

Barbara Mróz-Gorgoń
Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny we Wrocławiu

Grzegorz Szymański
Politechnika Łódzka

Rebranding – Determinants and Meaning in Higher Education

Summary

The main aim of the article is to determine the marketing communication of the rebranding process on the example of higher education institutions in the context of their activities, and its meaning for the students. The cognitive task is to explore the mechanisms and results of brand image management (in terms of marketing) of the surveyed organisations, including: corporate identity, as well as their offerings, promotions, and other relevant factors (including marketing strategy elements such as CSR).

Key words: branding strategies, rebranding, marketing research, higher education.

JEL codes: I23, M14, M31

Introduction

The paper constitutes an attempt to comprehensively present issues related to the difficulty of creating a new, changed or renewed image on the example of higher education institutions, which in many cases have undergone significant changes in the past - “academies” and “higher schools” have been transformed into “universities “. This is a new approach to the problem, and its implementation might influence of the development of these institutions. It will as well contribute to the development of science, in the form of managerial implications for the managers within the sector, to deepen their knowledge of stakeholder responses (students, graduates) for the changes in the image of the investigated units, as well as the mechanisms determining these changes (scientific contribution).

The main aim of the article is to determine the marketing communication of the rebranding process - on the example of higher education institutions in the context of their activities, and its’ meaning for the students. The cognitive task is to explore the mechanisms and results of brand image management (in terms of marketing) of the surveyed organizations.

The goal, identified by the authors, requires exploring both -the demand side and the supply side of the higher education market. In order to acquire research material, the author conducted in-depth interviews with managers of higher education institutions (whose brands have undergone rebranding). The article will also presents the results of the survey in which the respondents (N=350) where students of the universities (whose brands have undergone rebranding). There has been taken 8 focus groups interview with the academic staff (from administration and didactics departments) of these higher schools.

This article is based on systematic review of foreign and Polish literature, as well as based on the authors' own studies and observations.

Rebranding concept

Behavior of consumers is increasingly contrary to the stereotype of their rational thinking in the decision-making processes of shopping. The behavior is largely automatic or spontaneous and it results from habits and other unaware factors, including brand awareness. The brand concept is related to many different definitions. The common feature of these definitions is the unambiguous identification of a product or a manufacturer. On the other hand, the brand image can be the result of associations that will refer to one or more of the following elements (Kall, Kłeczek, Sagan 2013, p. 19-22).

An efficiently constructed brand not only enables to achieve a good position in the market, but it also helps to take over clients from the competition and significantly increases the current number of own clients. In order to create a recognizable brand, various techniques and methods are used, including: building of positive associations, giving character of emotions to the brand or constant extension of the image (Cheverton 2006, p. 9-11). By distinguishing the concept of image and identity of the brand, it can be pointed out that the image identified outside the organization is influenced by the organization. On the other hand, the identity is an inseparable internal element of the company, which can be covered by a full decision-making process.

The modern market forces companies to introduce changes both in the area related to the implementation of innovations, recognizing client's needs and marketing activities. The process of changing a brand's perception on the market, which includes the modification or complete change of selected elements, affecting the company's communication with the recipients, is called rebranding. The rebranding activities, mainly related to the change of the brand's name, have already been used for many years (Kumar 2003, p. 86-95). Important actions in this area include: change of name, trade mark, symbol, pattern or their combination (Muzellec, Lambkin 2006, pp. 328-352). Rebranding is often used in cases when the organization tries to take advantage of the opportunity or thwart the potential threats on the market by, for example, preparing the expected increase in competitiveness or the introducing a new product line. Other situations that affect the decision on rebranding may be crisis events related to the activities of competition or legal uncertainties (Ballouli, Grady, Stewart 2016, p. 212). A common determinant is also the buyout or merger of companies.

Other activities are undertaken in the case of rebranding of service companies, sales companies and production companies. Service companies, which implement the rebranding, should ensure that the new brand is justified in relation to the features of a particular service. Furthermore, a new brand must be more attractive than the previous one and customers must feel connected to the place where the services are provided (Collange 2015, p. 185). The main activities of companies in the area of brand building and management should consist in creating or changing the brand in accordance with the client's preferences, as a result of

competition's activities and internal expectations initiated by the board and managers of the company (Majerova, Krizanova 2015, p. 1087).

