DETERMINANTS OF STUDENT GOVERNMENTS' PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITY

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Summary

The subject of marketing activity of students' governments hasn't been present in scientific literature up till now. There have been only few publications devoted to chosen areas of functioning of students' organizations. However, they generally skipped the promotional dimension. In association with this, the goal of this article is partially filling the existing gap by highlighting the factors which determine the effects achieved when students' governments communicate with the environment. On the basis of own participatory observations and experiences gathered during many years of participating in the work of the student government of a Polish university, the authors have identified three main determinants of efficient marketing communication of students' governments. Among these three factors there are: the attitude and engagement of students, the choice of contents and promotion tools (forming the system of communicating with the environment), the available financial resources. Each of the three mentioned elements has been presented in detail. Among others, the typology of people engaged in promotional activity of students' organizations has been presented. Also, the contents that should be conveyed to diversified groups in the environment of students' governments have been defined. Taking into consideration the fact that this paper is the first work of its kind devoted to the promotional activity of students' governments, it serves as an introduction to the subject areas and may constitute a basis for deeper exploration of the subject in future theoretical and research works.

Introduction

In this work attention is focused on students' governments, perceived as organizations which similarly as typical market entities have to conduct marketing activity, including promotional activity[1]. The efficiency of this activity is desirable on many planes, including mainly in the dimension of having an image confirming trust and effectiveness of activity making it possible to represent the student community in contacts with various groups in the environment (among others, university authorities, sponsors, other students' organizations), as well as to acquire new members from the group of people studying at universities.

Students' governments operate within particular frameworks defined by legal regulations, universities' statutes and own regulations. The personal composition of students' governments — due to limited duration of studies — gets changed completely every few years. In most cases the promotional activity of students' governments is coordinated by young people without experience in managing students' organizations. They also have no knowledge from the area of marketing. Moreover, students' initiatives are implemented on the basis of volunteer work. Thus, it is not possible to apply such forms of motivating and holding students accountable for not carrying out their duties diligently, or at all, like companies do with regard to their employees. As a result, it is possible to assume that the dimension of marketing functioning of students' governments — compared to typical market entities — has its specific character. For this reason the goal of this article is highlighting the determinants of the results of promotional activity of students' governments. It is an intention of the authors to identify basic challenges that organizations representing students face in the sphere of efficient conduct of marketing communication.

The thoughts presented in this article are the results of observations made by the authors in association with their engagement, during their studies (in various periods), in the students' government of one of Polish universities. Some of the presented conclusions have been also formulated in the MA thesis titled "Proces zarządzania marką organizacji studenckiej — złożoność, uwarunkowania, efekty"(The process of managing the brand of a student organization — complexity, conditions and effects)[2].

The issue of the activity of students' governments in scientific literature

The issue of the activity of students' governments has been discussed in Polish scientific literature to a limited extent. Even though the functioning of these organizations was discussed already in the previous era (Pustelnik and Wołoch, 1976), after the social-systemic transformation of the 1990's little attention was devoted to the subject. There have been only few publications referring directly to students' governments, showing: the influence of organization on the process of university management (Bielecki, 2010), structure of students' governments and the scope of their functioning (Grzonka, 2012), the students' approach to engaging in works of the self-government organizations representing them (Muś and Depta, 2017), publishing activity under conditions of censorship (Centek, 2016), adaptation of students "who have been internally displaced" (e.g. refugees from areas hit by war) in the academic community thanks to activity in students' governments (Krashchenko, Sorokina and Degtyarova, 2017).

