

# THE TIME EVOLUTION OF THE OPINIONS OF THE ECONOMIST STUDENTS IN CLUJ-NAPOCA IN WHAT CONCERNS HIGHER EDUCATIONAL SERVICES (COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS)

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## **Abstract:**

*The aim of this paper is represented by the interception of the dynamic of the opinions of the students in what concerns the changes they would agree with in order to improve the quality of the higher educational economic services in Cluj-Napoca. The main objective of the research is to identify the practices used by the biggest universities in the world which have very good results and which, according to the opinions of the students, can also be applied in Romanian universities. The main result of the research shows that, irrespective of the moment the primary researches were carried out, part of the opinions are constant, part vary depending on the respondents. This paper is structured in four essential parts: an introduction, a theoretical background of the main terms used in the paper, a practical part where are presented the opinion of Romanian students and in the last part are presented the conclusions which result for this study. This paper presents an actual subject, an important domain, as higher education, an area in which the inadaptability at market makes the difference between to be or not to be active in the market. The deep change which happen in today society impose of educational institutions new exigencies of the qualifications of the young generation. The educational service providers must pay a special attention and do not neglect students' opinions in this market more and more competitive.*

**Key words:** higher educational marketing, students, cross descriptive research, cohort research, the dynamics of the opinions of the consumers

**JEL classification:** M31, A23

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The activity of any organisation, no matter where it comes under: in the goods' or services' sphere, in the profit or non-profit organizations' area, in the sector of institutions which have as their objective the obtaining of profit or not, must take into account the key element of every activity, respectively the familiarity with their consumers in order to be able to offer the market the products and/or services which come to meet their needs.

Nowadays, every institution on the market must pay attention to these elements so that it attracts the main competitive advantage aimed at: market survival. In order to achieve this goal it is important for the entity to differentiate from the rest of the competitors. This will be possible, in the highest degree, by knowing the opinions, attitudes, perceptions and elements which create satisfaction/dissatisfaction to the beneficiaries of goods and especially services, all the more so as the services represent the direct interaction between the provider and the consumer.

In the economic theory, the educational services are considered to be goods and services consumed by the primary consumers in order to achieve a certain personal level of education, consequently to store the educational human capital for future usage.

Thus, in the current competitive environment, the universities start to recognize the increasing importance of services they offer, and, as a consequence, to concentrate on meeting the needs and expectations of the students. In order to be successful, an university must identify which

are the important aspects for students and to consequently offer the students what they expect. Particularly, on this new market, school is encouraged to very attentively examine the needs of its clients and consumers, with the aim of precisely satisfying these needs (Hanson, 1996).

## 2. THE COHORT TYPE MULTIPLE CROSS DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH

Due to the major importance higher education has and, especially, to the fundamental role the opinion of the student plays in what concerns the (in)success of the higher educational institution, I considered the achievement of a multiple cross descriptive research (the object of the research) as being useful, a research which aims at describing the indicators of the marketing phenomenon by focusing on the evolution of the phenomenon in question and not on the causes that led to its development. At the same time, the level of applicability of this research was an applied research in order to allow the establishment of the coordinates of the decision making process at the level of the analyzed higher educational institution. The research which was carried out was a field research achieved through the direct investigation of the beneficiaries of the higher educational services (the operation place), being framed within the framework of periodic researches (the frequency of the research), because it took place with space in order to come to know the time evolution of the marketing phenomenon on test specimens constituted ad-hoc for each ongoing field research. As well, the tested persons were numerous, representative from a statistical point of view, allowing the generalization of the results, thus framing as a quantitative research.

The objective of the descriptive research is represented by the description of certain parameters of some marketing phenomenon. This type of research is frequently used in order to identify the opinions and perceptions regarding the higher educational services. The cross descriptive research represents the most common type of research used depending on its development in time. This involves the collection of data by conducting the survey once, on a sample of people on the issue of the research. Due to the fact that it reflects a momentarily image, the pattern used is imposed to be representative. I referred to multiple cross transversal research because I gathered information from two independent patterns, one single time, during different moments of time.

The analysis of the “cohort” (Norvel, 1981) supposes the realization of a succession of surveys conducted from time to time, whose basic unit is represented by a group of persons who witness the same phenomenon or event at the same time. This method emphasizes the time evolution of the opinions and perceptions of one age segment (in our case, the BA and MA students, namely persons aged between 23 and 24 years old), the evolution of a certain cohort during the ageing process (the Ph.D. students (the 2012 research) who during the first research were part of the MA category (the 2009 research) or the time evolution of the opinions and perceptions regarding the higher educational services as an effect of the received tendencies at the level of different age categories.