Among popular forms of rebranding, we identify: make up, lifting, metamorphosis and reincarnation. Make up belongs to less thorough processes. It is limited to minor corrections and it can refer to both trademark and the entire brand. The purpose of this form is usually a reminder about the existence of a certain brand on the market and the modernization of the image. Make up does not require detailed researches and analyzes or intensive actions of publicity and public relations. In the marketing industry, lifting is an improvement of the image. It presents a new concept of creating a brand, and in some cases – changing the archetype. In comparison to the form of make-up, it is a process that requires greater financial expenditures. The preparation of this process should be preceded by researches.

On the other hand, the most common reasons for rebranding are the reduction of sales volume, merger with another entity or changes in the market. In such cases, the metamorphosis is carried out – i.e. a process that creates a brand's new image. Modifications that take place in the image are radical and global. Metamorphosis is a rebranding of perhaps the highest costs. The process of change should be designed in the long term in order to reduce the risk, which is a big problem. Recipients are reluctant to accept changes, and their first reception of a significantly changed brand is one of the most important success factors. The last model of rebranding is the reincarnation. It introduces the biggest and the most drastic changes. The company's image is rebuilt almost from scratches with the selection of new strategies, tools and the creation of another identify.

All brand features are completely changed – starting with the logo, name, up to consciousness and color. Implementation of the process of change usually takes place in several stages, and each subsequent phase is connected with the market research and analysis (Rzemieniak 2011, p. 372).

Rebranding in higher education institutions – the results of the authors' own studies

Over a decade ago, the Senates of many colleges in Poland, included three in Wrocław, which had so far been called “academies” (in Wrocław's case it was: „Academy of Economics”, „Academy of Medical Science” and Academy of Nature Science”), applied to change the name to „universities”. One of the immediate and official reasons for this decision was the entry into force of the new Law on Higher Education, which significantly reduced the rank of the academies, increasing the rank of universities and creating the possibility of establishing so-called- profiled universities. That change of the name of the institution can also become only a facade- be just the change of the title, nothing more, or become a cover of a very deep changes in the brand architecture and strategy. In both cases rebranding occurs: evolutionary rebranding (Simms, Trott 2007) - in first scenario, and revolutionary rebranding in the second case (Muzellec, Lambkin 2007).

The study was conducted in April 2017 among the group of the students studying at Wrocław's higher schools, which had changed the name to „universities”. The group selection was non-random, deliberate and the sample included 350 students. The study was carried out by means of an on-line survey technique. The survey was sent to the students of all study cycles and forms (*i.e.* to the first-cycle, second-cycle and third-cycle students as well as to the postgraduate, full time regular and part-time extramural students).

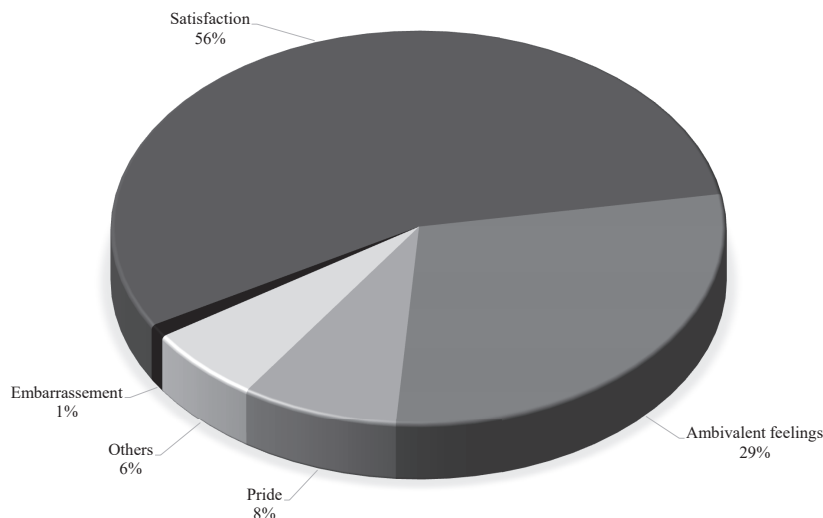
The group arrangement was the following: 46% – the first-cycle students, 36% – the second-cycle students, 16% – postgraduate students, 1.5% – doctoral students. This can be taken as an approximate reflection of the student proportion in Poland.

The aim of the study was to obtain the students' opinions about rebranding process and the students' loyalty towards the higher school brand which they represented and the opinion and feelings about the difference of studying at academies or universities

. In the great majority, the surveyed students expressed their positive opinions about their higher schools – both in terms of their feelings as well as opinions, which is presented in Figure 1.

