

## MARKETING COMMUNICATION, IMAGE AND AWARENESS OF THE FACULTY

**Zuzana Švandová**

*Technical University of Liberec, Faculty of Economics, Czech Republic  
zuzana.svandova@tul.cz*

### **Abstract:**

The article discusses selected problems of the image of the university based on a brief outline of the current state of knowledge of the studied subject and primary research. The author defines the concept of image, the specifics of the university image and the methods of measuring its image. The article presents an image analysis method using the research of awareness of the Faculty of Economics of the Technical University of Liberec with the general public of the Liberec region and research of the public's attitude towards this faculty. The author presents the results of the research that was carried out in 2007 and 2017 and reflects on all aspects that affect the faculty image. The results of the two questionnaire surveys carried out over a period of ten years were analysed, compared and evaluated in terms of the effectiveness of the faculty communication. In conclusions, the importance of analysing the faculty's awareness and regular surveys measuring positive attitudes of the public towards the faculty is indicated. The image of the university is becoming more important in the context of an intensifying competitive environment in tertiary education. A systematic approach to the management and monitoring of the external communication of the faculty should be followed and information on the attitude of the general public towards the faculty should be regularly obtained.

### **Key words:**

Image, awareness of the faculty, integrated marketing communication, university, image research

**JEL:** M31, M37, I23

## **1 Introduction**

The core of school communication in general is the ability of a school to communicate its goals and its offer to individual subjects and to the whole school environment, thereby creating and supporting their position and image. Until 1995, in the Czech Republic, we often encountered misunderstandings when presenting marketing school management applications. *In the past, little attention was paid to the communication of elementary and secondary schools. The situation was not better even at universities, where in 2000 only 20% of universities applied for systemic thinking in this area.* (Marhounová, 2000).

Today there is no doubt that non-profit organizations, and therefore schools need the proliferation of good reputation, building a positive image and long-term relationships with the public for their existence. This is the task of marketing communication, and in particular, its Public Relation tool. The goal of communication with the public is to create and build a "good name" and to build a positive perception of schools, educational programs, school credibility, stimulating customer interest and school services, etc. (Světlík, 2006).

Integrated marketing communication comprises careful planning in order to deliver consistent message. Effective integrated marketing communication should certainly encourage strong customer

relationship, but it does that through effective planning in order to develop an integrated communication programme that will optimize specific communication objectives that lead to a desired behaviour on the part of the target audience (Percy, 2014).

According to Shimp and Andrews (2013) the integrated marketing communication is coordination of the marketing communication mix elements with each other and with the other elements of the brands' marketing mix (product, price, place) such that all elements speak with one voice. Integrated marketing communication is a goal worth pursuing because using multiple communication tools in conjunction with one another can produce greater results than tools used individually and in an uncoordinated fashion. There is a synergistic effect of using multiple well-coordinated marketing communication tools.

Part of the marketing management of any university in more and more fierce competition is effective marketing communication with the target groups in the external and internal environment. The market position of the school is determined not only by the current students and employees, but by all its surroundings. Each university, therefore, informs potential students, other partners and the public about its existence, about the offer of educational programs in order to raise an interest in studying or cooperating with this university.

Target groups of the university can be divided into:

- internal groups that are part of the inner academic environment, i.e. teachers, academic officers, other staff and current students
- external groups that are part of the external academic environment, i.e. potential applicants for study, graduates, representatives of organizations from practice, partners, expert teams and the public, competition (Soukalová, 2012).

The aim of external communication is to make an effort to raise awareness, to identify the competitive advantage, to build and maintain the image of the university. It can be said that a significant part of Czech universities have already acquired a strategic approach to communication (the existence of thoughtful communication strategies, continuity with an overall school strategy, etc.). On the other hand, there are still a significant number of schools that do not systematically access the strategic management of this area. The possibility of deepening of the work with strategic, especially external, information and emphasis on the further improvement of the management of the implementation of communication strategies (more systematic work with human resources, suppliers of marketing services, budgets, etc.) can be considered as crucial (IPN KREDO, 2017).

