THE INTERNET AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR UNIVERSITIES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Simona Muchova

INTRODUCTION

The situation in the education market has changed rapidly. The general public has become far more educated, with higher education being more approachable. We have observed a continual increase in competition among universities and other institutions of higher education; due to this, educational institutions have adopted a completely new approach.

This approach is more marketing-oriented. The institutions of higher education around the whole world are following America in the trend of “marketisation”, as universities are operating on similar principles as any other profit-making organisation, and higher education products are sold on the market like any other product. [5] Many institutions of higher education realize that this marketing approach creates more value for their customers.

The contemporary global economy forces universities to focus on the international context. Globalisation is becoming more obvious and has a huge influence on all organisations including universities. Due to this, they have to compete in an even bigger, more diverse, international dimension. It is now important for universities to focus on an international audience and spread their brand abroad too. It means that they have to tailor their communication to different countries, with a focus on the internet and social media when communicating with foreign students and other stakeholders. [4]

This approach is essential for private universities and institutions, but many of the public universities and institutions are attempting to further develop their marketing strategy, since the process of state funding depends on the number of students enrolled. [2]

The choice that students face in deciding on which institution to attend is often considered being one of the most important decisions. Students choose their university often on the basis of advice from many different sources such as friends, family, and school. The attractiveness of the brand and the reputation of the institution are highly important too. [1, 4]

The Internet is one of the most important sources of information these days and belongs to one of the most used communication channels of many organizations, including higher education institutions. The Internet appears to be suitable media especially for higher education institutions, since young people and students use them the most. The Internet is crucial for communication with international students and other stakeholders. [4]

1 INTRODUCTION INTO THE RESEARCH

This paper presents results of the research on website as a communication tool of the university in the Czech Republic, as this is one of their most important communication tools. The main objective is to discuss its quality – according to the type and amount of the information published. The research consists of eight research questions followed by analysis of each question. For the purpose of this research, the public economic-orientated faculties in the Czech Republic were chosen for better comparability.

This paper deals with the Internet as a tool for marketing communication of the economic-orientated faculties in the Czech Republic. It researches the communication of the faculty with its potential students, current students and the general public. The main objective is to discuss the quality of their websites – the quality and quantity of the information provided, as the websites are generally becoming one of the most common resources for information these days.

This paper uses a primary research and presents its results. As previously stated, the research sample consists of public economic-orientated faculties in the Czech Republic. In total, there are 16 faculties included.

Information on the website is researched in relation to the different stakeholder groups – potential students, current students, and the general public. Research questions are set within each group. Figure 1 illustrates these research questions grouped according to these stakeholder groups.
The language of the website stands above all the questions in the picture as it is highly important, especially for international students and stakeholders.

The first group of research questions relates to the potential students and explores the extension of information provided on the following questions: the possibility of electronic application, the preparation course, admission procedure, study courses, and career options. The second group is related to the current students and observes the following areas: the possibility of studying abroad, academic staff and sport, cultural and other leisure activities. The last group relates to the general public with two research questions surrounding the faculty’s success and exceptionality described, and the information for and regarding graduates.

There are three possible answers to each question with the descending strength – the first variation means that the research question is fully covered on the faculty’s website to the third variation means that the website provides only basic or no information regarding the research question. Table 1 outlines all of the research questions with possible answer variations.

### 2 INTRODUCTION INTO THE RESEARCH

Table 1: Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. APPLICATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Electronically</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 By mail</td>
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<td>1.3 Both ways</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. PREPARATORY COURSE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 The webpage contains very detailed information regarding preparatory course including the outline and the aim of the course, information about the payment options, information on how to apply, contact details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Some important information (mostly the course outline) is missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Just the basic information about the course is published or the webpage does not provide any information on this course</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>3. ADMISSION PROCEDURE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Complete information regarding admission procedure; including information about the entry exams, application, recommended literature, sample tests, open day information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 General information about admission procedure, with the most necessary dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 No or very little information provided</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>4. COURSES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Information about study courses and all the subjects included. The website contains all the information regarding subjects, the number of hours per week, what is required to successfully pass the subject, detailed information on course outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Course structure with very brief information on subjects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Just brief information on the course structure with no specific description

5. INTERNATIONAL STUDY
5.1 All international study and work options, including various scholarship possibilities are described, including Erasmus program. This means detailed information on Erasmus program with all the conditions and features are provided, as well as all necessary forms and documents, the list of optional countries with the scholarship provided for every country and the reports from all students, studying abroad previously.
5.2 Some of the important information mentioned above is missing
5.3 The website provides basic information about Erasmus (more detailed information is missing though) or no information on Erasmus provided

6. ACADEMIC STAFF
6.1 Detailed information about the academic staff, including full name, degree, telephone and email contact, consultation hours. Resume and all publications are included.
6.2 Complete information on academic staff is not provided, some of the information is missing
6.3 Not much information provided, the website contains only the list of employees, sometimes with the contact information included

7. SPORT AND CULTURE
7.1 Information about the accommodation for students, various events and different free-time activities for students, information about offered internships and jobs, information about different student organizations
7.2 Some information regarding sport and cultural options for students provided
7.3 Information of this kind is not provided

8. GRADUATES
8.1 Detailed information for graduates with all the updates, list of graduates, special events for graduates, club for graduates
8.2 The website includes some basic information for graduates
8.3 None or minimum information

2.1 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The conducted research reveals some interesting facts. Regarding the language of the websites the vast majority (81.25%) of the observed websites are available in both, Czech and English, language. 12.5% of them exist only in Czech language and 6.25% of them are available in Czech, English and French version. In these days of globalisation, it is necessary for all the educational institutions to be open to the whole world and be able to attract the international stakeholders too. Researched faculties are adapting to this trend, although two out of sixteen still have their website only in Czech language.

