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**EDUCATIONAL MARKETING – ACADEMIC ACTION AND
IDENTITY**

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Abstract

The marketing practice proves that the biggest actors on the market, despite their leading position, develop consistent and sustainable communicational campaigns, in order to consolidate and increase their status. It is the case of Babeş – Bolyai University (UBB) in Cluj-Napoca – the oldest, the biggest and the most prestigious university in Romania from several points of view. On this basis, the present study analyses the particular case of the university's Extension in Târgu-Mureş, belonging to the UBB Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, in terms of brand awareness, compared to the tutelary organisation. From the conceptual perspective, the analysis reveals significant awareness differences between the two entities, in favour of the tutelary institution, although the Extension is identified with its reputation, practice and organisational culture. On the action level, the study presents an educational marketing plan, targeting to improve the Extension's awareness and connection to the local community, as well as some of its earliest results. The project scope, derived from the initial needs analysis, was to consolidate the presence of UBB – Mureş Extension in its local space of reference and to increase its awareness, on a medium-term basis, by means of organizational communication and educational marketing, in order to support the organization's credibility and attractiveness among the local providers of educational services.

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1. Introduction

The Babeş-Bolyai Extension in Târgu-Mureş, belonging to The Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (FPSE), is one of the local structures of the university through which the institution has a local presence, besides its headquarters in Cluj-Napoca.

The Extension in Târgu-Mureş (UBB – MS Extension) was established in 2000, with the purpose of offering the local community services of academic specialization in The Pedagogy of Preschool and Primary School Education (PPPE), thus contributing to the development of the local pedagogic community through the experience and reputation held by Babeş-Bolyai University. In 17 years, through its two sections, Romanian and Hungarian, the UBB – MS Extension formed over 1.500 preschool and primary school teachers.

Considering the increasing competitiveness on the local market providers of licensed educational services specialized in The Pedagogy of Preschool and Primary School Education, the present study analyses the premises and partial results of a project developed within the discipline Educational Marketing, with the focus on the image and brand awareness of UBB – MS Extension, in relation to the image and brand awareness of the tutelary organization, with the purpose of *identifying directions of action and adequate means to consolidate and improve the UBB – MS Extension positioning within the local environment of reference*, in order to sustain a durable development of the Extension from the perspective of organizational communication and educational marketing.

2. Problem Statement

In order to formulate *the problem to solve*, a diagnosis was performed as an operation “consisting in the identification of the causes related to negative phenomena (processes which represent the substance of the respective problem), of the factors which might influence positively or negatively the chosen solution.” (Iacob, & Cismaru, 2010).

In this phase, preliminary to action, the purpose was analyzing a set of elements with an impact on the Extension’s image and awareness, predominantly in the area of the organizational culture (vision, ideas, myths, believes, traditions, norms, values, symbols) which reflects in the managerial style, in the members’ motivations, in the organization’s image. Naturally, the identity elements targeted for the analysis represent common elements of the local organization (UBB – MS Extension) and of the tutelary organization (UBB), as a local reflection of the organization’s identity, vision and mission.

The multicultural culture of the university reflects in all of the 21 faculties within the University, as well as in the network of the university’s extensions in Transylvania. The Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (FPSE) was established in 1997. Its present structure reflects the declared intention of the academic staff to cover domains and subdomains which are scientifically and professionally related. Integrating high academic standards and a broad educational offer, FPSE provides initial training and continuing education in the field of Psychology and Educational Sciences. The programmes of study are conducted in Romanian, English, Hungarian and German. (<http://www.ubbcluj.ro/en/despre/prezentare/misiune>)

In the present organizational structure, the UBB – MS Extension holds the status of a network element, with a role and impact reflected at the micro level of analysis (in this case, the social and academic

community in the Mureş area), as well as at the macro level (the extended Transylvanian space, as reference environment for the tutelary organization). (Hâncean, 2014)

3. Research Questions

According to the *Romanian Explanatory Dictionary*, awareness is synonym to the reputation or the fame of an individual or of an institution. In terms of media market, the brand awareness reflects the extent to which a brand is known and recognized, measured in “the number of persons in a given population, who are able to identify something or someone, even approximately. Notoriety can be spontaneous when the questioned person gets no additional information, or assisted, when the answers are expressed in yes or no regarding the products names or individuals that need to be identified.” (Media dictionary LAROUSSE, 2005).

