

## DEFINING THE TARGET AUDIENCE OF THE MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE ROMANIAN MILITARY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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*Abstract: The current challenging context of economic crisis has significantly affected the Romanian military higher education institutions. One of the most important problems encountered by these institutions was communication with their public, especially with their candidates, aiming to promote the educational services offer and to attract appropriate candidates. The quality of marketing communication represents a determining factor for the success of the admission session.*

*The paper presents the results of an analysis conducted at the level of the Romanian military higher education institutions, in order to explore the characteristics of their candidates and to identify their demographic, psychographic and behavioral profile in relationship to the definition of the target audiences of the future marketing communication campaigns to be implemented in the Romanian market of educational services.*

*Keywords: Strategy, marketing, communication, military, higher education, Romania,*

### Introduction

The changes that occurred in the Romanian society of the recent decades, mostly after the accession to the European Union and NATO, have generated debates at national level on the quality of the services provided to the citizens, including services of public interest such as the educational ones. The marketing approach of the educational services market involves the development and implementation of some marketing strategies of the educational institutions focused on identifying the needs of the educational services consumers and on adapting the educational programs to these needs (Grigoruț et al., 2011).

One of the foundations of the educational services market is the education of potential consumers, respectively the target group of the higher education institutions, namely students, direct or related customers of the educational services, as well as future employers, beneficiaries of products, who will use the ability and skills that graduates acquire during studies (Enache, 2012)

The main activity of the educational institutions is to provide educational services - the basic services provided, in addition to some complementary services such as the registration of consumers – students, organization of exams and some auxiliary services –the activity of scientific research (Gyönös, 2011).

The military higher education system is a part of the national education system and it includes: undergraduate studies for training officers and other specialists and graduate studies. Military higher education institutions together with the specializations and study programs provided, acknowledge the same rules on quality assurance, including those related to licensing and accreditation, as the non-military higher education institutions.

Marketing communication, defined by Kotler (2008) as a specific combination between advertising, sales force, sales promotion and public relations that the organization uses in order to achieve its advertising and marketing objectives, has a particular importance in positioning the military higher education institutions in the educational market. Developing effective marketing communications involves the design of a communication strategy that considers the context in which the communication will be conducted, the attained objectives, the audience targeted through the specific communication activities, media and

communication tools to be employed, messages to be delivered, budget and implementation timetable of the specific campaigns, coordination, evaluation and control procedures to be used.

Defining the target audience is one of the most important marketing communications decisions that the higher education institutions, including the military ones, should take into consideration. Strong relationships with prospective and current students allow universities to identify and respond to their educational needs. Thus, marketing requires the definition of the target audience and the selection of the appropriate strategies for an effective market coverage (Hawes and Lewison, 2007).

### **Methodological notes**

Marketing research is a scientific, systematic and objective approach used to generate the information needed in the process of adopting marketing decisions. This process involves the collection, processing and analysis of the information related to the goods, services, organizations and consumers on the market (Cătoiu et al., 2009).

The investigation of secondary data sources is one of the most frequently used methods to conduct exploratory research that aims to identify the general coordinates of the investigated marketing phenomena. Auxiliary information is that information obtained for purposes other than the current undergoing research and which is collected earlier in a different research project (Cătoiu et al., 2009).

Using secondary data from the system of military higher education institutions, the current research intends to provide results corresponding to the following objectives:

- (1) Assessment of the current status, at the level of the academic year 2013-2014, of the military higher education institutions;
- (2) Assessment of the target audience of the military higher education institutions in terms of the demographic profile of the candidates as it is revealed through the analysis of the admission processes conducted between 2009 and 2013.

