A INFLUÊNCIA DOS VARIÁVEIS PERFIS DOS STAKEHOLDERS NA IMAGEM PERCEBIDA DA UNIVERSIDADE DE WEST DE TIMISOARA

RESUMO

Devido ao aumento da intensidade competitiva no ambiente acadêmico, mas também para o desejo de atrair um maior número de estudantes, os gestores das instituições de ensino superior romenas foram forçados a adotar em maior medida a orientação de marketing em sua atividade. Um componente importante dessa orientação representa a necessidade de construir um uma imagem única e competitiva nas mentes de todas as partes interessadas dessas instituições e identidade. Apesar do fato de que o tema da imagem institucional em geral, e à imagem das instituições de ensino, em particular, os benefícios de uma maior atenção na literatura, consideramos que nas universidades romenas praticar há um insuficiente nível de preocupação com este tema. Para construir essa imagem que seria correctamente percebida pelas partes interessadas, também assume que estar ciente dos principais fatores que influenciam a maneira em que esta imagem é percebida. Este trabalho tem como objetivo conseguir uma revisão da literatura especializada, após o qual irá identificar os principais fatores que influenciam a percepção dos stakeholders sobre a imagem de uma organização em geral, com particularidade no caso de instituições de ensino superior. Em seguida, usando uma pesquisa quantitativa, pretendemos destacar a maneira em que algumas das variáveis do perfil stakeholder`s influenciar a percepção da imagem da Universidade West of Timişoara.

Palavras-chave: Imagem Institucional; Percepção; Fatores de influência; Universidade West of Timişoara.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE STAKEHOLDER`S PROFILE VARIABLES ON THE PERCEIVED IMAGE OF THE WEST UNIVERSITY OF TIMISOARA

ABSTRACT

Due to the competitive intensity increase in the academic environment, but also to the desire to attract a higher number of students, the managers of Romanian higher education institutions were forced to adopt in a greater extent a marketing orientation in their activity. An important component of this orientation represents the necessity to build an identity and a unique and competitive image in the minds of all the stakeholders of such institutions. Despite the fact that the subject of institutional image in general, and the image of educational institutions in particular, benefits of a greater attention in the literature, we consider that in the Romanian universities practice there is an insufficient level of concern for this topic. To build such an image that would be correctly perceived by stakeholders, also assumes to be aware of the main factors which influence the way in which this image is perceived. This paper aims to achieve a review of the specialized literature, after which will identify the main factors which influence the stakeholder's perception on the image of an organization in general, with particularity on the case of higher educational institutions. Then, using a quantitative research, we aim to highlight the way in which some of the stakeholder`s profile variables influence the perception of the image of the West University of Timişoara.

Keywords: Institutional Image; Perception; Influence Factors; West University of Timişoara.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Previous studies regarding identity and image have proved the fact that by developing a favorable image before its groups of interest (stakeholders), the organization generates a positive impact upon its products and services (Keller and Aaker, 1992), upon the loyalty of its consumers (Andereassen and Lindestad, 1998), as well as upon their satisfaction (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2003). Simons (2005) considers as extremely important for its decision makers to understand the factors that influence the image that individuals have regarding their organization, in the aim of obtaining real competitive advantages. Although the literature focused on this subject, the aim of obtaining a large image of the factors that could influence the development and the management of the organizational identity and image has not been attained yet.

The concept of organizational image has been approached in the present research from the perspective of the public institutions, in particular those that function in the market of educational services. The image of public organizations with national vocation is highly important for the running within the society, this fact is even more important in the field of education, health, culture, national security, organizations situated in the social part of the society which offers them a high degree of relevance. The previously mentioned organizations cannot work efficiently within the society unless they enjoy a good image and a high social support, given by the trust the people have in them.

In the paradigm of educational services, an extremely important aspect is the one of educational marketing specific features and of the factors that contribute to the making of the organizational image within the context of educational services market. The growth tendency can be seen even in the sector of educational services, where traditional universities face the occurrence of a great number of private universities. Thus, students have the possibility to choose from a larger offer, emphasizing the need of educational organizations to focus on image and marketing mix elements, in order to make the difference from their competitors.

The importance of marketing strategies applied at the level of universities is quite high in the stage of recruitment of new students, fact supported by the literature (Cubillo et al., 2006; Maringe and Foskett, 2002; Ivy, 2001; Fisk and Allen, 1993; Carlson, 1992; Wonders and Gyuere, 1991; Murphy and McGarrity, 1978).

This research intends to measure the respondent's perception regarding the organizational image of one of the most important educational institutions from Romania, i.e. West University of Timisoara, and its correlation with the factors that contribute to its making.

2 ORGANIZATIONAL IMAGE

According to the American Marketing Association Dictionary, image is defined as the consumer perception of a product, institution, brand, business, or person that may or may not correspond with "reality" or "actuality". Obviously, the term of „image'' does not refer restrictively to the material reproduction of a given reality, but also to an attribute of the psychic life based on the capacity of the human psychic to build mental representations determined by communicational relation.

Roger Muchielli (1970, p. 110) defines image as „the representation or idea which is formed by individuals of an environment or segment of the audience – as a result of the reception of some information about a social object. In the case of image, it is about an opinion or about an attitude, whose roots are, for most, irrational".

The theoretic approaches undertaken within the French school, placed within the constructivist conception, stipulates that social representations are "an evaluative device, a reality lecture grid, a situation in the world of values and its own interpretation given to this world." (Moscovici, Abric and Doise cited by Neculau, 1995, p. 118)

Organizational image is a high value asset, either it is inherited, or it is included in the total assets of the organization, or it is appreciated as a non-material, subjective dimension, but which can be appreciated on a material side since it is valuable on the market.