Before getting a good image by means of communication and educational marketing, an organisation must obtain awareness, an indicator measurable by the spontaneous notoriety (the respondent indicates spontaneously the organisation’s name), top of mind (the organisation is one of the first mentioned spontaneously by the respondent), assisted (the respondent knows the name of the organisation which is presented to him) and qualified (the respondent is capable to mention some marks or products associated to the organisation) (Libaert, 2009, p. 117).

In order to formulate the research questions necessary for identifying the problem to solve, the study started from the assumption that locally, the notoriety level of UBB – MS Extension was lower compared to the notoriety of the governing organization, UBB Cluj-Napoca. For formulating this assumption, a necessary distinction was made between the different categories of local public: the general public (the entire local community in the Mureş area) and the specialized public (practitioners, graduates of the specialized educational institutions).

The diagnosis was based on the following questions, targeting both general and specific aspects:

- *Is there a difference between the awareness of the governing organization – UBB Cluj-Napoca and its local structure UBB – Mureş Extension?*
- *By which channels does the UBB – Mureş Extension generally communicate with the local community and specifically, with the specialized community formed by education specialists and practitioners?*
- *What image do the graduates of UBB – Mureş Extension project (self-image / organization-wise image)?*
- *Which are the messages, channels and means to be used in order to increase the awareness of the Mureş Extension, with reduced costs or none?*

4. Purpose of the Study

The *project scope*, derived from the initial needs analysis, is to consolidate the presence of UBB – Mureş Extension in its local space of reference and to increase its awareness, on a medium-term basis, by means of organizational communication and educational marketing, in order to support the organization’s credibility and attractiveness among the local providers of educational services.

For each of the analysed elements (notoriety, educational offer, human resources, material resources), the project aimed to identify the capital and the needs of the organisation, in order to formulate the ways of action and the necessary instruments:

- the problem to solve;
- the proper methods for action;
- the messages for different target groups;
- the available means to be used for achieving the objectives (mostly the modern technologies for mass communication, especially the social media, by finding the most efficient ways to adapt to the current informational abundance, which requires a profound restructuring and transformation, both at an individual and educational level). (Albulescu, 2003)

The project’s ways of action were structured for a gradual development, in 4 phases:

- the diagnosis;
- the scope;
- the action planning on a medium term (2015-2017);
- the plan implementation and monitoring (2015-2017).

5. Research Methods

The diagnosis aimed to identify the problem to solve by a SWOT analysis from the perspective of Educational marketing discipline, which analysed the image and notoriety of the organisation, on the two levels relevant for the local level: the tutelary institution (UBB) and its local organisation (UBB – Mureş Extension).

In order to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, we used the *interview* for a subject *focus-group* composed of the second year students, who attend the courses of the faculty in Târgu-Mureş (100% girls aged 19-34). From the sociological perspective, given the students gender structure within the Extension, by using this focus-group we operated with a partially representative sample of subjects – compared to the external environment of the organisation (the community/general public), and with a totally representative sample of subjects – compared to the internal environment of the organisation (the students population).

The needs analysis targeted four components, relevant from the image and activity of the organisation: the notoriety, the educational offer, the human resources, the material resources.

Table 01. The needs analysis – diagnosis phase

Image / Notoriety	Educational offer	Human resources	Material resources
+ the reputation of an powerful academic brand + high level of direct promotion + high level of notoriety within the specialized public	+ multicultural profile + accredited specialization	+ high academic standards + high representation of practitioners + high reputation of the teachers	+ accessibility / proximity

– lack of media promotion – low awareness of the organisation within the local community (general public)	– unique specialization for bachelor’s degree		– lack an own building – lack of laboratories and library
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6. Findings

The first result of the project was represented by the elaboration of the action plan for consolidating the Extension’s presence within its local environment of reference and for increasing the notoriety of the organisation by means of organisational communication and educational marketing.