World literature devoted to the discussed academic entities is much broader. In work by foreign authors the participation of students in the activities of their students' governments has been related to various aspects — including, among others, the development of academic self-government (May, 2010); the process of choosing the authorities of an organization (Oxendine, 1997; Lewis and Rice, 2005; Tilton, 2008), relations between academic activity and future political engagement (Fendrich and Turner, 1989; McFarland and Starmanns, 2009; Saha and Print, 2010), engagement and influence of students' representatives on university management (Miller and Nadler, 2006; Lizzio and Wilson, 2009; Planas et al. 2013), satisfaction from studying (Abrahamowicz, 1988), ethical issues (Golden amd Schwartz, 1994), the development of organization members' competences (Cuyjet, 1994; Aymoldanovna et al., 2015; Dorozhkin, Zaitseva, Tatarskikh, 2016), equal treatment in students' governments and the participation of women in actual organization management (Miller and Kraus, 2004), differences occurring at universities from various countries (Pabian and Minksová, 2011). It is worth pointing out here that also in world literature it is possible to find references to students' governments at Polish universities (Antonowicz, Pinheiro and Smużewska, 2014).

A review of literature devoted to students' self-governance reveals a gap — visible particularly in Polish scientific literature. This gap should be filled by works taking into consideration the diversified aspects of the activities of organizations representing students, including, above all, the dimension of student governments' promotional activity, which up till now has been completely disregarded.

The significance of students' governments in the system of Polish higher education

The scope of competences of students' governments in Poland and their internal structures are defined by the law and statutes of particular universities, as well as internal regulations of students' governments and years of practical experience. What is a crucial legal act for the considered organizations is the act from July 27, 2005 on higher education (Journal of Laws 2005 Number 164 position 1365 with latter changes). Pursuant to article 202, paragraph 1 and 2 of the act, students from first and second cycle studies and students from uniform Master's studies run by a university form students' government and its bodies are the representatives of all people studying at the university. In the legal sense the democratic character of students' governments and their durability should be recognized as indisputable. What illustrates this thesis is the fact that by law every student of a particular university becomes a member of students' government and cannot renounce his membership. At the same time the law doesn't allow "people from the outside" to become members of students' government. In light of the law students' government satisfies the requirement of functioning outside the structure of state administration understood as the lack of subordination to the institutions of the state apparatus, but not necessarily independence in financial terms (Dańczak, 2015). According to the provision from article 202, paragraph 3 of the aforementioned bill, students' government operates on the basis of this bill and on the basis of the regulations adopted by the university legislative body, which define the rules of organization and mode of operation of the organization, including the kinds of collective and single-person bodies, the methods of choosing the members of these

bodies and scope of their competences. Moreover, every students' government operates according to the statute of a particular university.

In the academic dimension the broad spectrum of competences held by students' governments means that they have a real impact on the current functioning of universities and the directions of their development. Students' community, choosing their representatives for self-government bodies and further, university bodies, gives them a strong voice, which cannot be easily disregarded. The activity of self-governments supported by good communication with the closest environment (within a university), makes it possible to diligently represent students, efficiently defend their interests and to carry out many diversified projects of a social, cultural, didactic and scientific character. The activity of students' governments in practice often goes beyond the university buildings, exerting a strong influence on the local community — not just in the educational aspect (by encouraging the students of high schools to study at a particular university), but also in other, highly diversified dimensions, dimensions important for the local communities (numerous students' governments get engaged in, among others, charitable activity, supporting orphanages and hospices in their area).
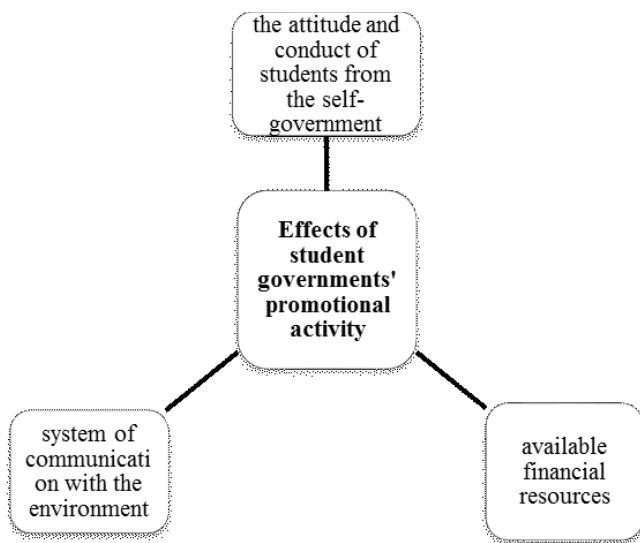
In the system of higher education which currently exists in Poland, students' governments are an inseparable part of the academic community, playing an important role in its proper functioning. A range of competences assigned to these organizations brings not just privileges to their members, but above all responsibility for students that they represent and the duty to uphold their rights, look after their interests and development. What is also important is the influence of the activity of students' governments on the image of a university formed in their environment.