Although the image is a subject of research in marketing and in the consumer's behavior starting with the 1950's, in the last years, the organizational identity and image have become topics approached to a greater extent within several studies conducted in different organizations. Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) consider that this intensification of researches concerning the 2 subjects is also due to the fact that both concepts are notions with more levels, which take into account a series of aspects both at an individual level and to the organizational level, but also because both can offer a perspective towards the character and behavior of organizations and its members. These 3 authors underline, by quoting an article of Whetten and Godfrey (1998), that the organizational identity and image have become key-concepts used for describing and explaining individual and organizational behaviours. In addition, in their article, Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) argue that there is a strong mutual

relationship between organizational identity and various forms of image.

Researchers have seen the organizational image as a wide concept which includes notions related to the ways in which organization members consider that those from the outside look at the organization (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991) or to a series of images, made, projected and destined to different types of audience (Bernstein, 1984) or to the public perception concerning a certain organization (Berg, 1985). Kotler and Fox (1995) defined image as „the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions which a person could have in report to an object".

Arpan, Raney and Zivnuska (2003) noticed that the concept of „organizational image", as it is presented in specialized literature, changes its form and look as often as an amoeba. Also, Lee (1999) pointed that this concept is pretty evasive. Arpan, Raney and Zivnuska (2003) noted the fact that the term „organizational image" is often used in parallel with the term „reputation", and highlighted more definitions given to this concept. A synthesis of these definitions is presented in the table below.

Table 1 - Synthesis of the definitions of „Organizational image" concept

AUTHORS	YEAR	DEFINITION
Robinson	1966	An essential abstract of attitudes towards an organization
Marken	1990	Overall perception of an individual related to the products, services, management style, communication efforts and global activities of an organization
Gatewood et all	1993	A simple association based on the name of one organization
Haedrich	1993	A psychological personality profile built by an individual concerning one organization
Treadwell and Harrison	1994	Current representation of an individual related to an organization, including his attitudes, beliefs and impressions about the organization and its behavior

(Source: taken from Arpan, Raney and Zivnuska, 2003, p. 97)

Related to the concept of image, we can identify several ways to approach it.

Thus, we can talk about the desired, ideal image, this being the image which an organization is looking to create about itself, its services and products. It is one of the most important managerial strategic decisions; it is the concern to place the organization in the mind of stakeholders groups. Managers must identify which are the attributes and characteristics which they want to associate in the mind of different stakeholders groups with the organization, and must concentrate their efforts on the attributes which they want to be more prominent in the visions of stakeholders.

The intended image promoted by the organization can often be perceived in a different way by various stakeholders groups. The option of what it is desired to communicate, belongs to the organization. Whichever the message will be, in one way or another, the organization must communicate a particular image to one group or another, „Which type of organization is it?" The intended image is a syntagm which reflects the point of view of the organization management regarding the way in which the organization is desired to be perceived by others. It is clear that this image is desired to be a positive one. If between the desired and the perceived image there are distortions, the reason is that the communicated image, rather how the desired image was embodied in the messages sent to the public was not the most appropriate, or the means that were used did not reach the target audience.

The real image, perceived by the audience and which corresponds to its representations about the organization, is, in fact the one which counts in the "buying" decision. Moreover, each organization has, either through its managers or employees, a prospective image – the way in which these perceive the exterior existent image related to services and the organization itself.

3 INSTITUTIONAL IMAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

After December 1989, the Romanian education in general, and the academic education in particular, has suffered a series of radical transformations. The adjustment to the European norms and standards, depoliticization of education, academic freedom and mobility, implementation of new forms of organizing the educational process, cooperation with foreign universities, have opened new opportunities for the educational institutions, but have imposed a radical transformation as well concerning how these organizations are managed. Furthermore, the diversification of educational services market through the appearance and development of private universities, and through the penetration of some foreign universities on the market has dramatically changed the rules of the

competitive game on this market. Being in accordance with the rules of market economy, and being trained in the harsh competition on the educational services market, universities were thus forced to use appropriate tools for promotion, but also to adopt a new orientation – client orientation. Thus, within the Romanian higher educational institutions has appeared and developed the institutional communication, which mainly aims to transform the organizational identity in institutional image.

The importance of adopting the client orientation, and the intensification of practical preoccupations for the subject of institutional image, have been also highlighted by the implementation of Bologna convention, and by the harmonization of different academic degrees to the European Union level, which lead to an increase of students, teachers and researches mobility. In these conditions, also doubled by the adoption of funding per student, some universities, namely the less competitive ones, could no longer survive. Alves and Raposo (2010) describe these new conditions in which higher educational institutions must compete and in which have to find new methods to survive. Quoting Landrum et al (1998), Alves and Raposo consider that "the university image could represent a valuable asset in this competitive arena". (Alves and Raposo, 2010, p. 73)

Arpan, Raney and Zivnuska (2003) noticed that, even though there are many studies that addressed different aspects of corporate image, the number of studies which examined the image of non-profit organizations (such as state universities) is much smaller. Thus, Treadwell and Harrison (1994) conducted one of the few studies of this type, analyzing the image of one university within its stakeholders group (students, teaching staff and support staff).

Starting from the definition of image given by Kotler and Fox (1995), Landrum et al (1998) but also Arpan et al (2003), consider that the image of a university can be defined as a sum of individual's beliefs about one university.

Ivy (2001) underlined the fact that the image of higher educational institutions is not an absolute but a relative one to the image transmitted by other higher educational institutions. It is a result of the strategies which that particular higher educational institution elaborate, of how they are implemented, and also by how they are perceived by the audience. Also, Dowling (1988) acknowledged that organizations do not have one single image, but multiple images, a natural thing if we take into consideration the fact that an organization has some more audience categories.

In respect to the components of higher education institutions' image, Palacio et al (2002) have identified two image components in this context: cognitive component and affective component. This finding is consistent with the view of Kennedy (1977), who underlined that the image has two distinct components: functional component (related to intangible stimuli and which can be relatively easy to measure) and emotional component (associated with psychological conditions, and which it is highlighted through the individual's feelings and attitudes). Palacio et al (2002) proved the fact that affective components have a higher influence in the image formation process but also that the affective component of the university image is influenced by its cognitive component.

Wilson (1999) conducted a study on the universities and colleges image, and he considered the fact that image is a "cognitive and a communicative process", but also a "product perception".

