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## Communicative Action & Transdisciplinarity in the Ethical Society

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11<sup>th</sup> LUMEN International Scientific  
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## The Educational Marketing between Theory and Practice in the Context of Secondary Education Institutions

Gabriel GORGHIU<sup>1</sup>, Ana-Maria Aurelia PETRESCU<sup>2\*</sup>,  
Roxana Constanța ENACHE<sup>3</sup>

### *Abstract*

*In the context of the contemporary society, animated by material values, the concept of marketing - in its practical sense: the art of selling and/or the art to persuade customers to buy - becomes more important, crossing its traditional areas defined by economy or industry, and penetrating in various fields, like administration, culture and social life. As such, the concept of educational marketing started to be promoted, justified by the idea that education - together with culture and administration - has to become a profitable field at the societal level. The educational marketing involves: investigating the educational market, the consumption of education, the adaptation of the educational marketing policies to the requirements of the social and economic environment, the sizing of the educational services provided by the educational institutions according to the needs, preferences, expectations and exigencies of the consumers, as well as the goals of educational policies at national and international level, promotion of an efficient management of human resources, which together with the material and informational resources stimulate the synergic effects of the educational values and services, and ensure the achievement of the predetermined objectives.*

*In the paper, using the results of a questionnaire survey, there are identified the opinions of a sample of secondary school teachers - who participated in the European FP7 project IRRESISTIBLE -, concerning a series of theoretical and practical aspects connoted by the implementation of the educational marketing principles, at the level of the educational institutions.*

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**Keywords:** *educational marketing; educational services; educational market; specific instruments; teachers' feedback; IRRESISTIBLE project.*

## 1. Introduction

The concept of *educational marketing* has been increasingly used in the literature over the past decades. This may be firstly explained by the fact that the education system, in general, and the learning system, in particular, are directly subordinated to the social macrosystem, whereas the latter, in its turn, is nowadays strongly influenced by values and principles of economic and material nature like: profitability, consumerism, marketability, productivity etc. On the other hand, in the context of the educational crisis - signaled by Coombs in late 60s' -, fostering the concept of educational marketing, it represents *one of the most important strategies proposed by the education system in order to overcome this critical situation, generated by multiple contradictions between: the demand for quality education - the shortage of quality pedagogical resources; the actual costs per pupil/student allocated in the system - the actual social results (usually analyzed upon graduation); the flexible and growing social / economic / cultural / political structures - the internal and extremely rigid learning structure; the need to rejuvenate the education actors and the education communities - the conservatism of the teaching staff* [1: 12].

## 2. Problem Statement

In strong relation to the abovementioned observations, the educational marketing seems to be a viable solution for decreasing the phenomenon of educational crisis, having the goal *“to elaborate and apply training strategies and educational programmes by an accurate assessment and permanent redesign, with a view to correlate the young generation with the general interests of the society, together with the development of human personality”* [2: 43].

E. Şişcan understands the educational marketing as *“a conception of managing the activity carried out within the education establishment, oriented towards identification and satisfaction of the needs and desires of the target groups, by designing, establishing the price, promoting and providing competitive education programmes and services, and therefore achieving the individual and organizational goals”* [3: 9].

The educational marketing implies the achievement of the following specific functions: investigating the educational market, the needs related to the consumption of education, the social and community environment etc.; adjusting the educational marketing policies to the requirements of the environment; sizing the education services provided by the learning

institutions with the needs, preferences, expectations and requirements of the consumers and also with the desiderate of the education policies worldwide; promoting an efficient management of the human, material and informational resources designed to stimulate the synergic effects of the education values and services, and ensuring the achievements of the established goals [4]. In addition, the policy concerning the educational marketing of each institutions - under the umbrella of the learning system - should be elaborated in line with the analysis of the motivations and symbolic representations of the consumers, in order to define options, expectations and interests of potential beneficiaries (preschoolers, pupils, students, parents, teaching staff and community etc.).

The implementation of the market strategy - related to the educational marketing - requires a series of activities focusing around several basic elements: product and/or service, price, distribution and promotion of the education products/services - which are all known by the syntagma of *marketing mix*.

The school is the main beneficiary of a good market strategy: “*its whole image is clearly defined at the level of the potential clients, expressed by their attitudes and behaviors that support or, contrarily, hinder or have a negative effect on the educational institution activity, modelling in this way the support offered by the community*” [5].

### 3. The Role of Extracurricular Activities

The main extracurricular activities performed to promote the educational marketing policy, which are also identifiable within institutions falling under the Romanian learning system, are: school festivities, school competitions, education fairs, cultural, artistic and scientific events, anniversaries marking various events in the life of schools or the community etc. There are many examples in this sense, but here, several events designed and implemented by a group of university teachers, secondary school teachers and researchers working in the *Community of Learners* (set up in the European FP7 IRRESISTIBLE project) are illustrated, due to its specificity oriented on the actual topic of *nanomaterials* and *nanotechnology*.