Universities are taking care of their brand, which seeks to strengthen their placement in the success and quality of other educational institutions, as well as international accreditations, while students and lecturers also act as school ambassadors. Schools focus on classic communication channels (in particular, radio, print and out of home advertising), promotional prints and films, in-depth information on school media education, professional seminars for applicants, open days, presentations at educational fairs and cultural events. Schools create a unified visual style of presentation. Promotional items are the standard equipment of each school. In the field of tertiary education, the cost of student projects, public events, graduate programs, and science popularizing projects is increasing.

Technologies such as the convergence of the internet, mobile devices, and traditional channels are changing the way companies use marketing tools to communicate with their customers (Belch et al., 2014). As today's young people who primarily universities target at spend most of their free time on the Internet, universities are creating attractive websites, online games, competitions, and present themselves on social networks, using digital campaigns. For example, some schools have the whole communication campaigns on YouTube, where, in addition to official ad spots, there are viral spots (mostly student works) supported by the school.

The aim of paper is the presentation of selected problems of the image of the university based on the background of the current state of knowledge of the studied subject and the primary research of measuring the attitude of public towards EF TUL in Liberec.

## 2 Methodology

Image of the school is at the forefront of strategic planning of school communication. The concept of the school image first appears in the Czech environment in the works of Jindra (1996), Světlík (1996), Jakubíková (1998), Štefka (1999) and especially Eger and Egerová (2001, 2002). The authors agree that the image of the school is its image formed in relevant parts of the public. It comprises the ideas, attitudes and experiences of an individual and a group of people about the school or educational program. It is undergoing development, it is measurable, and despite certain stability, it is influenced by the long-term concept of public relations (Eger and Egerová, 2007).

### 2.1 Measuring school awareness and image

We use a specific *definition of an image for the educational entity: it is a sum of all the ideas, knowledge and expectations associated with the given subject, with teachers not only current but also former ones, with students not only current but also graduates and their expected knowledge.* (Štefko, 1999).

The image of the school is explained in the literature that it may not just be about school as a whole, but with larger secondary schools and universities, it can be a certain educational program or product of the school. On the contrary, at primary schools, in our conditions, it is mostly the school as a whole with an educational program in all its complexity (Eger and Egerová, 2000).

The image of the university is divided into the inner and outer areas. The culture and identity of that university are included in the inner image. As for the external image, attention is paid to how the university influences the public.

To clarify the content of the image and the relationship between its individual components, we can come out of a formula where the individual components mean:

$(CD + CC + CI) \cdot CCom = Cim$ ,  
CD = Corporate design  
CC = Corporate culture  
CI = Corporate identity  
CCom = Corporate communications  
CIm = Corporate image (Vysekalová and Mikeš, 2009).

In theory (Světlík, 2006; Vysekalová, 2009), the concept of corporate identity consists of the following elements:

- *Corporate Design* - coordinated setting of visual elements, i.e. logotype, brand, script, colours, uniform layout of documents, forms, publications and promotional materials, appearance and uniforms, protective clothing of workers, product design and packaging, architecture, the buildings and surroundings, etc.
- *Corporate Culture* - summary of ideas, attitudes and values widely shared within the company and relatively long maintained, i.e. long-term and current climate in the company,

management level, relations in the organization, values and motivation scale, customs, rituals and ceremonies, puns, stories, etc.

- *Corporate Communication* - summary of all methods and means of communication within the company and externally. It covers all corporate communication actions outside and inside.
- *Corporate Identity* is a personification of a company derived from its philosophy, history, culture, strategy, environment, management style, reputation and behaviour of the company representatives. It shows how the organization communicates inside and how it is presented on the outside. Corporate identity expresses how the company understands itself, how distinct it is from its competitors.

