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# Higher Education Branding through Instrumental Values



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## ABSTRACT

*Due to the complexity of the educational market, changes are also occurring in the field of education itself - from the constant transformation of the curriculum to new trends in the management of education at all levels. Faculties compete with each other for the best students, professors, projects, discoveries and resources. This forces higher education institutions, which want to survive in the long term and to be highly listed on the market, to take special care of their reputation and prestige. In order to improve their quality and thereby ensure a competitive advantage, higher education institutions use brand management activities to emphasize the values on which their engagement is based. The aim of the paper is to investigate the opinion of students - users of the service of a higher education institution and to show the importance of instrumental values on the basis of which the faculty brand should be shaped. Descriptive statistics and survey techniques*

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*were used in the empirical research, and the sample consisted of 403 respondents - students at six private and state faculties. The obtained results indicate a positive opinion of the respondents about instrumental values, such as those on which a higher education institution should build its brand. This finding provides a basis for the creators of not only higher education brands, but also for the creation of study programs based on the estimated value, an incentive for further research of other values in higher education, as well as for the creation of an optimal brand model of higher education institutions.*

## **Introduction**

Education is the central system of every society because it represents the agent of its reproduction through the perpetuation of basic social values. Still, it is also the driver of its progress and further development. The changes brought by postmodern and postcapitalist times put higher education institutions in an awkward position. Higher education in developed countries remains a central political, ideological and economic issue, but increasingly under the umbrella of the ubiquitous paradigm of *neoliberalism*. Neoliberalism at the base of higher education propagates competition among universities in selling their services to students (students are seen as buyers in the market) and producing specialized and highly skilled workers with high-tech knowledge who will be able to compete in the global market economy (Canaan & Shumar, 2008). Work (and increasingly digital) competencies are placed in the foreground (Simović & Domazet, 2021), while the educational role of higher education fades in the light of globalization. The spread of the ideas of neoliberalism led to the reform of education that was visible in all spheres, starting from the enrollment policy, mobility, flexibility, content and scope of the curriculum, to the issue of financing education, its accessibility (Wenzel & Beck-Peter, 2020) and availability. Johnson (2008; according to Reiners, 2014: 17-18) believes that new trends require universities to become companies (Barnová et al., 2020) that will meet the demands of the economy, be a source of managerial and technological knowledge (Ivanović et al., 2021), have a wide range of commercialized activities and a large number of foreign students.

Globalization has changed not only higher education institutions, but also the users of their educational services - students (Pavlović, Domazet & Lazić, 2019). Today, adults, migrants, racial and national minorities, employees, mothers with small children, young people from families no one

studied before, etc., are being educated. (Spariosu, 2012). Responding to the demands of all interested groups in this process seems like an impossible mission.

Today, faculties are trying to actualize their fundamental values, using all available means to highlight, operationalize and bring them closer to users (Simović et al., 2022), hoping that the market will recognize them as a brand. Until recently, faculties, especially those with a humanistic orientation, viewed marketing and branding as something that contradicts their mission and values. Today, that approach is largely behind us. Marketing and branding in education are seen more as communication and exchange with service users and the general public than as propaganda and persuasion. It can be said that there is an awareness that precisely the brand can be decisive when choosing a higher education institution (Lazić, Jovanović & Lazarević-Moravčević, 2021). The concept of branding can help a lot in spreading humanistic values, primarily through the actualization of the concept of social and non-profit marketing, as well as through the concept of social entrepreneurship (Anđelić & Brnjas, 2019).

The concept of lifelong learning has a fundamental value, so its branding is also important. By branding the concept of lifelong learning, an advanced knowledge society, sustainable economic development, a greater number of quality jobs, tolerance and multiculturalism can be achieved (Vrban, 2015; Domazet, Đokić & Milovanov, 2018). Therefore, investing in the branding process is the right way to create faculty excellence, which benefits the faculty and the direct users of its services and society as a whole.