4 CONSEQUENCES OF IMAGE IN EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FIELD

The image projected by a higher educational institution plays an essential role in the process of forming the audience attitudes towards this institution (Yavas and Shemwell, 1996; Landrum et al, 1998). Paramewaran and Glowacka (1995), in a study on the universities image, have concluded that higher educational institutions must to create and maintain a clear and distinct image in order to achieve a competitive advantage within a market with an increasing competitive intensity. Kotler and Fox (1995) concluded that the image that people form about higher educational institutions shall affect the probability that they enroll, recommend, make donations or join the staff of that institution. Ivy (2001) continue this idea by highlighting the importance of universities image, and showing that this shall have the highest impact on the students' will to enroll to that institution in order to be admitted, or on a sponsor who takes into consideration the possibility to equip that institution with equipments, or on a company seeking to select an institution to make research contracts with. He also stated that, at a time when higher educational institutions around the world are facing a decrease in student numbers and a reduction in budgetary allocations, it becomes imperative for these institutions to project a more favorable image in the eyes of different audiences. Even though in his study Ivy (2001) focused on the higher educational institutions of Great Britain and South Africa, the conclusions presented above are perfectly applicable when it comes to Romania, and West University of Timişoara as well, the institution which makes the object of this research.

Thus, in Romania, the budget allocation per student fell by 30% between 2009 and 2012 (from 3,103 RON / student in 2009 at 2,206 RON / student in 2012). At the West University of Timişoara level, the budget allocation per student has decreased, in the same interval, with 20% (from 2,806 RON / student in year 2009 at 2,241 RON / student in year 2012). Also, West University of Timişoara is also included in the decrease trend of the number of students, registering a decrease from 25,069 students (in the 2007-2008 academic year) to 16,046 students (in the 2012-2013 academic year), which means a decrease with 36% in the last 5 years.

In an attempt to highlight the importance of university image, Gavin (quoted by Kotler and Fox, 1995) even states that the prestige, the image and the reputation in terms of quality are even more important than the quality of services offered by the university itself. He argued this affirmation by showing that the perceived excellence of universities is the one which guides the decisions of future students, of teachers who are considering a job or even a state position (and its institutions) when this grants funds.

According to Eskildsen et al (1999), the image is a variable which has a very strong influence on the student's loyalty towards the higher educational institutions. In a study conducted by Nguyen and Leblanc (2001), loyalty was measured by the student's intentions to consider that respective institution as their first choice for the higher education, the intention to continue his studies in that institution, the intention to encourage friends to study at that institution and the intention to recommend that institution as being the best from that area.

Alves and Raposo (2010), after one study aimed to analyze the influence of image on the satisfaction and loyalty of students, concluded that, of all constructs from the conceptual model that they have proposed, the university image was the construct which greatly influenced both the satisfaction and the loyalty of students. The authors showed that this influence does not only exist, but it is even a very strong one: thus, in case in which the institutional image increases or decreases by one unit in terms of value, the student's satisfaction increases or decreases in a proportion of 0.86, and loyalty changes in a proportion of 0.73. (Alves and Raposo, 2010, p. 81)

Wilson (1999) appreciates that an effective management of image can help colleges to develop results-oriented communication programs towards their audience (especially of the future students) but also to achieve a more competitive position in the market.

Summarizing, we can say that the image of higher educational institutions influence the student's will to enroll to a certain university

(Landrum et al, 1988; Fielder et al, 1993, James et al, 1999), students' satisfaction (Clow et al, 1997; Eskildsen et al, 1999; Cassel and Eklof, 2001; Alves and Raposo, 2010), students' loyalty (Eskildsen et al, 1999; Alves and Raposo, 2010) or the retention and students' loyalty (Bloemer and de Ruyter, 1998; Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001; Helgesen and Nesset, 2007).

Given all the consequences discussed, Ivy (2001) concluded that the higher educational institutions should understand very well the image they project and to ensure that this image is an accurate and favorable reflection of this institution.

5 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PERCEIVED IMAGE IN EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FIELD

Understanding the importance of institutional image but also aware of their numerous consequences, many higher educational institutions have started to think more about this subject and to invest more to differentiate themselves from their competition (McPherson and Shapiro, 1998). In this regard, management strategies should include efforts both to build an appropriate image, and also ways through which this image can be changed. The development of such strategies requires knowledge of factors influencing perceived image of educational services and the way in which this factors operate.

Kotler and Fox (1995) emphasized that people form the image about a higher educational institution, generally, on a limited and often incorrect set of information. They also showed that this image may vary among different audiences. Ivy (2001) showed that different audiences of universities draw conclusions about the overall image of the institution from the impressions which they form about strengths and weaknesses of that institution offer. These images are formed as a result of some rumors, previous experiences but also as a result of the institution marketing activities.

Institutional image is a perceptual opinion about an organization influenced by tangible and intangible elements of the organization, communication and by the personal and social values. Normally, the target audience perceives an institution through multiple dimensions, called components. These components include the academic reputation, campus appearance, the cost of school fees, personal attention, location, distance from home, the theoretical and professional level of training, etc. (Huddleston and Karr, 1982)

According to Fram (1982), the university image is, most often, composed of ideas about the faculty, about the curriculum, about the quality of the teaching method, but also about the relation between

the tuition and the quality of services received in exchange for the fee.

A qualitative study conducted by Theus (1993), found that university managers perceive that the institution's reputation is built and maintained through the evaluator's considerations concerning an assembly of attributes such as: institution size, location, appearance, faculty excellence, level of endowment, students' diversity, campus moral, students skills in sports activities, services offered to communities, institution visibility and prestige.

Another qualitative study conducted by Bryant et al (1996) that attempted to identify the attributes of a university that can influence young people desire to be admitted to the institution, has identifies several factors similar to those identified by Treadwell and Harrison (1994): family connections with university, ranking of certain schools, colleges or departments, the overall quality of education, the size of the university and its courses rooms, relative emphasis on sports.