The respondents were asked about their first associations with the higher school, of which they were the students. For the great majority (65%), the feelings were positive and included: satisfaction – 54%, pride – 8%, excitement – 3%. Some of the respondents did not have any opinion and they described their feelings as ambivalent (28%).

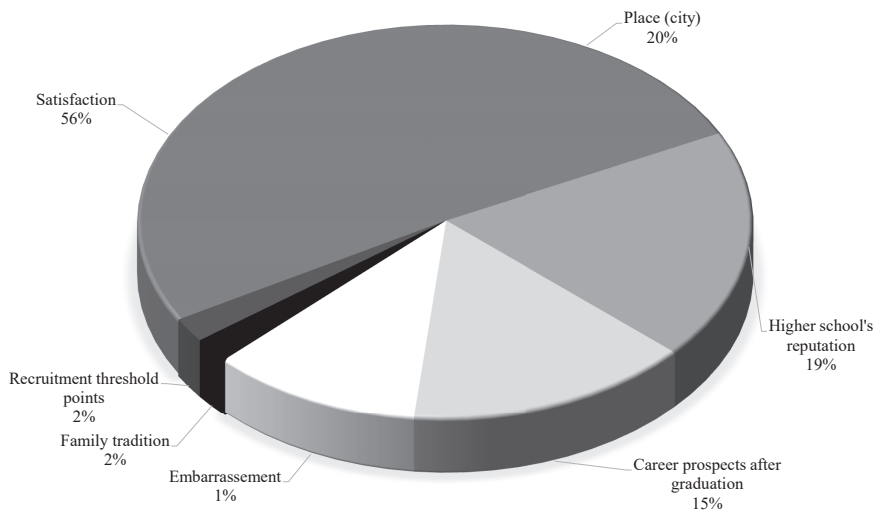
Figure 1
The feelings related to the higher school



Source: on the basis of the authors' own studies.

In the connection with the above, what appeared interesting was the reason for selecting a given higher school (Figure 2). The replies related to the quality perception areas constituted only 34%. Here, what was indicated as an essential factor was “higher school’s reputation” (19%) and “career prospects” (15%). The most significant determinant was the opportunity to study a selected field of study (31%), which shows a great level of students’ awareness as regards the choices they made. An essential element was location (20%), where in the detailed responses, the respondents frequently stressed the high multispectual attractiveness of Wrocław. Other factors were of marginal character.

Figure 2
The reason for selecting the higher school



Source: as in Figure 1.

The respondents showed a great tendency to provide the data concerning the higher school where they studied, which should be treated as an effect of prestige. 31% of the respondents said that in social contacts, they inform about their higher school in a spontaneous way whereas 65% of them did so only when asked about it. Only 5% of the respondents replied that they did not inform about it while establishing new contacts.

The vast majority of respondents answered that the name of the college is irrelevant for them (92%), and for the rest- minority (8%) the name of the chosen higher school is important.

It should be also noted, that the vast majority of them (bachelors and masters) answered that they did not know that the higher school they had chosen had a different name earlier (87%).

The results of the survey were deepened by in-depth interviews. As a result of the focus groups, a more complete picture of the process of the new name entering in selected higher schools was obtained. The respondents (representatives of the administrations of these higher education institutions and didactics) stated that the introduction of new names was neither consulted nor introduced with the accompanying strategy. For many of them, the name change seems to be “artificial” and “nothing contributing”.

Through the interview process one could also discovered that the employees of studied organizations feels that there are no organizational culture habits of inviting them to create the branding strategy together.

Analyzing visual communication of the institutions one can find no wider plan, or strategy of bringing the new name with the full format CI (Corporate Identity).

Conclusions

The consumers' loyalty is a phenomenon which is linked to the process of forming positive opinions about a product, seller, producer or brand. Consumers develop such opinions as a result of purchasing a given product or service. Satisfaction with the purchased product/service can lead to more shopping, which – in turn – develop the purchaser's loyalty. What is needed for the consumer to be left with a positive impression after purchasing the product is the marketing activities. One of such activities is creating an appropriate brand image (Grabarski 1998), that can be describe as branding process. In some cases we can observe the change of that process in the horizon of time- and the change we define as a rebranding process.

Rebranding means defining the brand image, which can occur at different levels, from the modification of the visual marking of the company (logo, colors, etc.), to change the brand strategy - to transform the concept of positioning the brand in the minds of consumers and other stakeholders organizations. The review of Polish and foreign literature has shown that there is the insufficient number of the theoretical and empirical works devoted to the issue of rebranding. The study has shown that rebranding process in higher education institutions is a problematic issue, and that very often it is treated as an administrative decision, with no branding context.

