

Types of Image Making activities. The image-maker in a Higher Education Institution

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Abstract

A corporate image is the general idea of the organization at a certain period of time or a relatively short reference one.

The generalized, consensual and persistent ideas of the target audiences build up the reputation of an organization, but it does not claim to be the same for each separate case.

This article attempts to clarify the specific characteristics that create the image of a university and the different image-making activities. The individual indicators are summarized and analyzed and they are taken into account when determining the image of a university, as well as the sources that induce image-making activities.

The listed activities that a university undertakes for creating its good image suggest that the reputation of a university is formed not only through the media coverage but also through specific actions that the higher education institution performs.

Image makers are those people who work to create and validate the trademark and the brand. However, it turns out that the PR activity, advertising, and the image are to some extent underestimated by the management boards of the universities in Bulgaria.

Keywords: image, image-making activities, higher education institution, image-maker, PR;

1. Image-making activities

The corporate image of a higher education institution is built in a targeted, organized and systematic manner as the purpose is being created for mirror images and representations to be implied in the recipients and public. Only the continuous and well organized image-making activities over the time can create and guarantee real competitive advantages for the organization. The attempts to classify the image-making activities that build the corporate image cannot lead to unambiguous systematization, which has to claim of completeness. Classifications can be made based on the subject and the object, as well as several different attributes and criteria. Given the above, we will illustrate our thesis with some the following examples of possible classifications of these activities.

By the degree of innovation, image-making activities can be defined as: *foundational* - a high degree of innovation and non-conventional means, they are brand new to the company and the market, they lead to significantly new market outcomes and changes in the corporate image, or at least in the product image of the company; *follow-up (subsequent)* - related to relatively significant adjustments and modifications of an already existing mean; *simulating* - partial, insignificant improvements.

In respect to the causes and the need for their emergence and implementation, image-making activities are: *strategic* - they are fundamental and are part of the long-term corporate strategy and goals; *defensive (drawn)* - aimed at the survival of the company and applied under force (or duress); *attacking (pushed)* - are related to the resources, capabilities and success of the company

In terms of their radicality, these activities can be classified as: *partial* - such are some of the enhancing image-making activities related to one or more details of the corporate image; *trans-systematic* - they are usually basic and radical, completely altering the object and the object. In terms of their impact on audiences and consumers, the activities that build the image are: activities that impose new ideas and attitudes in the audience and destroy the old ones; activities that change perceptions and attitudes, but not significantly.

According to the method of implementation and the degree of impact on the recipients the image-making activities can be classified as: *revolutionary; evolutionary*

Depending on the duration of their impact, image activities are: *short-term, mid-term; long term;*

1.1. The profession image maker- practice and science

“No job is more difficult than establishing a name for yourself”¹. As the medieval scientist Nicholas of Cusa) wrote: “We consider abstract images to be the most reliable and certain. Images through which we perceive things as neither lacking material nature, without which it

¹ Marinov R., *Public Relation, publishing house Vanyio Nedkov, Sofia, 2001, p.321*

² Quotation same page 321

is impossible to imagine them, nor are they fully subjected to the swinging in doubt possibility.²

The Web pages of five state Universities in Bulgaria have been studied through empirical research, including Sofia University, University of Plovdiv, the University of Veliko Tarnovo, South-West University and Shumen University. It is stated accordingly if there is an indicated PR Department, on their website, its title and how many employees on a payroll work in the department. The results are summarized in the table below.

The implementation of image-making activities that built the corporate image is carried out by and is within the prerogatives of the respective PR department, Advertising Department, or the Innovation and Rationalization Department (if any) within the organization. A simple survey on universities websites is conveyed, which justifies the brackets used above. Moreover, the survey demonstrates a few existing departments, lack of staffing in the Public Relations and Advertising Departments.

