

## THE ANALYSIS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' BEHAVIOUR IN THE SELECTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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The paper is to examine the Romanian education system and it focuses on the most important aspects of the education marketing and marketing research. A survey instrument was designed to include the research upon high school student's behavior in selecting a higher education institution. The results shown that the Romanian education system has some drawbacks, the most important being the weak implementation of marketing in the education institutions. Therefore, the purpose of the marketing researches is to establish a connection between the public which education services are dedicated to and the necessary information used to select a higher education institution.

**Keywords:** marketing research, higher education institution, education marketing, high school students.

### 1. Introduction

The concept of marketing has evolved, undergoing a period of change from product-oriented to consumer-oriented marketing, and lately, to value-oriented marketing. But the purpose remains the same: satisfying clients.

A major tendency reveals the fact that the market where certain firms function is becoming more and more unreliable. Nowadays, trust is a characteristic of horizontal relations; the consumers trust one another rather than vertical- firms. The main effect of social networks rising is to mirror the migration of consumers trust from firms to other consumers.<sup>1</sup> Marketing studies or marketing research represent the systematic data collection, the analysis and presentation of relevant results for a certain marketing problem a firm can encounter on the market.

Marketing research want to identify who the buyers are, where, when, who and why are buying the products or services and to discover new market segments where they can sell firm's products and services or to suggest the manufacturing of new or upgraded products and services for those segments.<sup>2</sup> Education institutions should implement modern management and marketing practices because they have a passive attitude nowadays. They have to adopt a proper market behavior because there is a competition and student's needs are becoming more and more dynamic, so education institution must adapt to all these changes, and this is the reason why a marketing research is necessary.

This research is useful to higher education institutions confronting a decrease of students number.

So, this institution is highly interested in increasing the number of accepted students. In order to do this, the institution must be familiar to high school student's needs and expectations to be able to satisfy them properly, or more than this. The final goal is the increasing number of accepted students and a high level of their satisfaction.

### 2. The actual mainframe of the Romanian higher education system

The role of education in a civilized society is very important. Education is interconnected with a country economic development, because universities provide well-prepared and competitive working force which brings its contribution to the society development.

The role of higher education institutions is not only to form graduates that are identical, with the same amount of knowledge applied in a similar way, but to create creative people with the taste of initiative.

Romanian universities are not perfect, but we hope that they will evolve in both an European and worldwide context, but also in a national context to allow Romania to have a chance to the quality which will lead to the excellence our ancestors dreamed about

The high level of demand for higher education can be attributed to a complex interaction of three main sets of factors: social, political and economic, operating at both personal and social levels. At personal level. selecting a higher education institution represents a momentous decision that may shape the life

and success of a student's career and his/her family. Nevertheless, the increased public demand for graduated students has led to a competitive higher education market.

### **3. Education marketing**

By adapting the definition of marketing, according to American Marketing Association, we can consider education marketing as : "a function of the educational organization and a set of creating, communicating and delivering value processes to clients and managing long-term relationships with benefits for both the organization and its stakeholders ".<sup>5</sup>

Education marketing can be considered an organization informational interface with the environment. The role of the education marketing is to identify these interfaces and to use them so as the education organization to enhance communication with all public categories and clients. Its main objective is to establish relations and partnerships. To achieve its goals, school must integrate into society, initiating and developing relations and partnerships within a particular community. Education marketing is an instrument used by an educational organization to achieve resources and to offer value to its stakeholders: teachers, students, parents, employers, local community, etc.

### **4. The analysis of high school students' behavior in the selection of higher education institution**

The process of marketing research consists of defining the problem and research objectives, making the research plan, collecting data, analyzing information, presenting the conclusions and making a decision.

The starting hypotheses are personal opinions, dating long before starting this paper. Some of them remained the same; others were changed during this research.

H1- The main criteria according to which students select a higher education institution is their passion for a specific domain.

H2- Students make a decision about their future higher education institution during 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

H3 – About information sources, students consider institutions WEB pages as being the most reliable.

H4 – Students' main expectation about a higher education institution is that they would get theoretical and practical abilities.

The problem refers to the diminution of the number of potential students from Higher education institutions.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the importance of high school students behavior in the selection of higher education institution and to offer solutions for the improvement of the higher educational system and for overtaking the problem (the decrease of students number).

### **Research objectives and hypotheses**

Therefore, the objectives of this study were:

- ◆ To obtain data on the behavior of high school students in selecting a particular higher education institution – the selection criteria according to which they prefer choosing one, their expectations and some other aspects.
- ◆ To design a promoting campaign for the institution education offer, according to the results from the questionnaires.
- ◆ To give solutions for a better higher education institution's offer.

