

Research on the Image of a School

Professional paper

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KEY WORDS: *image, competitive advantage, semantic differential*

ABSTRACT - *By promoting and introducing the commercial way of management and behaviour, transition countries, and Croatia among them, found themselves facing numerous challenges. One of these challenges is the appearance of competition in all the areas of human activity, including education. Many processes have additionally contributed to this, with globalisation as their mutual denominator, and membership in the EU also affects the development of competition in this area. Therefore, it is not surprising that the areas of economic consideration and practice are also used more often in education. "Consumers", who are the key segment of the environment due to their importance, deserve full attention of the educational management. The benefits and advantages resulting from good image have been accepted a long time ago, and are recognised in the developed world countries. One of the most important ones is certainly the role of image in the positioning of products and services, which means taking a certain place regarding the competition in the consciousness of consumers and service users. Image can be "the one thing" that makes a difference. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to point out the importance of image control, the competition advantages that it can bring, how and why it is necessary to research and follow it.*

Strokovni članek

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KLJUČNE BESEDE: *imidž, konkurenčna prednost, semantična razlika*

POVZETEK - *Z uvajanjem tržnega gospodarstva se je obnašanje držav v tranziciji, tudi Hrvaške, znašlo pred številnimi izzivi. Eden izmed teh izzivov je pojav konkurence na vseh področjih človekovega delovanja, tudi v šolstvu. K temu so še dodatno prispevali mnogi procesi, katerih skupni imenovalec je globalizacija, članstvo v EU pa dodatno prispeva k razvoju konkurence na tem področju. Zato ni presenetljivo, da se področja gospodarskega razmišljanja in prakse vse bolj uporabljajo tudi v izobraževanju. „Potrošniki“, kot njegov ključni segment, zaslužijo vso pozornost vodstva šol. Koristi in prednosti, ki jih prinaša dober ugled, se v razvitih državah že dolgo priznavajo. Ena od najpomembnejših je gotovo vloga ugleda pri pozicioniranju izdelka ali storitve in posebno mesto v glavah potrošnikov ali uporabnikov storitve glede na konkurenco. Ugled je lahko ravno tisto »nekaj posebnega«, kar nas loči od ostalih. V prispevku želimo poudariti vpliv ugleda na konkurenčne prednosti, ki jih ta lahko prinese, pa tudi zakaj ga je treba raziskovati in spremljati.*

1 Introduction

By promoting and introducing the commercial way of management, thinking and behaviour, transition economies, including Croatia, found themselves facing numerous challenges. On the one hand, there are challenges arising from the overwhelming emergence of competition in all areas of human activity, including education. On the other hand, schools of all levels must meet the needs of the market by adjusting their curriculum and by organising their educational programmes and content. Along with these requirements that are necessary to meet the needs and accept the activities of the market economy, there are also other processes that fall under a common denominator – globalisation. Croatia's membership in the EU helped further expose its market to competition by bringing down even the last barriers – the formal ones, as well as the mental ones.

In the same way, commercial behaviour and entrepreneurship is being promoted even in the educational sector itself. This phenomenon is usually called the privatisation of education. The basic idea behind every privatisation, including this one, stems from the concept of neoliberalism, which claims that the state is a bad master and that the market is the most efficient way to allocate resources. The supporters of privatisation claim that the strong ideology of the private sector, which includes competition, experimenting, and initiative, can solve the problem of public sector inefficacy. Companies that make profit can manage the school system more purposefully and can achieve better results by following the logic of the private sector (Gidens, 2007). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the economic concepts and theories which are used in managing all other business organisations that operate in the environment of the market economy should be used in managing the education system. In the market economy, “a product is considered to be everything that can be offered to the market, with the purpose of attracting attention, encouraging purchase, usage or consumption. In the broader sense, products include physical goods, services, persons, places, organisations, ideas, and combinations of these units” (Kotler et. al., 2006). Even though education and knowledge are products of a separate kind, they also fall under the same rules of market competition that are set in the newly emerged market circumstances.

1.1 Competitiveness – the Requirement for Market Competition

If a company is to survive in the market, it has to have an economic advantage over its competition. Advantage in the market or competitive advantage is the punctum saliens of the strategic activity of the company, and its presence is the basic difference between the successful and the unsuccessful (Tipurić, 1999). In general, the strategy of a company should be directed towards offering a product or service different from products and services that their competitors offer, or it should be directed towards developing a competitive capacity against which the competitors can hardly measure (Thompson et. al., 2008).

