

The influence of marketing communication on perception and decision-making process of service users

Uticaj marketinške komunikacije na percepciju i proces odlučivanja korisnika usluga

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Article info

Review paper/ Pregledni rad

Received/ Rukopis je primljen:
16 March, 2023
Revised/ Korigovan:
25 June, 2023
Accepted/ Prihvaćen:
10 August, 2023

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.5937/bizinfo2302057J>

UDC/ UDK:

339.138:378(497.11 Leskovac)

Abstract

The paper presents an analysis of the impact of marketing communication tools on the attitudes of service users, with a special emphasis on users of services provided by higher education institutions (HEIs). It first present the theoretical assumptions of the marketing concept and its application in HEIs, while the empirical part presents an analysis of the representation and adequacy of the various marketing communication instruments application at the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in Leskovac. With different combinations of marketing communication instruments, comparative advantages in the education market can be achieved. The paper analyzes the results of the survey, which examines how and to what extent certain marketing communication instruments influence the attitudes of students of the HEI. The contribution of this research is reflected in the possibility of a better understanding the complexity of the issues related to the application of marketing communications in HE.

Keywords: marketing communication, service marketing, higher education

Sažetak

Rad predstavlja analizu uticaja instrumenata marketinškog komuniciranja na stavove korisnika usluga, sa posebnim akcentom na korisnike usluga koje pružaju visokoškolske institucije. U radu će najpre biti date teorijske postavke marketinškog koncepta i njegove primene u visokoškolskim institucijama, dok je u okviru empirijskog dela rada prikazana analiza zastupljenosti i adekvatnosti primene različitih instrumenata marketinškog komuniciranja na Visokoj poslovnoj školi strukovnih studija u Leskovcu. Pomoću različitih kombinacija instrumenata marketinške komunikacije, mogu se ostvariti komparativne prednosti na tržištu obrazovanja, a njihovom optimalnom kombinacijom, ostvaruje se postizanje boljih performansi, što predstavlja dobru osnovu za kreiranje imidža i pozicioniranje, odnosno veći stepen satisfakcije korisnika usluga. U radu su analizirani rezultati ankete, kojima se ispituje kako i u kojoj meri određeni instrumenti marketinške komunikacije utiču na stavove studenata visokoškolske ustanove koja je obuhvaćena istraživanjem. Doprinos ovog istraživanja ogleda se u mogućnosti boljeg razumevanja složenosti problematike vezane za primenu marketinških komunikacija u visokom obrazovanju.

Кljučне речи: marketing komunikacija, marketing usluga, visoko obrazovanje

1. Introduction

In the conditions of intensive Internet development and competition growth in the market of educational services, it is necessary to achieve the highest level of satisfaction of service users. Considering that it is an environment that is subject to constant changes, it is necessary to constantly reconsider marketing communications, in a constant search for new and effective ways of approaching target groups. If we observe higher education institutions, the most important target group are high school graduates,

where the largest number of future students come from. The development of marketing activities in higher education institutions, through marketing communication with identified target groups, enables the formation of a positive image of the educational institution and loyal relations with entities in the market of educational services, which is related to customer satisfaction. By implementing marketing communication programs, higher education institutions influence the formation of image, from the point of view of customers, by using different communication channels, as well as by

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integrating various marketing instruments to increase the probability of acquiring new and retaining existing students.

The aim of this paper is to point out the necessity of a holistic approach to marketing communication and the adequate application of traditional and digital instruments and media, in order to measure their impact on future student's decisions. It is necessary to look at the different forms of marketing communication applied by higher education institutions and to determine how these forms, applied in an integrated manner, with a synergistic effect, affect the positioning of the educational service of the higher education institution.

The result of this research, which includes the collection and analysis of information, should help in the process of designing, planning and implementing the next marketing communication program. The results should provide a basis for a better understanding of the factors influencing the choice of higher education institution by potential and current students, so that higher education institutions are able to adequately shape their marketing communication programs. It is extremely important that higher education institutions understand and accept the concept of marketing communications, which include both traditional and digital instruments, because it is a condition for their success in the education market, and for some it is also a condition for survival.

