

Dominika NarożnaFaculty of Political Science and Journalism
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

MEDIA POLICY OF ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY IN POZNAŃ – THE STATUS QUO AND VISION OF DEVELOPMENT

Summary

The issue of the image of any university in the eyes of public opinion is becoming crucially important, given, for instance, population decline. Regardless of the condition of the media in Poland, as well as the skills and intentions of journalists, care has to be taken to create positive relations with journalistic circles.

In the opinion of the AMU authorities and the academic community the Adam Mickiewicz University needs a media strategy. Such guidelines would allow the University to develop certain procedures and unify activities, thus allowing it to apply model modes of conduct depending on the topic raised by journalists or the situation. The media strategy should be designed by an expert team, with detailed knowledge of AMU, and at the same time aware of how the mass media work. This media strategy should then be implemented by PO workers.

Key words: *public opinion, higher education institution's media strategy, higher education institution's relations with journalists*

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (AMU) is apolitical. This does not mean, however, that it does not run its own policy addressed at its environment. AMU takes advantage of its autonomy and has a clear impact on the social life in the region and nationally. These activities cannot be identified with supporting any political groups in Poland. The core of AMU's activities consists in running research and education.¹ The university is a part of the environment, though, and it collaborates with other institutions and business entities in order to improve its own condition (both intellectual and economic). One

¹ "(...) Being aware of its responsibilities arising from rich tradition, the University conducts academic research in the fields of the natural and exact sciences, humanities and social science (...)." Cf. *Strategia rozwoju Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu na lata 2009–2019. Misja, wizja, cele strategiczne i operacyjne*, p. 2.

of the elements that shapes relations with the outside is media relations.

It is said for a reason that the media are the fourth estate in Poland. They frequently act as partners in discussions with academic circles. Increasingly often, academic authorities (rectors, chancellors and deans), either by means of university departments or designated workers, answer journalists' questions and send announcements to them in order to inform society of certain events. By this token they try to shape (enhance) the positive image of their university in the public's eyes. As the mass media are becoming the main tool of providing information about certain issues, one might risk the statement that "what the media cover exists and what they do not cover – does not exist" in social awareness. It is therefore the University's task to shape media policy in this respect.

The unit in charge of contacts with journalists at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań is the AMU Press Office (PO), established by virtue of a regulation by the Rector, Professor B. Marciniak in 2010.² Currently,³ there are four employees (three employed under contracts for work and one receiving special duty allowance) in the PO headed by a Press Officer (*Rzecznik Prasowy*). The many tasks of the Press Office include, among other things, communicating with the press, answering journalists' questions, positioning University experts in the media, winning media patronage (with the Rector's approval) and ongoing monitoring of the press. The workers of the PO operate on the basis of internal and external procedures.⁴

The Press Office is an administrative unit of AMU, yet it reports directly to the Rector. On the basis of decisions made at Rector's meetings (by the Rector and Vice-Rectors) and at Collegia of Rectors and Deans, PO workers receive information they are obliged to convey to journalists (to the wider environment) and data they should have in order to answer potential questions by journalists. The role of this organisational unit is thus not limited to that of a conveyor belt between AMU and media editors, but also involves shaping the University's image in the mass media and using their assistance for this purpose.

² Zarządzenie Nr 200/2010/2011 Rektora Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu z dnia 15 grudnia 2010 r. w sprawie zmian organizacyjnych w administracji centralnej – utworzenie Biura Prasowego.

³ As of 30 September 2015.

⁴ The procedures for the AMU PO have been developed by the AMU Press Officer.

Survey

In June and July 2015, an empirical survey was conducted at AMU for the purposes of this paper. The object of this survey was to collect the information and opinions of the AMU authorities with respect to how AMU shapes its relations with the media. In order to gather the answers to the selected questions the research technique of a questionnaire was applied.