A study conducted by Kazoleas et al (2001) proved that the influencing factors that can be controlled by university (the existence of some study programs, the strengths of academic programs, sports programs, libraries and technical facilities) are stronger predictors of the overall evaluation of image compared to the demographic characteristics of respondents or environmental factors (location, costs involved compared to other universities, admission standards comparatively with other universities). The same authors have also shown that the respondent's personal experiences with the university in question have a more powerful impact on the overall image comparatively with the university media exposure.

Kazoleas et al (2001) have also found that respondents made comparisons between the university they had in mind and other universities based on specific attributes such as superior quality of academic programs, faculty commitment to provide quality education and also the commitment to offer connected services that are good for students. These attributes have been conceptualized and labeled by the authors as being "separate images" of the university which contributes to its overall image.

In order to really understand the image which they project, universities should measure the opinions of current students, alumni and also local communities. In this regard, Arpan et al (2003) in a study that sought to identify the dimensions of academic image and the capacity of these dimensions to predict overall evaluation of image, have found three stable factors which influence the universities image: academic attributes, athletic attributes (including here the perception on an environment in which students can also have fun) and the mass-media news.

6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to obtain valid results, our entire research has been a scientific one, complying with the systematic and objective characteristics of a research. Furthermore, Dowdy et al (2004) underlined that the scientific approach requires, each time, a rigorous sequence, which is related to several aspects. After a critical review of the literature dedicated to the subject of organizational image, we have identified several research questions and hypotheses for this research.

The main objective of this research was to identify the influence exercised by a number of profile variables on the respondents' perceptions concerning the West University of Timisoara image. The formulation of this research objective is based on an extensive review of the specialized literature from which we have identified several factors that might influence the formation of client`s perception on the organizational image.

In the next part of our scientific approach, we have proceeded to the formulation of research hypotheses, i.e. those clear, explicit and verifiable assumptions concerning the existent relationship between two or more variables within this research. In formulating hypotheses presented below, we obviously started from the objective of this research. The hypotheses of this research are, actually, represented by supposed relations between the most important profile variables of the questionnaire and the dimensions of organizational image, as well as between this profile variables and the „West University of Timişoara image" construct. In the statement of these hypotheses we started from the literature, more precisely from the existing gap from its level. Thus, after the literature review, we noticed that there is very little attention given to the influence that stakeholders profile variable has upon the way in which the image of high educational institutions is perceived. Moreover, in the research where similar subjects have been discussed, researchers reached the conclusion according to which demographic variables are not good predictors of the perceived image. Therefore, the hypothesis we formulated represent a novelty, as they are not based on any others tested before. They have the intention to fill in the existing gap in the literature by studying the impact of stakeholders profile variables upon the way in which is perceived the image of high educational institutions from Romania.

The hypotheses are presented below and are grouped on profile variables. In total, there have been formulated hypotheses for 4 profile variables ("Nature of respondent's relation with the West University of Timisoara", "Age", "Cycle of study" and "The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara"), to each variable being analyzed its

influence on the 8 dimensions of the West University image, as well as on the construct as a whole. Thus, thirty-six hypotheses have resulted and are presented below:

A.) Research hypotheses related to the profile variable „Nature of respondent's relation with the West University of Timisoara"

H1a: The nature of the respondent's relationship with the West University of Timisoara has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of academic programs".

H1b: The nature of the respondent's relationship with the West University of Timisoara has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of teaching staff".

H1c: The nature of the respondent's relationship with the West University of Timisoara has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of educational spaces".

H1d: The nature of the respondent's relationship with the West University of Timisoara has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff".

H1e: The nature of the respondent's relationship with the West University of Timisoara has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the social experience".

H1f: The nature of the respondent's relationship with the West University of Timisoara has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space".

H1g: The nature of the respondent's relationship with the West University of Timisoara has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the West University of Timisoara website".

H1h: The nature of the respondent's relationship with the West University of Timisoara has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the benefits offered".

H1i: The nature of the respondent's relationship with the West University of Timisoara has an influence statistically significant on the construct „Perception on the West University of Timisoara image".

B.) Research hypotheses related to the profile variable „Age"

H2a: The variable „Age" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of academic programs".

H2b: The variable „Age" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of teaching staff".

H2c: The variable „Age" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of educational spaces".

H2d: The variable „Age" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff".
H2e: The variable „Age" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the social experience".

H2f: The variable „Age" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space".

H2g: The variable „Age" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the West University of Timisoara website".

H2h: The variable „Age" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the benefits offered".

H2i: The variable „Age" has an influence statistically significant on the construct „Perception on the West University of Timisoara image".

C.) Research hypotheses related to the profile variable „Cycle of study"

H3a: The variable „Cycle of study" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of academic programs".

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H3b: The variable „Cycle of study" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of teaching staff".

H3c: The variable „Cycle of study" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of educational spaces".

H3d: The variable „Cycle of study" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff".

H3e: The variable „Cycle of study" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the social experience".

H3f: The variable „Cycle of study" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space".

H3g: The variable „Cycle of study" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the West University of Timisoara website".

H3h: The variable „Cycle of study" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the benefits offered".

H3i: The variable „Cycle of study" has an influence statistically significant on the construct „Perception on the West University of Timişoara image".

D.) Research hypotheses related to the profile variable „The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara"

H4a: The variable „The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of academic programs".

H4b: The variable „The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of teaching staff".

H4c: The variable „The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the quality of educational spaces".

H4d: The variable „The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff".

H4e: The variable „The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the social experience".

H4f: The variable „The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space".

H4g: The variable „The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the West University of Timisoara website".

H4h: The variable „The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara" has an influence statistically significant on the dimension „Perception on the benefits offered".

H4i: The variable „The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara" has an influence statistically significant on the construct „Perception on the West University of Timişoara image".