The action plan elaboration was immediately followed by its implementation (2015-2017) (through a process still going on) after a projects contest, addressed to the students participating in the Educational marketing discipline. The contest was organised in order to:

- define and organize the necessary actions;
- set the messages (according to elements such as target, targeted public, coherency, accessibility, visibility, adaptability).



Figure 01. Aspects of the projects contest addressed to the students (Educational marketing discipline)

From the perspective of **time**, the action plan comprised actions programed on two levels: a short-time planning (2015-2016) and a medium-time planning (2017-2017), considering that on a period of time longer than three years such a plan risks losing its pertinence because of the acceleration of the economic and financial evolution, whereas on a period shorter than one year, the plan lacks the prospective vision. (Libaert, 2009)

From the perspective of the **defined actions**, the plan is *flexible* and *stable*, following coordinates such as: scope, action, human / material resources, timing.

From the perspective of the fundamental **principle of action**, the plan targeted efficiency, by maximising the actions' impact and the targets reach with reduced or zero costs, aiming not only to promote the organisation's image but also to differentiate the Extension within the local academic environment, by generating the authority effect in what its influence on the targeted public is concerned.

Table 02. Action plan to increase the organisation's awareness

Action	Details / Message	Chanel/ Space	Cost	Time
Interactive educational workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public workshops • partnership with the Mures County Library 	<i>Multi-process interrogation. Premises for approaching learning on cognitive levels.</i> Lecturer PhD. Olga Chiş	American Corner	0	the 29 th of Oct. 2015
	<i>The nonverbal language: what do we say when we don't talk?</i> Phd. candidate Irina Petrea	The Palace of Culture Târgu-Mureş	0	12 th of Nov. 2015
	<i>Dyslexia – o challenge</i> Assist. PhD. Claudia Grec	The Extension	0	1 st of Feb. 2016
	<i>Strategies for optimising the early literacy.(ELIRA project)</i> Professor PhD. Vasile Chiş	The Vocational Highschool M.Eminescu	0	29 th of Feb. 2016
	<i>Valorising the stories by practical workshops</i> Lecturer assoc. PhD. Iftinia Avram Assist. PhD. candidate Irina Trifan	Kindergarten 16 Târgu-Mureş	0	19 th of April 2016
	<i>The handwriting in the digitalised society</i> Assist. PhD. Angela Precup	The Mures County Library	0	22 nd of March 2017
	<i>Integrating the ethnographic traditions in the educational activities</i> Lecturer assoc. PhD. Eugenia Someşan	The Medieval Fortress workspace	0	15 th of May 2017
“Springtime joy” public show - didactic demonstrative games	Partnership between UBB Mureş Extension – The Popular Arts School Târgu-Mureş	The Puppets Theatre „Ariel”	0	28 th of May 2015
The Schoolteacher and Educator's Oath	Elaborations and implementation by the students' public assumption within the graduation ceremony		0	annual
Facebook page of the Extension - creation and content maintenance	UBB Mureş Extension <i>UBB comes closer to you!</i>	Facebook	0	perma- nent
Extension newspaper „Our world” (concept, format)	Annual issue	Print	300 lei	annual
Open Doors Week	18 th of April - – Pedagogy literature presentation 19 th of April – workshop “Stories used for practical approaches” 20 th of April – Students' Day 21 st of April – “Critical thinking” workshop 22 nd of April - Week's Journal			18 th - 22 nd of April 2016
Promotion within the community	Meetings for promoting the Extension's educational offer	The Vocational Highschool M.Eminescu	100 lei	Mai 2017

7. Conclusion

The results of such a project can be measured by means of sociological research (statistics, surveys). By empirical means, its first effects can be seen in the constant growth of the student population of UBB in Târgu-Mureş, as well as in the significant number of participants who attend the Extension's public events or engage in a communication with it by means of social media.

For the 2015-2017 action plan, the implementation, monitoring and analysis continue, with a series of observations relevant for its adjustment and continuation on a long-term. Its directions can already be anticipated based on the first results obtained by short and medium-term action: a detailed survey of the evolution within the local competition environment, increasing the material investment for assuring the organisational sustainability, adjusting the actions according to professional surveys, optimizing the social and organisational public relations in order to increase efficiency.

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