to carry out an efficient process in a manner differentiated in relation to direct and indirect competitors present in the educational market.

The communication actions of military higher education institutions should focus on the transmission of data, events, information, figures and results to support the public in forming their own conclusions. The communication strategy proposed to military higher education institutions according to the overall objectives of promotional activity is that of promoting the overall image of the institution. It is necessary for the target audience to present appropriate and motivational compatibility with the military institution, both at the level of the potential candidate group and the support group.

Depending on the timing of the promotional activity, the recommended strategy for military higher education institutions is one of intermittent promotion, because during one year there are some periods of maximum attention paid to these institutions, accessing web pages, such as those before the baccalaureate exam, the admission exam, the publishing of information regarding admission in the next academic year or exam sessions. The communication actions undertaken by military higher education institutions should capitalize on these moments and be planned and deployed to maximize the effects of communicating with an audience whose level of interest is high or very high.

With regard to the role of promotional activity, the strategy recommended for military higher education institutions is offensive promotion. In a market that abounds in educational offers, the massive use of all promotional means will increase interest and lead to an increased number of candidates for the admission exam, thus increasing the number of future students.

Depending on their position within market structures, the strategy recommended for military higher education institutions is that of differentiated promotion. It is necessary to adapt the promotional activities to the specifics of each segment of the target audience and the education market, thus sensitizing each segment to the options of the study programs offered.

Depending on the location of the promotional activity, the recommended strategy for military higher education institutions is the promotion with its own forces as well as through specialized institutions. Promoting the educational offer through activities carried out by its own structures will guide the whole activity and all the staff involved in the promotion of military education and the institution as a whole. The high cost of promotional materials, advertisements, banners, leaflets, or magazines may generate the redirection of resources initially intended for other activities, requiring an analysis of the benefits in terms of the professionalism of the promotion and the solutions adopted, correlated with the costs of organizing promotional activities through specialized institutions.

With regard to the criterion of motivation, the strategy recommended for military higher education institutions is to increase their degree of involvement in promotion. Everything that is or may be associated with a higher education institution plays a role and can be considered in the communication to the market and the target audience: the name or logo of the institution, the university campus as a whole, the quality of the educational services offered, the prices set for products and educational services, institution staff, vehicles, buildings, technology, organizational philosophy.

With regard to recruitment, selection and employment of personnel criteria, the strategy recommended for military higher education institutions is the stability of staff. Employing well-trained staff by concluding permanent contracts determines their better motivation to develop a favorable relationship with students - consumers of educational products and services, in order to contribute to the development of the image and achievement of its objectives.

Regarding the criterion regarding personnel training, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is continuous education and training of the personnel.

With regard to the number of employees, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is to increase the number of employees. Both the national defense system and other institutions in the field of public order and national security have, in recent years, increased the number of enrolled students from one year to another, which generates a growing need for staff of military higher education institutions, thus maintaining an effective teacher-student ratio in line with national quality standards in education.

Regarding the qualitative dimension of human resources, the strategy recommended for military higher education institutions is to improve the quality of staff. The technological revolution in the military field calls for an increase in the quality of staff through continuous training and development, both to develop technical skills and interoperability through participation in joint military and university programs. The high quality of the staff of military higher education institutions is reflected in the high quality of education offered to students and communicated to potential students.

The recommended strategy for military higher education institutions is the extension of the material resources, necessary given the increased demands of the beneficiaries of the

national defense system, public order and security for a higher number of places for admission examinations and graduates respectively.

Considering the criterion of the institution's traditions, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is to permanently capitalize on traditions. The system of values and traditions of military higher education institutions are aspects that contribute to differentiation from other higher education institutions. The traditions are manifested in the attitudes and behavior of the entire community of military higher education institutions, being able to influence, by harnessing traditions, the behavior of potential candidates when they opt for university experience. Increasing the valorisation of traditions leads to the improvement of the image of military higher education institutions.

With regard to the criterion of extracurricular facilities, the recommended strategy for military higher education institutions is to extend them as a natural response to the growing interest in extracurricular activities of students, which can act as a determinant of the option for a particular higher education institution.

Considering Internet access, the recommended strategy for military higher education institutions is that of expanding Internet access. The growing number of students, the need to meet the need for knowledge and information, research and documentation are matters that justify this strategic option. The processes carried out in military higher education institutions involve the existence of procedures, educational, administrative and military activities, through which different departments and categories of staff carry out activities specific to the educational act as a whole, in a strongly regulated environment.

Regarding the criterion of the complexity of processes, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is that of increasing complexity. In this way an increase in the quality of the educational services offered is made, a clear differentiation from the competition present on the educational market, the services being offered become very personalized.

Regarding process divergence, the strategy recommended to military higher education institutions is that of increasing divergence, in this way each sequence of the educational process as a whole is unique, the educational service is consumed through the performance to the users, the resumption of the process to other consumers is not identical, the teaching staff adapting to the different levels of training and understanding of the users. Thus, processes are not standardized, but flexible, always adapting to consumer needs and expectations, increasing quality of education, consumer satisfaction, and improving market position.

### **Conclusions**

The realism of the marketing strategy recommended to military higher education institutions, the substantiation of strategic options and the actual formulation of the strategy are the factors that influence the success of its implementation. The arguments for the strategic options are based on factors from the external marketing environment of the institutions, as well as their human, material and financial resources, the recommended strategy building the link with the external environment that highlights the resources at its disposal.

The implementation of the marketing strategy will have an impact on the number of enrolled students, in the way of increasing them. On the same evolutionary trend will also be the number of places occupied by students who opt for tuition fees, which will have a positive impact on the income and expenditure budget, by increasing the income received from study fees and the collection of fees for additional services offered to this category of consumers.

We appreciate that the implementation of the marketing strategy recommended to the military higher education institutions will also have a positive impact on their market share, the promotion of the educational offer and the selection process that led to the registration of



a number of students in correlation with the size of the educational offer. Increasing the number of enrolled students due to the increased demands of the beneficiaries, increasing the quality and the novelty of the offered educational products and services will lead to an improvement of the image of the military higher education institutions and increase the visibility among the public interested in the educational offer and in the society as a whole.

Marketing strategies applied in an environment where communication essentially has one way will create an educational environment that attracts the consumer audience, maintains the opportunities for university education, the opportunities offered by the dynamics of technology and the military-political context, with the adoption of some market-oriented and consumer-oriented attitudes and behaviors so as to gain a better image and position on the market.

Marketing approaches in military higher education institutions require changing the optics, anticipating the evolution of the education market and the expectations of consumers, addressing the educational offer to the specific segments of consumers, focusing on knowing the education market, the consumers, adapting to their educational needs and demands.

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