The project involved 10 countries and 14 partner institutions represented by universities, research centres and museums. In Romania, Valahia University Targoviste was accompanied by two museums (*Prabova Natural Science Museum* and *History Museum of Targoviste*), offering a powerful partnership for proposing and organizing non-formal educational activities.

The *Community of Learners* worked for about 1 year to design a *Training Module* dedicated to primary and secondary students, aiming to inform the students on the evolutions in the leading fields of science and technology, making them aware of the necessity to approach scientific cutting-edge topics (as *nanomaterials* and *nanotechnology*) from a multidimensional perspective (scientific, ethical and social), and familiarizing them with the paradigm of *Responsible Research and Innovation*, introduced and exploited in the learning activities of the *Module* [6]. Most of the activities took place in 2015 and 2016, in the special weeks proposed by the national program “*School in Another Way: To Know More, To Be Better*”, and also in connection with the annual event of the *European Researchers’ Night* [7].

We consider that such activities may be included in the category of the activities pertaining to educational marketing, due to the fact that they focused, even secondarily, on the objectives related to fostering out-of-school activities organized in various settings (research labs, museums), scientific topics, emerging fields of research, at the level of both local and regional community [8]. In this regard, in the case of the IRRESISTIBLE project, there can be mentioned:

- students’ visits to the *Scientific and Technological Institute of Multidisciplinary Research* from Valahia University Targoviste. With those occasions, they were introduced to the specific equipment and installation of solar photovoltaic panels inside and outside the building, having the opportunity to attend demonstrative experiments (conducted inside and outside the area), and being also familiarized with the components of the solar conversion kits;
- students’ visits to the *Prabova Natural Science Museum and History Museum of Targoviste*, where they participated to a series of presentations, debates and exhibitions concerning the applications of nanomaterials in the museum research, but also in our daily life;
- students’ participation to *European Researchers’ Night*, organised by the members of the *Community of Learners* and the staff from the *History Museum of Targoviste*. The event implied a series of activities designed to make students and general public aware of the importance of emerging technologies (nanotechnology) and new materials (nanomaterials) in our life.

#### 4. Research Questions/Aims of the Research

The research aimed to identify the opinions of a sample of Romanian secondary teaching staff from the schools involved in the IRRESISTIBLE project, concerning a series of theoretical and practical

aspects implied by the implementation of the educational marketing principles, envisaging the educational institutions which actively promote and participate in extracurricular activities.

More, one of the intention was to start from the collected responses in order to identify to what extent the respondents know and apply in their education institutions the basic educational marketing principles, but also to identify a series of solutions meant to develop current practices used in Romanian schools, in reference to the field of educational marketing.

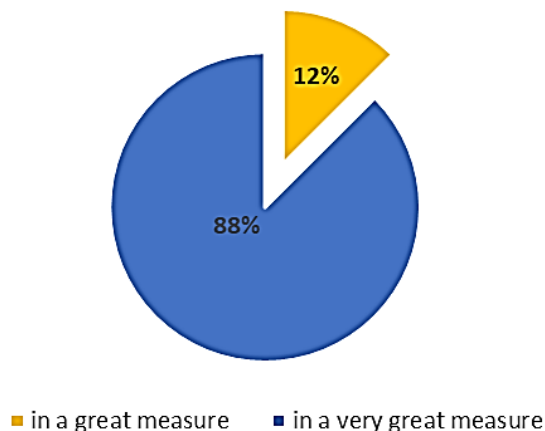
## 5. Research Methods

The research method used in the demarche was based on a questionnaire survey, designed and applied to 80 secondary teachers. The questionnaire proposed 10 items, of which 8 were closed-ended pre-formulated questions and 2 were open-ended questions.

The collected data was initially processed through quantitative analysis, and then discussions were held with some respondents to substantiate the conclusions of the micro-research.

## 6. Findings and Discussion

The first item of the questionnaire investigated the respondents' opinions concerning to what extent they consider important to promote a suitable image of the school and education in the contemporary society. 88% of the respondents consider being important *to a very great extent*, while the remaining 12% consider this to be important *to a great extent* (figure 1). Those results confirm that the sample of teachers are fully aware of how important is to promote the image of the own education institutions and the educational process at local, regional and national levels, and even worldwide, in the context of the contemporary society.