### **Main findings of the research**

Military higher education institutions provide training, specialization and skill improvement for the Romanian Army military personnel as well as for other domestic and foreign beneficiaries. Currently, the system of military higher education institutions comprises the following institutions:

- National Defence University „Carol I”, Bucharest: is a military higher education institution with the mission to prepare commanders, staff officers and military and civilian experts, selected for the performance of functions leadership and expertise in the fields of defense and national security national. It organizes and conducts training through undergraduate, graduate and doctoral study programs in the area of military science;
- Military Technical Academy, Bucharest: is the higher education military technical institution, having the mission to train officers, engineers, experts in the integrated management of technical systems, organization and conducting military operations and logistic systems in times of peace and war. It organizes and conducts training through undergraduate, graduate and doctoral study programs;
- The Land Force Academy „Nicolae Bălcescu” in Sibiu: is the military higher education institution integrated within the national education system, with university autonomy guaranteed by law and with legal personality, able to organize and develop accredited bachelor and master programmes and build up commissioned leaders for

the Romanian Land Forces as well as for other beneficiaries from the national defence, public order and national security system. It organizes and conducts training through undergraduate and graduate study programs;

- Naval Academy „Mircea cel Bătrân” in Constanța: is the military technical higher education institution with the mission to train officers, engineers, experts in technical systems management integrated in the organization and management of naval actions in times of peace and war. It organizes and conducts training through undergraduate and graduate study programs;
- Air Force Academy „Henri Coandă” in Brașov: is the military higher education institution with the mission to train control officers, military leaders, experts in organizational management and military action in peacetime and in war, able to integrate available resources to fulfill the tasks in the field of air forces according to the Training and Doctrine Military Strategy of the Romanian Army. It organizes and conducts training through undergraduate and graduate study programs;
- The Military Medical Institute Bucharest: provides training of the military medical students in military medical education and postgraduate academic physicians and pharmacists military mission to ensure military medical training military students in schools medicine, dentistry and pharmacy at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy „Carol Davila” Bucharest and University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Târgu Mureș. The educational process for military doctors and pharmacists is completed through residency training and postgraduate courses.

In 2012, Romania had, according to the National Institute of Statistics, 57 public and 51 private universities accredited or authorized to function temporarily, with 614 faculties (of which 410 in public universities), with a total of 539,852 enrolled students (of which 399,464 registered within the public universities). By comparison, in the military higher education system there were functioning 6 universities, with a number of 8 faculties and 4,158 enrolled students. Since the beginning of the 2005-2006 academic year, all military higher education institutions (less than the Military Medical Institute in Bucharest) moved to the implementation of the requirements specific to the Bologna Process by organizing the education in three stages: Bachelor (with a duration of 3 or 4 years), Master (with a duration of one, one and half or two years) and Doctoral (with a duration of 3 years). The overall offer of the military higher education institutions includes a total of 38 undergraduate programs, in 16 areas of study, 22 master programs and one doctoral program – with 10 specializations in the three fundamental areas – Military Sciences and Information, National Security and Engineering Sciences, and at postgraduate level the career lasting up to six months (Stănică, 2013).

The undergraduate military studies curricula is designed in accordance to the national rules and regulations and usually comprises the following modules:

- a) undergraduate education according to national and specific standards;
- b) general military training and tactical skills training needed on the battlefield;
- c) acquiring specialized and military knowledge, specific competencies and abilities according to the students' specialization;
- d) internships in the military units.

Currently, all military institutions of higher education accredited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, have the capacity to educate students for the needs of the Ministry of National Defence as well as for other internal/external beneficiaries.

I noted the continuous development in the quality of education and scientific research at all levels and forms of education as well as in the case of graduate programs for training and continuous professional development, according to the principles of the Bologna process,

the national legislation and to the Romanian Army Transformation Strategy, keeping the key elements and features characteristic to the military.

The educational offer of military higher education institutions addresses high-school graduates with a bachelor degree or its equivalent. The target audience for the admission exam in these institutions are young people, boys and girls aged up to 24 years, military or civilian high schools graduates, selected by the Local Information and Recruitment office.