## **Literature Review**

A brand represents the essence of an organization, and through its characteristics, users can see its essential nature and fundamental values on which it is based. A brand should stand for something unique and consistent, and this goal drives experts to define a set of brand characteristics that function as an integral aspect of the entire brand management process (Bhasin, 2019). A strong brand is also attractive because it catches users with its pledge and values and maintains loyalty. Although it seems to be known what a brand represents, in the literature, there is no definition of this term that the relevant authors agree on. Foreign authors view it as a logo (Aaker, 1991), a legal instrument (Crainer, 1995),

an organization (Reil & Balmer; according to Maurya & Mishra, 2012), a perceived risk (Kapferer, 2008), an identity system (Van Riel & Balmer, 1997), value system (Cook, 1995; Meenaghan, 1995; Thrift, 1997; Beckett, 1996; Franzen & Moriarty, 2008; according to Maurya & Mishra, 2012), personality (Gutman, 1982), or as a developing entity (Goodyear, 1996).

Dašić (2016: 20) believes branding is "when something that is quite ordinary is improved and perfected so that it becomes more valuable and meaningful." This definition emphasizes that branding does not create an illusion or encourage people to make irrational purchasing decisions, and it should not be confused with propaganda and creating an illusion that makes a product or service look significantly better than it is. Veljković (2010) also made a contribution to this scientific field, who thinks that in the spirit of the Serbian language, instead of a brand, we should use the expressions "famous brand" and "undoubtedly known brand". "At the same time, other marketing activists in Serbia use the word brand, although only in situations where a brand has a corresponding intangible value" (Veljković, 2010). Veljković believes a brand must have a deep set of opinions and associations that provide additional value to the consumer and user.

A brand is a multidimensional construct, which can be a product, a service, a large corporation, a nation, a specific destination, or an individual. Hence, the paper focuses on the educational services of higher education institutions. Unlike tangible products, which can be seen, felt and tried before purchase, people buy services solely based on their trust that the service provider will deliver as promised (Chiaravalle & Findlay Schenck, 2007). Due to its specificity, the branding of educational services is more challenging than the branding of products precisely because they belong to intangible brands (Grljević, Bošnjak & Boš, 2019). Even other characteristics of this service, such as indivisibility (requires the presence of both the receiver and the service provider), the impossibility of conserving the service and their diversity (there are no two identical services), also speak in favor of the thesis about the challenge of branding intangible brands (Domazet & Neogradi, 2018). Therefore, the internal dimensions of the brand are of great importance, and the focus is on overcoming its intangibility and creating long-term relationships with users. In order to create a connection between the service user and the brand, the user must first recognize the problem he has and find a potential answer to it, then request information about alternatives, evaluate them, choose one of them, and finally evaluate the experience that the brand caused (Schiffman &

Wisnblit, 2015). Bearing all this in mind, the brand of the faculty can be seen as a corporate brand, i.e. as the total offer of the faculty, which is characterized by the high quality of services and emotional connection (Radović-Marković & Achakpa, 2018), belonging and the image that students create about themselves by attending a particular faculty.

In order for a faculty to become a brand, it must have a strong identity, recognition among its target group, student loyalty and, most importantly, *the values* that "color" its every single step (Veljković & Đorđević, 2010). Regardless of whether they are defined broadly, as desired forms of behavior, or restrictively, at the level of ideas about what is desirable, the function of values is significant in decision-making and conflict resolution. Values contribute to the stability of an individual's behavior and influence the shaping of an individual's morals. Value also represents something worthy for others, principles and standards that society considers precious and intrinsically desirable (Kiros, 1998). With this in mind, *Halstead and Taylors* (2005) view values as principles, fundamental beliefs, ideals, standards or life attitudes that guide behavior or decision-making.

University education is not and should not be a single-purpose, value-neutral endeavor. The higher education system prepares students for employment after graduation and also introduces them to the life of an active citizen, encourages their development, not only as professionals but also as individuals, and fosters a positive attitude towards lifelong learning and competence development (Simović & Domazet, 2021). Therefore, the faculty can foster instrumental, intrinsic, socially responsible values, additional values, etc. At the same time, the focus of values must not be steered exclusively on *education* as a result of the education process, but also on *the education process* itself, in which different values are materialized, manifested and adopted.

