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UNIVERSITY IMAGE AUDIT

Abstract:

The main purpose of this article is to analyse the university ranking methodologies, discusses the ways how a university may explore its identity, image and reputation, and what steps should be made upon accomplishing the self-assessment process.

In order to create a maximally positive image that helps the university to achieve a competitive advantage and increase its value, the audit of the university image must be carried out. This process must be consistent and should include the evaluation of both internal and external variables. The university image audit should be regarded as part of the university strategic planning, because only consistent studies can provide information on how the university is accepted by different impact groups and what should be the trends of its creation process. Before talking about the university image audit, the university rating methodologies should be presented as they specifically provide information about how the university is seen as compared to other higher schools.

The first comparative evaluation of higher schools was performed in the United States in 1983 when the journal "U. S. News & World Report" published the first rating table of universities and colleges of the United States. Today, university rankings are drawn up and published in more than 15 countries including the USA, UK, Australia, Canada, China, Germany, Hong Kong, Nigeria, Italy, Japan, Spain, Russia and Poland. In Lithuania, no generally accepted methodology of university ranking has been created so far.

On the other hand, university ranking results are only one way to find out how a university is accepted and evaluated. Analysis of the theoretical literature, empirical studies and surveys conducted by market research and consulting companies allows suggesting that information for the holistic assessment of university image may be obtained by studying its identity, image and reputation.

Keywords:

University image, reputation, audit

Introduction

In order to create a maximally positive image that helps the university to achieve a competitive advantage and increase its value, the audit of the university image must be carried out. This process must be consistent and should include the evaluation of both internal and external variables. The university image audit should be regarded as part of the university strategic planning, because only consistent studies can provide information on how the university is accepted by different impact groups and what should be the trends of its creation process.

University Ranking Methods

Before the analysis of university image audit it is relevant to present methods for university ranking that disclose information about how university is perceived in comparison with other higher education institutions.

The first comparative evaluation of higher education institutions was performed in the United States in 1983 when journal "*U. S. News & World Report*" published rankings of USA universities and colleges. Nowadays university rankings are compiled and published in more than 15 countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, China, Germany, Hong Kong, Nigeria, Italy, Japan, Spain, Russia and Poland (Ziliukas, 2006).

Below we will briefly discuss most popular higher education ranking systems. Let's start with the ranking system - "*The Academic Ranking of World Universities*". It is a system, developed by scientists of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, which compares and evaluates main higher education institutions in North America, Europe, Asia, Pacific region and Latin America, according to their academic and scientific performance (Ziliukas, 2006).

Ranking system – "*Times Higher Education – QS*". The basis of this method is academic evaluation. This indicator is obtained by the internet survey of members of the world academic society. Surveys are sent to "*World scientific*" and "*International book information service*" database subscribers and addresses included into „Times Higher Education – QS" database. Respondents provide their expert opinion on scientific work,

achievements and exclusivity in different scientific areas in particular universities. Results of employer evaluations are also collected by internet surveys. Usually, managers of human resource departments of international business organizations are surveyed (Milisiunaite, 2009).

At present, the most popular ranking systems in the USA are the following: “The Guardian”, “The Times”, “U.S. News”. They are aimed at helping potential higher education consumers – prospective students. Other systems (“Asiaweek”, “The Center”, “Good Guides”) are also comprehensive and universal, aimed at evaluating general university performance quality (Krisciunas, 2010).

In case of university ranking systems of the United Kingdom, it is important to emphasize that the government and the Quality Evaluation Agency, established by universities of the country, play an important role in this procedure. Rankings are used directly in the process of the allocation of science and study funding to higher education institutions (Ziliukas, 2006). “*The Research Assessment Exercises*” is the system developed by UK’s government. It is targeted at the evaluation of the scientific output of country’s universities. For each area of science, named the evaluation criteria, experts, who perform the evaluation, score particular university in 5-point scale according to the conformity of university’s scientific output with highest national and international scientific performance requirements (Ziliukas, 2006).

The ranking system of „Guardian“ newspaper, that publishes the list of university rankings according to the results of pedagogical performance, is based on results of the assessment of teaching quality in particular universities, performed by experts of QAA and on the data provided by Higher Education Statistics Agency (*HESA*) and Higher education financing funds (Ziliukas, 2006).

Ranking systems and methods, as well as higher education institutions themselves differ greatly and usually are closely associated with national context of higher education in a particular country. In Lithuania, universities are also ranked; however, broadly recognized method has not yet been developed.

Audit of university image: identity, image and reputation measurement techniques

On other hand, university ranking results are only one way to find out how a university is accepted and evaluated. Analysis of the theoretical literature, empirical studies and surveys conducted by market research and consulting companies enables us to claim, that information for the holistic assessment of university image may be obtained by studying its identity, image and reputation.