The survey covered 27 persons, selected by means of a certain key, who hold different positions at AMU. Answers were collected from six Rectors, fifteen Deans,⁵ five Chancellors⁶ and one Director.⁷ The questionnaire included 16 closed questions. Several were multiple-choice questions where more than one answer could be indicated.⁸

Several questions in the questionnaire concerned the issue of the assessment of knowledge and skills possessed both by journalists and the respondents themselves. It turned out that when applying the grading scale of Polish universities (ranging from very good, to good, to satisfactory to unsatisfactory/fail) the majority of respondents assessed the condition of the Polish media as satisfactory (15 respondents). They usually gave the same grade to journalists when assessing their professional preparation for the job (16 respondents). At the same time, respondents frequently answered ‘no’ to the following question: “Do journalists collaborating with AMU have sufficient knowledge about the University?” (“yes” – 5 replies, “no” – 18 and “I do not know” – 4). It can therefore be surmised that in the opinion of AMU authorities, while journalists are in general sufficiently prepared for their profession, their knowledge about AMU is below the level of a passing grade (18 out of 27 respondents claimed that journalists do not have even satisfactory knowledge of AMU). The respondents’ assessment of their own knowledge of how the media operate in Poland was usually assessed as good (as many as 16 respondents said so). Their self-assessments as regards their own collaboration with journalists tended to be lower, though.

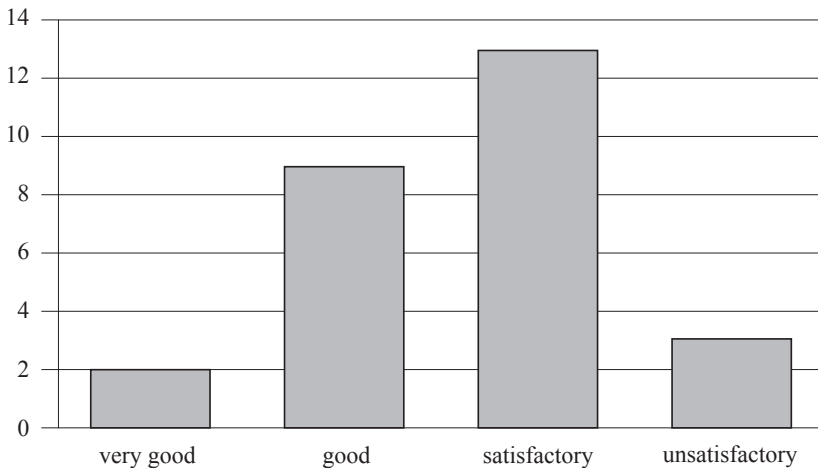
⁵ One representative from every faculty was surveyed.

⁶ The terms ‘Rectors, Deans and Chancellors’ are applied here to cover Vice-Rectors, Vice-Deans and Vice-Chancellors as well.

⁷ The survey covered the Director of John Paul II Collegium in Gniezno on account of this unit having been reorganised and transformed from a branch of the University into an independent institute.

⁸ On account of the topic of this paper it does not discuss all the results of the survey.

Graph 1. How do you assess your own collaboration with journalists in relation to the position you hold at AMU?



Source: PO internal materials.

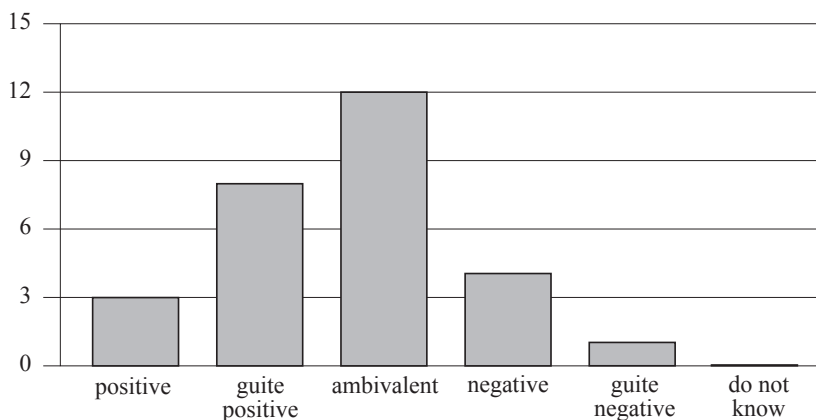
The analysis of the survey results could lead to the conclusion that the reason for the limited relations between AMU and the media might be journalists' insufficient knowledge of AMU. In conversation with the University authorities, they admitted that journalists approach issues related to the University in a superficial manner. Representatives of the media do not verify their sources of information and frequently base their press materials on guesswork.⁹ Their reasoning frequently lacks precision and explanations, leading to a lack of clarity. On the other hand, the survey participants indicated the good level of their own knowledge about the media, but the assessment of their potential in developing relations with journalists is poorer. So, scholars do not lack information (theoretical