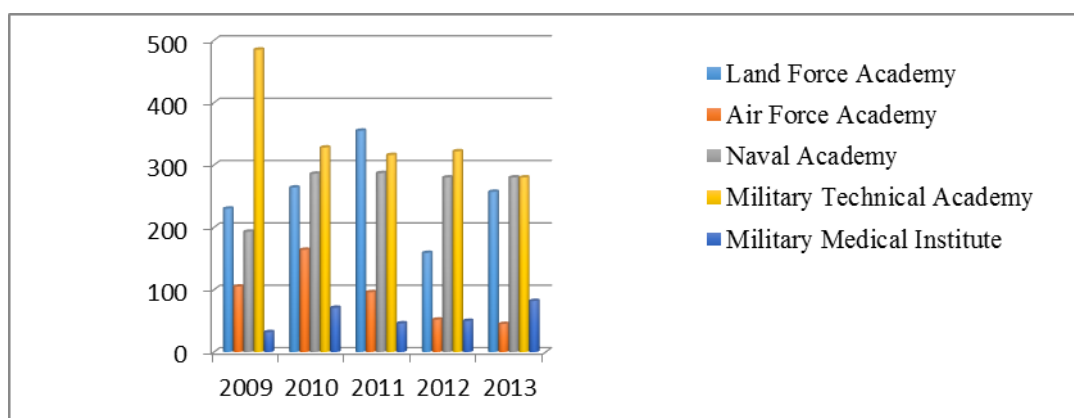
Military higher education institutions offer education services for two types of customers:

- military students-in their case, the educational services, accommodation, feeding, military equipment and medical assistance during the studies are funded by the state budget;
- civilian students with tuition fee -a different methodology concerning participation in educational programs is applied in their case.

The admission system in military higher education institutions is different from the one in civilian universities namely, for the candidates competing for places financed from the state budget, the first stage of selection is done by prospective employers (defense system, public order and safety structures).

In the period 2009-2013, the dynamics of the educational offer for the military higher education institutions has been influenced by the needs in terms of personnel of the Ministry of National Defense and the other beneficiaries of educational services in the system of public order and national security and by the strategies and career evolution policies for the graduates. Thus, each higher education institution has different offers for the potential candidates, according to the approved educational plans.

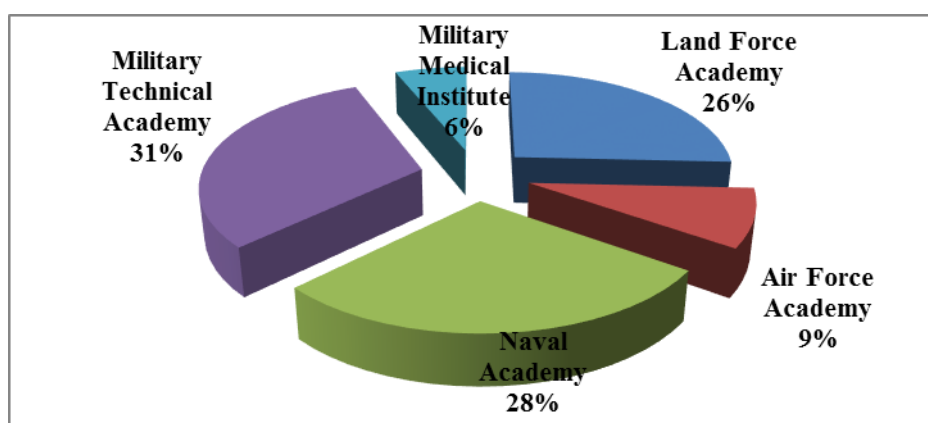
**Figure 1. The evolution of the educational offer of the military higher education institutions between 2009-2013**



(Source: Ministry of National Defence)

In the year 2013 the total number of students from the military universities was approximately 4,020, the percentages corresponding to the Military Technical Academy, to the Land Forces Academy and to the Naval Academy being quite similar while the other institutions registered a smaller number of students taking into account the requirements of the beneficiaries concerning the number of necessary specialists and the approved tuition plan.

**Figure 2. Share of students in military higher education institutions in 2013**



(Source: Ministry of National Defence)

The number of candidates tends to decrease being influenced by the population decline and by the number of graduates obtaining a bachelor degree every year.

According to data provided by the National Assessment and Examination Center from the Ministry of National Education, the number of those who passed the bachelor exam has been constantly decreasing in the last years.

