

## EFFECTIVENESS OF MARKETING ACTIVITIES IN ATTRACTING STUDENTS FROM LUBLIN UNIVERSITIES.

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### **Abstract:**

Population decline has become an increasingly significant issue impacting the situation of universities. The decline results in the drop in the number of applicants. Due to the market being saturated with public and private higher education institutions, the level of competitiveness has increased. As a consequence, the need for marketing campaigns has become more pressing. Such campaigns aim at the dissemination of information regarding educational offer, reaching and developing communication with the candidate with the ultimate objective of expanding the student body.

The aim of the present paper is to examine the effectiveness of marketing campaigns undertaken by Lublin universities in order to gain new students.

The study was conducted among students of public universities in Lublin by means of an online survey and in the course of the analysis of available databases maintained by state institutions.

The results proved that the opinion of friends and family exerts significant influence upon the selection of the university to apply to. In addition, it was observed that promotion campaigns conducted in certain months are more effective than in others, thus, maximizing the effort in this particular time is worthwhile. The shift from traditional advertising to its online equivalent has also been observed as an emerging trend. The study proved that, even if intensified, the application of hitherto tools in marketing campaigns does not serve its purpose properly. As a consequence they have been replaced by modern, trendy and novel ones.

Last but not least, the impact of social media upon the recognition of the university's name and reputation and the swiftness of reaching and communicating with the candidate they offer has also been acknowledged.

*Keywords: marketing activities, marketing tools, information channels, recruiting students, educational offer, university, choice of studies*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent past, Polish universities cherished a relatively stable and friendly environment when conducting their mission i.e. teaching and research. In 1990/1991 academic year, the number of students in Poland amounted to 403 824. The number grew annually and peaked in 2005/2006 reaching 1 953 832<sup>1</sup>. In subsequent years, a downward trend emerged, and in 2015/2016 the number of students amounted to 1 405 133<sup>2</sup>.

The trend was also visible among Lublin public universities and found reflection in the number of students.

**Table 1:** Summary of the number of students in each academic year.

Academic year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
University name								
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University	29 485	28 427	26 888	25 192	23 640	21 794	21 984	21 874
Lublin University of Technology	10 006	10 088	10 105	10 100	10 788	10 640	10 341	10 095
University of Life Sciences	12 288	11 331	10 795	10 762	10 075	9 560	9 103	8 682
Medical University of Lublin	6 227	6 890	7 257	7 358	7 312	7 051	6 886	6 696
Catholic University of Lublin	17 364	17 199	16 627	15 734	15 191	13 567	12 389	11 799
Total	75 370	73 935	71 672	69 146	67 006	62 612	60 703	59 146

Source: Own study based on data provided by the Statistical Office in Lublin.

The above chart indicates that the greatest decline in the number of students was observed at UMCS (Maria Curie Skłodowska University) and amounted to 8 thousand. In turn, KUL (Catholic University of Lublin) suffered a loss of approx. 6 thousand students, UP (University of Life Sciences) approx. 4 thousand. On the other hand, the number of students at UM (Medical University of Lublin) and PL (Lublin University of Technology) increased.

Based on demographic data pertaining to the population of Lublin Voivodeship, it can be estimated that by 2019/2020 academic year, the number of students in Lublin will have shrunk by 58.500 people in relation to their current number. The fall in the number of students will exert impact upon all universities but to different degrees. Only a slight impact, if at all, will be observed at UM. PL will suffer a slightly higher drop. Both private universities as well as UMCS, UP and KUL will suffer a more than average fall in the number of students<sup>3</sup>.

The population's decline has been increasingly affecting universities in Poland. As a consequence, a greater emphasis has been placed both on the improvement of the quality of education and development of new prospective courses, and on marketing practices in general.

At the end of 2016, the population in Poland amounted to 38433 thousand. When compared with the previous year, it has decreased by 4 thousand people. The depopulation rate amounted to -0,01%, i.e. for each 10 thousand citizens there was one less person (in 2015, the rate amounted to -0,11%, i.e. there were 11 people fewer). The year 2016 was the fifth consecutive year noting the population's decline which followed a boom of 2008-2011.