The sustainability of competitive advantage is particularly important. Without it, the advantage can be quickly lost. Consequently, the basic goal of strategic management is to determine, create, and sustain competitive advantage through a relatively long period (Sikavica et. al., 2008).

Today, competition takes place mainly in the intangible and fluid facets of products and services. It is no longer enough for the product to have certain technical features, functionality or a reasonable price and such. It must establish and communicate a special relationship to the potential consumer. It must get the potential consumer to like it, to entice his/her emotions. It needs to undergo the selective perception process, to “click” and take a unique place in the consumer’s mind. In the same way, the line that separates the successful from the unsuccessful is becoming thinner and thinner. There are two important reasons for this: a) the consumers have access to information that enable them to make purchase and post-purchase decisions; b) consumers are aware of their importance and the competitive struggle that takes place in order to

earn their favour, and they want to be pleased and have their expectations fulfilled and exceeded (Garača et. al., 2013).

The image of the company is also its fundamental distinguishing factor from its competitors. It is often the strongest factor in the differentiation of a particular company, its products and/or services in comparison with competitive firms (Pirić, 2008).

1.2 The Theoretical Review of Image

The concept of image entered business theory and practice as a result of the soaring mass production and mass markets. A large number of companies offer the same or very similar kinds of products or services, which makes it difficult for consumers to adjust. Therefore, some kind of a marker guideline had to appear in order to guide the consumers and ease the purchase (Vugrinec – Hitrec, 1997).

The term “image” was introduced by Sidney Levy of Northwestern University in 1995, and since then it has been applied to various objects (Kotler and Barih, 1991). What Kotler (Kotler et. al, 2006) calls image is the sum of all beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has acquired about a particular product. Petz (1974.) sees image as “a picture of the product” or “an idea about the product” and describes it as a sequence of associations and an intellectual and emotional experience. Kesić (2003) defines image as the cognitive image of the company, product, person, process or a situation that the individual shapes based on the entire previous experience, attitude, opinion and perception which are more or less compatible with the actual characteristics of the product. Skoko (2005) writes that image is picturesque and specified and always simplified. In fact, image is always much simpler than the subject it represents. In addition, it is ambiguous because it hovers somewhere between imagination and senses, expectations and reality. It always has to be acceptable to the broad audience, and therefore, it should not be insulting.

1.3 The Competitive Advantages that Result from Image

There are many advantages that can be achieved through a desired image. The following text will highlight only the most important ones.

Image allows a faster and easier identification and selection of a particular product in a multitude of identical or very similar images. When making a decision about the purchase, the image does not simply “shift” a consumer through all stages of the process, but it also accelerates the decision-making process. Image strongly influences the satisfaction we experience when using a product and increases the social or psychological interpretation of satisfaction and, thus, creates loyalty among consumers. Positive associations and experiences regarding the image of existing products will be transferred onto new products and, therefore, facilitate their introduction into the market. It is also known that image affects the price level by reducing the elasticity of demand with respect to the prices. In other words, products with positive image can achieve a higher price than the competitors’ products, and at the same time, keep the same level of demand. The internal public, that is, managers and employees, will identify with the positive image of the product, and they will develop a sense of loyalty and

commitment to the organisation, which will attract new professionals and, ultimately, result in higher labour productivity. The external public will also respond positively to the good image by enabling faster access to goods, materials or funds.

1.4 The Specifics of Image Research

Every activity that determines an image ends up in the consumer's psyche, where it is processed and, as a result, has a certain reaction or behaviour. Therefore, an image is closely associated with the "mental" stimuli and conditions that occur in the human organism, two of which are of the utmost importance - the perception process and our attitudes. There is no particular method to conduct research on images, but due to high connectedness and interrelation, the traditional methods used to explore attitudes can also be used to research images.

Due to its complexity and the complexity of viewpoints, it is not possible to conduct direct testing in order to obtain objective answers. The reasons for this are the following:

- participants sometimes do not want to reveal the reasons for their behaviour because they believe doing so would put them into an unwanted or subordinate social position;
- participants often do not know the real reasons for their behaviour, and as a result, they do not know what their real attitude is;
- rationalisation, which often results in stating a "good" reason rather than the "real" reason behind our actions, in order to explain or justify certain behaviour (Marušić and Vranešević, 2001).