Regarding the type of research, we decided upon a descriptive study which conferred to our approach a more planned, formal and structured character. The method we used was the cross-sectional study, a sample survey and the measuring instrument was the questionnaire. In order to collect the data, we chose the online administration of the questionnaire, using the facilities provided by the free Google Docs service. The questionnaire was

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placed online at the address https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?pli=1&formkey=dEwtbDJ2MFJMejJWZXY4Szhia1RYalE6MQ#gid=0. Potential respondents were sent an e-mail through which they were invited to participate in the research, e-mail containing the link above.

The time interval allocated for data collection was initially of 2 weeks, from 18.06.2012 until 01.07.2012. Since the number of questionnaires completed during this period was below the minimum initial setting, the time interval was extended by one week, respectively between 02.07.2012 and 08.07.2012.

All the 8 dimensions of the construct which this research is related to, were operationalized through a number of items, each item being measured with a five-point rating scales built on the principle of semantic differential scale (where 1 means "very bad perception" and 5 means "very favorable perception"). Thus, the dimension „Perception on the quality of academic programs" was operationalized through 6 items, the dimension „Perception on the quality of teaching staff" was measured using 8 items, the dimension „Perception on the quality of educational spaces" had 5 items, the dimension „Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff" was operationalized through 9 items, the dimension „Perception on the social experience" was measured using 4 items, the dimension „Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space" had 8 items, the dimension „Perception on the West University of Timisoara website" was operationalized through eleven items and the dimension „Perception on the benefits offered" was measured using also eleven items. The construct called "West University of Timişoara image" was obtained by aggregating the 8 dimensions using the option "Compute variable" from the "Transform" menu of the SPSS program.

As for the sampling plan, in a first stage we defined statistical population to be studied. Thus, in the case of this research, the statistical population is represented by teaching staff and students from all eleven faculties of the West University of Timisoara. According to the data provided by the secretariats of the eleven faculties of the West University of Timisoara, it has been established that on the date when the questionnaire administration started, there were 16,983 students registered to the three academic cycles (bachelor, masters and PhD). Moreover, from the records of the Human Resources Department of the West University of Timisoara resulted that on 01.03.2012, there were 723 teaching staff employed with labor contract (for a determined or undetermined period). As a consequence, the total dimension of statistical population was established to 17,706 persons.

The sampling unit is represented by the teacher employed by the West University of Timisoara (regardless of the teaching title, faculty to which he/she is employed, seniority in the field, sex or other criteria), as well as by the student of any faculties within the West University of Timisoara (regardless of the academic cycle: bachelor, masters or PhD).

As for the sampling method, a non-probabilistic sampling method was opted for, namely the convenience sampling. Using the convenience sampling procedure, in total 5,478 students and teaching staff were contacted, whose e-mail address was known. Among them, 183 persons answered to the questionnaire, which represents an answer rate of 3.34% which can be appreciated as being normal for an online administered questionnaire.

In establishing the minimum sample size, there were taken into account both organizational restrictions (especially those of time that could be spent for data collection), as well as restrictions regarding the ratio between the number of respondents and the number of items of the dimensions and the construct in the research model. Thus, there is a consensus in the literature according to which, in order to validate the measurement scales one must observe few minimum requirements related to the ratio between the number of items of the focal construct and the number of respondents included in the sample. Thus, the recommendations concerning the report between the number of respondents and the number of items of the scale ranging from a ratio of 3 to 1 to a ratio of 10 to 1 (Cattell, 1978; Everitt, 1975). Other authors recommend that in an explanatory analysis the sample size to be between 100 and 500 people (Comrey and Lee, 1992; Gorsuch, 1983). Because in the present research the maximum number of items in a dimension was that of eleven (in the case of the dimensions "Perception of university website" and "Perception of benefits"), we have established the minimum sample size of 110 respondents, which corresponds to a ratio of 10 to 1 between the number of respondents and the one of items. Given that in the initial data collection period were collected only 106 questionnaires, we have decided to extend the period of data collection for another 1 week. At the end of this period, the final sample size was that of 183 respondents.

Statistical analysis was done using SPSS.

7 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In the first phase we have tested the reliability of measuring scales used and we have determined the factor loading scores. Thus, for each dimension and construct of the research model were following the next steps: testing the measuring scale

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reliability (by determining the coefficient α - Cronbach), analyzing the opportunity of using the factorial analysis (through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett's test of sphericity), identification and elimination of irrelevant items for the construct (through the exploratory factorial analysis) and determine the factor loading scores.

After testing the measuring scales reliability, we concluded that all scales are reliable considering the fact that the value of coefficient α − Cronbach ranged from 0.825 (for the scale used to measure the dimension "Perception of social experience offered by the university") to 0.945 (for the scale used to measure the dimension "Perception on the university website"). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (with values between 0.709 and 0.947, all upper limit value of 0.7) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity (for which was recorded, in all dimensions, the probability p=0.000<0.01) have confirmed that between the items which form a

dimension there are statically significant inter-correlations, which can be studied through a factor analysis. After applying the factor analysis (the method used for extracting factors was Principal Component Analysis) it was found, in all dimensions analyzed, that all factor loading scores are above the minimum value of 0.5, hence there are no arguments for the removal of any of these items. In conclusion, in order to test statistical hypotheses, the dimensions analyzed were formed by all items initially suggested.

The first profile variable analyzed was "Nature of respondent's relation with the West University of Timisoara" a nominal variable with three categories: "Teaching staff", "Student with scholarship" and "Medium level student". It should be noted that the two categories of this variable called "Student with scholarship" and "Medium level student" were grouped into one generic category called "Student". The results of the analyses are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 -The results of testing hypotheses about variable "Nature of respondent's relation with the West University of Timisoara"

Hypothesis	Dimension / Construct	The value of F statistics	Level of significance p	Result
H1a	Perception on the quality of academic programs	3.928	0.049	Accepted
H1b	Perception on the quality of teaching staff	1.475	0.226	Rejected
H1c	Perception on the quality of educational spaces	15.786	0.000	Accepted
H1d	Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff	0.006	0.940	Rejected
H1e	Perception on the social experience	7.846	0.006	Accepted
H1f	Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space	3.091	0.080	Rejected
H1g	Perception on the West University of Timisoara website	2.096	0.149	Rejected
H1h	Perception on the benefits offered	1.901	0.170	Rejected
H1i	*Perception on the West University of Timişoara image*	*0.300*	*0.741*	*Rejected*