⁹ A majority of the respondents believe that publications that harm the University's image, based on unverified data are intentional. I do not agree with this. In my opinion, it is a result of the lack of time and haste in conveying information which prevents journalists from checking their sources. It may also be a consequence of AMU workers using a hermetic language which the representatives of the mass media do not understand. On the other hand, even if the language is understandable it still needs to be translated into colloquial language. It needs to be borne in mind that the materials developed by mass media are designed for everybody, rather than for an outstanding expert in a given area. Therefore, journalists often simplify and take mental shortcuts that are unacceptable in academic standards.

knowledge) but rather experience in contacts with media representatives (practical skills). Therefore, it is proposed to organise training in media relations for managerial staff and design an offer for a course or a post-graduate programme for candidates interested in this field. Participants of such courses and programs would learn how to appear in the media, write rectifications, what needs to be done in order to win media patronage, how to solve a crisis situation in an institution using the media, and so on. It could also be considered whether to develop guidance material, for instance, in the form of a handbook presenting data and guidelines as regards relations with the representatives of the mass media.

The image of a given entity, formed with the assistance of the media, is never a 100% reflection of the actual state. It is true, however, as has already been said in this paper, that which appears in the media exists, while that which is absent from the media is absent from public opinion, therefore it does not exist. That is why the questionnaire included the question: “What is the image of AMU in the media?” which actually meant whether AMU is present in social awareness, and what image of AMU is shaped. Out of several options, respondents most often went for “ambivalent” (12 replies) or “quite positive” (8 respondents).

Graph 2. What is the image of AMU in the media?



Source: PO internal materials.

It is reassuring that only four respondents claimed that the image of AMU in the media was negative. Since as many as twelve people indicated that this image is ambivalent, or in other words, “dual, full of mutual

contradictions and comprising contradictory elements,”¹⁰ the question can be asked: what are the reasons for this state of affairs? Is this a result of the tabloidisation of the media or the absence of AMU’s cohesive media policy?

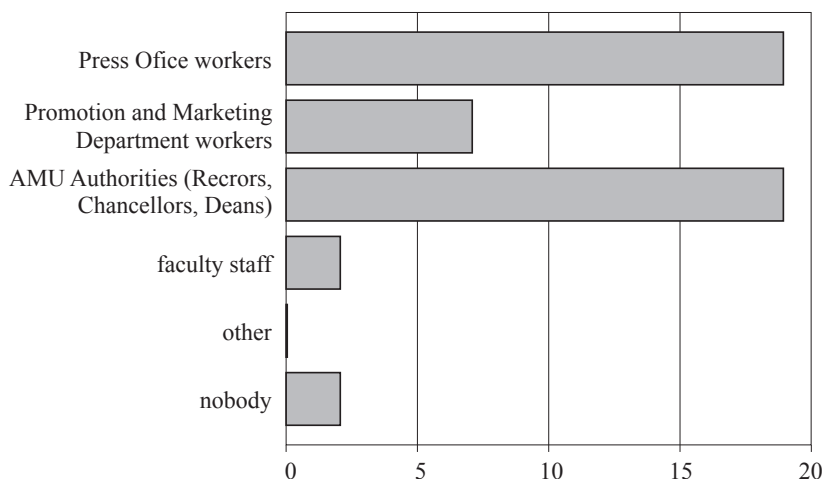
AMU is obviously facing a number of tasks in order to improve its media image. Who should work on this at the University? Respondents, when asked about who was responsible for shaping media relations indicated the workers of the Press Office (23 persons) first and foremost, and later – AMU authorities (19 respondents), workers from the Promotion and Marketing Department (13 respondents) and faculty staff (5 respondents). There were no answers “other” or “nobody.” Interestingly, one respondent added his own answer suggesting that everybody is responsible for the relations with journalists. This is an accurate answer because the behaviour of every AMU worker and student influences how the University is perceived by the environment. If one representative commits reprehensible acts and the journalists take it up, this type of conduct will always be associated with this person’s place of work (regardless of whether a given act was committed on the University’s premises or not). This will change the way the recipients of the message will perceive the institution. The task of the workers of the PO will be to try to solve the crisis in the media, and thereby alleviate the negative impact of the event.