I referred to using some quantitative researches carried out based on survey. The quantitative research is a method of primary data collection by addressing some questions included in a questionnaire to one representative pattern (100 MA students) of the targeted population (MA students registered in 2008-2009 at FSEGA-UBB, one year term, daily classes) and 57 students registered in 2012 at FSEGA, daily classes with frequency, into one of the following cycles of study: bachelor, master, PhD. Students.

Therefore, the studies used a structured survey which supposes the use of a questionnaire with questions which were previously established and were arranged in a certain order which must be respected. At the same time, the survey was not dissimulated one, the respondent being informed about the purpose of the research and being also able to easily identify it based in the questions in the questionnaire. The classic personal survey was also used, a survey which supposes a face to face discussion between the interview operator and respondent, which permits the obtaining of the necessary information for the research.

I used the proportionally multi-layer survey depending on the percent of students inside the mother population and, at the same time, depending on their repartitions on sections. One of the advantages of the multi-layer survey, as compared to other probabilistic methods, is the increase of the precision of the estimations made. The proportionally multi-layer survey (“representative multi-layer”) is the only one which can be interpreted as a census (Chirouze Y, 1993). The interest of this type of survey is that the number of the interviewed persons, having common characteristics, is proportional with the layer’s population. The proportionally multi-layer survey ensures a “n/N” survey rate in each layer equal to the one of the entire population “n/N”.

### 3. THE ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE STUDENTS’ OPINIONS (COMPARATIVE RESEARCH)

The educational service providers must pay a special importance to the increase of the consumer’s acceptance together with the agreeable environment given to the educational act. The attitudes are perceived by certain specialists as representing a general evaluation. This evaluation can go from extremely positive to extremely negative. Thus, it is very important to observe how the interviewed persons perceive the utility of introducing a selection exam in order to be admitted to college, taking into consideration the fact that the attitudes vary in intensity and favourability.

**Table no. 1: Selection through Entrance Exam**

Entrance exam efficiency	2009		2012	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
no	7	7	14	24.6
yes	93	93	43	75.4
Total	100	100	57	100

We can observe the fact that the FSEGA MA students consider that the selection based on an exam in order to be admitted to college, as the greatest universities of the world do, would be more efficient, 93% of the respondent students in 2009 agreeing to participate to such an evaluation before being admitted to college (Popescu, 2009 a, pp.36; 2010 b, pp. 1260; 2010 c, pp. 613; 2011 e, pp. 365 & 2012 b, pp. 209). In 2012 we can observe that only 75% would agree with this method in order to be admitted to higher education (Table no 2).

**Table no. 2: Higher Education Diploma according to a Range of Options**

Higher education according to a range of options	2009		2012	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
no	12	12	25	43.9
yes	88	88	32	56.1
Total	100	100	57	100

An important characteristic of the attitudes is that they are dynamic. That supposes that the attitude will change in time, therefore it can be observed that if during previous period the consumers of higher educational services were somewhat reluctant to changes in the professional training process, nowadays, as a consequence of the enlarging of the horizons and of the unrestricted access to information, as well as of the informational “air raid” we lately witness, we can observe an opening to novelty which is perceived much more as an instigation and an opportunity than an inutile change. The students interviewed in 2009 are aware of the fact that the system used by the greatest universities, which involves the proposal of a wide range of options of

which the consumer of educational services can choose those which represent him/her the best and the obtaining of a diploma in accordance with the profile obtained based on the range of disciplines studied is more efficient, 88% proclaiming this (Popescu, 2009 a, pp.36; 2009 e, pp. 88; 2010 b, pp. 1260; 2010 c, pp. 612; 2011 e, pp.366 & 2012 b, pp. 210), while the percent of the persons which agree with this affirmation in 2012 decreases at 56% (Table no. 3).

**Table no. 3: Higher Education Diploma versus Competencies**

Diploma versus competencies	2009		2012	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
no	12	12	1	1.8
yes	88	88	56	98.2
Total	100	100	57	100

The competitiveness, attractiveness and educational efficiency of the study programs are often reflected not as much by the higher education diploma obtained by the graduates, but especially by competencies, skills and abilities the students display on the labour market after graduation. The MA students in 2009 are aware that the most important aspect of an educational training it is represented by competencies, skills, aptitudes and knowledge attained at the end of the process. 88% of them affirm that the accent must be laid on this side and not only on the existence of a diploma (Popescu, 2009 a, pp.37; 2009 e, pp. 88; 2010 b, pp. 1260; 2010 c, pp. 613; 2010 e, pp. 671; 2011 e, pp.366 & 2012 b, pp. 210). The same sentiment is shared by the respondents in 2012 which state, in an overwhelming proportion, that the acquired knowledge must prevail and not the diploma (Table no. 4).