2. Literature Review

The modern marketing concept, as the dominant business concept, encompasses marketing communications, which can be viewed from different perspectives. They cover all communication activities between the organization and its stakeholders, which makes them very complex. One study (Dawar, 2004) concluded that marketing communications play an important role in building good relationships between an organization and customers in terms of branding. According to Popescu (2002), the effectiveness of communication is determined by careful communication and obtaining an objective response from the target audience, which is why many organizations focus more on marketing communication with integrated marketing instruments. As Fill states (2009, p. 18), "the role of marketing communications is to engage customers (target groups), and the basic tasks are reflected in informing, persuading and influencing customers to think, feel or behave in certain ways". Kotler and Keller (2017, p. 558) define marketing communication as "the ways that companies use to inform, persuade and remind consumers - directly or indirectly - of the products and brands they sell".

According to Kotler (2011) a promotional mix or mix of marketing communications is a specific combination of tools that promote an organization and they are applied to communicate convincingly with customers, conveying information about values that are important to them and building long-term relationships with them. There is no universal definition of marketing communications and there are many interpretations of this term. Kostić-Stanković et al. (2017, p. 190) point out that "marketing

communication is a set of all communication aspects of marketing mix instruments, which seek to influence the awareness and behavior of current and potential customers, consumers and/or users, in the direction of their motivation to buy and enter into long-term relationships with concrete organization, based on mutual trust and loyalty".

Scientists dealing with this field recognize different types of communications within the mix of marketing communications, but as the basic instruments of marketing communication Kostić-Stanković stands out (2011, p. 126) "advertising; sales improvement; personal sales; public relations; economic publicity; direct marketing communication activities; communication aspect of the product/service; communication aspect of the price; communication aspect of distribution and sales". Kotler and Keller (2017, p. 560) define advertising as "any paid form of impersonal presentation and promotion of ideas, products or services, performed by a sponsor through print media (newspapers and magazines), broadcasting media (radio and television), online media (telephone, cable, satellite, wireless), electronic media (audio cassettes, video cassettes, video discs, CD-ROMs, websites) and visual media (billboards, posters, posters)". According to Shimp (2010, p. 188) "the main advantages of advertising are high coverage, because it is a great way to reach a mass audience, low cost per contact, the advertiser can choose different media to reach the target audience, it is good for nurturing customer relationships, relatively efficient and economical way to reach to large groups of customers and an excellent way of influencing the knowledge and attitudes of target groups". The American Marketing Association (2018) defines sales promotion as "the marketing pressure of the media and non-media, which is applied in a predetermined limited period of time at the level of consumers, retail or wholesale, to stimulate choice, increase demand and improve product availability". According to Peter & Donnelly (2001, p. 146) personal selling can be defined as "two-way communication between a potential buyer and the seller, designed to achieve at least three tasks: identifying the needs of the potential buyer, responding to those needs for one or more products or services of the organization and convincing the buyer to buy the product". The simplest definition of personal selling is that it is "a sale that involves face-to-face interaction with the customer" (American Marketing Association, 2018). The essence of market relations with the public is reflected in building good relations with external stakeholders of the organization, such as customers, other companies, government agencies and the media, all in order to promote and protect the image of the organization. Economic publicity is a promotional instrument that involves providing editorial space that is not paid for in all media that customers or potential customers read, watch or listen to (Yeshin, 2012). Direct marketing means that the organization uses channels of direct contact with consumers, in order to reach them without the use of intermediaries. It is not just a direct mail or electronic catalog, but something much more and more complex (Belch & Belch, 2011).

The product, as one of the basic instruments of the marketing mix, has a certain potential in communication with customers. We can look at it from the point of view of its physical characteristics and from the point of view of packaging, which finally influences the decision to buy by potential buyers. Price has a very great power of communication and many scientists believe that the communication aspect of price has gained an advantage over other instruments. The place refers to the distribution and sales channels and, in that sense, the appearance of the sales space, the atmosphere and the location, have a strong influence on the formation of the impression in the minds of the customers. The basis of the communication potential of the sales environment consists of external elements, such as shop window, lighting, facade; and internal elements, such as shelves, arranged sales space, music, etc. (Filipović et al., 2010).