Recognizing the wide range of values on which faculties can build their brand, the research attention of this work is directed towards instrumental values. The instrumental character of higher education is a phenomenon that gained particular importance with the advent of the third industrial revolution, which created the information society. *Drucker* (2000, according to Bralić, 2012: 40) called this phenomenon the knowledge economy. An intellectual workforce whose basic driver is knowledge (knowledge society) is "a society that creates, shares and uses knowledge for the progress and betterment of its people, through several features: the penetration of scientific achievements into all spheres of social activities, science as a

productive force, differentiation of new forms of political activities (policy of science and education, policy of lifelong learning), development of the economic sector (production and knowledge management), change in structural power (technocracy) and intellectuals as a social class" (Knežević, 2013; according to Vrban, 2015: 45).

Faculties and the labor market are closely related because employers hire graduates, faculties can form new industries through research, and the government invests in higher education to see its economic profitability (West, 2000) and other social implications. One of the preoccupations of the faculty is to secure graduates good jobs in their professions (Harvey, 2010). "A clear connection between higher education and the knowledge economy has been observed as the creation of the best possible scenario, in which the demand for highly skilled work implies that it will be available to all those who have the motivation and resources to acquire a good education" (Lauder & Mayhew, 2020: 1). Therefore, the faculty's instrumental values make learning and education viewed as a means, as they enable students to get a job after obtaining a diploma (Kotlar, 2019) and apply the acquired knowledge in the working environment. In addition, the faculty can provide students with work experience, support their career development (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2004), provide an opportunity to acquire a network of contacts (Brass, 1984), develop entrepreneurial and leadership skills, etc.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

The goal of the research was to investigate the students' opinion about the importance of instrumental values (learning and education have an instrumental value because they enable students, after obtaining a diploma, to get a job, apply the acquired knowledge, etc.) as a value on which the brand of the faculty should be built, as well as whether the opinion is related to the biological and educational characteristics of the respondents. Descriptive statistics were applied in the research using the survey technique. To examine the opinion of students of private and state faculties about the desirable instrumental values of a branded higher education institution, we used a battery of instruments composed of a questionnaire and a Likert-type scale.

Students of state and private faculties represent the population in the research. At the same time, the sample is convenient and includes 403 students from six higher education institutions based in Belgrade: Faculty of

Philosophy, Faculty of Organizational Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Banking, Insurance and Finance (BBA), Alfa BK University and Singidunum University. The methodological design of the research consists of two independent variables and one complex dependent variable. The dependent variable in the research is *the students' opinion about the importance of instrumental value, as a value on which the faculty brand should be built*.

The aforementioned variable is operationalized through indicators, each of which represents the students' opinion on the importance of concrete instrumental values (application of knowledge, acquisition of international qualifications, work experience, development of a network of contacts, employment, financial stability, the importance of postgraduate studies for professional development and development of leadership and entrepreneurial skills), as values on which the brand of the faculty should be built. The independent variables represent the *biological characteristics of the respondents* (gender and age) and the *educational characteristics of the respondents*: type of studies of respondents (professional and academic), level of education of respondents (first-degree studies - basic professional and basic academic studies; second-degree studies - specialist professional and specialist academic studies, master's academic and master's professional studies; third-degree studies - doctoral academic studies), the faculty attended by the respondent and the average grade of the respondent in previous studies.

As part of the data processing, the following were analyzed: percentages, distribution frequencies, arithmetic means and *chi-square test*, while the calculation was performed with the help of the SPSS software package.

The research was conducted in the period April-November 2022 through an online questionnaire in the mentioned higher education institutions, with the general hypothesis that students believe that the brand of the faculty should be built on instrumental values.