In order to avoid these difficulties, projective tests have been developed. These tests are based on the assumption that people express themselves more freely in indirect ways, whether they are aware of it or not. Projective tests are indirect means of testing which allow participants to project their feelings and beliefs onto a third party or another facility, while also putting them in situations where they are supposed to solve certain tasks. It is expected that participants will, based on their personal experiences and attitudes, express the emotions and opinions that are hidden and of which the participants are sometimes not aware (Marušić and Vranešević, 2001).

One of the most well-known methods of attitude research is the semantic differential. The semantic differential was developed in 1957, and, according to Pennington (2001), it measures the attitude strength and gives further information on the meaning of that attitude for the individual. The test is very simple: it consists of bipolar scales (for example: black - white), and the task of the participant is to place each adjective on the scale in the position where he/she personally believes it belongs. The scale consists of seven degrees, the negative extreme carries the lowest rating, and the positive extreme carries the highest rating.

During the construction of bipolar scales, one should be especially careful to choose a bipolar scale that will indicate the attitude towards the concept that is being examined, and not the scale that can only be applied to the specific characteristics of the concept. Therefore, if we ask a chimney sweep to use the scale "dirty – clean" to

determine the position of the concept “my job”, it is certain that he will place his rating in the “dirty” end of the scale, because his job really is dirty. However, this is not his/her attitude but a description of the specific characteristic of his/her post (Petz, 1974). The obtained results are used to calculate the average or the median for each scale and this presents the profile of the attitude, which is usually also depicted through a chart.

2 Methodology

The goal of this research is to examine the image profile of the Virovitica College.

The starting hypothesis is that the Virovitica College holds a positive image with its students, which affects its status and reputation as part of competitive advantage.

In the research, a semantic differential with 12 bipolar scales was used, and the respondents were asked to rate their experience regarding these concepts: unpleasant – pleasant, boring – amusing, useless – useful, poor – rich, primitive – intelligent, unfriendly – friendly, old fashioned – modern, sleepy – stimulating, shameful – proud, worthless – valuable, selfish – selfless and gloomy – cheerful. Along with the semantic differential, the respondents were also asked to fill in a questionnaire, through which data on their year and course of study were collected. These data were to be compared to the data regarding the attitudes of participants.

The research was conducted on a sample of 181 students at the Virovitica College who made 75.73% of that student body. The current students of the Virovitica College were selected as the sample since a survey conducted earlier among the first-year students showed that 48% of them had heard about the College from their friends or acquaintances, and 32.4% of them found out about it through web sources. According to this, prospective students have high confidence in personal communication. They especially trust the sources which already had experience with the service. The survey was conducted from 20 January to 23 January 2014, during the last week of the winter semester.

Table 1: The number of students that participated in the survey

	<i>Number of enrolled students</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>	<i>% of participants</i>
1st year	120	96	80
2nd year	45	37	82.22
3rd year	74	48	64.86
<i>TOTAL</i>	239	181	75.73