The findings of the research discovers that the change of the name in higher education was not a part of a long term strategy and it was introduced unprepared and with no corporate culture elements. That might be the cause of the lack of knowledge about the brand of the given institution among the students. Authors want to point out the need to continue the study of the rebranding problem in the higher education perspective in order to prepare model of the rebranding process in these institutions.

Bibliography

Ballouli K., Grady J., Stewart R. (2016), *The delicate art of rebranding a minor league baseball franchise: Practices, pitfalls, and payoffs of rebranding the Winston-Salem Warthogs*, “Sport Management Review”, No. 19.

- Cheverton P. (2006), *Blyskotliwość to za mało! Jak skutecznie wykorzystać potencjał Twojej marki*, OnePress, Gliwice.
- Collange V. (2015), *Consumer reaction to service rebranding*, "Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services", No. 22.
- Garbarski L. (1998), *Zachowania nabywców*, PTE, Warszawa.
- Kall J., Kłeczek R., Sagan A., (2013), *Zarządzanie marką*, Wolters Kluwer Polska Sp. z o.o., Warszawa.
- Kumar N. (2003), *Kill a brand, keep a customer*, "Harvard Business Review", No. 81 (December).
- Lambkin M., Muzellec L. (2008), *Rebranding in the banking industry following mergers and acquisitions*, "International Journal of Bank Marketing", Vol. 26(5).
- Majerova J., Krizanova A. (2015), *Slovak Consumer's Perception of The Product Policy Activities in The Process of Brand Value Building and Managing*, "Procedia Economics and Finance", No. 23.
- Muzellec L., Lambkin M. (2007). *Does Diageo make your Guinness taste better?*, "Journal of Product & Brand Management", No. 16(5).
- Rzemieniak M.L. (2011), *Proces rebrandingu jako efekt współpracy przedsiębiorstwa z otoczeniem*, „Zeszyty Naukowe / Szkoła Główna Handlowa”, nr 32
- Simms, C. i Trott, P. (2007), *An analysis of the repositioning of the "BMW Mini" brand*, "Journal of Product & Brand Management", Vol. 16, Iss. 5.

Rebranding – determinanty i znaczenie w szkolnictwie wyższym

Streszczenie

Głównym celem artykułu jest określenie komunikacji marketingowej w procesie rebrandingu na przykładzie placówek szkolnictwa wyższego w kontekście ich działalności oraz jego znaczenia dla studentów. Zadaniem o charakterze kognitywnym jest zbadanie mechanizmów i wyników zarządzania wizerunkiem marki (w kategoriach marketingu) badanych organizacji, m.in. tożsamości korporacyjnej (*corporate identity*), jak również ich ofert, promocji i innych istotnych czynników (wliczając w to elementy strategii marketingowej, takie jak CSR).

Słowa kluczowe: strategie brandingu, rebranding, badania marketingowe, szkolnictwo wyższe.

Kody JEL: I23, M14, M31

Ребрендинг – детерминанты и значение в вузах

Резюме

Основная цель статьи – определить маркетинговую коммуникацию процесса ребрендинга на примере вузов в контексте их деятельности и значения для студентов. Когнитивная задача – изучить механизмы и результаты управления имиджем бренда (в категории маркетинга) обследуемых организаций, включая корпоративное тождество, а также их предложения, мероприятия по

продвижению и другие релевантные факторы (включая элементы маркетинговой стратегии, такие как корпоративная социальная ответственность, CSR).

Ключевые слова: стратегии брендинга, ребрендинг, маркетинговые исследования, высшее образование.

Коды JEL: I23, M14, M31

Artykuł zaakceptowany do druku w kwietniu 2018 roku

Afiliacja:

dr Barbara Mróz-Gorgoń
Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny we Wrocławiu
Wydział Nauk Ekonomicznych
Instytut Marketingu
Katedra Podstaw Marketingu
ul. Komandorska 118/120
53-345 Wrocław
e-mail:barbara.mroz-gorgon@ue.wroc.pl

dr hab. inż. Grzegorz Szymański
Politechnika Łódzka
Wydział Organizacji i Zarządzania
Katedra Systemów Zarządzania i Innowacji
ul. Wólczańska 215, II piętro, pok. 234
90-924 Łódź
e-mail:grzegorz.szymanski@p.lodz.pl