The complexity of student governments' promotional activity

As has already been pointed out, the functioning of students' governments has its unique character, which up till now hasn't been thoroughly investigated in scientific literature concerning marketing. For this reason it is reasonable to make an attempt to identify elements influencing the effects of promotional activities of the considered academic organizations.

On the basis of the observations that have been made and on the basis of gathered experiences, the basic determinants of the results of student governments' promotional activity can be illustrated with a triad covering: (1) people — self-government members and people cooperating with them (2) system of communication with the environment — both closer and further environment, (3) financial resources (picture. 1).

Picture 1. **Triad of the determinants of the effects of student governments' promotional activity**

Source: Own materials.

The scope and creativity of promotional activities depend to a large extent on the approach and the potential of people associated with the self-government. What is crucial in the context of the efficiency of human resources is in what way organization members understand the organization's mission and vision, as well as the specific character of its operation. Also, the internal motivation for engagement in the academic community is important. In this respect it is possible to attribute students working in self-governments to one of a few groups — just as done in table 1. Such distinction of groups constitutes an effect of the authors' own observations conducted among the members of the self-government of one of Polish universities. Future research should show, whether the proposed categories of student types have a universal dimension

reflected by the academic organizations of other universities.

The table shows that motivation to start work for a self-government and a community may differ a lot in character — starting from positive reasons, like in case of people described as "idealists" and "visionaries" and ending with negative, selfish motivation in case of "careerists" and "celebrities". In this respect it is worth noting that students' active participation in the works of self-governments may constitute a process bringing benefits not just to organizations representing the student community, but also to the individuals engaging in this activity. It is because students' government should be regarded as a personality-forming institution (Urbański, 2012). However, a self-government to properly develop individuals requires from them displaying the desired (above all, positive and selfless) motivation.

Table 1. Typology of people engaging in promotional activity of students' governments from the perspective of motivation

Type	Description
Idealist	understands the essence of students' self-government and wants to implement it as a duty towards the academic community
Visionary	has a sense of particular mission and vision he wants to materialize by means of work in a self-government
Collector of experiences	he treats work for a self-government as a possibility of expanding experiences gained during studies, which may be valuable in future professional life
Careerist — "born" leader	strives to lead — no matter whom, or what; in a self-government he focuses on climbing up the ladder; he cares mainly about new contacts and positions
Celebrity	wants to become a university "celebrity"; such a student wants to be known well and to meet the "elites"
Sympathizer	a person who attended a meeting of student government's members once and stayed; the person gets engaged in the work of the organization only rarely
Parasite	a student convinced that work for a self-government is supposed to bring him material benefits; such a person is the contradiction of an "idealist"
Friend of a self-government member	makes the assumption that if his friends work for a self-government, he should do it too; often he doesn't have a different concept for using the time of his studies
Malcontent	Constantly criticizes the activities of an organization and its members; such criticism is his only motivation to remain among students from self-government

Source: Own materials.