Marketing Concept of Service Organizations

For the purposes of this research, higher education institutions were taken as an example of service organizations. According to Gligorijević & Janičić (2021, p. 177) "In today's dynamic economy environment, higher education institutions, as centers for the development of human resources, play an important role in the economic growth and development of countries". The higher educational institutions primary customers are students, whom they offer the product in terms of the programme itself and render services to facilitate product delivery (Biswas, 2021).

Some authors characterized educational services as a combination of tangible and intangible components, which cannot be considered as pure services. For that reason, when it comes to higher education institutions, it is necessary to respond to the requests of different students and adapt to their expectations, but within certain limits. In recent years, the scope of research on service delivery and positioning in the higher education sector has increased significantly. Globally, there is a very high level of competitiveness among higher education institutions, which affects the business orientation of these entities (Varghese, 2008). As competition in this sector has become very intense, many focus on consumer orientation, thus providing excellent service quality (Wright, 2000). The service quality is a precondition of customer satisfaction (Dašić et al, 2022). The positioning of a higher education institution indicates the reputation, quality of teaching staff and resources, as well as the way of communication. According to Jurkowitsch et al. (2006, p. 10), "the positioning of the educational service is designed to develop sustainable competitive advantages in the minds of students". Some theorists deeply regret the industrialization of the higher education sector and express serious concern, especially for the future of higher education in management (Holbrook, 2018).

Higher education institutions have three basic missions: teaching, research and the provision of services of public importance and these missions have always been in conflict with each other (Altbach et al., 2009). However, in recent years, the higher education sector has

increasingly introduced and implemented a marketing concept within its business. On the one hand, as a condition for survival, it is imposed that higher education institutions must act as profit organizations, giving priority to revenue generation. On the other hand, these institutions must also function as non-profit organizations, providing knowledge and determining the path for the development of education (Council of the European Union, 2014). This fact, together with the changing requirements of service users, the introduction of legal regulations such as the "Bologna Process", the development of technology and the introduction of accreditation systems, leads higher education institutions to change their perspective on the market and turn to a marketing orientation approach (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), where students become users of their services. A market-oriented higher education institution focuses on current and potential students (who are, in fact, service users) and tries to meet the needs of target groups by applying and conducting various marketing activities. This is possible only through adequate research in terms of understanding the target groups, where it is necessary to design and develop direct and interactive communication (Pires et al., 2006).

Marketing communication mix of higher education institutions

If it is spoken about the marketing communication mix applied by higher education institutions, it is meant, first of all, at all those activities that can affect the demand for services, which these institutions provide. As it is a sector that provides certain services, the "7P" approach is applicable here in order to meet the needs of service users and it is very important that higher education institutions understand the necessity of applying the mentioned concept, together with all its constituent elements. "Higher education institutions are forced to actively digitalize their own activities in order to remain competitive in the educational services market" (Akhmedov, 2022, p. 72).

If it is spoken about communication aspect of a product/service, it should be said that a large number of theorists discuss how to define products in the case of higher education institutions. Some believe that a university product is a collection of academic, social, physical and spiritual experiences, while others treat them as study programs, actually as students, more precisely graduate students (Gajić, 2011). In this paper, authors look at students as users of services provided by higher education institutions, and at the diploma of a completed higher education institution as a product. In that sense, if the diploma is observed as a product, the importance of the curriculum should be emphasized, which must be adequately developed, attractive and adapted to meet the needs of students. In addition to modern study programs, an important factor in the choice of higher education institution by students is the length of study (three-year or four-year undergraduate studies, for example).