University identity studies

University identity studies should incorporate visual identity audit of the university and its departments. The evaluation of visual elements should contain aspects of the interior and the exterior of buildings, clothing, equipment, etc. During identity audit, the consistency of the use of visual identity is evaluated. Visual identity audit must include:

- Elements, used at university office;
- Informational literature of the university;
- Marketing elements
- Elements of the environment

The analysis of University identity can be performed using one of the identity management methods: Keller Mannheimer test for organization identity; organizational behavior research instrument SOCIPO (*The Social Organizational Climate Index for Profit Organizations*); Rotterdam organizational identification test (ROIT) (Pikciunas, 2002); FACTS (*Focus, Ask, Clarify, Tell, Show*) method and other.

University image audit

University image audit should incorporate student, community, leader, financial representative, employee and manager surveys. The aim is to obtain information about external groups' perception of the university in comparison with employees and managers perception of the university.

Firstly, we discuss studies of internal university stakeholder groups. Here, 2 different groups must be discerned: managers and employees.

In the evaluation of managers' perception of the university, it is important to identify the following (Druteikiene and Marcinskas, 2010; Druteikiene et al., 2009; Howard, 1998):

- *University image*: how managers define internal and external image of the university, should it be modified?
- *Competitors*: who are main competitors of the university, what are their strengths and weaknesses in comparison with the university, what makes university unique and different from others?
- *Organizational culture, mission*: how the culture of the university can be defined, what are the mission and vision of the university, does university image correspond with and support above mentioned elements?

The evaluation of employees' perception of the university should include the following (Druteikiene and Marcinskas, 2010; Druteikiene et al., 2009; Howard, 1998):

- *University governance, culture, mission, vision*: is university governed in proper manner, what is the culture of the university, what are main values, how are university mission and vision perceived?
- *University advantages over competitors*: are university employees more qualified in comparison with competitors; what makes university unique and different from other universities?
- *Loyalty*: are university employees loyal to the university, what determines their loyalty?

Therefore, one of the attainable and inexpensive tools for "the diagnosis" of organizational image is to perform internal image audit and to identify the quality of internal and external information and communication process as evaluated by employees.

Secondly, we discuss studies of other university stakeholder groups. We will begin with students. During the conduction of this type of studies, university students' perception on

the following should be evaluated (Druteikiene and Marcinskas, 2010; Druteikiene et al., 2009; Howard, 1998):

- *Services, provided by the university:* is the quality of services high, are services innovative, etc.
- *University advantages over competitors:* can services provided by the university be compared to services provided by competitors; how university is evaluated in comparison with competitors; what makes the university unique and different from others?
- *Loyalty to the university:* are students loyal to the university, what is the form of the loyalty, what criteria can be discerned in the determination of the maintenance of long-term relations with the university?

Constant transaction between students and the university can be ensured only when students are satisfied with services, provided by the university. Therefore, enduring success of the university can only be associated with strong students' image. Study can be performed by student survey.

Besides, university image in students' perception can be measured by semantic differential technique. Semantic differential usually contains the following factors: "cognitive", "evaluative" and "activity". "Cognitive" factor links direct associations with the object under observation, "evaluative" factor is described in terms "good – bad", "activity" factor shows time characteristics of the object. The profile of semantic differential is calculated based on the weighted average of each pair of definitions and presented in a chart.

In the performance of university image audit it is essential to evaluate society's perception of the university. Three main aspects can be identified in the study of this element:

- Does university take enough responsibility to the society?
- Does society demonstrate trust in the university?
- Is university performance perceived as ethical?

The society is the source of students, employees and suppliers. The maintenance of positive relations with this stakeholder group guarantees enduring support for university performance.

On the other hand, partners' ability to understand the needs of the university has to be evaluated. If they understand what university needs and if the university regards their demands, the effectiveness and performance results of the university will increase. Opinion leaders (journalists, leaders of political movements, government representatives, etc.) can influence general opinion regarding the university through public speeches, discussions and impact the opinion of students, employees and the society about the university and affect its success.

Evaluation methods of university reputation

In the analysis of methods of organizational reputation studies that can be applied for studies of the opinion on the university, several new reputation analysis methods that are used in reputation studies in various countries all over the world, can be mentioned. Those are: TRI*M model, Harris – Fombrun Reputation Quotient (RQ) model and RepTrak method.

Conclusions

On the basis of the analysis and in accordance with the image desired by the university, the following decisions can be made:

- To maintain current university image;
- To strengthen current university image;
- To change current university image.

The change of university image is closely related to change management at the university. If the structure, procedures, processes, culture, etc. of the university is changed, the image must be changed as well. Various circumstances lead to the change of university image: 1) internal – natural, planned or accidental changes within the

university; and 2) external – projected or unforeseen changes in external environment of the university. Natural changes within the university reflect natural evolution process that is not intended and occurs per se. It can be growing mutual understanding between employees, or, vice versa, deepening disagreements. Planned changes are conditioned by strategic directions of the university. It can be the change of economic activity, the introduction of new services, the change of university name, logo, slogan, place, or the change of communication strategy and policy. Unforeseen changes can be related to the change of managers, institutional crisis. Changes in external environment – are projected and unforeseen changes in economic, social, juridical, technological and cultural environment of the university, that push the university into the adaptation to innovations and thus to change its image.

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