In the literature ( Světlík, 1996; Štefko, 1999; Eger and Egerová 2001) four basic methods of measuring the image of the school are mentioned:

- *Measurement of the well-known and positive attitudes of the institution*
- *Semantic Differential* - measuring the location of an institution's image based on the main, so-called relevant dimensions
- *Multifactor method*
- *Multidimensional analytical map*.

According to Eger, the last two methods are not recommended for practice because of too much complexity (Eger and Egerová, 2007).

## **2.2 Research of the awareness of the Faculty of Economics of the Technical University of Liberec among public and the public's attitudes towards it**

The Faculty of Economics of the Technical University of Liberec (hereafter EF TUL) is also exposed to the competition of universities with a similar program not only in the Czech Republic, but also in the border regions. The development of demographic curves, emerging private educational entities, etc. may also effect the competition. The basis for creating external marketing communication of the faculty is the knowledge and understanding of the current external environment of the faculty. The public must first of all know that the faculty exists and provides specific educational services. Based on this, other communication activities may occur.

In order to determine the effectiveness of communication with the public, two surveys were carried out by EF TUL in the form of questioning inhabitants of the Liberec Region. The first primary research was carried out in 2007. Since then, EF TUL has intensified its communication with the public, the Communications Board has been established, the website has been revised and supplemented according to the uniform TUL style, the faculty has begun to advertise on regional television and radio, social networks. In addition, closer co-operation with companies (internship, "Model Partners", "Praxipolis" portal) has been established to bring students together with practice. Activities such as "Start-up", "Student Business Club" and intensified communication with faculty applicants (microsites, Facebook, Open Days, personal presentation of the faculty at secondary schools and the Gaudeamus Fair, presentation of the faculty in public transport, targeted TV and radio spots in the region, communication with mobile apps with the competition and promotional videos).

The need to verify the outcome of this intensified communication and the need to compare the awareness of the faculty ten years after led to the realization of further research in 2017.

The method of questionnaire survey in the form of a personal interview with the respondent was used for the research of the awareness of the Faculty of Economics of the Technical University of Liberec and the attitudes of the public towards it. The target group were people over 15 years of age from the Liberec Region, the scope of the sample was determined by deliberate selection by the technique of a suitable opportunity (choice of the respondent on the basis of availability) (Foret, Stávková, 2003). The data is obtained through a single standardized structured questionnaire in which both the query wording and the order of questions asked are precisely determined so that the interviewer has a minimal impact on the course of the interview. The research was conducted through a written questioning with five-step verbal scales. The method was used to identify two major data. By the first question we find the degree of faculty awareness (I do not know, I have never heard of it, I have heard about it only something, I know it, I know about it quite a lot, I know it very well).

We only addressed the second question to respondents who knew the faculty, and we found out the level of favour (very unfavourable, rather unfavourable, I do not care, rather favourable, very favourable). In the answer, "I have heard about it only something", one can assume that some of the respondents who did not want to admit the faculty's ignorance answered this way. That is why we consider the faculty knowledge only as "I know it", "I know quite a lot about it," "I know it very well".

The method is taken from the School Management and Economics course, within the framework of DVPP, No. 19935 / 2003-25-146, supported by the Socrates Comenius International Project and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Faculty of Economics at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen (Eger, 2003).

### **3 Research Results at the Faculty of Economics of the Technical University of Liberec**

*The first primary research of the public attitudes and opinions of the public towards the Faculty of Economics of the Technical University of Liberec (EF TUL) was carried out in 2007. At that time EF had another name, which was the Faculty of Economics – "Hospodářská fakulta", further HF). The basic set was 302, 628 people<sup>1</sup>, with a sample of 2, 018 respondents. Respondents came from the Liberec region, there were 49% of men. Age categories: under 25 - 43%, - up to 50 years - 44% and over 50 years there were 13% of respondents.*

The aim of the research was to find out:

- awareness of the faculty
- public attitudes towards the faculty.