They hire external consulting services or apply a matrix-functional approach to their image-making activities, if anything. Obviously PR activities, advertisement and the imagemaking are, to some extent, underestimated by the higher educational institutions in Bulgaria. The data in Table 1. illustrates the presence/absence of such departments in five state most respected and highly valued universities in Bulgaria- Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ", Plovdiv University" Paisii Hilendarski ", South-West University" Neofit Rilski ", Veliko Turnovo University" St. Cyril and Methodius ", Bishop Konstantin Preslavski The University of Shumen. The same, perhaps, applies with no less force to the other 47 accredited higher education institutions.

Chart 1. PR Departments of five state universities

	<i>PR Department</i>	<i>Name of Department</i>	<i>Contracted employees</i>
<i>Sofia University</i>	<i>YES</i>	<i>Information and Public Relations</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>University of Plovdiv</i>	<i>NO</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>
<i>University of Veliko Tarnovo</i>	<i>NO</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>
<i>South-West University</i>	<i>YES</i>	<i>Public Relations</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Shumen University</i>	<i>Not a department but part of the Rectors office</i>	<i>Public and Media Relations</i>	<i>1</i>

Source: Webpage of the above university as per July 1, 2018

1.2. Results

It is obvious from the data in Table 1. that the best attitude towards the PR activities of Sofia University, which has a department of five specialists, who take care of media relations and the public. Having a department with only one person in it, makes it questionable whether the right definition is “department” or “position”, having in mind that the public relations activity is carried out by a single person. According to their web pages, two of the universities don't have public relations departments. After a small survey on our part, it was found out that this activity is carried out and is assigned to workers from other administrative units.

Image making as a profession is becoming more and more popular. Many celebrities, companies and organizations from different fields use professionals to maintain their good image.

Conditionally, depending on the level of expertise and qualification, we can distinguish two types of image-makers - practitioners and theorists. Of course, theoretically well-grounded image-makers can also have sufficient practical experience and vice versa - people with solid practical experience can have profound theoretical background and expertise.

Building a certain images is much easier, than maintaining one. Building a positive image of a university is not an easy task, especially in the circumstances of increasing competition.

When Edward Bernays is asked how to build an image most effectively, he replies that experts work with realities rather than “images”³. Effective management of these images requires a good image-making strategy and highly professional actions in building a positive and favorable image. Image-makers need to create positive images, emphasizing on the

³Marinov R., *Public Relation*, publishing house Vanyio Nedkov, Sofia, 2001, p.321

virtues and the positive sides of the subject they represent. They are able to select exactly the qualities that are well presented in the public. Through their work, image professionals build up the authority of the individual, institution or the product they work for. Even when using hyperbole and metaphor, everything should be kept professional and not too obvious to the audience. These are specialists that know what, where, when and how to spread through communication channels, which are also carefully selected to achieve the expected effect.

It is not really recommended that one person carries out image making only. The practice of the past is the use of the so-called. an intuitive, instinctive approach that relies on the extensive personal and practical experience and enterprise of the image-maker. In executing the image-making activity in modern conditions, when large-scale projects require the use of a systematic and scientific approach, a considerable amount of people are involved in building a certain image. These are specialists various fields like public relations,

sociology, psychology, public speaking, acting, fashion, communications, journalism, statistics and more. They are the ones who can foresee any unpleasant associations, compromising comments or unwanted messages, people perceiving the details, signs and hidden elements in every public statement. These at first glance subtle details can have a big impact on the mood (state of mind?) of the audience.

Image-making professionals are one of the most important individuals in the team because they are able to prevent negatives even before they exist as such or to reduce the damages after their occurrence. They are in accordance with current public interests and thus legitimize the activity of the organization or the individual to the public. In other words, the image-maker is seeking public recognition for the person or entity he represents.