### **Research methodology**

The findings of this report are based on a series of research methods and instruments. A questionnaire- based approach was taken in order to obtain information on students' preferences towards a particular education institution. The questionnaire was applied to 100 students (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade): 60 students from "Virgil Madgearu" Economic College and 40 students from "Al. I. Cuza" National College.

The qualitative fieldwork is represented by the questionnaire that had 22 multiple- choice questions, with the possibility of choosing an answer from 1 to 5 (1- the least important, 5 – the most important) and an open question where students noted words and expressions about Romanian education system.

The number of questions and of students was considered satisfactory for statistical analysis and representative of the population strata.

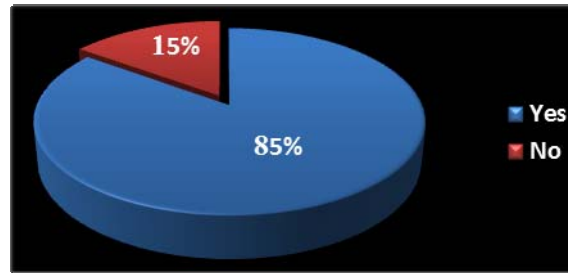
**Research results****Question 1:** Do you intend to enroll a higher education institution (Faculty)?

Table 1- Students 'intention to enroll a higher education institution

We can observe that a wide majority, 85% from respondents intend to enroll a higher education institution, while 15% from the interviewed do not have this intention.

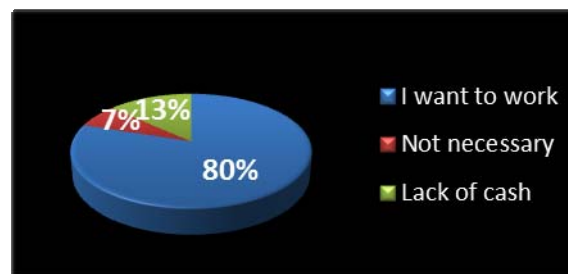
**Question 2:** Which are the reasons why you don't want to enroll a higher education institution?

Table 2- The reasons why students do not intend to enroll a higher education institution

As shown in Table 2, 80% from the 15 % of high school students that don't have the intention to go to university declared that they intend to get a job after graduating college. Therefore, the institution should advertise more its studies or to design partnerships with business partners, offering its students the possibility to have a part-time job.

The second reason, with 13% is the lack of funding. Because the access to higher education is highly sensitive to socio-economic and demographic characteristics, universities improve their scholarships policy, or to make agreements with financial institutions for students funding. On the opposite side there are the students that do not consider necessary to enroll a higher education institution.

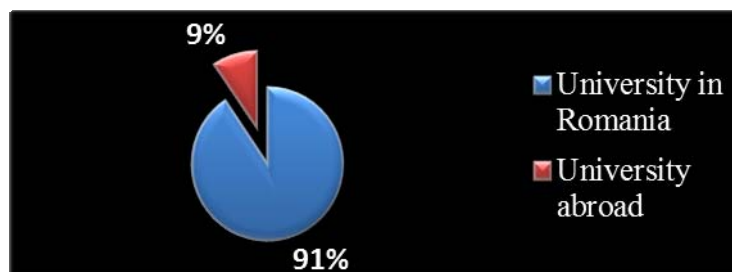
**Question 3:** If your answer to previous question was affirmative, do you intend to enroll :

Table 3 – The percentage of students who intend to enroll a higher education institution

Among the 85 % of students willing to get a university degree, a wide majority, 91% intend to enroll a Romanian university.

**Question 4:** What is the importance of the following criteria in selecting the type of higher education institution you want to enroll (1-the least important, 5- the most important) ?

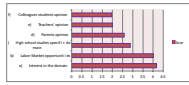


Table 4 – The importance of the criteria according to which students select a higher education institution

The majority of these answers is within the preferred domain and considered as a critical choice criteria by students. It has the higher score: 4,17.

On the other hand market opportunities have also a high score: 4,01 and this is a sign that students guide themselves according to the terms of future employment and status.

The least important is considered the teachers and other students 'opinion.