*Table 1: Characteristics of the sample*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>In %</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	286	71%
Male	117	29%
Total:	403	100%
<b>Age</b>		
Less than 20	51	13%
20-24	314	78%
25-29	25	6%
30-34	4	1%
35-39	3	0,7%
40 and more	6	1,5%
Total:	403	100%
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Basic professional and basic academic studies	355	88%
Specialist professional and graduate master's studies	40	10%
Doctoral academic studies	8	2%
Total:	403	100%
<b>Faculty</b>		
Faculty of Medicine	99	25%
Singidunum University	98	24%
Faculty of Philosophy	80	20%
Belgrade Banking Academy (BBA)	77	19%
Alfa BK University	25	6%
Faculty of Organizational Sciences	24	6%
Total:	403	100%

*Source: Authors' research*

## **Results and Discussion**

The obtained results of the research on the respondents' attitudes about concrete instrumental values are presented in Table 2.



*Table 2: Respondents' opinion on the importance of indicators of instrumental values for brand creation*

<b>Instrumental Values Claim</b>	<b>Completely agree</b>	<b>Partially agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Partially disagree</b>	<b>Completely disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>In order for the faculty to be the best for me, it should:</b>						
Guarantee me employment upon graduation	45.7%	32.3%	14.9%	5.5%	1.6%	100%
Enable me to apply the learned knowledge in the work environment.	87.6%	10.7%	1.2%	0.5%	/	100%
Enable me to acquire professional qualifications	80.9%	15.4%	3%	0.7%	/	100%
Provide me with financial stability upon graduation	37.2%	26.1%	24.5%	8.2%	4%	100%
Speed up my career development in postgraduate studies	39.2%	31.5%	23.1%	4.7%	1.5%	100%
Develop my leadership and entrepreneurial skills that I can also use outside of my profession	37.7%	30.3%	22.6%	7.9%	1.5%	100%
Enable me to acquire a network of contacts.	47.6%	31.3%	15.6%	4.3%	1.2%	100%
Enable me to gain relevant work experience before finishing my studies	50.4%	35%	10.4%	3.2%	1%	100%

*Source: Authors' research*

The obtained research results unequivocally suggest that students believe it is desirable for the faculty to base and build its brand on instrumental values, which was concluded based on the high arithmetic mean of the answers received: 4.38, where the maximum score was 5. Students' positive opinion additionally contributes to this conclusion expressed about each indicator of instrumental value, shown in Table 3.

The results do not indicate that the faculty should build its brand *exclusively* based on instrumental values. In this research, they were in

focus, which does not mean that other values are unimportant to students. On the contrary, other values must be either complementary to the instrumental values or neutral to them, but they should never be on opposite sides.

Based on the arithmetic mean of the received answers, the highest score in the student assessment of the indicators of instrumental values on which the faculty should build its brand was the *application of the learned knowledge in the work environment*. Therefore, students primarily expect practicality and pragmatic competencies in the context of their work environment from best-in-class faculties. This presents a significant challenge to the faculties due to the huge turbulence in the labor market on the one hand and the faculty's attempt to conceive the curriculum as broadly as possible in order to enable its students to find employment in a wide range of positions. At first glance, this seems like an impossible mission because it is about jobs that have yet to be created or will be significantly modified in the future.

*Table 3: Students' opinion on the importance of indicators of instrumental values for creating the brand of the faculty, displayed through the arithmetic mean*

<b>Instrumental - values</b>	<b>Arithmetic mean</b>
Training for applying learned knowledge in the work environment	<b>4.85</b>
Acquiring professional qualifications that are recognized and respected worldwide	<b>4.76</b>
Gaining relevant work experience before completing studies	<b>4.31</b>
Development of a network of contacts that will help in the further professional development of students	<b>4.20</b>
Guaranteed employment after graduation	<b>4.15</b>
Accelerated career development due to postgraduate studies	<b>4.02</b>
Development of leadership and entrepreneurial skills	<b>3.95</b>
Financial stability after graduation	<b>3.84</b>
<b>Arithmetic mean of all answers received:</b>	<b>4.38</b>

*Source: Authors' research*

The faculty highly positions the possibilities of applying the learned knowledge in the working environment as a basis for creating its brand. It means that it must focus its resources on constant research of the labor

market to make strategic decisions regarding the curriculum, taking into account the current and observed state of the local and global labor market. It also requires making an additional effort to connect with current stakeholders in the field they are dealing with, nurturing those relationships, and focusing on student internships and volunteering. At the same time, it is important to say that one of the faculty functions is to create scientific progeny, so it is necessary to carefully balance between theory and practice.