2. Stages in decision-making and implementation of image-making activities

Whatever image policy and actions are taken, the process of building a corporate image must start with an audit of the inter-institutional environment. The analysis of the situation requires the application of SWOT, PEST, FORCE-FIELD and other analyzes that answer the question which are the strengths and weaknesses of the company, what are the opportunities, the potential threats, and risks. The resource capabilities of the organization must be evaluated so that the potential internal resistance and disagreement and the reasons for them can be examined. The fear of additional work, of the new, of the existence of interpersonal conflicts and relationships, can undermine any good idea, generated to enhance the corporate image. It is imperative to create a group of supporters of this idea, to find opinion leaders within the company. The identification of the resistance is not supposed to reject it, but to serve as feedback and connection.

The analysis of the offered forms of education in the Bulgarian higher education institutions in different educational qualification levels shows that there is a huge number of full time and part-time master and bachelor programs and an extremely low number of specialties with distance education form. The demand for this form of education and the available market niches should push universities specifically into this direction. There is a

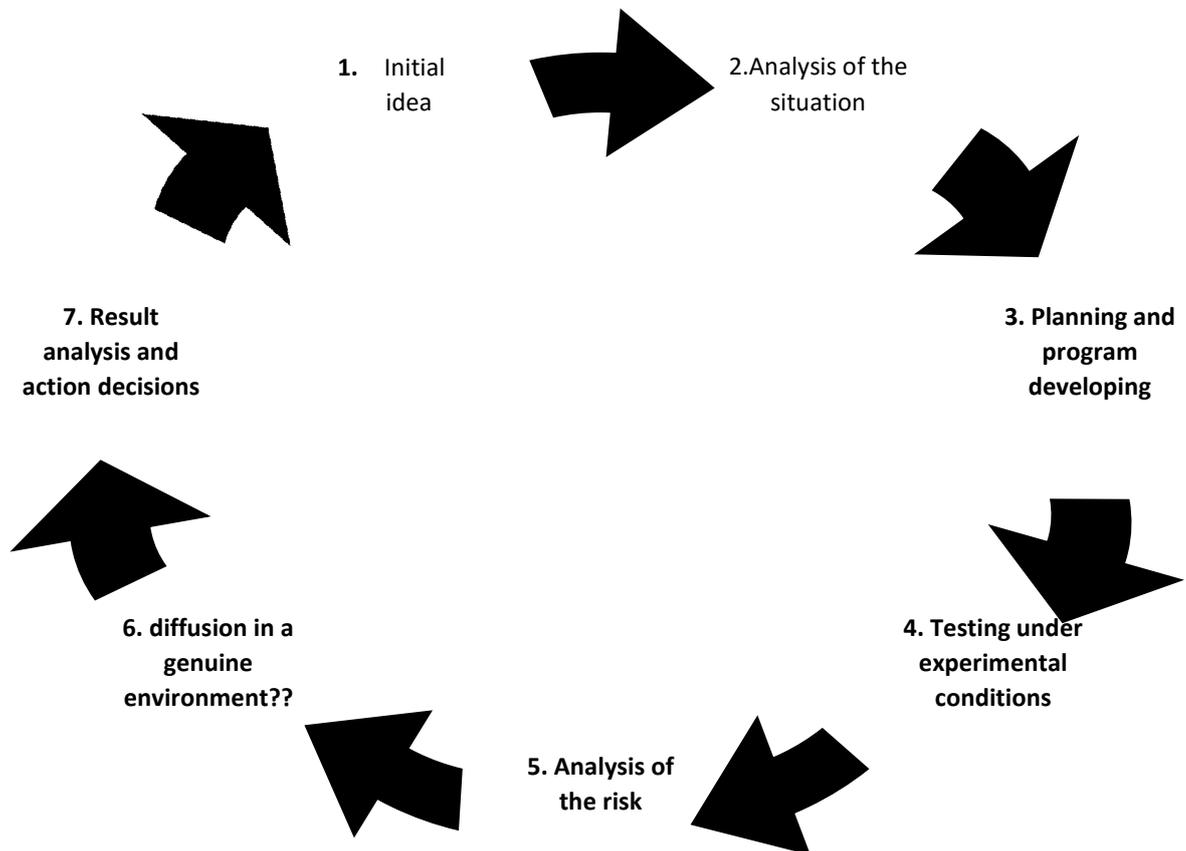
education, who want to take advantage of the opportunity to obtain additional qualifications and long life education, without breaking away from their current professional obligations. However, all this is difficult to be done in many Bulgarian higher education institutions due to the presence of serious internal resistance - the lack of a sufficient number of lecturers, who master foreign languages and the use of modern interactive forms of teaching.