The total population of a country is determined by the internal growth and international migration. The decline of 2016 emerged due to the negative rate of natural increase- approx. 6 thousand more deaths than

<sup>1</sup> Raport GUS *Szkoły wyższe i ich finanse. Informacje i opracowania statystyczne.* (Warszawa 2016). s. 25-26.

<sup>2</sup> Instytucje szkolnictwa wyższego. (2017 January 08). Retrieved from <https://polon.nauka.gov.pl/opi/aa/rejestry/szkolnictwo?execution=e1s1>

<sup>3</sup> Furtak R. Lipowski M. (2012) Fundacja Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej; Raport z badań; *Analiza oferty lubelskich uczelni i możliwości jej dostosowania do aktualnych potrzeb rynku pracy*; s 3-10, 24.

births were registered at that time. In addition, the rate of natural increase (calculated by a 1000) was negative and amounted to -0,2% (in the previous year it equaled -0,7%). The decline was observed in cities (-10 thousand). On the other hand, in rural areas, the number of births was higher by 5 thousand than the number of deaths.

The second factor impacting population is the permanent international migration. In 2016, the rate was positive and amounted to 1,5 thousand.

**Table 2:** Basic demographic data for 1990-2016.

Academic year \ Specification	1990	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total population in thous.	38073	38254	38157	38530	38538	38533	38496	38479	38437	38433
Actual growth in thous.	85	-9	-17	33	9	-5	-37	-17	-41	-4
w %	0,22	-0,02	-0,04	0,08	0,02	-0,01	-0,10	-0,04	-0,11	-0,01
Natural growth in thous.	157,4	10,3	-3,9	34,8	12,9	1,5	-17,7	-1,3	-25,6	-5,8
Per 1000 population	4,1	0,3	-0,1	0,9	0,3	0,0	-0,5	-0,0	-0,7	-0,2
Balance of foreign migration in thous.	-15,8	-19,7	-12,9	-2,1	-4,3	-6,6	-19,9	-15,8	-15,8	1,5

Source: Own study based on data provided by the Statistical Office in Lublin.

In Lublin Voivodeship, the total population equaled 2133340, the rate of natural increase -2618, and permanent migration -4067<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 3:** Population, internal growth and migrations in relation to Polish voivodeships in 2016.

Region \ Specification	Population (as of 31.12)	Natural growth	General balance of fixed migration
Poland	38432992	-5752	1505
Lublin province	2133340	-2618	-4067

Source: Central Statistical Office Department for Demography and Labor Market Research.

Recently, a growth in the number of international students in Lublin has been observed. However, these students will not compensate for the decline of Polish students, but can merely mitigate negative consequences of the population's declines.

**Table 4:** Summary of all students in Lublin.

Academy Year \ Specification	Total	Including foreigners	Percentage of foreigners
2015/16	68130	5639	8,28%
2014/15	70919	4395	6,20%
2013/14	73091	3034	4,15%
2012/13	75906	2314	3,05%

<sup>4</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny Departament Badań Demograficznych i Rynku Pracy. (Warszawa, z dnia 23.03.2017 r.) *Ludność i ruch naturalny w 2016 raport.*

<sup>5</sup> Rządowa Rada Ludnościowa. (Warszawa 2015). *Sytuacja demograficzna Polski; Raport 2014-2015*; s. 7-13.

Source: Statistical data conducted by Lublin City Hall <sup>6</sup>.

The above-mentioned factors resulted in the growth of competition for students among universities. Secondary-school graduates are motivated by various conditions as far as the selection of the university and the particular course of studies are concerned. The motivation encompasses graduates' interests, prospective salaries, quality of education, renown, ambitions. There is a multitude of such factors due to the fact that each individual is motivated by different criteria<sup>7</sup>.

Universities place a growing emphasis upon marketing campaigns in order to disseminate information and attract candidates to select the particular institution. Such practices are reflected in the establishment of universities' promotion departments, which were not relatively visible 10 years ago, but are currently present at virtually each university. Moreover, the view that universities operate very much like any other enterprise has become increasingly widespread<sup>8</sup>.