**Question 5:** Specify the time needed to make a decision about the type of university you intend to enroll.

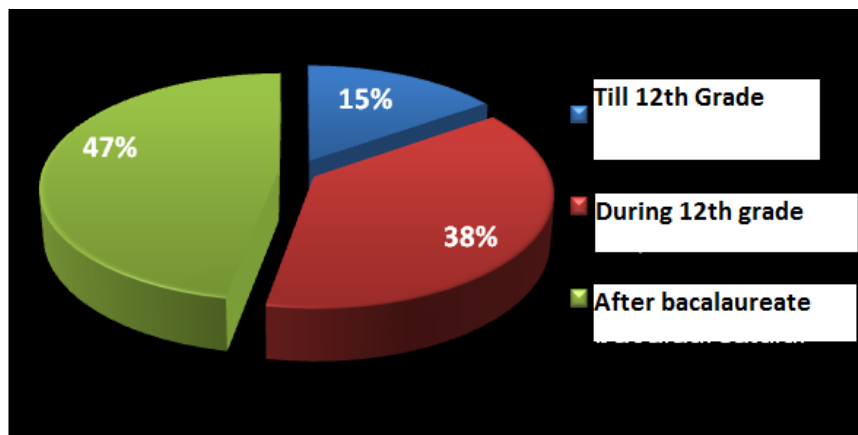
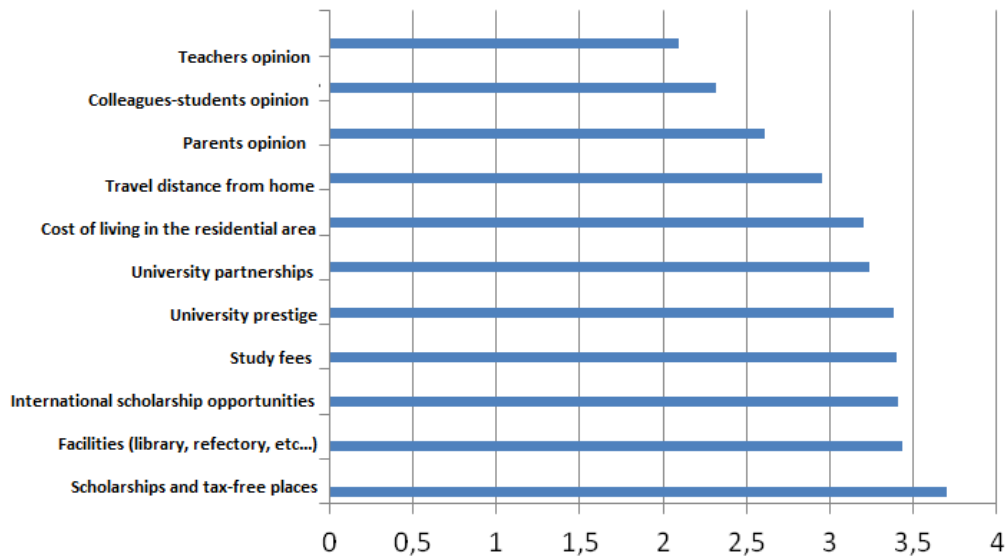


Table 5- The time needed to make a decision about the type of university they intend to enroll.

As shown in Table 5, the time needed to make a decision about the type of university you intend to enroll, 47 % from the respondents chose the period after baccalaureate, 38% - during 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and only 15% decide their future till 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Knowing the high time for decision-making is very useful for the education institutions because they can organize a well-structured marketing campaign, in order to promote its degree programs and to attract a large number of students.

**Question 6:** Label the importance of the following criteria in selecting a higher education institution (from 1 to 5, 1 is the least important and 5 is the most important).



The most important aspect is considered the number of tuition-free and scholarships, and has the highest score:3,70. The next factors were: institution facilities, foreign scholarships, University partnerships, the cost of living in the residential area and the travel distance from home.

The least important factor for the respondents is their teachers 'opinion with the lowest score – 2.09, not far from friends and parents' opinion.

**Question 7:** Which information resources do you consider more reliable when researching about higher education institution?( from 1 to 5, 1 is the least important and 5 is the most important)

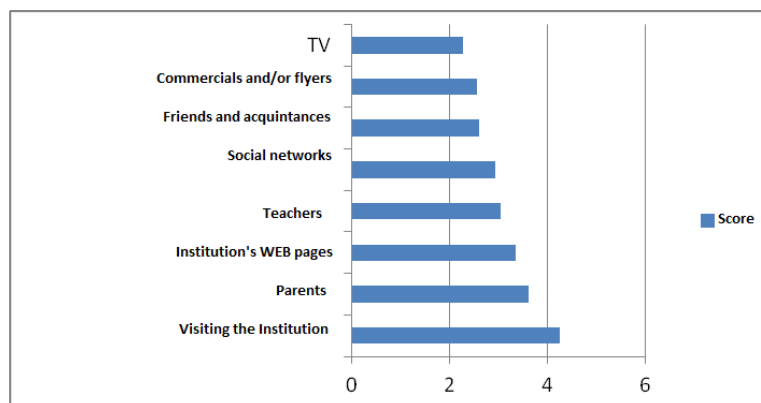


Table 7 – Information resources in the order of their importance for students

The most reliable information source for the respondents is visiting the institution, with a very high score of 4.25. The opposite consists of TV commercials and flyers that students do not consider reliable.