After the audit and analysis of the internal institutional environment, we proceed to the situational analysis of the external environment (users, clients, and their attitudes), which

sometimes requires contacting an external consulting services in order to get qualified expert assistance.

More thoroughly, the chronological stages in which an image-making decision to build a corporate image goes through, can be described in the following way:

Fig. 4. Stages in image cycle



Source: Adapted from Scott Cutlip, Allen H.Center, Glen Bruum, Effective Public Relations, 2010 , p. 316, fig. 11.1

The undertaken activities, which are the foundation of the corporate image, as every product have an "expiry date " and the quality of the product decreases or is completely lost overtime. Therefore, when it comes to image cycle, it is of utmost importance that when making an "analysis and evaluation of results and decisions for future actions", it is crucial to predict, anticipate these deadlines, ie. what is the estimated life cycle of the action taken. In other words, how and how far are the results going to increase, when will it reach its local extremes, ie, how long will it stay up to date and when will it be reached and what will the absolute minimum and maximum in the curve that describes the behavior of the results.

People practicing the image-making profession must comply both to the laws of the country and the rules of the company they work for. They need to analyze and find the right approach and alternatives, as well as make the decision that will be most favorable, correct and useful at the same time for the company for the largest number of people. It is essential that the organizations approach their audiences morally.

According to the data available to us as of mid-2018, there is a Code of Ethics for PR Specialists in Bulgaria, which is signed only by 100 people. It aims to give basic guidance on the ethical behavior of PR professionals in Bulgaria and to outline the core professional values and principles that they must follow in their practice. It is created by the Bulgarian PR community and should be respected by Bulgarian PR professionals. In the preamble to this code, all signatories declare that ethical conduct is the hallmark of professionalism and adopts the following values and principles of professional conduct, namely values as competence, independence, honesty, loyalty, commitment. The Code of Ethics also outlines specific responsibilities for promoting, enhancing trust and respect towards the profession. "Trust and mutual respect are at the core of the relationship between PR professionals and their clients and employers," the code of ethics says⁴.

Taking these principles in consideration will ensure a successful and loyal fulfillment of the image-makers duties of planning and continuous efforts of establishing beneficial connections between society and the organization or the individual. This will secure the authenticity and guarantee the transparency of the information.

3. Conclusion

Through image-making the organization gains positions, clients and market popularity, so it should not be underestimated by the management of the respective organization. Gradually, the flaws can be turned into assets, and a carefully crafted image is a guarantee for positive public opinion. Specialists in the creation of this image carefully use communication systems, develop practical programs that aim to direct or change the public's attitudes towards the interests of the organization.

Therefore image-makers look for facts and create stories and ideas that are of interest to the company, the people who work for it, the public and the media. These facts are told and

described in the best and most interesting possible way. After all, the goal of an image-maker is to create an emotional connection on the one hand between the company and its product, and the consumer, while keeping ethical rules and behavior in mind.

When building a corporate image, all this requires using new forms and ways, which are in accordance with the latest possibilities and requirements of the information society. More than ever, image makers and PR professionals in higher education institutions need to complement the formal classical communication of newspapers, radio, and television, with the latest ways of communication with the public.

In other words, the new dynamics in the development and the use of technology require innovative and up-to-date image solutions and purposeful and systematic actions. The world is increasingly governed by social networks. A fact that image-makers should not ignore. The world is ruled by social media more and more – a fact that the image-makers should not ignore.

⁴ Code of Ethics of the PR specialists in Bulgaria, <http://www.bapra.bg/docs/etichen.pdf>

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