**Table no. 4: The Distribution of Necessary Materials before the Class**

Materials before the class	2009		2012	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
no	-	-	22	38.6
yes	100	100	35	61.4
Total	100	100	57	100

There is a general agreement in the speciality literature according to which the attitudes are learned. As a predisposition, the attitudes possess a motivational quality, this quality being responsible by directing the consumer to certain behaviour. The distribution of necessary materials before the class is considered an efficient method for all the participants of the survey in 2009 (Popescu, 2009 a, pp.38; 2010 b, pp. 1261 & 2011 c, pp. 56). Only 61% of the interviewed students have a similar opinion in 2012 (Table no. 5).

**Table no. 5: Addressing Topics by Specialists**

Addressing topics by specialists	2009		2012	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
no	12	12	13	22.8
yes	88	88	44	77.2
Total	100	100	57	100

The relevant attitudes for a purchase behaviour are formed as a result of direct experience with the current situation, the information received from others and the exposure to marketing

actions. The students would want for certain themes to be addressed by specialists in companies which confront the aspects studied in real life (Popescu, 2009 a, pp. 30 & 2009 c, pp. 4), considering that they could provide more relevant data than teachers (Table no. 6).

**Table no. 6: Pro using a Student Identification Code**

Using a student identification code	2009		2012	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
no	44	44	29	50.9
yes	56	56	28	49.1
Total	100	100	57	100

Individuals can have different attitudes towards a specific behaviour, each corresponding to a certain situation. The understanding of the manner in which the attitudes of the consumers vary from one situation to another presents a special importance. Thus, it becomes necessary to come to know the preferences of the educational services' consumer as regarding the use of grading system based on an identification code. The higher education consumer has a certain behaviour defined as the totality of acts and decisions regarding the exploitation of the opportunities in order to obtain and use higher education goods and services. The creation of the attitude, the mental predisposition of the students to "buy" these products and services, and the motivation, which represents the mental tension which leads the individual towards the purchase action, satisfying his needs and expectations, are extremely important. When it comes to the efficiency and utility of using a single code for each student, the opinions are divided (Popescu, 2009 a, pp. 31; 2009 c, pp. 5 & 2009 e, pp. 84), 56% (2009), respectively 49% (2012) of the interviewed students giving a positive answer, while 44% (2009) and 51% (2012) appreciate the contrary as per Table no. 7.

**Table no. 7: Taking Internships in Companies**

Internship in companies	2009		2012	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
no	11	11	18	31.6
yes	89	89	39	68.4
Total	100	100	57	100

It is important to understand the extension to which the attitudes are based on utilitarian perceptions as compared to the hedonic properties which constitute the attitude's object. For certain products, the attitudes will very much depend on their utilitarian proprieties as in the case of taking an internship in a company in order to obtain a higher education diploma, because the students consider that they will obtain practical skills during this action. The MA students interviewed in 2009 were inclined to take an internship before obtaining the higher education diploma, only 11% of them being disinclined to make this effort (Popescu, 2009 a, pp. 39 & 2009 e, pp. 86). 68% took an interest in such an opportunity in 2012 (Table no. 8). The understanding of the relative influence of these utilitarian and hedonic properties on attitudes provides a useful guidance in the development of an efficient marketing action in favour of the product or service.

**Table no. 8: The Elimination of Fee Free Places**

Eliminate Fee Free Places	2009		2012	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
no	89	89	35	61.4

yes	11	11	22	38.6
Total	100	100	57	100

The higher educational systems significantly differ from one country to another. Similarly, the perceiving of a tuition fee varies from state to state. Thus, if in the Nordic countries having fee free places for higher education studies is a common practice, we do not come across the same thing in the Western European countries. While realizing the empirical studies, the students were asked to express their opinion regarding the efficiency of removing the fee free places at college. If, in 2009, 11% of the FSEGA students considered that the absence of the free funded places may be favourable (Popescu, 2009 a, pp. 39 & 2009 c, pp. 5), in 2012 the percentage of those who agree to this statement increased to 38.6% (Table no. 9).