3 Results

Chart 1: The profile of image by the year of study

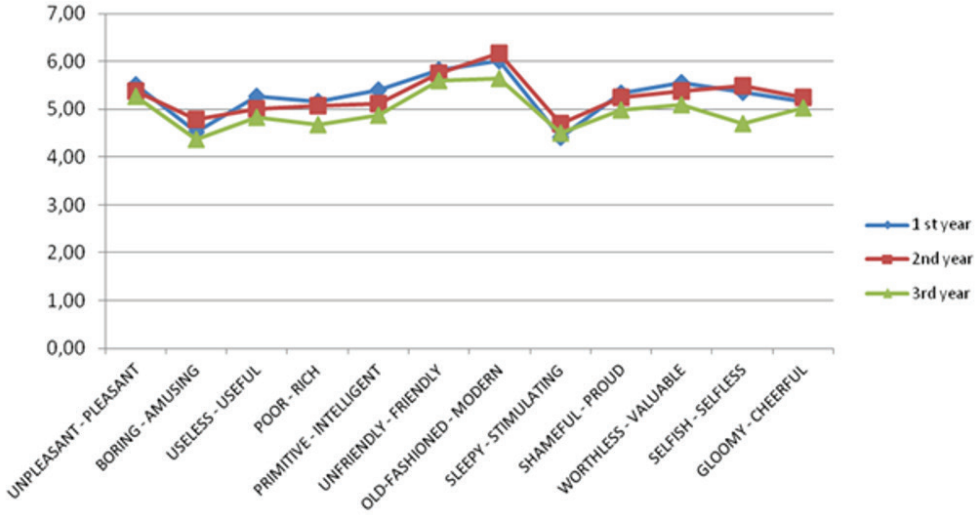
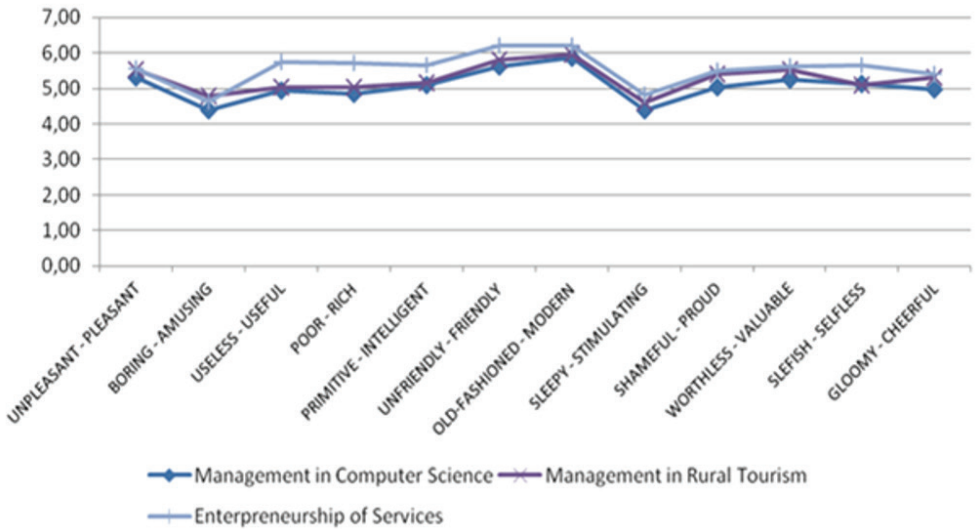


Chart 2: The profile of image by the course of study



4 The Analysis of Image of the Virovitica College

The Virovitica College was established by the Government of the Republic of Croatia on 7 September 2007. At the beginning, it was located in an older building, and in 2011, it moved to a newly renovated and fully adapted building of the former barracks in Virovitica, where it now has at its disposal an area of 2,852.57 m². The student restaurant was completed in 2013, and by 2012, the teacher student ratio was 1:30. The College includes two professional undergraduate study programmes in management and entrepreneurship with specialisations in Computer Science (quota of 60 students), Rural Tourism (quota of 30 students), and Services (quota of 30 students). At the professional studies of management, full-time professors and instructors teach 63.77% of classes, and at the professional studies of entrepreneurship, they teach 73.36% of classes. In order to enrol into the next academic year, students must pass all their exams and have no right to transfer their ETCS credits. To enable students to meet such high criteria, they are permitted to pass any exam by passing at least two continual assessments. Professors and instructors are also available for consultations, any literature and teaching materials are made accessible, and there is group mentoring and two additional examination periods.

The full profile of image of the Virovitica College is rated positive by the students that currently attend it (Chart 1 and Chart 2). If 3.5, the middle rating on the scale of 1 to 7, is perceived as a neutral image, and everything below 3.5 is perceived as a negative image, a positive image is the result of the fact that ratings in every bipolar scale vary between 4.42 and 6.21.

It can be seen that the minimum average values for all years and courses of study can be found on the sleepy – stimulating and boring – amusing scales (Chart 1 and Chart 2), which brings us to the conclusion that the students primarily feel sleepy and bored. Other research of the educational process (Bognar and Dubovicki, 2012) shows that the predominant emotions are boredom and fear, but the studies also show that it is possible to bring change and achieve for the positive emotions to prevail. As stated by Suzić (2010), learning and studying should bring daily joy and happiness to students, not fear and concern. His research, however, showed that the situation is different, and that our students are more concerned about the future than they are looking forward to learning and cognition. Even though sleepiness and boredom are perceived as the worst results, it should be noted that their average values do not fall below the 3.5 point, but are 0.70 points above, in the positive part of the scale. This shows that there is a possibility of changing these emotions in the future.

The highest average values for all years and courses of study can be found on the old-fashioned – modern and unfriendly – friendly scales, and they exceed the value of 6 points (Chart 1 and Chart 2), which can be perceived as a very high rating. The fact that students feel exceedingly modern and friendly can certainly be ascribed to: a) new and modern equipped college area, b) an adjusted student quota which is in accordance with the school capacity and the optimal teacher-student ratio which allows for easier building of positive relationships, and c) the atmosphere of the town of

Virovitica itself which, due to the scope of this paper, can only be described as open and intercultural.