Hypothesis H1a is accepted because the value of F statistic is 3.928 at a significance level of p=0.049<0.05. The conclusion of this analysis is that between the variable "Nature of respondent's relation with the West University of Timisoara" and the dimension "Perception on the quality of academic programs" there is a statistically significant connection. Analyzing the mean calculated, we can say that teaching staff (normalized mean 0.254) has a more favorable perception than students (normalized mean 0.083) on the dimension "Quality of academic programs". Hypothesis H1b is rejected. In this case, the value of F statistic is 1.475, corresponding to a significance level of p=0.226>0.05. In conclusion, we can say

that there are no significant differences of perception between the two groups (teaching staff and students) against the dimension Quality of teaching staff". In the case of hypothesis H1c, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) leads to a value of F statistic equal to 15.786 and the significance level is lower than 0.05 (p=0.000). This hypothesis is accepted and we can affirm that between the variable "Nature of respondent's relation with the West University of Timisoara" and the dimension "Perception on the quality of educational spaces" there is a statistically significant correlation. Observing the normal means calculated, we can say that students (normalized mean 0.161) have a more favorable perception than the teaching staff (normalized mean 0.495) against

the dimension "Quality of educational spaces". Hypothesis H1d is rejected the value of F statistic being 0.006 at a significance level of 0.940>0.05. Thus, we can conclude that the nature of respondent's relation with the West University of Timisoara has no statistically significant influence against the dimension "Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff". Hypothesis H1e is accepted. In the case of this hypothesis, the value of F statistic is 7.846, corresponding to a significance level of p=0.006<0.05. We could affirm that there are significant differences of perception between the two groups (teaching staff and students) against the dimension "Social experience". Analyzing normalized means calculated, we could conclude the fact that the teaching staff (normalized mean 0.356) has a more favorable perception than students (normalized mean 0.116) against the dimension "Social experience". Hypothesis H1f is rejected, an aspect underlined by the value of F statistic which is 3.091, corresponding to a significance level of 0.080 superior to the value of 0.05. In conclusion, we could affirm that the nature of respondent's relation with the West University of Timisoara has no statistically significant influence against the dimension "Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space". Hypothesis H1g is rejected the value of F statistics being of 2.096, corresponding to a significance level of 0.149>0.05. Thus, we could affirm that the nature of respondent's relation with the West University of Timisoara has no statistically significant influence against the dimension "Perception on the West University of Timisoara website". Hypothesis H1h is rejected. In the case of this hypothesis, the value of F statistical is 1.901, corresponding to a significance

level equal to 0.170>0.05. We can say that the nature of respondent's relation with the West University of Timisoara has no statistically significant influence against the dimension "Perception on the benefits offered". Also, hypothesis H1i is rejected (significance level is much higher than the limit of 0.05) which shows us that the overall image of the West University of Timisoara is not significantly influenced by the nature of respondent's relation with this institution.

In conclusion, out of 9 hypotheses tested to this variable, only 3 have been accepted. Thus, the profile variable „Nature of respondent's relation with the West University of Timisoara" influences the dimensions "Perception on the quality of academic programs", "Perception on the quality of educational spaces" and "Perception on the social experience", while the overall image of the West University of Timisoara is not significantly influenced by this variable.

In the following part of the paper, we verify the existence of some statistically significant connections between the dimensions of the West University of Timisoara image and the profile variable „Age". The „Age" variable was operationalized as a nominal variable with 4 categories. In order to identify the existence of some significant differences between this categories of „Age" profile variable, in terms of how different dimensions analyzed are perceived by people belonging to different age groups, the Bonferroni statistic test was used, which is recommended when there is a finite number, relatively small, of contrasts tested. The synthesized results of the analysis conducted are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 - The results of testing hypotheses about variable „Age"

Hypothesis	Dimension / Construct	The value of F statistics	Level of significance p	Result
H2a	Perception on the quality of academic programs	1.804	0.148	Rejected
H2b	Perception on the quality of teaching staff	1.372	0.253	Rejected
H2c	Perception on the quality of educational spaces	5.266	0.002	Accepted
H2d	Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff	0.323	0.809	Rejected
H2e	Perception on the social experience	4.203	0.007	Accepted
H2f	Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space	0.532	0.661	Rejected
H2g	Perception on the West University of Timisoara website	0.627	0.598	Rejected
H2h	Perception on the benefits offered	1.508	0.214	Rejected
H2i	*Perception on the West University of Timişoara image*	*0.279*	*0.840*	*Rejected*

Analyzing the data from Table 3 above, we can conclude that hypothesis H2a is rejected since the value of F statistic is 1.804 at a significance level of p=0.148>0.05. The conclusion of this analysis is that between the variable "Age" and the dimension "Perception on the quality of academic programs" there is no statistically significant connection. Hypothesis H2b is rejected. In this case, the value of F statistic is 1.372, corresponding to a significance level of p=0.253>0.05. In conclusion, we can affirm that there are no significant differences in perception between the 4 groups of age against the dimension „Quality of teaching staff". In the case of hypothesis H2c, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) leads to a value of F statistic equal to 5.266 and the significance level is below 0.05 (0.002). This hypothesis is accepted and we can affirm that between „Age" variable and dimension "Perception on the quality of educational spaces" there is a statistically significant correlation. Observing the mean for each age range, we can say that people with ages between 18 and 24 years (normalized mean 0.164) have a more favorable perception than the other 3 groups formed (with normalized means -0.475, -0.779 and -0.302 respectively) against dimension „Quality of educational spaces". However, after using the Bonferroni test we can affirm that only between the persons with ages between 18 and 24 years and the persons with ages between 31 and 35 years there is a significant difference regarding the dimension "Perception on the quality of educational spaces" (level of significance 0.02<0.05). In the case of comparisons conducted between other age categories, the Bonferroni test did not point out the existence of some statistically significant differences between different age categories in terms of the dimension "Perception on the quality of educational spaces" (significance level exceeds, in all situations, the value of 0.05). Hypothesis H2d is rejected, the value of F statistic is 0.323 at a significance level of 0.809>0.05. Thus we can conclude that age has no statistically significant influence on the perception of the quality of relationship with the supporting personnel. Hypothesis H2e is accepted. In the case of this hypothesis, the value of F statistics is 4.203, corresponding to a significance level of p=0.007<0.05. We can say that there are significant differences between the four age groups as far as the dimension "Perception on the social experience" concerns. Analyzing the normalized means, we can conclude the fact that the persons over 35 years (normalized mean 0.468) have a more favorable perception than the 3 groups of persons (with