*The second primary research with the same goal was carried out in 2017. The basic set was 419,185 people<sup>2</sup>, the sample consisted of 665 respondents. Respondents came from the Liberec region, there were 54% of men. Age categories: under 25 - 39%, - up to 50 years - 51% and over 50 years there were 10% of respondents. The results of the two questionnaire surveys carried out over a period of ten years were analysed, compared and evaluated in terms of the effectiveness of the faculty communication.*

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<sup>1</sup> Data obtained from Obyvatelstvo - demografie. [online]: Český statistický úřad, Praha: 2007. [cit. 2006-10-20]. Available from WWW: <[http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/obyvatelstvo\\_\(demografie\)\\_lide](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/obyvatelstvo_(demografie)_lide)>.

<sup>2</sup> Data obtained from Obyvatelstvo - demografie. [online]: Český statistický úřad, Praha: 2017. [cit. 2017-01-17]. Available from WWW: <<http://www.czso.cz/csu/xl/obyvatelstvox1>>.

*The results of the research in 2007 showed:*

- 27% of people think they know the faculty quite a lot or know it very well, 29% confirmed they knew it. *The total awareness of the faculty was 46%. All these respondents (1,200 respondents) were asked what their attitude towards the faculty was.*
- A quarter of respondents had a neutral relationship, only 3% of respondents perceived the faculty in a bad way. A similar percentage of people like those who have a rather unfavourable relationship with the faculty viewed the faculty very favourably.
- 41% of respondents perceived the faculty positively (rather favourable and very favourable) as compared to 14% of those who see the faculty negatively (very unfavourable and rather unfavourable attitude).

For more detailed analyses of causes and contexts, contingency tables with empirical absolute frequencies were created; corresponding hypothetical (theoretical) frequencies were established and were compared using a test criterion. The statistical significance and power of contingency dependence was compared to Pearson and Cramer's dependence. There were tested hypotheses, of which at 10% of the significance level it was confirmed *that the faculty's reputation and respondent's attitude to it is not statistically significantly dependent on the gender of the respondent and the attitude towards the faculty does not depend on the respondent's age.* In addition, the same section of hypotheses was tested but only for respondents from the Liberec Region (the largest group of respondents). It was found here that in the Liberec district, the faculty's awareness changed more with the age than in other districts, however, the attitude towards the faculty did not change with age in the Liberec district.

*Conclusions from the research in 2017:*

- Assuming that the answers "I know it", "I know about it quite a lot", "I know it very well", are understood as a good awareness of the faculty, then 59% of the respondents from the Liberec Region know the faculty (390 respondents).
- 58% of respondents perceives EF TUL positively (rather favourably and very favourably)
- 12% of respondents occupy rather negative attitude (rather unfavourable and very unfavourable).

The results of both surveys are listed in the following tables. Only percentages of summary results are shown for ease of comparison.

**Table 1: Faculty awareness (HF/ EF – Technical University of Liberec) in %**

<i>What do you know about (HF/EF TUL)?</i>	<i>2007 Research</i>	<i>2017 Research</i>
I don't know it, I have never heard of it.	22	16
I have heard of it a little bit.	24	25
I know it.	29	30
I know about it quite a lot.	15	15
I know it very well.	10	14
Total	100	100

Source: authors' calculations.

**Table 2: Attitude towards the faculty (HF/ EF – Technical University of Liberec) in % – the degree of favour that respondents feel towards the faculty**

<i>Attitude towards the faculty (HF/EF TUL)</i>	<i>2007 Reasearch</i>	<i>2017 Research</i>
very unfavourable	3	2
rather unfavourable	11	10
I do not care (neutral)	43	30
Rather favuorable	32	44
Very favourable	11	14
Total	100	100

Source: authors' calculations.

When comparing the results of the two researches, it is obvious that the faculty awareness among the public in the Liberec Region did not change much over the course of ten years, in other words, the attitude towards the faculty is somewhat more favourable. Based on the methodology used to construct the questionnaire, the institution does not have a positive image on condition that most of the respondents use the first three options to express their attitude to the institution.