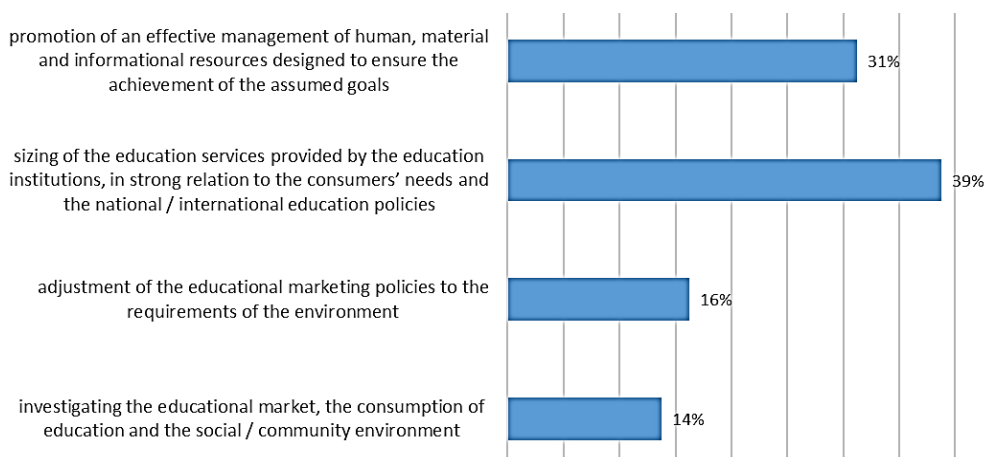
**Figure 1.** Teachers' opinion concerning the importance of promoting the school image and educational process in the contemporary society.

The next item was an open-ended question that focused on detecting the sample teachers point of views regarding what educational marketing represents to them. A series of answers were noticed at this point:

- promoting the image of the education institution in the community and its educational offer, by using all the available means;
- managing the resources that aim to promote the school image;
- challenging the school leaders concerning their capacity to provide attractive information in relation to the quality of the educational actions proper to their education institution;
- analyzing the educational market and promoting an effective management;
- harmonizing the educational services in strong relation to the students' needs;
- attracting human and material resources for school;
- making public the extracurricular activities and students' results (competitions, contests etc.).

The third item confirms the responses to the previous question related to the most important function assigned for the educational marketing. In this context, the most important seems to be the sizing of the education services provided by the education institutions, in strong relation to the consumers' needs and the national / international education policies, closely followed by the promotion of an effective management of human, material and informational resources designed to ensure the achievement of the assumed goals (figure 2).





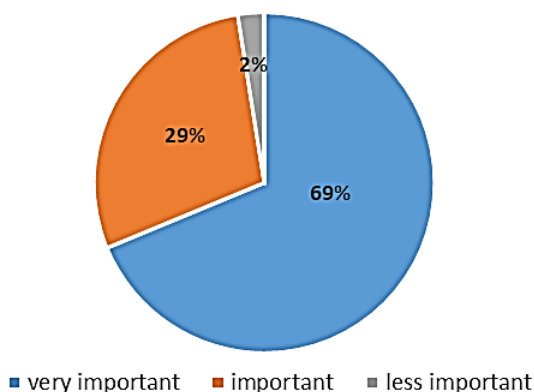
**Figure 2.** Teachers' feedback related to the considered hierarchy of the educational marketing functions.

The next two items were designed to confirm the responses to the first item of the questionnaire. Therefore, the responses to the questions “*to what extent is the educational marketing activity important to you?*” and “*to what extent do you value the educational marketing activity conducted in your education institution?*” are illustrated in figures 3 and 4.

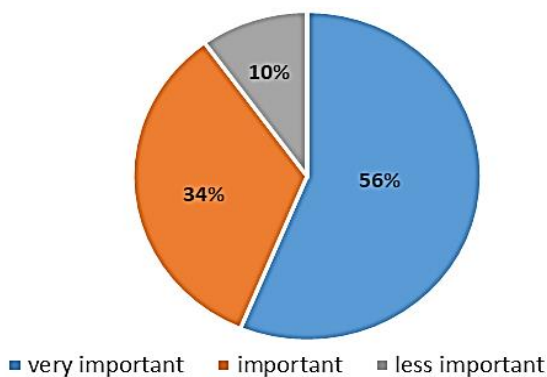
A comparative analysis of the charts indicates some differences between the considered importance to educational marketing activities by the teachers and their perception in relation to the considered importance attached to their education institution. The discrepancies may be justified by some factors pertaining to a deficient management system/leadership of the education institution, fragile cohesion of the teaching team, poor involvement of the school directors and teachers in the educational marketing activities, inefficient educational partnerships with the parents and local community etc.