**Table 1 Number of high school graduates who promoted the bachelor exam between 2009-2013**

Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
204,854	163,541	111,932	104,751	114,652

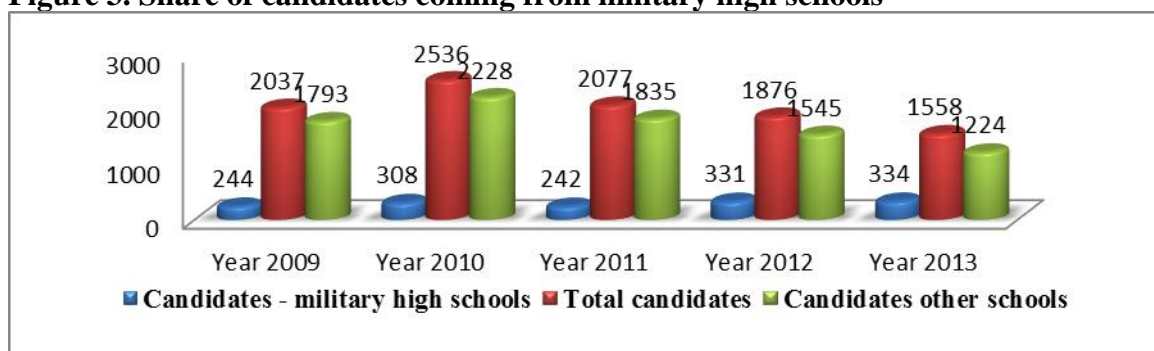
(Source: Ministry of National Education)

Military high-schools graduates are constantly the main target audience for military higher education institutions due to the fact that the training period during high-school gives students a strong motivation for further study at university level throughout the military system.

The constant evolution of the candidates that come from military high school is given by the high graduation rate registered in these institutions. We can even notice a growth with 36% in their number in 2013 compared to 2009 and an annual average variation rate of about 8%.

Although military high schools graduates are the captive target audience for the military higher education institutions, they do not benefit from special treatment during the admission exams, the educational offer being addressed to everyone.

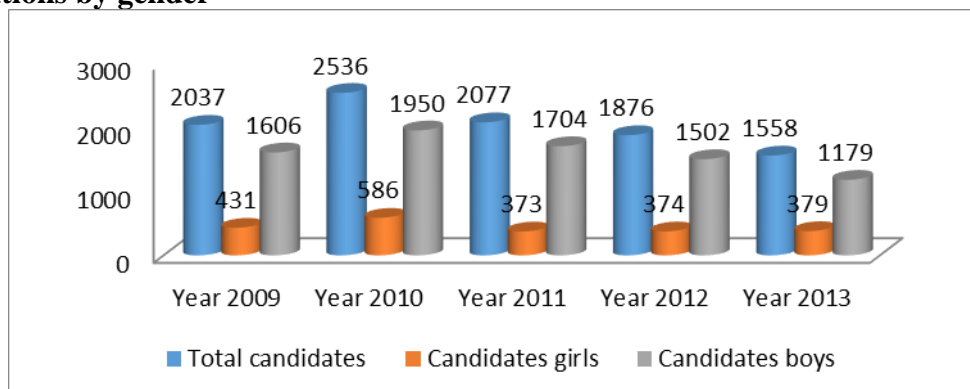
**Figure 3. Share of candidates coming from military high schools**



(Source: Ministry of National Defence)

The evolution of the number of candidates at the admission exams for the military higher education institutions records an average annual variation rate of -6.49%, which means that between 2009 and 2013 the number of candidates decreased on average by 6%.

**Figure 4 Distribution of candidates for admission to the military higher education institutions by gender**



(Source: Ministry of National Defence)

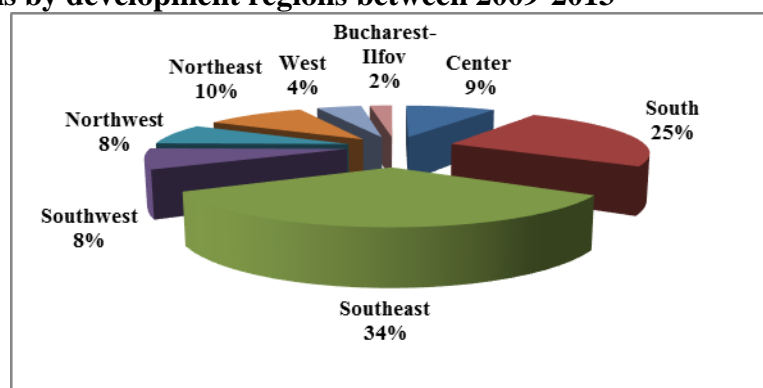
Although there is a real interest of the female population for the military profession and the promotion campaign aims at young people of both sexes, there has been noticed a decrease in the educational offer for female students.