normalized means -0.154, 0.225, respectively 0.440) against dimension „Social experience". After applying the Bonferroni test, we can affirm that only between the persons with ages between 18 and 24 years, and persons over 35 years, there is a significant difference in terms of dimension "Perception on the social experience" (level of significance 0.013<0.05). In the case of comparisons conducted between other age categories, Bonferroni test did not point out the existence of some statistically significant differences among different age categories in terms of dimension "Perception on the social experience" (the significance level exceeds, in all cases, value of 0.05). Hypothesis H2f is rejected. The value of F statistic is 0.532, corresponding to a significance level of 0.661>0.05. In conclusion, we can affirm that age has no statistically significant influence against dimension "Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space". Hypothesis H2g is also rejected, the value of F statistics being, in this case, 0.627, corresponding to a significance level of 0.598>0.05. One can therefore say that age has no statistically significant influence against the dimension "Perception on the West University of Timisoara website". Hypothesis H2h is also rejected. In the case of this hypothesis, the value of statistical F is 1.508, corresponding to a significance level equal to 0.214>0.05. We can affirm that age has no statistically significant influence against dimension "Perception on the benefits offered". The hypothesis concerning construct "Perception on the West University of Timişoara image" is also rejected (p=0.840>0.05). Thus, we conclude that the age of persons researched had no statistically significant influence against the perception on the West University of Timişoara image.

If we are to make a conclusion after those described above, we notice that from the total of 9 hypotheses tested for this variable only 2 have been accepted. Thus, the profile variable „Age" influences just the dimensions "Perception on the quality of educational spaces" and "Perception on the social experience", but not on the construct as a whole.

We shall further verify the existence of some statistically significant correlation between the dimensions of image and variable „Cycle of study". In the statistical analysis were retained only the two answer variants to which at least one valid answer was obtained (bachelor and masters). For the „PhD" answer variant no valid answer was registered. The synthesized results of the analysis conducted are presented in the Table 4 below.

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Table 4 - The results of testing hypotheses about variable „Cycle of study"

Hypothesis	Dimension / Construct	The value of F statistics	Level of significance p	Result
H3a	Perception on the quality of academic programs	4.381	0.038	Accepted
H3b	Perception on the quality of teaching staff	0.559	0.456	Rejected
H3c	Perception on the quality of educational spaces	0.448	0.504	Rejected
H3d	Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff	5.537	0.020	Accepted
H3e	Perception on the social experience	8.621	0.004	Accepted
H3f	Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space	0.015	0.902	Rejected
H3g	Perception on the West University of Timisoara website	0.001	0.971	Rejected
H3h	Perception on the benefits offered	1.553	0.215	Rejected
H3i	*Perception on the West University of Timişoara image*	*2.735*	*0.100*	Rejected

Analyzing the data from the table above, we can conclude that hypothesis H3a is accepted since the value of F statistic is 4.381 at a significance level of $p=0.038<0.05$. The conclusion of this analysis is that between the variable "Cycle of study" and dimension "Perception on the quality of academic programs" there is a statistically significant connection. Analyzing the normalized means obtained, we can highlight the fact that students from the bachelor level (normalized mean 0.027) have a more favorable perception than the students from the masters level (normalized mean -0.397) against the dimension "Quality of academic programs". Hypothesis H3b is rejected because, in this case, the calculated value of F statistic is 0.559, corresponding to a significance level of $p=0.456>0.05$. In conclusion, we consider that there are no significant differences between the two groups of students regarding the dimension "Perception on the quality of teaching staff". In the case of hypothesis H3c, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) leads to a value of F statistic equal to 0.448 and the significance level exceeding the value of 0.05 (p=0.504). This hypothesis is rejected and we can affirm that between variable "Cycle of study" and dimension "Perception on the quality of educational spaces" there is no statistically significant correlation. Instead, hypothesis H3d is accepted the value of F statistics being 5.537 at a significance level of $0.020<0.05$. Thus, we can conclude that variable "Cycle of study" has a statistically significant influence against the dimension "Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff". The normalized means calculated highlight the fact that the students from the bachelor level (normalized mean 0.117) have a more favorable perception than the students from the masters level (normalized mean -0.377) against dimension "Perception of

quality of the relationship with the support staff". Hypothesis H3e is accepted. In the case of this hypothesis, the value of F statistics is 8.621, corresponding to a significance level of $p=0.004<0.05$. We can affirm that there are significant differences between the two groups of students in terms of the dimension "Perception on the social experience". After comparing the normalized means calculated, we can notice the fact that the students from the bachelor level (normalized mean 0.014) have, again, a more favorable perception than the students from the masters level (normalized mean -0.570) against dimension „Social experience". Hypothesis H3f is rejected. The value of F statistic is 0.015, corresponding to a significance level of 0.902>0.05. In conclusion, we can affirm that the variable "Cycle of study" does not have a statistically significant influence against dimension "Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space". Hypothesis H3g is rejected the value of F statistic being of 0.001, corresponding to a significance level of 0.971>0.05. Thus, we can conclude that the cycle of study does not have a statistically significant influence on the dimension "Perception on the West University of Timisoara website". Hypothesis H3h is rejected as well. In the case of this hypothesis, the value of F statistical is 1.553, corresponding to a significance level equal to 0.215>0.05. We can affirm that the cycle of study does not have a statistically significant influence against dimension "Perception on the benefits offered". The hypothesis related to the construct "Perception on the West University of Timişoara image" (H3i) is also rejected, which allows us to conclude that there are no significant differences of perception on the West University of Timişoara image between the bachelor and masters level students.