If the image profile is viewed according to the year of study of the student (Figure 1), it is evident that first-year students hold the most positive image. They feel more cheerful, selfless, valuable, intelligent, rich and useful. Second-year students slightly lag behind first-year students. Third-year students, compared to their younger colleagues, hold the worst image. They feel less cheerful, selfless, valuable, intelligent, rich and useful than their colleagues. There are three possible explanations for this: a) first-year students are most enthusiastic, they are happy because they are continuing their education, and they look forward to the ambitions they are going to fulfil in the future, when they finish college, b) third-year students are fatigued, c) the fear of the future and the loss of enthusiasm, as Suzić (2010) states in his research.

If we look at the image profile of the Virovitica College with regard to the course of study of respondents (Chart 2), we can see that the students of Computer Science Management and Rural Tourism Management have an almost identical image of the College. Services students hold the most positive image. They feel more modern, friendly, intelligent, rich and useful. The similarity of image profile of students of Computer Science Management and Rural Tourism Management is understandable because both courses belong to the same undergraduate study programme. Somewhat more positive attitudes of the Entrepreneurship students show their optimistic view of the environment, a different view of problems and difficulties faced as well as their entrepreneurial spirit.

5 Conclusion

The initial hypothesis, that the Virovitica College holds a positive image with its students, which affects its status and reputation as competitive advantage, was confirmed.

The positive image of the Virovitica College built within its students is an intangible, but valuable property, which is one of the fundamental means to build the identity and framework of the business strategy. The positive image of the college, spread by the students within their surroundings, affects the building of the status and reputation of the college, which is its most important competitive advantage.

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Podoba šole kot konkurenčna prednost

Z uvajanjem tržnega gospodarstva se je obnašanje tranzicijskih držav, tudi Hrvaške, začelo soočati s številnimi izzivi. Na eni strani gre za izzive konkurence na vseh

področjih človekovega delovanja, tudi v izobraževanju. Po drugi strani pa je treba šole na vseh ravneh prilagajati potrebam trga s kurikuli ter izvedbo izobraževalnih programov in vsebin. K tem zahtevam po upoštevanju dejavnosti in potreb tržnega gospodarstva na vseh ravneh so prispevali tudi vsi procesi globalizacije. Prav tako se je tržno obnašanje in spodbujanje podjetništva uveljavilo tudi na področju izobraževanja, ki se običajno imenuje privatizacija šolstva. Osnovna ideja vseh privatizacij (vključno s to) je, da je država slab gospodar in da je trg najbolj učinkovit način za dodeljevanje sredstev. Zato ni presenetljivo, da je treba pri upravljanju izobraževalnih ustanov uporabljati ekonomske koncepte in teorije, ki so prisotni tudi pri upravljanju vseh drugih poslovnih organizacij v razmerah tržnega gospodarstva. V resnici pa se v tržnem gospodarstvu za »proizvode šteje vse, kar se lahko ponudi na trgu z namenom, da zbudi pozornost, spodbuja k nakupu, uporabi ali porabi, s tem pa lahko izpolnjuje želje ali potrebe. V širšem smislu med proizvode štejemo fizične predmete, storitve, osebe, kraje, organizacije, ideje ali kombinacijo posameznih enot« (Kotler et al., 2006). Čeprav je izobraževanje in znanje proizvod posebne vrste, tudi za njiju v novih tržnih razmerah veljajo vsa pravila konkurence. Da bi podjetje preživel na trgu, mora imeti konkurenčno prednost pred svojimi tekmeci. Danes je konkurenca večinoma prisotna v neopredmetenih in tekočih sestavinah izdelkov in storitev. Ni več dovolj, da ima izdelek določene tehnične lastnosti, funkcionalnost, da je stroškovno ugoden in podobno. Mora vzpostaviti poseben odnos s potrošniki, mora jim biti všeč, mora spodbuditi njihove občutke, iti skozi proces selektivnega dojemanja in zavzeti posebno mesto v njihovih mislih. Imidž podjetja je tudi njegov glavni razpoznavni dejavnik glede na konkurenco in pogosto najmočnejši dejavnik diferenciacije določenega podjetja, njegovih izdelkov in/ali storitev v primerjavi s tekmecem. Vsota prepričanj, idej, vtisov, ki jih je oseba pridobila o določenem predmetu Kotler (Kotler et al., 2006), imenuje imidž (ugled). Kesić (2003) ga definira kot kognitivno podobo o družbi, izdelku, osebi, procesu ali stanju, ki jo posameznik oblikuje na podlagi celotne predhodne izkušnje, odnosov, mnenj in pogledov, ki so bolj ali manj usklajeni z dejanskimi značilnostmi. Slika omogoča hitrejšo in lažje prepoznavanje in izbiro posameznega izdelka med množico enakih ali zelo podobnih. Pri odločanju o nakupu boljši imidž ne more samo »premikati« potrošnikov skozi vse faze postopka, ampak tudi pospeši proces odločanja. Imidž močno vpliva na občutek zadovoljstva, ko uporabljamo ali porabljamo proizvod in povečuje socialno ali psihološko razlago zadovoljstva, s tem pa ustvarja med potrošniki lojalnost. Pozitivne asociacije in izkušnje v zvezi z obstoječimi izdelki se prenašajo na nove izdelke in jim s tem olajšajo vstop na trg. Znano je, da imidž lahko vpliva na raven cen z zmanjšanjem elastičnosti povpraševanja v zvezi z njim. Z drugimi besedami, izdelki s pozitivno podobo lahko dosežejo višjo ceno od konkurence, ne da bi se zato zmanjšalo povpraševanje po njih. Notranja javnost se poistoveti s pozitivno podobo proizvoda, razvije se občutek pripadnosti in zavezanosti organizaciji, privabijo se novi strokovnjaki, ki v končni fazi vplivajo na večjo produktivnost dela. Zunanja javnost se bo tudi pozitivno odzvala na dober imidž, tako da omogoči hitrejši dostop do blaga, materiala ali finančnih sredstev. Ne obstajajo tehnike za raziskovanje ugleda, ampak zaradi izjemne povezanosti in soodvisnosti se za to raziskovanje tradicionalno uporabljajo tehnike mnenjske raziskave. Zaradi