*International professional qualifications* are also important to students. Modern generations are motivated to build a flexible, non-linear career, which certainly includes international dimensions in some form. Whether it is a complete relocation abroad, work in an international company, a virtual organization with emphasized international dimensions, or full/partial freelancing on the international labor market - the students themselves are probably not entirely sure at this moment, but for them this a very significant possibility, and accordingly they rated it very highly in the ideal faculty brand. This means that the faculty, which wants to position this element highly in its brand construct, must make an extra effort to establish and maintain international cooperation. This refers not only to the increased mobility of students and teaching staff, but also to interconnections with the international labor market and its prominent organizations, which also implies devoting oneself to research and monitoring international trends, flows and legislation related to the activities in focus.

*Acquiring relevant work experience before completing basic studies*, as an element on which the brand of a higher education institution should be built, took a high third place among the indicators of instrumental values. If it decides to incorporate this item into its brand, the faculty faces the huge task of networking with various organizations where their students could gain relevant work experience. The number of students and the number of places needed to gain work experience are directly related, so in the case of a faculty with a large number of students of the same educational profile, it is questionable how far this goal can be achieved in practice.

In the case of educational profiles that offer the possibility of performing several jobs, the situation becomes even more complicated because cooperation with many organizations would have to be established and maintained. Additionally, it should be kept in mind that acquiring quality work experience would require much more time than two to three weeks of mandatory professional practice. If the realization of this value is taken seriously, it is necessary to establish a special organizational unit (e.g.,

Center for Career Development, Student Practice and/or Career Counseling and Guidance) whose mission would be to realize the possibility for students to gain appropriate work experience during their studies. Such an organizational unit would have to cooperate closely with the teaching staff and the faculty's administration to harmonize the students' educational and work obligations.

*Table 4: Presentation of statistically obtained relations*

<b>Related claims</b>	<b>Contingency Coefficient</b>	<b>Statistical significance</b>
Gender of respondents * Branded faculty should provide work experience before completing the studies	.400	0,043
Level of education * Branded faculty should develop their leadership and entrepreneurial skills	.450	0,010
Gender of respondents * Branded faculty should develop their leadership and entrepreneurial skills	.500	0,018

*Source: Authors' research*

We obtained a statistically significant connection ( $\alpha = .043$ ), of medium intensity ( $c = .400$ ) between the gender of the respondents and the opinion on *acquiring relevant work experience before completing basic studies* as a desirable value at which the faculty brand should be built. The mentioned opinion is more pronounced among female students, which may indicate that they are more pragmatic than male students and value work experience more. In Serbia, the possibility of gaining work experience outside the university is more available to male than female students. This result may also indicate that female students feel better when the faculty also provides the opportunity to gain work experience, which relieves them of the pressure to independently search for such opportunities.

*Developing a network of contacts that will help in the further professional development of students*, as part of the instrumental values on which a higher education brand should be built, is rated highly with an arithmetic average of 4.20. These results are expected considering that social capital is crucial for every professional aspect. The implementation of this value requires significant involvement of the faculty in many aspects, but also the necessity of maintaining and nurturing relations with former students, who would be offered "after-sales services" (that is, those that are

offered even when the process of providing the basic service is completed), which would be reflected in joint gatherings, alumni cooperation, joint implementation of projects, participation in professional development (attending seminars, training and participation in conferences), offering current students the opportunity to volunteer with former students, etc. In addition, the faculty should foster a culture of cooperation among students and teamwork, rather than mutual competition, to create predispositions for their mutual networking and lay the foundations for the acquisition of future social capital.