In the context of human resources an important determinant of the effects of self-governments' promotional activity is deciding who will manage the marketing activities of an organization — who will take care of planning such activities (among others, defining strategic, operational goals), organize daily work, motivate the team and check the achieved results. Practice shows that in students' governments of Polish universities these tasks are usually handled by persons assigned to one of the commissions (sections) of the organization usually called "Commission for promotional matters".

Another element of the distinguished triad is the system of communication of students' governments with various groups in closer and further environment. It is formed above all by the used communication instruments, as well as the conveyed contents. It is these contents that shape the image of an organization determining cooperation with students, other university employees, as well as people from the outside. What should be the main determinant in the dimension of communication is clear specification of the identity of a self-government and later making all members of the organization realize in what way its image should be presented in the environment. Groups that a self-government interacts with are diversified, that's why messages addressed to each of these groups should focus on different aspects (tab. 2). Thus, it is necessary to define the recipients of promotional activities and precisely determine the content of messages addressed to them.

Regardless of the goals and character of promotional activities taken up by students' governments, students should always be in the centre of attention. Communicating with various groups from the environment should lead to satisfying the needs of people studying at a particular university — as the final effect. In this context it is necessary to mention the necessity to particularly focus on those members of the academic community who until now haven't been the target of any offer, or promotional activities. It is necessary to be aware of the fact that the group which receives and processes the messages of the organization is limited and will never be equal to the total group of students of a given university. However, it is necessary to diversify the offer and the channels for conveying promotional messages to the maximum degree — in order to attract the attention of as many students as possible to the activities of self-governments.

Table 2. Main contents conveyed in the process of communication with groups
in the environment of students' governments

Groups in the environment	Contents conveyed in the process of marketing communication
All students	the ability of self-government to work for the benefit of the student community; support for solving disputes between students and lecturers, as well as university authorities; consulting in case of lack of knowledge of regulations concerning studies; broad and attractive possibilities of participating in diversified self-government projects
Potential new members of an organization	self-government is an organization open to new members, it is characterized by: positive atmosphere, good organizational culture, efficient motivation system, friendly approach to persons participating in work of the organization; there are numerous opportunities for development, including expanding your interests and implementing your own ideas
Graduates	great significance of maintaining stable and strong relations which have already graduated from a given university for the current students; pride of being a member of an aspiring group of former students, appreciated in the environment (by local community and employers)
University authorities	carrying out statutory tasks of self-government associated with the functioning of a university in a responsible and efficient way; popularization of a university by means of the biggest projects (among others, student festivals called "juwenalia") — building a recognizable and positive image of the university
Academic teachers and other university employees	self-government plays a positive role in the life of the academic community; organization of events dedicated to not just students, but also university employees by the self-government
Other student organizations	self-government eagerly cooperates and supports the activities of all organizations gathering students — both in the internal dimension (science clubs, academic governments etc.), and in the external dimension (e.g. students' governments of other universities, Parliament of Students of the Republic of Poland)
Sponsors and partners	the ability of a self-government — as an organization enjoying trust among students — to efficiently convey in the academic community information about sponsors' products; cooperation with a self-government may become for market entities an important activity from the area of public relations — as it is a symptom of support for young, creative people, as well as local communities

Źródło: opracowanie własne.

The last of the distinguished three basic determinants of the promotional activity of students' governments are financial resources that they have at their disposal. The size of these resources is to a large extent shaped by the two remaining elements of the triad, that is, the efficiency of activity of people engaging in the works of a self-government, as well as the efficiency of communicating with the environment. Financial resources that students' organizations have at their disposal come mainly from subsidies granted by university authorities, as well as money paid by sponsors. Students have to actively strive to maximize funds from these sources.

Apart from the elements included in the proposed triad, it is necessary to mention a few other important aspects which determine the effects of promotional activity. Just as in the activity of every organization, also in case of students' self-governments the crucial issue is coherence and consistency in carrying out marketing ventures. In case of academic organizations continuing the started works over many years constitutes a major challenge, as the personal composition of a student government — due to limited duration of studies — is subject to frequent modifications. That's why it is necessary to make sure that people who join an organization for the first time immediately learn about the organization's mission, vision, adopted long-term goals and pursued values.