The majority of universities apply similar marketing practices but with various degrees of success. Promotion aims at the dissemination of information regarding the product in a way which would popularize knowledge on the issue among recipients and boost sales. Information on the product ought to be disseminated in a systematized manner expressed in a particular information strategy. All promotional activities developed by means of various instruments form a promotion campaign. Growing competition among universities requires considerable creativity and originality in order to attract the attention of the target group. A positive, stable and recognizable image of the university seems to constitute the success factor in this case. Image-building practiced by universities ought to focus on communicating with the target audience so as to raise interest and goodwill. Recipients have their own expectations and requirements. When informing about their educational offer, universities may meet or even surpass these. A favorable market proposition and product recognition constitute ultimate objectives<sup>9,10</sup>.

As a consequence, the question regarding the effectiveness of marketing campaigns arises. The present paper constitutes a response to the issue.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

A survey establishing sources of information on universities and their educational offer was conducted among Lublin public universities. The study originated from promotion practices applied at these universities and the need for assessing their effectiveness.

Results emerging from the study were presented and discussed in the present paper.

### 2.1. Objectives

The study aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of marketing practices applied by Lublin universities in order to attract new students.

Research questions:

1. Which criteria exert particular influence upon the selection of the university?
2. In what period of time are marketing campaigns the most effective?
3. Which sources of information are the most attractive?
4. Which information channels used by universities are the most effective?

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<sup>6</sup> Potencjał edukacyjny miasta. (2017 January 08). Retrieved from: <http://lublin.eu/biznes-i-nauka/nauka/potencjal-edukacyjny-miasta/>.

<sup>7</sup> Badanie ewaluacyjne ex ante w zakresie oceny możliwości doboru optymalnych narzędzi motywujących kandydatów na studia do wyboru kształcenia na kierunkach technicznych, matematycznych, Raport przygotowany na zlecenie Ministerstwa Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego. (2009). Retrieved from: [http://www.nauka.gov.pl/raporty-i-publicacje-pokl/wyniki-badania-ewaluacyjnego-ex-ante-w-zakresie-oceny-mozliwosci-doboru-optymalnych-narzedzie-motywujacych-kandydatow-na-studia-do-wyboru-ksztalcenia-na-kierunkach-technicznych-matematycznych-przyrodniczych\\_22179.html](http://www.nauka.gov.pl/raporty-i-publicacje-pokl/wyniki-badania-ewaluacyjnego-ex-ante-w-zakresie-oceny-mozliwosci-doboru-optymalnych-narzedzie-motywujacych-kandydatow-na-studia-do-wyboru-ksztalcenia-na-kierunkach-technicznych-matematycznych-przyrodniczych_22179.html)

<sup>8</sup> Pawlak M. Grzesiuk K. Przedsiębiorczość i Zarządzanie. (2013). *Factors influencing the college choice decisions of high-school graduates from Lublin voivodship*. s. 93–106.

<sup>9</sup> Urbanik W. Aspiracje edukacyjne młodzieży szkół średnich. (2010). Retrieved from: <http://wshtwp.pl/img/media/Raport.pdf>