The next value emphasized by the students in the conducted research is *the guarantee of employment after graduation*. Although hardly any faculty can give this kind of guarantee, 78% of students agree with the above statement. Namely, every student expects to receive competencies and a diploma that will open the door to the labor market, and it is up to the faculty to do everything in its power to ensure that the student not only gains employability but also real employment. Certainly, many factors affect whether employment will occur, and the responsibility for getting a job cannot be transferred only to the faculty - when choosing a higher education institution, the student consciously made a decision for which he bears personal responsibility. However, although the faculty cannot, in the true sense of the word, guarantee that every student will be employed, it seems that if the previous values in the research have been updated, there is a high probability that employment will occur. On the other hand, if the need for personnel trained by the faculty in the labor market is low, if the faculty has a good system of career information, counseling and guidance, it would completely transfer the responsibility for finding a future job to the students, because it has given them all the relevant information about the state of the labor market, and the student made a decision based on that.

The instrumental value of *accelerated career development due to postgraduate studies* is highly rated by respondents based on the arithmetic average score of 4.02. In practice, it often happens that students continue their education at master's studies in order to either acquire additional knowledge or, at least for a while, postpone employment. What is certain is that well-conceived postgraduate studies can help in the career of a student who knows what he wants and why he enrolled in this level of education. A career guidance and counseling system would help the decision to continue studies at the optimal moment in the student's career. At the same time, the benefit for a postgraduate's career would be greater with the increase of

multiple connections between the labor market and the concept of continuing studies. We should not forget the organizational dimension of postgraduate studies either because the faculties are mostly organized in a way that it is very difficult to be a regular student and work in parallel.

In addition to practical competencies related to future work, students expect a branded faculty to help them develop *leadership and entrepreneurial skills*. More than 65% of students agree with this statement. This speaks of the importance of the aforementioned competencies for functioning in a postmodern and postcapitalist society. One gets the impression that students have a strong proactive attitude regarding taking responsibility for their destiny in a constantly changing society. The respondents are aware that without entrepreneurship and leadership competencies, they will not be able to reach an enviable level of performance, regardless of the possession of professional competencies. Non-traditional forms of work organization, which are quite flexible and changeable and require a high level of entrepreneurship, also contribute to this. This can and must have an impact on the curriculum of the higher education institution, but also on its organization and organizational culture, which can contribute to the development of leadership and entrepreneurial competencies.

The statistical processing of the data revealed a statistically significant connection ( $\alpha=0.010$ ) of medium intensity ( $c=.450$ ) between the evaluation of this indicator of the dependent variable and the level of education of the respondents - those who are in basic studies, compared to other groups of respondents, attributed it to greater significance. It is possible that respondents in basic studies feel a greater deficit of leadership and entrepreneurial competencies because these competencies are increasingly necessary for generations to come, and it is possible that students at higher levels of study think that this type of competence should not be developed within the faculty as a formal educational institution but through other forms of education. It was also found that more female respondents than male respondents share the opinion that the faculty should develop leadership and entrepreneurial competencies. The statistically significant connection ( $\alpha=0.018$ ) is of medium intensity ( $c=.500$ ). Practice shows that compared to women, there are more men in leadership positions, which is the case with entrepreneurship. In a situation where there is female tokenism in managerial positions in organizations, phenomena such as the glass wall and glass ceiling (which limit vertical and horizontal mobility in organizations)

or the mommy track phenomenon (which determines the career path of women who have decided to have children), it is not surprising that female students want all possible educational help that would allow them to break stereotypes and step out of the vicious circle.