During the survey, respondents also indicated which entities shape AMU’s media policy in their opinion. In this case, they could choose more than one answer. AMU authorities (Rectors, Deans and Chancellors) came on par with the workers of Press Office getting 19 answers each. They were followed by workers from the Promotion and Marketing Department (7 answers) and faculty staff (2 answers). Two respondents answered “nobody.”

Shaping the policy of every entity (in all its fields) is the responsibility of its authorities. Respondents indicated those authorities together with the workers of the Press Office, though. The reason for that might be their assumption that the two “leaders in this ranking” permanently collaborate in the field of media relations. In this setup, AMU authorities present information and PO workers convey it to the environment. It is, however, the former who set, or should set trends, whereas the latter implement or try to implement these trends.

¹⁰ “Ambiwalentny” (ambivalent) as defined in *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, <http://sjp.pl/ambiwalentny> (last access: 2 October 2015).

Graph 3. Who creates AMU's media policy?



Source: PO internal materials.

Given the above, it is surprising that only two respondents indicated faculty staff as those who also shape media policy. If general academic relations were to be translated into the relations inside basic organisational units (such as faculties) they could be reflected as the collaboration between the Dean and a faculty worker responsible for media contacts. The reason for a different state of affairs can be the fact that some faculties do not employ a person whose job description would involve the task of a faculty press officer.

It was an intention of this survey to also collect data on the assessment of the information flow within AMU. The results turned out to be unequivocal. Sixteen respondents deemed the information flow to be satisfactory, nine respondents believed it is not so, while two respondents had no opinion on this topic. With the exception of one person who replied neither 'yes' nor 'no,' all respondents agreed that AMU needs to develop procedures for contacts with journalists. Taking into account this suggestion by respondents, the AMU Press Office and Press Officer are going to develop an information package on this topic. This unit has both internal and external media relations procedures. If these general operating guidelines for contacting journalists were presented to the academic community in the form of regulations, or at least training material it would certainly strengthen the confidence of members of

the University community in undertaking collaboration with different representatives of the press.

AMU has a development strategy for 2009–2019. Over several years the attempts to design a promotional strategy for AMU have been discussed. There have been no needs expressed so far to develop a media strategy for the University, though. The respondents were asked whether they were calling for a media strategy to be developed and implemented by AMU. There were as many as 23 affirmative answers. The reason for that is that the University lacks the vision of how to shape relations with the media in different fields and over the long term. Developing positive relations with journalists, with the indirect outcome of shaping and/or strengthening AMU's good image in the eyes of the public, is not a task to be performed *ad hoc*. It is a complex process involving the exchange of ideas, listening to one another and hearing what the other party has to say, and on building trust. AMU's media strategy would certainly assist this process in procedural terms.

Conclusions

The results of the analysis seem to clearly suggest that the responsibility for shaping AMU's media policy should be borne by University Authorities. The ultimate decision with respect to the issues concerning the entire university in this field should be made by the Rector; in different faculties – by their respective Deans (upon notifying the Rector), due to the autonomy of this organisational unit. Therefore, the responsibility for this matter at the level of faculties has to be borne by Press Officers appointed by their respective organisational units, or by persons authorised to perform these tasks by the Dean. If, for various reasons, they are not authorised to speak to journalists, they should at least compile information materials for the Press Office. The tactics of burying heads in the sand accompanied by a lack of reliable information provided by the Press Office usually results in a critical press release.

