

## IMPROVING POSITIONING STRATEGIES OF UKRAINIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION SPACE UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF REFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION

### УДОСКОНАЛЕННЯ СТРАТЕГІЙ ПОЗИЦІОНУВАННЯ ЗАКЛАДІВ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ УКРАЇНИ В МІЖНАРОДНОМУ ІНФОРМАЦІЙНОМУ ПРОСТОРИ В УМОВАХ РЕФОРМУВАННЯ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

*The article describes the main stages of development, improvement and implementation of the positioning strategy of higher education institutions, in particular: benchmarking of positioning strategies of educational service markets and determining the priority areas of our own strategy; setting goals and related tasks; making a management decision regarding the choice of a strategy for the positioning the HEI in the international information space; planning, development and implementation of special measures, forms and means of positioning the HEI in the IIS; analyzing the effectiveness of the implementation of the chosen positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS. The forms and means of presenting the advertising background have been determined: introducing, convincing, reminding or consolidation of information about educational services or educational products of the HEI and positioning of the university brand. The forms of the advertising background presentation have been chosen: informative (briefings, press events, press conferences, holding Open Days, etc.); scientific, scientific and educational, educational, business (conferences, symposia, congresses, workshops, meetings, etc.); organizational and festive (opening ceremony (research laboratory, new building, summer school, etc.), student day, freshman day, graduation ball, New Year festivities); charitable (charity evenings, auctions, flashmobs, etc.); image events (celebration of significant dates in honour of the founding of the HEI), special recurrent events held on the premises of the HEI and associated only with this education institution. There have been suggested recommendations for improving the positioning strategies of Ukrainian higher education institutions in the international information space under the conditions of reforming higher education of Ukraine, which include: advertising on television, in magazines, newspapers, specialized educational advertising press, use of Internet resources (social networks, state educational sites, official HEI websites (promo sites, business card sites, targeting, etc.), blogs).*

**Key words:** positioning, international information space, PR managers, educational marketing.

*У статті розглянуто основні етапи розробки, удосконалення та реалізація стра-*

*тегії позиціонування закладів вищої освіти, а саме: бенчмаркінг стратегій позиціонування ринків освітніх послуг й визначення пріоритетних напрямів власної стратегії; формулювання цілей і виходячи з них відповідних завдань; прийняття управлінського рішення щодо вибору стратегії позиціонування ЗВО в міжнародному інформаційному просторі; планування, розробка та реалізація спеціальних заходів, форм і засобів позиціонування ЗВО в МІП; аналіз ефективності реалізації обраної стратегії позиціонування ЗВО в МІП. Визначено форми та засоби подання рекламного бекграунду: ознайомлення, переконання, нагадування або закріплення інформації щодо освітніх послуг або освітніх продуктів ЗВО та позиціонування бренда університету. Обрано форми подання рекламного бекграунду: інформаційні (брифінги, прес-івеннти, прес-конференції, проведення Днів відкритих дверей тощо); наукові, науково-освітні, освітні, ділові (конференція, симпозіуми, конгреси, воркшопи, майстер-класи, зустрічі тощо); організаційно-святкові (церемонія відкриття (науково-дослідної лабораторії, нового корпусу, будівлі, літньої школи тощо), проведення дня студента, першокурсника, випускного балу, новорічних свят); благодійні (благодійні вечори, аукціони, флешмоби тощо); іміджеві (святкування урочистих дат із нагоди заснування ЗВО), спеціальні періодичні заходи, що проводяться в стінах ЗВО та асоціюються тільки з даним закладом освіти. Запропоновані рекомендації для удосконалення стратегій позиціонування закладів вищої освіти України в міжнародному інформаційному просторі в умовах реформування вищої освіти України, до яких входять: реклама на телебаченні, журналах, газеті, спеціалізованих освітніх рекламних виданнях, використання інтернет-ресурсів (соціальні мережі, державні освітні сайти, офіційні web-сайти ЗВО (промо-сайти, сайти-візитки, таргетинг тощо), блоги).*