From this point of view, HF TUL in 2007 did not have an expressive positive image among the people of the Liberec Region older than 15 years. In 2017, less people responded the same way (42% of respondents), so it can be assumed that the attitude towards the faculty is more favourable.

The image of the faculty depends on a number of factors and also relates to how the faculty was perceived in the past and what idea of the current situation people have. The faculty image is relatively stable from this perspective, and therefore, it cannot be changed quickly.

#### **4 Conclusion and Discussion**

Based on an analysis of measuring public awareness and public opinion, we can draw conclusions in a form of strategies for planning communication and other activities to increase or maintain the image of an educational institution. According to Eger (2003), on condition that many people know about the school but do not seem to have a positive awareness, it is necessary to find the causes of the negative evaluation and to eliminate what causes them. It is also necessary to prepare a plan for creating a positive image in the region and gradually implement it. In connection with the results of both surveys, further steps were recommended to make the faculty communication more effective.

The current image of an institution in the field of education is mostly based on its previous reputation and shows relative stability. Therefore, it is necessary to count on the fact that for a number of factors we can make changes only by long-term and patient work. In practice, some opinions of the general public may even be detached from reality (Štefko, 2003).

The image of the faculty as an educational subject is part of a higher order structure, such as the university image, the image of the whole higher education, the image of the region and the nation. The image of the faculty is related not only to the quality of the provided educational services, but also to the teachers and students (current and former) as well as to the graduates who take over the image of the faculty. The faculty image is formed by the subjective characteristics of the perception of the institution by individual groups of respondents. It is influenced, for example, by the tradition of the faculty, its climate and culture. The faculty image is also influenced by the objective characteristics (address, building and its surroundings, equipment, etc.), some of which can sometimes be difficult or at a very high cost.

The basis for building and maintaining the faculty image is its familiarity with the general public. All groups of people and organizations for which the university is not a direct service provider are considered to be the general public for the communication of the university, however, their favourable rating can fundamentally influence their development (Pelcmacker, 2004). The awareness is created by the ability of the faculty to communicate with the external environment and can play an important role in its competitiveness.

Communication with the general public is mainly carried out through Public Relations tools. They aim to spread a good reputation, build and maintain a positive image, to consolidate trust, understanding and long-term relationships with the public. The content of communication with the public is focused on general information on the development and activities of the faculty, on Open Doors, the participation of the faculty at trade fairs focused on the offer of education, on the possibilities of graduate employment, on professional and social events of the faculty, on significant achievements of students etc. Mass media that support building of the faculty image by appropriate and up-to-date information are the most significant in communication with the public. The efficiency of this communication can be determined by regular monitoring and content analysis of mass media. The knowledge gained on the subjects of the communication, the amount and type of information, their form and timing help to identify weaknesses in faculty communication with the external environment.

There is always a certain image, and therefore, in order to improve it, the faculty management should first analyse the image and identify its weaknesses. The image analysis is a complex process. We can only partially determine the image by appropriately selected research. The effect of the faculty's marketing communication on its awareness should be also found in repeated researches with a shorter time span (for example by interviewing or guided interviews with different target groups) (Soukalová, 2012). By the analysis of this information, more detailed results and feedback will be obtained. Regular image research is an important tool for evaluating and self-evaluating of the faculty.

## 5 Limitation of the study

When comparing the 2007 research results with the research results from 2017, it should be taken into account that the sample of respondents in 2017 was one third of the respondents in 2007, so the results are not fully comparable. The number of respondents in this research, however, significantly exceeds the minimum sample size (statistically determined for the unknown composition of the respondents as 400 respondents). Therefore, the validity of the research is not impaired. It means that its informative capacity about the real state of the studied area and the comparability of the phenomena, which are the subject of both investigations, can be used.

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