The communication aspect of price of educational services in the case of higher education institutions, is

reflected in the amount of tuition and enrollment costs. The price affects not only the income that the higher education institution generates on the basis of enrolled students, but also affects the perception of students and the decision to choose to study. It has its economic dimension (due to the impact on income and profit), but also psychological (perception of quality and image). In the research of some authors, price has proven to be an extremely important and significant element in the choice of higher education institution by future students (Ivy, 2008). In a developing country, such as Serbia, the price of educational services plays a very big role, which is understandable. There is a difference if it is talked about state and private higher education institutions. At state institutions, the education of a certain number of students is financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia, while other students, up to a specific quota, pay their own tuition fees. On the other hand, there is no possibility of budget financing for private higher education institutions. For this reason, these institutions offer a number of incentives regarding the payment of tuition fees, in order to attract as many students as possible.

The communication aspect of distribution of the educational service refers, above all, to the location of the higher education institution. Some authors emphasize the importance of the city in which the faculty is located, as well as the image of that city. In this regard, they point out that important elements are the size of the city, the cost of living and the environment (Cubillo et al., 2006).

The promotion includes all the instruments that higher education institutions can use to provide potential students with information about their offer of educational services, through advertising, publicity, public relations and other opportunities. Different elements of promotion, through different channels, are used for different target groups. The higher education institution establishes communication with users of educational services using various means of mass communication (auditory, visual, audio-visual and graphic type) and through various forms (advertisement, newsletter, website, slogan, logo, promotional events...). The impact of digital advancement is currently very big on the education sector, especially the promotion of higher education institution, that are now more and more widespread, and it is also one of the opportunities for every institution (Ramadhan & Gunarto, 2021). According to Wong et al. (2020), the future of higher education marketing is reaching out to students and drawing them through social networks.

The intangible nature of services has resulted in the introduction of an additional element of the marketing mix and their communication aspects - people. It includes all employees in the institution of higher education, who communicate with future students, but also with enrolled students during their studies. There is difference between teaching, non-teaching (administrative) and support staff. The teaching staff and its reputation can play a very important role in the selection of students. Alibabić (2002) points out that the staff employed in the educational institution, by the quality of their work, but also by their own image, influence the "popularity" of the institution

itself. The popularity of certain teachers in scientific or professional circles, or even in the general public, can result in the desire of potential students to get acquainted with the teaching content through that person. In addition to the teaching staff, a significant contribution to the provision of higher education services is given by the administrative staff of the higher education institution, which influences the creation of a certain perception of students about the quality of services. As Lin claims (1999, p. 190), "there is no more important element than choosing adequate people for certain positions in a higher education institution. A simple process, such as answering a phone call and providing the necessary information, may have a greater impact on whether a student will still be interested in enrolling in a particular higher education institution than the publications of eminent professors". The physical environment is the latest addition to the marketing mix of services. It can be said to represent a tangible component of the services offered. The diversity of these aspects is assessed by different target groups, ranging from teaching materials to the appearance of facilities at the location of the higher education institution. Processes, as an element of the marketing mix of services, include all administrative functions of a higher education institution: from receiving documentation upon enrollment, through evaluation of study programs and examinations, all the way to graduation. During the period of student education at a particular institution, processes must be initiated to ensure that the student is enrolled in a specific study program, has correctly calculated and entered grades in the information system, as well as in the personal file, and that he was awarded an adequate qualification upon completion of his studies.

3. Research methodology

This research is motivated by the problem of determining the impact of marketing communication mix on the perception and decision-making process of service users. A various literature was reviewed, on the basis of which the basic assumptions and goals of the research were set. The theory summarizes and organizes existing knowledge, provides a basis for making predictions and provides a working explanation of a phenomenon. There is a reciprocal link between theory and research construction. Empirical questions derived from theory, lead to specific hypotheses, and then to the design of experiments (Goodwin, 2010). Based on an insight into the available literature related to this topic, the initial hypotheses were set:

H1: Higher education institutions apply traditional and digital marketing communication with identified target groups.

H2: Through adequate marketing communication, higher education institutions influence the decision-making process of future students on choosing a higher education institution.

H3: There exists no significant difference between the perceptions scores of the students about the marketing communication elements of higher education institution.