At the same time, during the discussions with the questioned teachers concerning the main educational marketing activities performed by the education institutions, they mentioned the *Open Days* activities, followed by school anniversary, first day of school, school competitions, conferences, symposiums, workshops and school festivities. As main educational marketing instruments used by the education institutions, the questioned teachers mentioned - in descending order, according to how often they were used -: brochures for promoting the education institution, school websites, school / class Facebook pages, blogs and banners. Additionally, some respondents mentioned other educational marketing tools such as: billboards, exhibitions, posters and activities of public/local impact.

Here, it is interesting to specify that few teachers brought into discussions the huge potential offered by the national program “*School in Another Way: To Know More, To Be Better*”. Originally regarded as a *lost week*, the program represents a step towards strengthening the teacher-student relationship, in the absence of any pressure. More, the visits to museums or science centres, and the meetings with experts or researchers add real-value pieces of knowledge for students, making also a good image for the education institution.



**Figure 3.** Teachers’ feedback concerning the importance of the educational marketing at individual and organizational level.

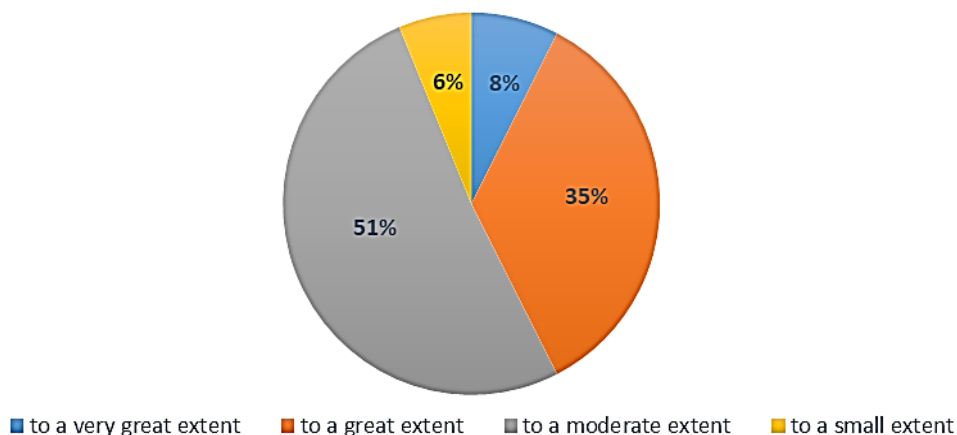


**Figure 4.** Teachers’ feedback related to the main educational marketing activities conducted in their schools

Another item was dedicated for questioning the teachers concerning the main issues coped in relation to the educational marketing activities. At this point, the respondents identified the low availability of the teaching staff to carry out educational marketing activities (27%), a clear poor knowledge

of the aspects regarding the theory of educational marketing (24%), poor skills related to implementation of the educational marketing principles (21%), insufficient material resources (15%), low interest of beneficiaries in the already implemented marketing strategies (10%) and a deficient management of the human and material resources (3%).

In addition, regarding their own skills in order to design and conduct educational marketing activities (figure 5), the questioned teachers considered they have such skills *to a very great extent* and *to a great extent* (43%), but their majority are around the average (51%) or lower (6%).



**Figure 5.** Teachers' feedback concerning their own skills in order to design and conduct educational marketing activities

The resulted data, corroborated with the opinions expressed by the teachers regarding various activities of scientific or methodological nature, highlight the need for training/improving the teaching staff skills and abilities, in relation to the educational marketing activities.

## 7. Conclusions

Both the theory and the practice of the educational marketing still represent vulnerable elements which are insufficiently understood, interiorized and used by the secondary teachers.

Being aware of the need to optimize the educational marketing activities, the teachers who responded to the questionnaire identified a series of solutions - which can be valued as pertinent in terms of applicability and efficiency - at the level of the Romanian education institutions:

- involving all the teachers in activities regarding the promoting of the school image and creation of valuable working teams;
- developing the feeling of belonging to a certain education community, in case of headmasters, teachers, students and parents;
- diversifying of the educational marketing instruments;
- setting some coherent procedures to foster activities carried out, and formulating a marketing strategy;
- initial and lifelong training/formation of the teachers in the field of marketing (promoting the importance of marketing, raising awareness of its importance among teachers, training courses);
- attracting financial resources needed to promote the school image, active involvement of the local community representatives and parents in the school activities;
- conducting an objective, coherent analyzing of beneficiaries' needs and adaptation of the educational offer to the direct and indirect beneficiaries' needs considering the market requirements.

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The authors notice - on their own responsibility - that all the secondary teachers who participated in the research have been informed concerning the voluntary nature of their participation, the understanding of the received information and the fact that the withdrawal from the research process can be done at any time without any negative consequences on participants. The whole research respected the actual ethical standards and the participants offered their consent to participate in the research.

At the same time, the authors mention that their contribution to this paper is equal.

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