**Ключові слова:** позиціонування, міжнародний інформаційний простір, PR-менеджери, освітній маркетинг.

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**Problem statement.** Modern life realities impose new rules on us. It relates not only to our everyday life. Unfortunately, changes are happening in all spheres of life, in particular in education. During the war, the introduction of market relations and autonomy into the activities of Ukrainian higher education institutions (HEIs), the rapid spread of open online and distance higher education, the competition of universities is steadily increasing, and a well-chosen positioning strategy contributes to the creation of a suitable positive image (image, brand) of HEIs, which

differs from the analogues of HEI-competitors in the mind of the consumer of educational services and outlines an attractively convincing background as for the HEI's activities to interested parties.

**Analysis of the recent researches and publications.** A. Kharkivska and other scholars devoted their works to the general issues of positioning theory and strategy. The importance of using modern marketing by education institutions was focused on the studies of domestic scientists S. Ilyashenko, M. Matviyiv, O. Mitsura, M. Kovalchuk, etc.

**The aim of the article** is to determine and give recommendations on improving positioning strategies of Ukrainian higher education institutions in the international information space (IIS) under the conditions of reforming the system of higher education in Ukraine.

**Presenting the main material.** Modernization of higher education in Ukraine calls for searching for ways to improve the management systems of higher education institutions, higher education accreditation, fundraising, increasing the quality of teaching, etc. A. Kharkivska emphasizes, «the change in the directions of strategic development of higher education institutions, the growth of competition in the labour market and educational services, the wide use of modern information technologies and means of communication in the conditions of an unformed Smart-society encourage higher education to find new ways to increase competitiveness and create competitive advantages. Each HEI strives to be more attractive to its target audience (applicants, students, employers, state authorities, investors, etc). This task can be solved by developing a positioning strategy for the higher education institutions» [8, p. 134].

The development, improvement and implementation of the positioning strategy of higher educational institutions consists of the following main stages: 1) benchmarking positioning strategies for educational services markets and determining the priority directions for our own strategy; 2) defining goals and corresponding tasks; 3) making a management decision regarding the choice of strategy for the positioning of the HEI in the IIS; 4) planning, development and implementation of special activities, forms and means to position a higher education institution in the IIS; 5) analyzing the effectiveness of the chosen strategy of the HEI positioning in the IIS; and at different levels, according to the organizational structure of the higher education institution: the education institution in general; faculties; departments; structural subdivisions, etc. But the goals differ in scale at different levels, for example: at the level of higher education institutions – determining of mission positioning, at the level of faculties – the positioning of faculty-wide goals, at the level of departments, structural divisions (research institutes, laboratories, etc.) – the positioning of specific goals.

PR-managers have to understand that in the case of proper, carefully thought-out development and implementation of the corresponding strategy, a synergistic effect will occur, the overall desired result of which will be higher than the result of the arithmetic sum of its structure components.

The first stage is benchmarking of strategies for the positioning of educational services markets, which involves a comparative analysis of university PR activities with those of university-competitors at the university level; at the faculty level the same

should be done for related specialties; at the level of departments and structural subdivisions – for separate educational services; determining competitive advantages in positioning (the quality of educational services, relatively lower commercial price of education as compared to university-competitors, the availability of summer schools for schoolchildren, additional vocational training, holding special free events (open seminars, lectures by leading scientists, open online workshops), high level of university internationalization and academic mobility, etc.). Moreover, priority areas of university own positioning strategy have to be identified.

It is necessary to systematize the results of benchmarking and determine which areas of strategy and PR activities should be modernized.

The second stage involves determining goals and related tasks of the positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS, which are subordinate to the general mission of the university (support or formation (if the HEI has only been established or has been carrying out educational activities for only a few years) of its image, reputation and effective presentation of its own achievements, educational services and educational products compared to HEI-competitors), the goals and relevant tasks of faculty positioning (carrying out information and advertising activities with the aim of increasing interest in the faculty's specialties and helping to define them), department positioning (carrying out in-depth information and advertising activities about particular specialties and focusing on the prestigious career of the graduates); at the level of structural subdivisions – advertising through the visual display of interesting and unusual scientific researches, experiments, achievements.