**Question 8:** Do you intend to get a full-time or a part-time job during studies?

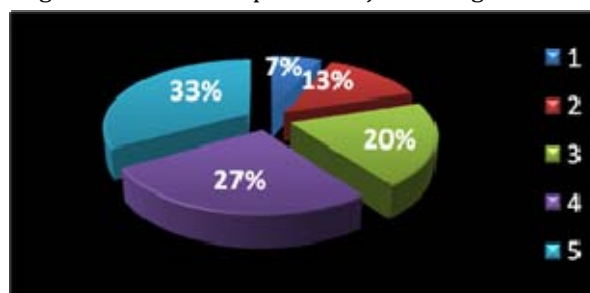


Table 8- Students intention to get a full-time or a part-time job during studies

The high score of 4.10 suggests that most of the students intend to get a job during their university studies.

**Question 9:** What are your main expectations from the faculty you intend to attend/graduate?

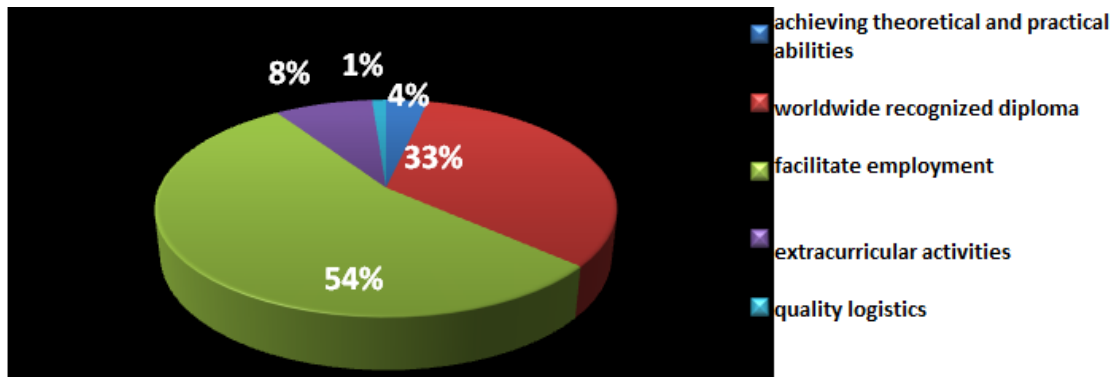


Table 9 - Students' main expectations from the faculty they intend to study in?

As shown in Table 9, 54% of the potential university students answered that their main expectation is to benefit from the facilitated access to market place, a worldwide recognized diploma and the extracurricular activities offered by that institution. Achieving theoretical and practical abilities and a high-quality material base are considered the least important.

**Question 10:** What is your opinion about The University of Galati?

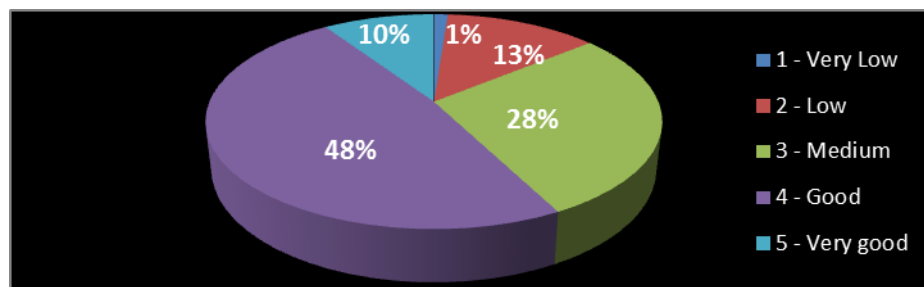


Table 10- High school students' opinion about The University of Galati

The high score (3, 4) expressed by respondents means that 40% of the students have a good opinion about The University of Galati.

**Question 11:** Do you consider that high school studies prepared you well enough to attend a high education institution?