From the institutional point of view, the Press Office and the Promotion and Marketing Department of AMU should bear responsibility for shaping its media image. The former is obliged to answer journalists' questions (typically in order to refute allegations). The latter is responsible for promoting university events and it can ask the PO for support in informing journalists about the events it has prepared. As concerns the

activities of the University, the responsibility to create the image in the mass media is borne by everybody. The sum total of individual behaviour of the University's workers lays the foundations for the holistic perception of the institution by the media and by the recipients of media messages. Therefore it is suggested here to conduct different types of training and developing a handbook on media relations addressed at all members of AMU's academic community.

On the basis of the above data it can be concluded that, In the opinion of the AMU authorities and the academic community the Adam Mickiewicz University needs a media strategy. Such guidelines would allow the University to develop certain procedures and unify activities, thus allowing it to apply model modes of conduct depending on the topic raised by journalists or the situation. The media strategy should be designed by an expert team, with detailed knowledge of AMU, and at the same time aware of how the mass media work. This media strategy should then be implemented by PO workers.

The issue of the image of any university in the eyes of public opinion is becoming crucially important, given, for instance, population decline. Regardless of the condition of the media in Poland, as well as the skills and intentions of journalists, care has to be taken to create positive relations with journalistic circles. This is an indispensable condition in the challenges every entity has to face in the 21st century.

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Streszczenie

Sprawa postrzegania każdej uczelni w oczach opinii publicznej, chociażby w dobie niżu demograficznego, staje się tematem bardzo istotnym. Stąd też bez względu na to, jaka jest kondycja mediów w Polsce oraz jakie umiejętności i intencje posiadają

dziennikarze, trzeba dbać o to, by kształtować pozytywne relacje z tym środowiskiem zawodowym.

Zdaniem Władz UAM oraz społeczności akademickiej Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu uczelnia potrzebuje strategii medialnej. Wytyczne pozwoliłyby na wypracowanie określonych procedur i ujednolicenie pewnych działań. Te ostatnie dawałyby szansę na zastosowanie modelowych metod postępowania uzależnionych od poruszanego przez dziennikarza tematu lub rodzaju sytuacji. Autorka stoi na stanowisku, że strategię medialną powinien stworzyć zespół ekspertów, którzy znają środowisko UAM, a zarazem mają rozeznanie co do tego, jak działają środki masowego komunikowania. Z kolei za wdrożenie strategii medialnej powinni odpowiadać pracownicy BP.

Słowa kluczowe: opinia publiczna, strategia medialna uczelni wyższej, relacje uczelni wyższej z dziennikarzami

Резюме

Вопрос восприятия каждого учебного заведения в глазах общественности, даже во время демографического спада, становится очень важной темой. Следовательно, независимо от того в каком состоянии польские СМИ и какими навыками и намерениями владеют журналисты, нужно заботиться о том, чтобы развивать позитивные отношения с этой профессиональной средой. По мнению руководства UAM и академического сообщества Университета им. А. Мицкевича в Познани, ВУЗ нуждается в медиа-стратегии. Указания позволили бы на выработку конкретных процедур и унификации определенных действий. Последние дали бы шанс на использование модельных методик прогресса, зависящих от затронутой журналистом темой или родом ситуации. Автор придерживается позиции, что медиа-стратегию должна создавать группа экспертов, которые знают среду UAM, а также имеют представление о том, как действуют средства массовой коммуникации. В свою очередь, за осуществление медиа-стратегии должны нести ответственность сотрудники Пресс-Службы.

Ключевые слова: общественное мнение, медиа-стратегия ВУЗа, отношения ВУЗа с журналистами

Резюме

Репутація вузу в очах громадськості, навіть в час демографічного спаду, є важливим питанням. Потрібно створювати позитивні відносини вузу та ЗМІ, незалежно від позиції ЗМІ в Польщі та навичок і намірів журналістів.

На думку керівництва та академічної спільноти Університету імені Адама Міцкевича в Познані, вуз потребує медіальної стратегії. Потрібно розробити конкретні процедури та стандарти. Це дало б шанси на застосування методів моделювання певних ситуацій. Авторка вважає, що медіальну стратегію пови-

нна створити група експертів, які знають позиції університету та розуміють, як діють ЗМІ. За реалізацію медіальної стратегії повинні відповідати працівники пресс-служби.

Ключові слова: громадська думка, медіальна стратегія вузу, відносини вузу з журналістами