As it can be seen, the number of female candidates at the admission exams for the military higher education institutions has had a constant evolution in the past three years.

At the national level there is a different distribution of the number of students, depending on the development regions –areas with a reduced distribution (South, Southwest, Southeast- maximum 8 % of students) and areas with a high distribution (Bucharest-Ilfov, 30.9 %).

In comparison, in the military higher education system, the Bucharest- Ilfov area is underrepresented among those who opt for university education in military schools (2-3 %), while areas from southern Romania, South- East, South, and the Northwest, Northeast and Center have the highest percentage.

**Figure 5. Distribution of candidates for admission to the military higher education institutions by development regions between 2009-2013**

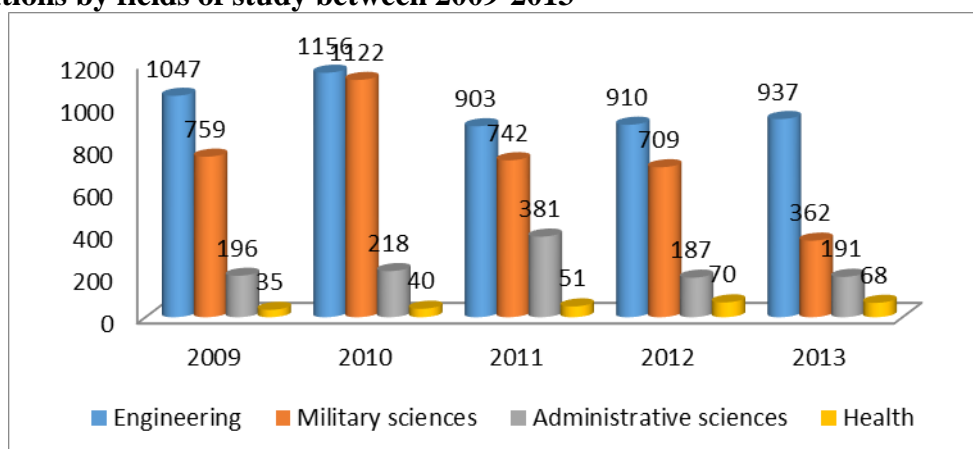


(Source: Ministry of National Defence)



The analysis of data available between 2009 and 2013 has revealed that candidates for admission to military higher education institutions have mainly chosen the fundamental field of engineering sciences namely an average of 50% of all candidates.

**Figure 6. Distribution of candidates for admission to military higher education institutions by fields of study between 2009-2013**



(Source: Ministry of National Defence)

### Conclusions

The market for professional and educational services works on the basis of the principle of supply and demand. The overall activity of the military higher education institutions as well as the design of the offer of educational products and services offer must consider the principles of marketing. The marketing communication – and within it, the definition of the target audience – is essential in this context.

The target audience of the military higher education institutions is different from the one of other higher education institutions namely male students, military high schools graduates-the captive audience which has a stronger motivation to pursue the military career.

The educational offer in the military universities provides study programs at the European level which are strictly specific to the missions of the beneficiaries, in areas such as mechatronics, complex systems of weapons and ammunition, military aviation, military transport, engineering and construction but also communications and military and administrative sciences.

It is necessary that the marketing objectives of military higher education institutions are sufficiently well formulated so that they can guide the process of marketing planning and result measuring. Marketing communication, promotion, is the best marketing tool that institutions can use in order to make sure that the target audience becomes aware of the existence of their educational offer (Kotler, 2008).

In order to maintain and develop a quality management in education in the military higher education institutions through a continuous process of planning, organization, development, verification and improvement of educational activities, directions and stable quality assurance practices have been made permanent.

Institutions generate an open flow of information with the target audience and capitalize the feedback in a process of evaluation and continuous improvement of activities.

Current academic culture of institutions from the military higher education system merges traditional conservatism with professional tenacity, aiming at enhancing the quality and status on the educational services market both regionally, nationally and internationally.

Military higher education system turns out to be a complex structure encompassing a wide range of programs and specializations, helping the national higher education system to promote quality in education and training of future generations.

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