In this paper, a combination of different methods was used, whereby the choice of methods was determined by

the topic of the paper and the goals of the research: theoretical analysis method, observation method, phenomenalist (empirical) method; analytical-interpretive method, statistical method, field research (systematic observation, examination: survey), inductive method and deductive method. The aim of the survey is to determine the assessment of the importance of certain elements of the marketing communication mix, as factors in the choice of colleges or faculties, assessed by users of higher education institutions - students. Based on the results of this research, it is possible to determine the importance of certain elements of the marketing communication mix, which the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in Leskovac uses in implementing its marketing program, as well as the degree of student satisfaction with these indicators. The positive attitude of students and their perception and attitude about the higher education institution influences their decision and interest in enrollment.

Survey procedure

The research was conducted at the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in Leskovac, in the period from June to September 2021. Students who enrolled in this school in the mentioned period are included. It must be pointed out that the research was conducted in four phases. In the first phase, a study of the literature related to the definition of the marketing communications was performed, especially in the implementation of marketing programs of higher education institutions. At this stage, a research sample is determined and a research instrument is formulated. In the second phase, a research was conducted with a selected target group, which are students who enrolled in the first year of basic vocational studies in 2021. By applying the survey research, the attitudes of students about the elements of the marketing communication mix, which the school applies, were examined. In the third phase, statistical processing and analysis of the results obtained by the research were approached. The performed analyzes showed the level of significance and the degree of satisfaction of the first-year students with the marketing communication instruments of the school. In the fourth phase, views were presented through discussion and conclusions.

The estimation of the sample size is based on the following criteria: error margin of 5%, confidence level 95% and sample frame $N = 319$, which represents the total number of students enrolled in the first year of vocational studies in 2021, after the first and second enrollment period. Based on these criteria, a sample of 319 subjects was taken and after checking its size using a Raosoft Calculator, the recommended sample size at the 95% confidence level was 185 subjects, which shows that the sample for this part research is adequate.

The survey was conducted by the authors of the paper with the help of the staff of the student service of the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in Leskovac. Students of the first year of basic vocational studies, who passed the entrance exam in June 2021 in the first enrollment period, or in September 2021 in the second

enrollment period, filled out a survey during the enrollment procedure, where, in addition to filling out general forms, they were asked to fill in the survey questionnaire for the purposes of this research. Statistical processing and analysis of data was performed after collecting the results of the survey questionnaires. Statistical software IBM SPSS 20.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used in the following methods of statistical data processing: descriptive statistics (frequency distribution, mean, standard deviation) and Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient.

The basic measures that describe the sample, based on the obtained research results, are expressed in descriptive statistics. When presenting certain elementary characteristics of the research, the following indicators of descriptive statistics were determined: percentage; frequency; measures of central tendency (arithmetic mean - M) and measures of dispersion (standard deviation - σ) (Turjačanin and Čekrlija, 2006). An important characteristic of each questionnaire is its reliability. The measuring instrument for checking the internal consistency of the scale, which is most often used in research, is the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient (α). According to DeVellis (2003), the value of α coefficient should be greater than 0.7 for the validity of the research instrument to be confirmed. In this case, α coefficient has a value 0.9, which indicates that this scale has good internal consistency and can be considered as a reliable measuring instrument.

The research has been carefully prepared. The treatment of the respondents is clearly and precisely foreseen. Clear, accurate and sufficiently detailed instructions to the respondents were prepared. The method of data collection and recording has been determined. Therefore, the survey method was used for data collection, and the instrument used to conduct the survey is a questionnaire that is not standardized, but was created for the purposes of this research. Using a detailed analysis of theoretical data sources on the topic, consulting both domestic and foreign authors, identified key areas, factors and characteristics on the basis of which a questionnaire was formed with questions whose answers lead to the possibility of processing the desired data and obtaining the necessary results. The survey lists all the instruments of marketing communication that the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in Leskovac uses in the implementation of its marketing program.