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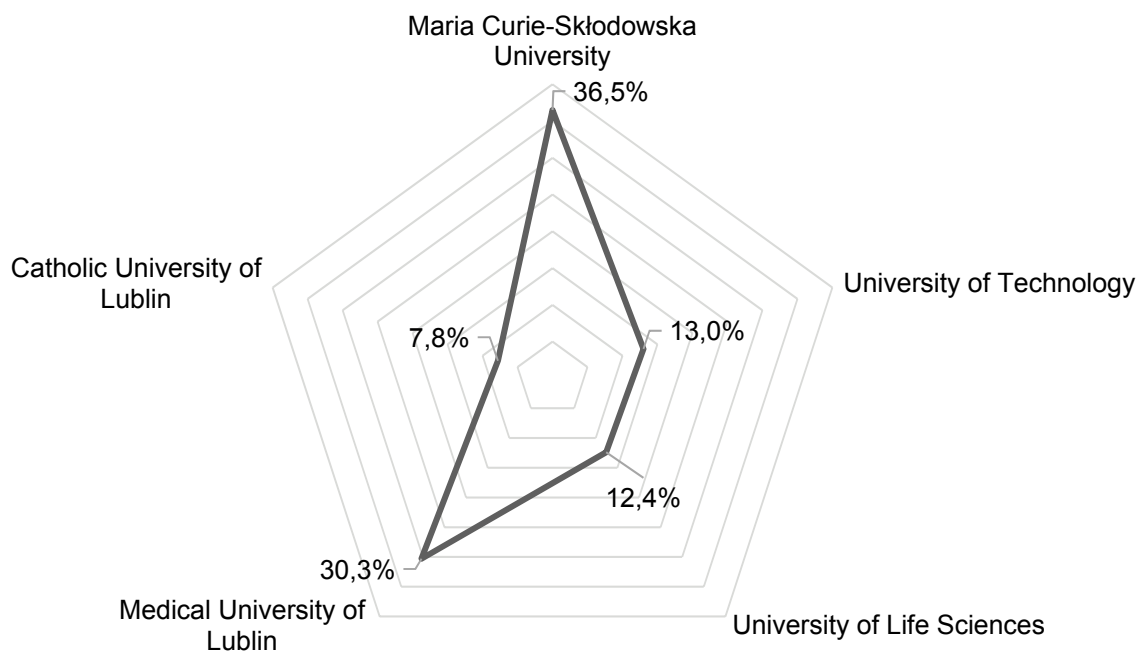
5. Are universities' marketing campaigns conducted properly?
6. Are traditional forms of advertising effective in the promotion of universities?
7. Are social media more successful in reaching candidates when compared with traditional advertising?

## 2.2. Approach to the study and the sample

The study was conducted by means of an online survey among 500 students and graduates of all public universities in Lublin. The questionnaire was sent directly to respondents or posted in private groups of individual classes on Facebook. In addition, it was emailed to addresses dedicated to individual courses of studies. The survey was anonymous. It consisted of three sections: general questions, marketing practices, and personal information.

The distribution of students of individual universities was presented in the chart below.

**Picture 1:** Participation of respondents from individual Universities.



Source: Own study based on a survey.

The majority of respondents study full-time at an undergraduate course (42,9%), uniform Master's studies (27,9%), and at a graduate course (24%). For more than 80% of respondents, the university they study at has been their initial choice, and only 14,6% do not intend to continue their education. More than 80% of respondents observed that the course of their studies is divergent from the course their parents followed. As far as the place of residence is concerned, 39,3% of respondents stated they came from a village, 19% indicated a city of up to 50 thousand inhabitants, 25,1% indicated a city between 201 and 500 thousand inhabitants. 71,1% of respondents come from Lublin Voivodeship, and 37,5% of them live closer than 50 km from their university, 28,1% between 51-100 km, and 24,2% between 101-200 km. 58,7% of respondents declared their siblings studied at the same university, and only 4,6% indicated universities outside Lublin.

## 3. RESULTS

When selecting the university, the majority of students considered location (73,3%), personal ambitions (54,9%), and views and opinions of the community, family members, friends on the particular university and the level of education (52,3%). For 37,7% of respondents, employment opportunities available to graduates of particular universities as well as a wide selection of courses and specializations constituted a significant criterion. Every third respondent claimed that the university's renown, prospect of high salaries, low costs

of studies, and development opportunities were decisive. The following criteria occupied further positions on the list: faculty members' professionalism, experience and traditions of the university, student organizations, attractiveness of student life, and favorable social conditions (question 1).

**Table 5:** Criteria for choosing the University.

Specification	Value	Number of respondents	% Respondents share
Location		367	73,3
Personal ambition		275	54,9
Opinion of the environment / family / friends about the college and the level of education		262	52,3
Ease of finding work after graduation		189	37,7
Wide choice of directions and specialties		181	36,1
Reputation / prestige of the university		165	32,9
Ability to develop their own passions, interests		163	32,5
Cost of studies		162	32,3
Attractiveness of the city of Lublin		149	29,7
The prospect of good earnings		142	28,3
Easy qualification requirements		104	20,8
University experience and tradition		97	19,4
Position of the university in nationwide rankings		97	19,4
Activities of student organizations and the attractiveness of student life		71	14,2
Professional cadre		71	14,2
Attractive social conditions (social scholarships, dormitories)		70	14
Parental ambitions		41	8,2
Campus infrastructure facilities		40	8
Cooperation with foreign universities / foreign trips / Erasmus etc.		26	5,2
Other		21	4,2

Source: Own study based on a survey.