Identifying goals and tasks of this strategy contributes to realizing further actions and answering the question on how these goals can be achieved. It interrelates with the transition to the next stages.

The third stage is making a management decision regarding the choice of a positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS. The essence of the positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS is an action plan aimed at segmenting the educational market, determining the interests and needs of the target audience, forming a positive image (brand) and maintaining the reputation of the HEI among the consumers of educational services or users of educational products; providing an attractive background to the interested parties regarding the competitive advantages of education and the prospects that appear after graduating from this education institution, as well as to scientists, stakeholders within the international space of exchange and obtaining information with the help of relationships between the material and objects, subjects and phenomena.

Having completed the third stage, you can move on to the next one, which is planning, development and implementation of special events, forms and

means of positioning the HEI in the IIS to ensure the awareness of the potential target audience on the activities performed by the HEI.

To implement the fourth stage, we offer the structural unit (if available) or PR managers the following algorithm to realize this stage of the positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS.

First, the appropriate target audience (schoolchildren, applicants, students, academic staff, employers and others) and its approximate volume should be determined.

Secondly, it is necessary to determine the content and arguments of the advertising background presentation (the initial familiarization of the target audience with the education institution is usually carried out by the distribution of mass advertising in the IIS, the content of which contains the minimum necessary information about the higher education institution). The main arguments for presenting an advertising background for consumers of educational services can include: financial; brand recognition; internationalization of the HEI activity; innovativeness and quality of the educational process.

Thirdly, it is recommended to determine special measures, forms and means of positioning the HEI in the IIS, taking into account the goals set and the available opportunities for achieving the specified advertising tasks.

Traditionally, the positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS resorts to advertising to form «public relations» about the activities and achievements of higher education institutions in general and to provide background information on individual educational services or educational products to the immediately interested target audience.

PR managers, starting to determine the forms and means of presenting the advertising background, have to understand that the goals of advertising include familiarization, convincing, reminding or consolidation of information about educational services or educational products of higher education institutions and positioning of the university brand.

Having determined the goals, PR managers should choose the forms of presenting the advertising background: informative; scientific, scientific and educational, educational, business; organizational and festive; charitable; image, special recurrent events held within the walls of higher education institutions and associated only with this education institution. The effectiveness of advertising depends on the correctly chosen ratio: informativeness – price – emotionality.

Thus, special measures of positioning are more or less the same and aimed at informativeness. At the same time, PR managers do not sufficiently take into account the need to form «public relations».

This is confirmed by M. Matviiev's analysis of the national central and local press regarding the quality of advertising of higher education institutions. This anal-

ysis showed an «exceptional dryness», no appeal to the emotional world of potential consumers in advertising messages about educational services. 57 % of advertising messages inform about the duration and terms of education, 38 % concern documents issued after graduation, and only 19 % – about the cost of education. Obviously, the minimization of the volume of the absolute majority of messages is due to the low solvency of educational institutions» [7, p. 232].

At the current stage of ICT development and taking into account the global problem of today (the rapid spread of the COVID-19 and the full-scale invasion of russia into Ukraine), the distribution of advertising in the IIS is especially relevant when solving the research task. The development of digital technologies helps PR managers to make advertising more creative, emotional, to provide an increased amount of relevant information. The modern positioning strategy of the university and the advertising campaign carried out by PR managers affect not only the selected target audience, but almost all strata of the population, which use the IIS to this or that extent.

When choosing means of media advertising, PR managers, first of all, should pay attention to advertising on television, which covers the largest audience and combines sound, video, movement, colour, and therefore can be more informative, creative, emotional, etc.

We suggest considering radio as the next means of advertising for HEIs positioning. The development of digital technologies contributes to the development of mobile phones, which have a built-in radio function; radio is available in private cars, in public transport. Life experience shows that the use of this tool will be effective if advertising is repeated from time to time.

Media advertising also includes advertising in magazines, newspapers and other print media. Readers usually keep purchased magazines for a long time and re-read them. Therefore, advertisements can attract attention many times.