The questionnaire is divided into two areas. The first part of the questionnaire deals with general questions, while the second part presents the main questionnaire. In the second part, the degree of significance is examined, as well as the degree of satisfaction of the respondents (students) with the attributes of the elements of the marketing communication mix, of which there are 26 in the questionnaire. Participation in the research was anonymous. Students expressed the assessment of the importance of educational services in choosing a higher education institution, as well as the degree of satisfaction with educational services through several indicators. The term marketing communication mix in this research

means a customized (modified) marketing communication mix for higher education services, which includes the following elements: communication aspect of educational service, communication aspect of price of educational service, school promotion, communication aspect of distribution of educational service and communication aspect of teaching staff. Respondents did not directly assess the importance of the offered elements of the marketing communication mix for the selection of a higher education institution, but, due to the complexity of these elements, did so through their indicators, using a three-point Likert-type scale. In addition, the respondents expressed the degree of satisfaction with the indicators of the marketing communication mix elements of the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies.

4. Results and discussion

For the purposes of the research, a total of 185 validly completed questionnaires were collected, which were used in statistical processing and data analysis. By analyzing the socio-demographic characteristics of the surveyed students, it can be seen that out of the total number of surveyed subjects, 50.8% of the respondents are female, and 49.2% of the respondents are male. When it comes to the age of the respondents, by far the largest percentage of them is between 18 and 24, which was expected, considering that the respondents are students who enrolled in the first year of study in 2021 (those who finished high school in 2021). The largest percentage of respondents live in Leskovac (42.7%), followed by Nis (48%) and Vlasotince (11%). Descriptive statistical analysis determined the characteristics related to the education of the respondents, which refer to the type of previously completed high school, as well as the status of the respondents after enrolling in the Higher Business School (budget or self-financing student).

According to the type of previously completed high school, it is evident that the largest number of respondents completed the catering and tourism school (33.5% of all respondents). In addition, a large number of respondents completed economics (26.5%) and technical school (20.5%). This is quite understandable, because the study programs that are accredited and that are conducted at the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in Leskovac, represent the continuation of the education of respondents in the areas that began in the previous cycle of education. The surveyed students are mostly those students who in 2021 enrolled in the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies with the status of budget students (54.6%).

Special attention in this part of the research is devoted to the question related to the way in which the respondent heard about the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in Leskovac, where several different communication channels were offered. It was possible to choose more answers, so the analysis of this data was adapted and performed accordingly.

Table 1. Communication channels according to the frequency of selection by respondents

Communication channels	Answers		% of cases
	N	%	
Recommendation of a friend or relative	99	31.4	53.5
Recommendation of students of the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in Leskovac	45	14.3	24.3
Recommendation from friends in high school	23	7.3	12.4
School website	32	10.2	17.3
School Facebook page	23	7.3	12.4
School Instagram profile	8	2.5	4.3
TV	2	0.6	1.1
The press	2	0.6	1.1
Billboards	3	1.0	1.6
Presentation in high school	68	21.6	36.8
Education fair	5	1.6	2.7
Something else	5	1.6	2.7
Total	315	100%	170.3%

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 20.0

Table 1 shows the communication channels used by the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in communicating with potential students, along with the frequency of selecting certain channels in accordance with how the respondent's received information about the school, after which they decided to enroll. It can be seen that 185 respondents chose a total of 319 answers within the offered options, because one respondent had the possibility to choose a larger number of communication channels. The highest percentage, that is, the frequency of responses, is the recommendation of friends and/or relatives of the respondents (31.4%), which means that this is the dominant way. According to this, the greatest influence on the choice of the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in Leskovac by the surveyed students is the recommendation of their friends and relatives. After that, the presentation of the Higher Business School in high school (the school the respondent graduated from) is followed, with a 21.6% frequency of responses, followed by the recommendation of students of the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies (14.3%). In the next place according to frequency, there is a school website, as one of the digital forms and ways of communicating with students. It can be concluded that personal communication "face to face" has the greatest influence on the selection of students, but the influence of digital forms of marketing communication should not be ignored. This part of the research confirms the first hypothesis.

It has already been mentioned in the paper that the mix of marketing communication of this school, for the purposes of this research, is viewed as a set of the following instruments: communication aspect of educational service, communication aspect of teaching staff, school promotion, communication aspect of price of educational service and communication aspect of distribution of educational service. Accordingly, students were asked to rate the significance of each of these instruments that existed for them at the time of choosing the higher education institution they would enroll in. They were asked to rate on a three-point Likert scale how important each of the instruments of the marketing communication mix is for them, when choosing a higher education

institution (1 - I do not agree; 2 - I have no attitude; 3 - I agree).