Interestingly, the student assessment of the value of *financial stability*, as a value on which the faculty should build its brand, is in last place in terms of the arithmetic mean score (3.84). It is clear that financial stability definitely depends on the labor market and the amount of income linked to certain economic branches that the student has chosen, so there is an agreement that the chosen employment does not necessarily have to be accompanied by financial stability. However, the acquired competencies and the diploma's value can certainly contribute to the financial stability of former students. In order to achieve this, continuous professional development of experts from all fields is essential, and the faculty can and should participate in organizing this. This means that the financial security of graduated students is not a value on which students expect the faculty to build its brand, although if the faculty is in a position to provide it or clearly contribute to it in any way, it would not be poorly accepted by the majority of students.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The process of branding in higher education has practical and scientific significance for all areas that directly or indirectly deal with adult education, adult education policy and the concept of lifelong learning. In addition, the brand's characteristics at the faculties are significant both for the entire academic community as the carrier of higher education and for the entire society as its end user. Namely, the branding of higher education institutions can contribute to the quality of educational results, be an example of excellence for the improvement of the adult education system, bring the quality that all educational institutions will strive for, and, most importantly, it can change people's awareness that learning does not end after obtaining a diploma. The reality is that faculties pay more and more attention to increasing the number of students, and the quality of educational services has become a secondary aspect. Employers complain that many graduates have not mastered basic skills such as writing, problem-solving and critical thinking, which are key outcomes of higher education. On the other hand, students complain about the heavy burden of different and mandatory

courses that do not contribute to their professional development. This suggests that study programs do not contribute to the ultimate goals, or that professors do not care enough to fulfill them. Although professors have the most responsible occupation - preparing the future elite for participation in society, with a special emphasis on the labor market, there has never been less motivation to perform this role.

The new educational market is large and extremely competitive, and educational institutions, although their mission is usually not for profit, must constantly be visible and recognized in order to be in a position to perform their social function. In the case of the faculty's educational services, the student does not only choose the possibility of participating in educational activities and the possibility of building his competencies. He chooses the way of his future professional life, actualizes the values he believes in and creates the perspective of his life and the world. Speaking of studying, we mean the experience that a student goes through during his studies when he creates an image of himself, society, the world, the profession he has chosen to dedicate himself to, and the institution where he gains experience. Every effort of the faculty to provide information and technical knowledge can be in vain if they are not based on deeper values, which the user of the educational service shares. These values can be instrumental, social, political, religious, philosophical, ecological and many others. In this paper, attention is focused on instrumental values as the basis on which the brand of a higher education institution should be built.

The results of the research indicate that students have a clear opinion on the role of instrumental values in the construction of the ideal brand of the faculty because all indicators of the dependent variable achieved high scores of the arithmetic mean and, as such, can be considered a desirable value basis for creating the brand of the faculty. It remains an open question how the practical operationalization and manifestation of the identified instrumental values should look like within higher education institutions.

Certainly, it is not possible to give a universally applicable, exhaustively enumerated list of activities that the faculty should implement, but the identified elements must become part of the organizational culture of the educational institution and manifest as such in all segments of the activities of each individual institution. In addition to the mission and vision, they must also be clearly stated in other normative acts (statutes and regulations) that direct employees' work at faculties. The ultimate indicator of the incorporation of instrumental values must be the curriculum of the



higher education institution, the way the faculty administration treats students as the end users of the educational institution, and, to a large extent, their satisfaction with the services provided.

A faculty that bases its brand on instrumental values must provide: *relevant and contemporary study programs* at the level of undergraduate and postgraduate studies, which offer competencies applicable in the working environment; *teaching contents, methods and techniques* that will promote entrepreneurship and leadership and develop them as competencies; *curricular and extracurricular activities* (student visits, job fairs, volunteering, participation in faculty activities, student organizations, alumni organizations, international cooperation, organizing professional development and lifelong learning programs) in which students could meet and connect with national and international labor markets and their profession before completing their studies, but also develop a network of contacts that will help them find employment and gain financial stability. At the same time, we should not neglect the activities of career guidance and counseling, as a current trend in European dimensions.

Only having the instrumental values of the faculty is not enough if their implementation does not have an integral component of insisting on quality and constant improvement. Quality is the most important entity that attracts students and keeps them loyal to an educational institution. Therefore, the branding of each faculty should go in that direction, and all activities should be organized in such a way that they manifest the presented instrumental values.

The question remains whether the research results would have been different if students of natural and technical sciences had been involved. Additionally, the question of the desirability of other values (in addition to instrumental ones) remains for future research, which would synergistically influence the better positioning of the faculty brand within the higher education system.

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