The study indicated that marketing campaigns conducted by universities are the most effective between March and June because this is the time when applicants search for educational offers and select their prospective universities. More than 20% of respondents were interested in universities' offers in May, 16,2% in June, and approx. 14% in March and April (question 2).

For more than 80% of respondents webpages constitute the source of knowledge regarding educational offer. For half of respondents it is views and opinions of students, graduates, family members and friends. Facebook, open days and information brochures ranked third. Press, radio and television advertisements ranked last with the score of 1% (question 3).

For more than 70% of respondents the university's webpage and Facebook fanpage constitute the most attractive information channel as far as promotion of educational offer is concerned. Subsequent places in the ranking are occupied by open days, meetings with universities' representatives, and education fairs. Press, radio and television advertisements were attractive for merely 4% of respondents (question 4).

**Table 6:** The effectiveness of information channels in the promotion of the educational offer of the universities.

Specification	Number of respondents	% Respondents share
University website	379	75,6
Facebook and other social media	361	72,1
Open day	321	64,1
Meetings with school representatives in schools	182	36,3
Educational Fair	181	36,1
University brochure / leaflet	161	32,1
Advertising in social media	119	23,8
The presence of the university on educational web sites	108	21,6
Outdoor advertising	33	6,6
commercial	32	6,4
Advertising on the radio	22	4,4
Direct e-mail	15	3
Advertising in the press	13	2,6
Other	6	1,2

Source: Own study based on a survey.

Respondents consider Facebook and other social media (46,6%), webpage (33,1%) and direct mailing (11,2%) as the swiftest means of finding information.

The majority of respondents (57%) perceive universities' marketing campaigns positively. 78,2% of respondents observed that promotion via the university's webpage was decisive with regards to their selection of the university. Facebook and other social media ranked second (52,3%). In addition, information brochures (44,3%), university open days (42,9%), and marketing events (22,4%) were also significant. The last place was occupied by radio, television and press advertisements (1-2,2%) (question 5).

**Table 7:** The impact of marketing activities on the choice of university.

Specification	Number of respondents	% Respondents share
University website	392	78,2
Facebook and other social media	262	52,3
University brochure / leaflet	222	44,3
Open day	215	42,9
Educational Fair	113	22,6
Event marketing eg.: Medykalia / Koziernalia / Juwenalia / Feliniada / Kulturalia	112	22,4
Meetings with school representatives in schools	67	13,4
The presence of the university on educational web sites	67	13,4
Advertising in social media	52	10,4
Other	30	6
Outdoor advertising	27	5,4
Direct e-mail	25	5
commercial	11	2,2
Advertising on the radio	11	2,2
Advertising in the press	5	1
Other	5	1

Source: Own study based on a survey.



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Results of the study indicated that the location of the university, personal ambitions, and views and opinions of friends and family members largely determine the selection of a particular university. Moreover, promotion campaigns conducted from March to June are the most effective. Therefore, intensifying the effort in this particular time period seems worthwhile.

A shift in advertising, from traditional to online marketing, can also be observed. The study proved that tools applied hitherto in marketing campaigns are ineffective, even if the effort is intensified. Hence, they are being replaced by modern, trendy and novel ones (question 6). The role of Facebook and other social media is significant. Such media constitute the channel offering the swiftest promotion and dissemination of information (question 7).

In order to improve the effectiveness of marketing, effort ought to be intensified as far as Lublin Voivodeship is concerned due to the fact that the majority of students originate from this particular region. In addition, rural areas ought to be focused on as well due to the fact that these regions boast a larger rate of natural increase.

Moreover, due to the impact of friends and family members upon the selection of a particular university, marketing ought to encompass not only candidates but also their communities. Attention should also be paid to current students and graduates. All marketing activities should be treated multichannel. Ensuring the university's webpage, which constitutes a kind of a business card, is clear and appealing is also vital.

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