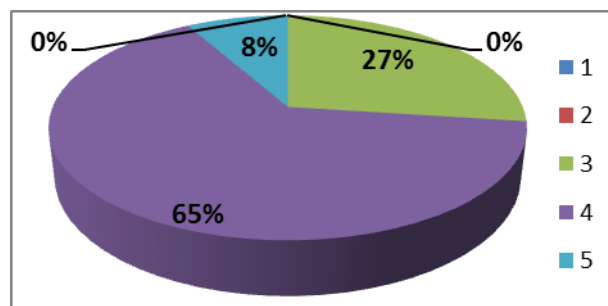


Table 11 - The degree in which high school students consider that high school studies prepared them well enough to attend a high education institution

The score of 3.81 means that 65% of students consider that high school studies prepared them well enough for a successful academic career.

**Question 12:** What is the first word that comes to your mind when thinking about higher education in Romania?

Very good (12)	Low (12)
Good (7)	Expensive (8)
Necessity (4)	Pile (10)
Work	Bribe (7)
Career (5)	Corruption (6)
Passion	Stress
Future	Useless ( not in trend)
Performance	It's OK (2)
Opportunity	It can be better (2)
	Chaos
	Easy to get diplomas
	Lack of organization

Analyzing these answers, we can observe that there are a lot of negative words and expressions from the right part of the table, that have a negative impact for the image of the Romanian education system, which leads to lack of confidence in the education system, probably because the socio-economic environment and mass-media which sometimes has a bad influence upon the way people think.

The university must find a strategy to infirm this negative thinking. We recommend the education institution to promote positive words and expressions in the marketing campaigns.

The majority of the respondents are females- 59%. 75% from the students come from urban.

The wide majority of the respondents answered that their monthly income per family member is between 700 and 1000 RON.

68% of the high school students answered that both their parents graduated high school; 24% have one parent graduating an university and 5% responded that both their parents have university diplomas.

## 5. Conclusions and future research

The findings of this research provide us with an indication on the importance of students' behavior in selecting a higher education institution. Analyzing high school students answers to questionnaires, the conclusions are:

\*85% of the high school students respondents intend to select a higher education institution;

\*The main reason for not going to university for the 15% is represented by their intention to get a job (80%) ;

\*The most important choice factor in selecting a higher education institution is the student's passion for that domain, closely followed by the benefits that a degree can provide in terms of employment, status and lifestyle.

\*The most reliable informing source expressed by respondents is visiting the institution. So, universities can encourage prospective students to visit them, in order to raise awareness of key influences in decision-making.

\*Another important choice factor in selecting a higher education institution for the candidates is the number of scholarships and tuition-free places they offer.

\* Irrespective of candidate's expectations, 54% of them answered that their main expectation from a higher education institution is to facilitate them the employment and to align their quality standards with the demands of the market place and employers.

We suggest that future studies attempt to draw a representative sample among Grade 11 and 12 learners and that each university to organize marketing campaigns in order to provide them useful guidance in the institution selection process. This aspect will enable higher education institutions to use their limited funds more efficiently to attract the right caliber of student (recruitment policies).

Knowing future students' needs, and main criteria in selecting a university, they are able to create a unique position and to segment the students market more appropriately, gaining a competitive advantage.

Our recommendation is that HEI to involve their own students in organizing marketing campaigns, and, as a result, they will become more experienced.

According to the information expressed by respondents, 49% of the students willing to go to university consider that the best period to select a HEI is after the baccalaureate exam, our



recommendation is to enhance careers guidance, organizing career orientation programs for students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, or for students in secondary schools, too in order to avoid making wrong decisions, after the baccalaureate.

When trying to focus the institutions' marketing strategy on solving problems such as: career counselling for students, our proposition is to make partnerships between high schools and universities, giving them the possibility to contact students and professors. A relevant example is the Partnership between "Virgil Madgearu" Economics College and the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration from Galati which has many advantages for both institutions. We can mention here: the permanent collaboration between high school teachers and university professors, and a higher quality of the teaching process. Some of the activities organized in this partnership consist of:

- The Open Days activity Organized at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration from Galati
- Presenting and distributing promoting materials from FEAA during marketing campaigns organized with the help of students and teachers.
- Supporting the high school teams participating to Business Challenge.
- Specific domain books donation organized by The Department Of Business Administration.

Considering that the most reliable information source is visiting the institution, we recommend that institutions to invest more in organizing the Open Days activities, such as: presenting institution facilities, assisting lectures, the interaction between high school and university students.

Further studies could consider the possibility of organizing informative campaigns during high school parents meetings, providing them useful information and guidance on the importance of choice factors in the institution selection process. Our recommendation for the institutions is to identify opportunities to engage parents as partners of prospective students. Finally, the study has accomplished its main objective that we are better informed about Romanian education marketing as to which choice criteria students prefer and perceive to be reliable to consider and what their behavior is when selecting a higher education institution.

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