svoje kompleksnosti in zahtevnosti odnosov so pokazale, da z direktnim spraševanjem ni bilo mogoče dobiti objektivnih odgovorov iz naslednjih razlogov:

- anketiranci včasih ne želijo navajati razlogov za svoje obnašanje, ker menijo, da če bi navedli te razloge, bi lahko prišli v neželjen ali podrejen družbeni položaj;
- anketiranci pogosto ne poznajo pravih razlogov za svoje obnašanje, tako da niti ne poznajo svojega pravega stališča;
- racionalizacije, ki je v tem, da se navede »dober« razlog namesto »pravega« razloga za naše vedenje, da se pojasni ali upraviči določeno vedenje (Marušič in Vranešević, 2001).

Da bi se izognili tem težavam, so razvili projekcijske tehnike, ki izhajajo iz predpostavke, da se ljudje svobodneje izražajo posredno. Ena izmed najbolj priljubljenih tehnik za mnenjske raziskave je semantični diferencial (pomensko razlikovanje). Preizkus je sestavljen iz bipolarnih lestvic, a naloga anketiranih je, da dani pojem postavijo na vsaki lestvici na (po njihovem mnenju) ustrezno mesto. Lestvica je sestavljena iz 7 stopenj, na negativnem koncu je najnižji rezultat, na pozitivnem pa najvišji. Visoka šola Virovitica je izvedla raziskavo o svoji podobi. Namen raziskave je raziskati profil imidža te šole. Začetna hipoteza je, da ima Visoka šola Virovitica pozitivno podobo pri svojih študentih, ki vpliva na njen ugled in priznanje konkurenčne prednosti. Pri raziskovanju je uporabljeno pomensko razlikovanje z 12 bipolarnimi lestvicami, na katerih so se morali vprašani odločiti v zvezi s pojmi: neprijetno – prijetno, dolgočasno - zabavno, nekoristno - koristno, revno - bogato, primitivno - inteligentno, sovražno - prijazno, staromodno - moderno, zaspano – spodbudno, sramotno - ponosno, ničvredno - vredno, sebično - nesebično in mračno - jasno.