In the following pages, we can see the analysis of the research. For each research question there is a pie chart illustrating. The first question deals with the different ways of applying for the study. 14 faculties (88%) provide the potential students with both options – by applying electronically and by post as well. 2 faculties enable to apply only online and there is none enabling it only by post. We can observe here the ongoing increase of the power of the internet as marketing tool – just a couple years ago this was possible only by mail, and now there are already 2 faculties providing only online application.

Fig. 2: Application
Information about preparatory course is important for those potential students who want to raise their chance of being accepted to the university. As we can see none of the observed faculties managed to provide detailed information on this issue including exact outline and content of the course. What is more, over half of the researched faculties provide none or minimum information (variation 3 – 62.5% of faculties).

**Fig. 3: Preparatory course**

![Pie chart showing distribution of preparatory course information](image)

*Source: Own*

The detailed admission is in a faculty’s best interest as they want to make it as easy as possible to apply for all the students. As we can see, faculties put effort into describing admission procedure in details, almost half of the faculties (37.5%) provide very detailed information including information regarding an open day, sample tests etc. More than half of the faculties (9 faculties=56%) provide good information.

**Fig. 4: Admission procedure**

![Pie chart showing distribution of admission procedure information](image)

*Source: Own*

When deciding which faculty to choose, students often decide according to the courses offered. The more detailed information, the easier it gets for students to decide. Only three faculties (19%) provide all specified information on all courses offered with all subjects including information about these subjects. 50% faculties provide just basic information on particular subjects and 31% just provide the list of courses with subjects with no further description.

**Fig. 5: Course**

![Pie chart showing distribution of course information](image)

*Source: Own*

As mentioned before, globalisation and internationalisation are becoming more present even in the higher education. Universities start international cooperation, students go to study abroad and our home universities welcome more foreign students. Universities in Czech Republic still have to adapt to this trend and provide more information about these possibilities for their students. The next research question is focused on the international study abroad, concretely Erasmus program. Only 19% of the observed web pages provide complete information on this topic including the reports of the past
students, the list of cooperating countries, scholarship for particular countries etc. There is still almost 40% of the websites that contain only general information about this program.

**Fig. 6: Academic Staff**

![6. International Study](source)

Source: Own

Another research question important for the current students is the academic staff. As we can see in the graph below, universities publish different information about their employees. One third of the sample websites provide very detailed information including contact information, resume and research information. There is about one third that provides only the list of the academic staff with some contact information or without it.

**Fig. 7: Academic Staff**

![7. Academic Staff](source)

Source: Own

Especially new students look for the information regarding sport, cultural or other options of spending their free time. Just 25% of the faculties inform their students about these possibilities on their websites, including different sport events, concerts, students clubs, different student’s events, etc. Rest of them inform only about one of them (e.g. sport) or do not pay much attention to this area.

**Fig. 8: Graduates**

![8. Sport, Cultural and Other Options](source)

Source: Own

25% of the sample faculties do not forget about the graduate students and try to keep contact with them in some way – either by establishing a graduate club, running an online graduate magazine, or creating events for graduates. 50% of the faculties do not mention (or very briefly) any information on this topic.
CONCLUSION

The following table analyses all the collected data together. The questions are in the columns and variations in the rows. The last row is for deciding which research question is the best explained and covered on the websites. Variations have decreasing value and are multiplied with the number of the faculties in each row. The smaller the number in the last row is, the better is the research question answered on the websites in general.

As we can see, the question number 3. (Admission procedure) is covered the best. There are 6 faculties providing full information regarding this topic on their website and only one providing only brief or none information. The worst answered is the question number 2. (Preparatory course). There are even ten faculties providing very few or none information on this topic.

Tab. 2: General Statistic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Var./Q.</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
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</table>

The paper is evaluating the qualitative and quantitative features of websites of Czech universities. Based on the research, universities in the Czech Republic are partly adapting to the new trends in the marketing communication. They have realised that in order to attract new students and general public, they must be able to go with the flow and adapt to the new rules so that they are competitive not only in the Czech Republic but also in the international environment. We can see the positive changes on more examples. Apart from two websites, all of them are accessible in both, Czech and English, language. Another example is, that all researched faculties enable their students to apply online, what is making the whole application easier for the most of the potential students nowadays. After these general questions, the paper deals with more specific ones separated according to their importance for the potential students, the current students and other public. The research shows, that the best answered research question, providing the most information, is the one regarding admission procedures on the most of the websites. The least answered research question is the one regarding the preparatory course. This question is followed by the question dealing with graduates. Many faculties forget about this group of stakeholders, although they could be very useful source of help and they could cooperate with them in many ways.

To conclude, we can definitely say that our universities are getting more „online“. The internet is one of the quickest and easiest forms of delivering the information. Sharing much information brings some complication, as well. The faculties should make the websites graphically as logic and organized as possible, because sometimes is difficult to find the required information. Some of the important questions should be better covered so that the students will not have to contact the faculty personally, but can find everything on the web.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Abstract:
The situation in the education market has changed rapidly. The general public has become far more educated, with higher education being more approachable. We have observed a continual increase in competition among universities and other institutions of higher education; due to this, educational institutions have adopted a completely new approach. This approach is more marketing-oriented. The institutions of higher education are operating on similar principles as any other profit-making organisation, and higher education products are sold on the market like any other product. The paper presents results of the research on website as a communication tool of the university in the Czech Republic, as this is one of their most important communication tools. The main objective is to discuss its quality – according to the type and amount of the information published. The research consists of eight research questions followed by analysis of each question. For the purpose of this research, the public economic-orientated faculties in the Czech Republic were chosen for better comparability.

Key words:
Online marketing, marketing for non-profit organizations

JEL Classification:
M31