The results of the empirical research unequivocally indicate that the current users of the services of the Higher Business School singled out the educational service as the most important element of the marketing communication mix. This element of the marketing communication mix

stood out as the most significant, with an arithmetic mean score of 2.54 (Table 2). This result is confirmed by the fact that 55.7% of respondents agreed with the statements that indicate the importance of this element. However, it is important to point out that as many as 42.2% of respondents do not have an attitude at all when it comes to assessing the importance of educational services.

Table 2. Descriptive indicators of the importance of marketing communication mix instruments for respondents

Attributes	Observed min-max	Arithmetic mean (M)	Standard deviation (σ)	Valid percentages		
				"I do not agree"	"I have no attitude"	"I agree"
Educational service	1-3	2.54	0.54	2.2	42.2	55.7
Price of educational service	1-3	2.46	0.58	4.3	44.9	50.8
Teaching staff	1-3	2.46	0.53	1.6	50.3	48.1
Distribution of educational service	1-3	2.45	0.54	2.2	50.3	47.6
School promotion	1-3	2.45	0.53	1.6	51.4	47.0

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 20.0

The educational service is followed by the price of the educational service and the teaching staff, with the same result of the arithmetic mean (2.46) and the users of the educational service assess them as extremely important for making a decision on the institution in which they will obtain higher education. The importance of these elements of the marketing communication mix is also indicated by the fact that 50.8% of respondents confirmed the importance of the price element of the educational service when making the decision on the choice of faculty, with the importance of the teaching staff (48.1%).

Finally, the last instruments in importance for the selection of a higher education institution are the distribution of the educational service and the promotion of the higher education institution with a score of 2.45. However, if analyzing the data from Table 2, it is noticed that the largest number of respondents are undecided about the significance of these two elements of the marketing communication mix. In addition, it should be noted that the standard deviation in all attributes is less than one ($\sigma < 1$), which indicates less oscillations in the

responses of the respondents. These results confirm the third hypothesis.

The impact of the promotional mix was evaluated through the informativeness of different forms of promotion, the appeal of different forms of promotion, the presence of the school in the media (TV, Internet...), well-designed advertising campaigns and school messages, a well-designed school website, easy finding of the necessary information on the website, created and continuously maintained Facebook page of the school and through the created and continuously maintained Instagram profile of the school (Table 3).

The best result within the descriptive analysis has the attribute related to a well-designed school website (2.54), with which 55.1% of respondents agree. In addition, it is very important easy to find information on the school's website (54.1% of respondents agree with this fact), as well as an attribute related to well-designed advertising campaigns and school messages. These results additionally confirm the first hypothesis.

Table 3. Descriptive indicators of the importance of school promotion attributes for respondents

Attributes	Observed min-max	Arithmetic mean (M)	Standard deviation (σ)	Valid percentages		
				"I do not agree"	"I have no attitude"	"I agree"
Informativeness of different forms of promotion	1-3	2.48	0.53	1.6	49.2	49.2
Appeal of different forms of promotion	1-3	2.48	0.56	3.2	45.4	51.4
Presence of the school in the media (TV, Internet...)	1-3	2.50	0.55	2.7	44.9	52.4
Well-designed advertising campaigns and school messages	1-3	2.52	0.52	1.1	45.4	53.5
Well designed school website	1-3	2.54	0.53	1.6	43.2	55.1
Easily find the necessary information on the website	1-3	2.52	0.54	2.2	43.8	54.1
Created and continuously maintained Facebook page of the school	1-3	2.51	0.54	2.2	44.3	53.5
Created and continuously maintained Instagram profile of the school	1-3	2.46	0.55	2.7	48.6	48.6

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 20.0

In addition to the above analysis (which includes determining the degree of significance of certain elements of the marketing communication mix for respondents),

respondents were asked to give ratings on the three-point Likert scale on how satisfied they are with each of the attributes of marketing mix elements applied by the

Higher Business School. (1 - I agree; 2 - I have no attitude; 3 - I disagree).