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In conclusion, out of the 9 hypotheses tested for this variable, only 3 have been accepted. Thus, the variable "Cycle of study" influences the dimensions "Perception on the quality of academic programs", "Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff" and "Perception on the social experience", while the overall image of the West University of Timisoara is not significantly influenced by this variable.

At the end of this paper we verified the existence of some statistically significant correlations between the dimensions of image and the variable "The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara", a dichotomic type of variable. The synthesized results of the analysis conducted are presented in the Table 5 below.

Table 5 - The results of testing hypotheses about variable "The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara"

Hypothesis	Dimension / Construct	The value of F statistics	Level of significance p	Result
H4a	Perception on the quality of academic programs	0.224	0.637	Rejected
H4b	Perception on the quality of teaching staff	0.710	0.401	Rejected
H4c	Perception on the quality of educational spaces	0.174	0.677	Rejected
H4d	Perception of quality of the relationship with the support staff	0.327	0.568	Rejected
H4e	Perception on the social experience	0.053	0.817	Rejected
H4f	Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space	2.839	0.094	Rejected
H4g	Perception on the West University of Timisoara website	3.733	0.055	Rejected
H4h	Perception on the benefits offered	0.386	0.535	Rejected
H4i	*Perception on the West University of Timişoara image*	*0.179*	*0.673*	*Rejected*

Analyzing the data from Table 5, we can conclude that all hypotheses are rejected, the significance level exceeding in the case of all 9 hypotheses, the threshold of 0.05. In these conditions, variable **"The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara"** does not have a statistically significant influence neither on the dimensions of the West University of Timişoara image, nor on the construct as a whole.

8 CONCLUSIONS, LIMITS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF RESEARCH

The objective of this paper was to verify the existence of some correlations between the dimensions of the West University of Timişoara image and the profile variables of the stakeholders, aiming to identify those variables which influence the stakeholder`s perception concerning the dimensions of the image of this institution. The present paper is a pioneer one, having in mind the fact that literature dealing with the subject of the influence of stakeholders profile variables upon the way in which is perceived the image of high educational institutions is extremely limited. Moreover, according to our knowledge, the profile

variables we choose to be tested have not been the subject of previous research (except for the variable "The existence of other family members who graduated one of the faculties of the West University of Timisoara").

The statistical analysis performed lead to the rejection of all 4 hypotheses concerning the construct "Perception on the West University of Timişoara image". Thus, we can conclude that the perception on the image of this higher education institution is not influenced significantly neither by the nature of respondent's relation with the institution, nor by his/her age, and nor by the existence within the family of other members who graduated from one of the West University of Timisoara faculties. These results are in accordance with the ones from previous studies. Thus, a study conducted by Kazoleas et al (2001) proved that the influencing factors that can be controlled by university (the existence of some study programs, the strengths of academic programs, sports programs, libraries and technical facilities) are stronger predictors of the overall evaluation of image, compared to the demographic characteristics of respondents. However, the lack of a significantly link between the perceived image of the West University of Timisoara and the existence in the family of a member that has graduated one of the

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faculties of this university is surprising, to a certain extent. Thus, we can relate to the research of Ivy (2001), as well as to the one of Treadwell and Harrison (1994), who proved that the image of an educational institution is formed, among others, on the basis of previous experiences, or on the basis of the links that the family has with the educational institution. Having this in mind, we would have expected that the existence in the family of a member who has graduated from one of the faculties of this particular university to offer the respondents enough experiences so that they can have an image of the West University of Timisoara, a different one from the respondents who did not have a member of their family to graduate from one of the faculties of this institution. Also, strictly referring to the students, the learning cycle in which they are enrolled does not influence statistically significant their perception on the institution image. Instead, different dimensions of the image measured within this research, proved to have been influenced by some profile variables analyzed. Thus, we were able to demonstrate that the dimension most influenced by profile factors is the "Perception on the social experience". In the case of this perceived image dimension, the nature of respondent's relation with the West University, age and cycle of study determine statistically significant differences between different categories of these variables. The dimension "Perception on the quality of academic programs" is influenced by the nature of respondent's relation with the West University and the cycle of study, while dimension "Perception on the quality of educational spaces" is influenced by the nature of respondent's relation with the West University and by age. Moreover, the cycle of study influences the perception on the quality of the relationship with the support staff. In the case of other 4 dimensions of image analyzed ("Perception on the quality of teaching staff", "Perception on the experience provided by the West University of Timisoara educational space", "Perception on the West University of Timisoara website" and "Perception on the benefits offered"), have not been discovered statistically significant influences from the profile variables analyzed.

Although this research may be considered as being a valuable one due to its novelty, a series of limits can be pointed out. Given the complexity of the research subject and the high number of correlations which could be studied, these limits should not be seen as weaknesses of this paper, but rather as some opportunities for future research.

The most important limit of this research is related to the way in which the sampling process was made. Taking into consideration that we used a non-probabilistic sampling procedure, the sampling error could not be calculated, so we cannot establish the accuracy of the estimations carried out. In addition, the sample size (183 respondents), is insufficient to extrapolate the results obtained at the whole statistical population level. Also, this sample size is not the result of a mathematical calculation but it was established based on some organizational restrictions, especially connected to the period allocated for data collection. In these conditions, a future research direction can be represented by the attempt to find new solutions and resources in order to carry out a representative research at the West University of Timisoara level.

Another limit of this research is given by the fact that only the University student (both the bachelor and masters level) and University teaching staff has been questioned. However, as it resulted from the literature review, in order to truly understand the image they project, universities should measure the opinions of current students, of graduated but also of the local community. In this regard, a future direction of research is represented by the possibility to extend this research among graduates and representatives of the local community as well, whose opinions about the West University of Timişoara image have not been measured within this research.

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