What is important for every student government is the choice of appropriate — in the context of maximum usefulness for the implementation of adopted goals — instruments of communication. Moreover, it is important to determine with regard to which groups of recipients particular instruments will be used. Self-governments usually communicate with their environment by means of:

- an official website of the organization (created within the website of a given university, or a separate website),
- official profiles of the organization on social media portals — such as, among others, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*,
- official channel on *You Tube*,
- printed advertising — among others, calendars, leaflets, posters,
- promotional merchandise — among others, stationery, lanyards, USB drives,

- own media — magazines (printed, or electronic magazines), academic radio and television,
- partners' media — newspapers, magazines, local radio stations, or local tv stations cooperating with a student organization,
- information boards (display cabinets) of the organization,
- organizations' headquarters.

Due to the fact that the main idea behind the functioning of self-governments is activity associated with work for the academic community and students are the main targets of contents conveyed to the environment, it is necessary to conduct transparent informational activity showing in it how students' needs are satisfied. For example, if the legislative body of a self-government makes a decision to present to the provost a petition for assigning rooms for science clubs, it is necessary to immediately publish a scan of this petition and to inform the student community about the provost's decision. The greater the number of such actions, the greater the conviction among students that their self-government is really working for their benefit. If there is no such exchange of information and communication takes place only among the bodies of a self-government and university authorities and if it's not available for the whole community, the view of self-government's activity will remain in the sphere of speculations, which will have a negative impact on the image of an organization.

Summary

The subject of promotion in case of student governments are diversified initiatives taken up by these organizations (e.g. mediation in search for work for students, or finding accommodation for students), as well as the products of these actions (e.g. cultural events). These initiatives and products may be targeted at both people associated directly with a university (students, graduates, employees and authorities), and outsiders (high school pupils, sponsors, journalists, local community). However, regardless of their character, these initiatives should be always accompanied by efficient marketing support. Thus, the dimension of promotional activity of students' governments is complex and should be

considered from the perspective of multiple aspects. The deliberations contained in this work point to possible areas for analysis.

The attitude and engagement of students, an organization's system of communication with the environment, as well as financial resources have been named as the main determinants of the promotional activity of students' self-governments. However, attributing to them primary importance is authors' subjective approach arising from their observations and gained experiences and perhaps in further papers based on the research conducted by other researchers, the proposed triad will be expanded to further, important conditions — such as e.g.: missions, visions and strategic goals of self-governments; scope and strength of relations of an organization with various groups of stakeholders; formal position of a particular self-government in the structure of a university. Thus, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that taking into consideration in deliberations only three groups of determinants of the effects of student governments' promotional activities constitutes a narrow, limited approach, which in future scientific papers may be expanded.

The conditions identified in the work — in the applicatory dimension — may turn out to be helpful for people responsible for the promotional activity of organizations gathering students. At the same time in the exploratory aspect the presented conclusions may constitute a basis for designing future research on the marketing activity of student governments — among others, in the dimension of formulating the research problems, forming hypotheses, building measurement instruments. Such research is necessary due to the identified gap in literature, as well as the highlighted specific character of the functioning of student governments. It is because in case of these organizations a simple transfer of tested marketing practices worked out by market entities, thoroughly investigated and discussed by scientists, is not possible.

Przypisy

[1] In the article the terms "promotion" and "marketing communication" are treated as synonymous. Literature on the subject may point to differences between these two terms (among others, Wiktor. 2001), but in the context of the level of generality of deliberations in this work, it doesn't make sense to distinguish between these two terms.
[2] The author of the diploma thesis defended in 2016 at the Faculty of Management of Rzeszów University of Technology is mgr Justyna Bryk and the thesis advisor was dr Marcin Gębarowski.

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