Table 4. Descriptive indicators of respondents' satisfaction with Higher Business School marketing communication mix instruments

Attributes	Observed min-max	Arithmetic mean (M)	Standard deviation (σ)
Educational service	1-3	2.50	0.53
Price of educational service	1-3	2.46	0.53
Teaching staff	1-3	2.43	0.51
Distribution of educational service	1-3	2.43	0.52
School promotion	1-3	2.43	0.54

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 20.0

The results from Table 4 indicate that the respondents expressed the highest degree of satisfaction with the element of educational services provided by the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in Leskovac. In second place is the satisfaction of respondents with the price of educational services at this institution. The explanation for this lies in the fact that there are a large number of budget places in this institution, as well as the fact that the amount of tuition fees for self-financing students is at a much lower level than in other higher education institutions.

Table 5. Descriptive indicators of respondents' satisfaction with school promotion attributes

Attributes	Observed min-max	Arithmetic mean (M)	Standard deviation (σ)
Informativeness of different forms of promotion	1-3	2.51	0.52
Appeal of different forms of promotion	1-3	2.48	0.52
Presence of the school in the media (TV, Internet...)	1-3	2.49	0.53
Well-designed advertising campaigns and school messages	1-3	2.44	0.55
Well designed school website	1-3	2.47	0.56
Easily find the necessary information on the website	1-3	2.51	0.55
Created and continuously maintained Facebook page of the school	1-3	2.48	0.55
Created and continuously maintained Instagram profile of the school	1-3	2.42	0.58

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 20.0

If a more detailed and in-depth analysis of each of the mentioned elements of the marketing communication mix of the Higher Business School is carried out, the degree of satisfaction can be determined for each attribute on which the respondents gave an answer. When it comes to the promotional activities of the marketing team of the school, respondents express the highest level of satisfaction with attributes related to the informativeness of various forms

of promotion of the school, as well as with regard to easily finding the necessary information on the website of the school (Table 5).

Results which show respondents' satisfaction with Higher Business School marketing communication mix instruments and respondents' satisfaction with school promotion attributes confirm the second hypothesis, considering the fact that respondents were enrolled students.

4. Conclusion

In addition to the theoretical part of the paper which sublimates the application of various marketing communication mix instruments, the empirical part of the paper, which presents the results of the survey, highlights the perceptions of the surveyed students about the importance of each of the marketing communication instruments of the Higher Business School of Vocational Studies in Leskovac. The analysis of these results leads to the conclusion that the respondents consider significant each of the elements of the mix of marketing communication, with no significant difference between the perceptions scores of each of them. All marketing communications of observed institution were listed, which include both traditional and digital marketing communications, depending on the identified target groups and the results of the survey indicate that face-to-face communications (traditional marketing communications) have the greatest influence on students, when it comes to their decision to enroll in a higher education institution, but digital forms of marketing communication also have a great influence. On the basis of the above highlighted findings, it can be concluded that the existence of both traditional and digital instruments of marketing communications in education service sector, have their significance for the students while making their choice about any institution.

It can be concluded that, according to the results, the quality of educational services is a crucial and most important factor in attracting new students, so investment in the quality-of-service delivery should continue. Marketing communication activities are significant, but in themselves they are not and cannot be sufficient, unless there is a quality behind them that supports them. However, this certainly does not mean that other forms of marketing communication should be neglected, because each of them individually and collectively, in addition to influencing student orientation, contributes to strengthening and creating the image and recognizability of the higher education institution.

The obtained results can be used in a more successful creation of the marketing communication mix of higher education institutions, where the care for the quality of the educational service must still be in the first place. Other elements of the marketing communication mix must be primarily in the function of improving this top-ranked element. There is no one successful recipe here that can be applied in all situations. The optimal combination of elements of the marketing communication mix is

conditioned by the nature of the activity, the management of the institution, but also the market in which the higher education institution performs its activity, so that each higher education institution must find an adequate mix of marketing communication instruments.

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