Advertising in the newspaper promotes educational services and educational products of the HEI to a wider range of readers.

It is worth resorting to specialized educational advertising publications for the positioning of HEIs as they are usually distributed free of charge and cover many groups of consumers of educational services. At the same time, the cost of such advertising is very high.

The use of Internet resources (social networks, state educational sites, official websites of higher education institutions (promo sites, business card sites, targeting, etc.), blogs) also belongs to the means of media advertising.

Personal sites or blogs can also be used to position the HEI in the IIS. Today, there is a trend in the development of the blogosphere to conduct various advertising campaigns, both open and hidden.

Having considered the means of media advertising, it is advisable for PR managers to take into account non-media advertising means when positioning HEIs.

Non-media direct advertising includes direct mailing or SMS. These means of HEI positioning give us an opportunity to monitor quantitative and qualitative indicators of responses of educational services consumers and help PR managers to measure the effectiveness of their usage.

Moreover, besides the magazines and newspapers (periodicals) discussed above non-media advertising includes such types of printed advertising as brochures, postcards, flyers, commercials, banners, etc.

Fourthly, it is required to implement related special measures, forms and means of positioning the HEI in the IIS in a certain sequence in time, in accordance with the objectives of the positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS.

The preparation and implementation of special measures and the choice of appropriate forms and means are within the competence of the PR managers of the HEI and are conducted at the following stages: creative and organizational-controlling.

Summing up the fourth stage, it is worth mentioning that there is no definite correlation between the number of potential consumers of educational services and the number of special measures, forms and means held, since they are all aimed at ensuring the overall desired result.

After the implementation of the chosen special measures, forms and means of positioning the HEI in the IIS (the fourth stage), it is necessary to analyze the effectiveness of the implemented positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS (the fifth stage).

The aim of the fifth stage is to obtain and analyze information (feedback) regarding the understanding of the effectiveness of the implemented positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS, the extent to which the goals set for the current year have been achieved (medium-term and long-term perspective).

Analyzing the effectiveness of the implemented positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS, it is necessary to understand that the positioning of the university is aimed, first of all, at maintaining a positive image and reputation of the institution, but it is very difficult to calculate and translate into financial equivalents. Moreover, the implementation results of the positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS can be obtained within the deferred period, which, accordingly, does not give an immediate result regarding the effectiveness of the chosen strategy.

Having adapted the indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of advertising means proposed by the scientist, we suggest that PR managers evaluate the overall effectiveness of the implementation of the chosen strategy for positioning the HEI in the IIS according to the following indicators: OTS (opportunity to see) (frequency of contacts with an advertising appeal) [3], CTR (click through rate) (clickability index

of Internet-advertising (in percentage terms), i.e. the ratio between the number of ad displays and clicks on it) [1], CPT (cost of advertising contact per thousand people) [5], Rating (the number of viewers who make up the target audience of an advertising message, watching this channel at a specific hour / visiting the site, social networks, etc., classified as potential consumers), Share (characterizes the degree of preference viewers give to certain events), GRP (gross rating point) (sum of ratings of all advertising placements in the IIS) [6], CCP (the ratio of the cost of advertising placement to the GRP indicator), CPC (cost per click) (the price of a transition (click) to Internet advertising, is calculated when exiting current advertising on a specific site and CTR price per 1000 advertising displays) [4], AIR (average issue readership) (average statistical number of readers of one issue of periodical and non-periodical publications) [2], etc.

**Conclusions.** Therefore, as a result of developing the positioning strategy of the HEI in the IIS on the grounds of the scientific and methodological recommendations presented above the following questions can be answered: «Is the existing university positioning strategy effective among consumers of educational services?»; «Does the quality of educational services provided by higher education institutions correspond to their positioning in the IIS?»; «How is the opinion of schoolchildren, applicants, students, listeners, stakeholders formed regarding educational services provided by higher education institutions?»; «Does the positioning of university's own social and educational infrastructure contribute to decision-making regarding admission to this higher education institution?».

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