Študija je bila izvedena na vzorcu 181 študentov Visoke šole Virovitica, kar znaša 75,73 % njene populacije. Ti študenti so bili izbrani za vzorec, ker se je v že opravljeni anketi med študenti prvih letnikov študija pokazalo, da jih je 48 % izvedelo za Visoko šolo Virovitica preko prijateljev in znancev in 32,4 % prek spletne strani. Torej, bodoči študentje imajo veliko zaupanje v tiste vire, ki imajo že izkušnje s to storitvijo.

Skupni profil podobe Visoke šole Virovitica pri trenutnih študentih je, lahko rečemo, pozitiven. Če je na lestvici od 1 do 7 polovico lestvice 3,5 obravnavamo to kot nevtralnno podobo, vse pod to vrednostjo pa kot negativno, pozitivna podoba izhaja iz dejstva, da se rezultati na vseh bipolarnih lestvicah gibljejo v intervalu 4,42-6,21.

Opozoriti je treba, da so najnižje povprečne vrednosti za vse letnike študija in vse študijske smeri na lestvici zaspano - spodbudno in dolgočasno - zabavno, kar pomeni, da se študentje večinoma počutijo zaspano in dolgčasno. Tudi druge raziskave vzgojno-izobraževalnega procesa (Bognar in Dubovicki, 2012) kažejo, da prevladujejo občutki dolgočasnja in strahu. Čeprav zaspanost in dolgočasje dojemamo kot najslabše rezultate, je treba opozoriti, da njihove povprečne vrednosti ne presegaajo polovice lestvice 3,50, ampak so za 0,70 točke pomaknjene desno, tj. v pozitivni del.

Največje povprečne vrednosti za vse letnike študija in vse smeri so na lestvicah staromodno – moderno in sovražno - prijateljsko in presegaajo vrednost 6 točk, kar se lahko šteje za zelo visoko. Da se študentje počutijo zelo moderno in prijazno je gotovo prispevalo: a) novi in moderno opremljeni prostori šole, b) prilagojene kvote vpisanih

štvorci u skladu z mogućivostjo škole in optimalnim razmerjem učitelj : študent (1 : 30), v katerih je lažje graditi pozitivne odnose in c) vzdušje mesta Virovitice.

Če profil imidža gledamo z ozirom na letnik študija anketiranih študentov, je razvidno, da je najbolj pozitivna podoba škole v očeh študentov prvega letnika. Ti se bolj kot njihovi kolegi iz drugega in tretjega letnika počutijo nekaj vredni, ponosni, prijazni, pametni, bogati in koristni. Študenti drugega letnika zanemarljivo malo zaostajajo za kolegi iz prvega letnika. Pri študentih tretjega letnika pa je v primerjavi z mlajšimi kolegi imidž škole najslabši. Manj kot njihovi kolegi se počutijo veselo, nesebično, vredno, inteligentno, bogato in koristno. Obstajajo tri možne razlage za to: a) prvo leto so študenti najbolj navdušeni in srečni zaradi nadaljnjega izobraževanja in ambicij, ki si jih želijo realizirati, ko bodo zaključili šolanje; b) utrujenost študentov v tretjem letniku; c) strah pred prihodnostjo in izguba entuziazma.

Glede na smeri študija raziskava kaže, da imajo študenti informacijskega menedžmenta in menedžmenta podeželskega turizma na Visoki šoli Virovitica skoraj identično podobo škole. Najbolj pozitivno podobo imajo študenti podjetništva storitev. Oni se bolj kot njihovi kolegi počutijo sodobno, prijazno, pametno, bogato in koristno. Podobnost profila imidža pri študentih informacijskega menedžmenta in menedžmenta podeželskega turizma je razumljiva, saj obiskujejo isti študijski program - menedžment. Nekoliko bolj pozitivna stališča podjetnikov govorijo o njihovem optimističnem pogledu na okolje, drugačnem pogledu na probleme in težave, s katerimi se soočajo, kar v resnici govori tudi o njihovem podjetniškem duhu.

Potrjena je začetna hipoteza, da ima Visoka šola Virovitica pri svojih študentih pozitivno podobo, ki vpliva na njen ugled in njeno konkurenčno prednost.

Pozitivna podoba Visoke škole Virovitica, zgrajena na njenih študentih, predstavlja nematerialno, a dragoceno premoženje, ki je eden od glavnih virov za izgradnjo identitete in okvira za poslovno strategijo. Pozitivna podoba Visoke škole Virovitica, ki jo študentje širijo v svojem okolju, vpliva na konstrukcijo podobe in ugleda škole, kar je njena najpomembnejša konkurenčna prednost.

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