**Table no. 9: Fee for High-quality Educational Services**

Tuition fee	2009		2012	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
till 1000 euro/year	86	86	38	66.7
till 3000 euro/year	11	11	17	29.8
till 5000 euro/year	3	3	1	1.8
> 5000 euro/year	-	-	1	1.8
Total	100	100	57	100

The consumers' decision making processes significantly vary in what concerns their complexity. In their analysis, the accent is placed on two dimensions, namely: the decision substance (what it is decided) and the complexity of the decision making process (how important the decision making process is). Much more students go in others countries for to realize a part of their studies and they go then at work in Europe or in outside and after they are graduates from (Hapenciuc V.C., Hapenciuc C., 2008). The budget allocation involves the choices of the people regarding the manner in which to spend the available funds, how to program in time the costs and if they borrow or not money to purchase. According to the input provided by the publication "Adevarul" at the end of May 2010, the best universities in Europe practiced the following tuition fees (Table no. 10):

**Table no. 10: The Tuition Fees for the First 10 European Universities**

Place	Institution (university)	Euro/year
1.	Cambridge University	3500
2.	Oxford University	3500
3.	Imperial College in London	3500
4.	London College	3500
5.	Royal College in London	3500
6.	Edinburgh University	3500
7.	Swiss Institute of Technology in Zurich	820
8.	Teacher Training College in Paris	300
9.	Manchester University	3500
10.	Bristol University	3500

Source: Adevarul, May, the 24<sup>th</sup> 2010

In 2009, 86% of the interviewed persons would be willing to pay the most 1.000 euro/year in order to be able to access educational services with a superior quality, while 11% would be willing to pay up to 3.000 euro/year and only 3% would have offered up to 5.000 euro, over this value none of the respondents being interested in offering. (Popescu, 2009 a, pp. 40; 2009 c, pp.5; 2010 c, pp. 613; 2011 d, pp. 532; 2011 e, pp. 367 & 2012 b, pp. 211). In 2012, the 66% of the FSEGA students affirmed that they would agree to pay up to 1.000 euro/year and another 30% up to 3.000 euro/year (Table no. 9).

**Table no. 11: Adequate Range of Books for the Economist Students in Romanian libraries**

Libraries endowment	2009		2012	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
yes	47	47	13	22.8
no	53	53	44	77.2
Total	100	100	57	100

Throughout history, all types of libraries, whether national, public, academic, scholastic or professional met, implicitly or explicitly, an educational function. Of all these types, the library of the university is closely related to the educational process and to the highest level of complexity. The interdependence between the higher education institution and the library it fosters is manifested through a permanent effort to appropriate the library to the needs of accessing information and documents, needs generated by the teaching, learning and research process, on the one hand, and the help the university offers in order to improve the quality of their own library collections and services, on the other hand. The library is the vector of access to scientific information within the framework of the university and has a major contribution to the improvement of the intern and international level of competitiveness this way. However, Romanian libraries have suffered during the last decades. This fact is also observed in the analysis of the students' satisfaction in what concerns the range of economic books they have access to (Popescu 2009 a, pp. 50; 2009 e, pp. 85 & 2010 e, pp. 670). If in 2009 47% of them declared themselves as being satisfied by the libraries' offer, in 2012 this percentage got reduced to approximately 23 units (Table no. 11).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The higher educational marketing is circumscribed to the fundamental principle of marketing which is represented by the placement of the consumer in the centre of any activity, as key element of the success of every business.

The satisfaction of the student represents the main barometer for measuring the performance of a higher education institution and it is the main indicator of the intention of repurchasing and recommendation to third parties.

The mains similarities concern: the fee which, in general, the students were willing to pay for higher education services, qualitatively superior to the ones they benefit of, the quality of the products/services and the value perceived by the student.

The most important differences were registered in: the focus point in order to obtain optimal results, the college and MA admission manner the students would wish for, the main promotion channels and the higher educational services placement, but also in what concerns the students' satisfaction.

One future research direction is represented by the attribution of a multi-annual budget in order to create a representative test sample of students which needs to be included in panel studies. The attribution of a multi-annual budget for the research of the opinions of the higher educational services' consumers should be regarded as an investment made by the university/college in its quality of direct beneficiary of the information obtained. It is needless for the allocation of the multi-annual budget to be regarded as an expense, due to the fact that getting to know the needs, wishes, perceptions, motivations, attitudes and behaviours, one can meet their requirements and can obtain the consumer's satisfaction which can be transformed in an important competitive advantage.

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