

MARKETING COMMUNICATION, VECTOR OF INCREASING THE AWARENESS OF THE MILITARY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES MARKET IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: The military higher education institutions operate in a competitive market, using extensively marketing tools and techniques to communicate about and promote their educational products and services.

Marketing communication is an essential activity which provides customers with the information regarding the educational offer of the specialized institutions and contributes to their differentiation in terms of marketing in a particularly challenging context.

The paper brings in the attention a potential answer to the question concerning the most appropriate media and supports to be employed in order to achieve the most effective results in the communication and promotion of the educational offer provided by the military higher education institutions.

Keywords: marketing communication, awareness, military, higher education, Romania

Introduction

In this ever-changing society, that traverses a period with quick and significant changes, the educational field must not be neglected. The profound transformations that take place nowadays impose educational institutions new demands in the process of training the new generation. By assuming the responsibility to teach citizens, educational institutions must permanently adapt by reforming their curricula, the economic and social changes strongly influencing the conception concerning the role of the educational system (Popescu, 2012).

Higher standards and the educational services market dynamics have compelled universities to rethink their strategies in order to maintain their competitiveness. Future students can choose where to study based on their preferences and degree of wishes satisfaction. Thus, students' opinion is important when it comes to educational services quality evaluation because they are the real consumers of these services and this is the reason why they are considered to be the most appropriate subjects for a fair assessment (Olteanu 2011).

The military higher education system is a part of the national education system, being unique through its results in the Romanian academic education.

The particularities of this domain require that military higher education institutions comply with multiple requirements and standards: on one hand being the academic harshness and on the other hand the rules imposed by the military domain. The entire activity of these institutions is aimed at developing an educational product that meets the requirements of the

beneficiaries from the defense, public order and national security system and at ensuring that graduates can successfully fit on the job market.

The process of promoting a new European security culture through military education at all levels of the military career will require a joint approach. In the national education systems, as well as in the European education systems we can observe a clear preference for teaching and learning based on skills as well as an approach oriented towards the results of the learning process that explicitly express the real needs of the beneficiaries. The military higher education system is based on innovation and diversification and it promotes a qualitative educational process, individual and institutional autonomy and participation of all educational actors in order to obtain excellent results by ensuring the valorization of the human resource which should meet the future needs of the beneficiaries (Stănică, 2014).

Military higher education institutions organize each year an admission exam aimed at filling the vacancies to undergraduate training put up for admission and approved by the Ministry of National Defense for every beneficiary and for each category of candidates (boys/girls).

The goal of the admission exam is to establish a candidate's hierarchy for each field of study in order to allow candidates to accede to the specific educational programs organized in the higher military education institutions.

Candidates must choose only one beneficiary and one educational field they want to sit the admission examination for. If there are any candidates that were recruited and selected by multiple beneficiaries, they will have to make their choice prior to taking the admission exam.

The educational offer of the military higher education institutions ensures training of officers through undergraduate studies and obtaining a diploma in fields like military sciences and intelligence, engineering sciences and medical or administrative sciences.

Experts in the field (Prutianu and others, 1998) define communication as a complex process which transfers the ideas of a person's mind to another mind. In the context of marketing, the process of transferring messages to the audience is called marketing communication and it implies multiple stages for the customer: product or service awareness, preference, acquisition and satisfaction.

Marketing communications is constantly changing, it is a new theory and technique according to which cultural changes and technological developments are combined in order to create a dynamic environment where marketers try to make sure that their messages reach the target audience (Blythe, 2006).

According to Shimp and Andrews (2013), marketing communication involves combining all the elements of the marketing mix in order to facilitate the exchange and to establish a common language with consumers.

Through marketing communications, one tries to inform consumers, persuade them and bring to their attention-by direct or indirect means-promoted products and educational services. Marketing communication can be viewed as „*the voice*” of the brand and a method of discussing and building relationships with consumers (Kotler and Keller, 2008).

By means of communications, educational institutions find out from the customers what they like or dislike regarding the brand and the products offered, the experience customers have with the institution and how could the institution improve this experience, the

goal of communication being the construction and maintenance of a good relationship between the educational institution and its consumers. An efficient communication implies more than just informing the target audience. The amount of messages that consumers are exposed to on the educational services market and the lack of time increases the importance of marketing communication (Ivanov, 2012).

Marketing communication of educational institutions has met an important development due to the advent of the Internet, the online environment facilitating their communication using an unusual mean of communication that implies more transmitters and more receivers. Moreover, the information exchanges in both directions thus encouraging feedback and interactivity between suppliers and consumers. Nevertheless, the audience is increased and using the online environment for marketing communication allows the interaction with a large number of Internet users that can become potential clients (Orzan and Macovei, 2012).

According to some authors (Ray, 1982 cited by Popescu 2003), marketing communication is as a mix of four elements (advertising, personal selling, sales promotion and public relations) or specific messages developed to express opinions, feelings or behaviors; marketing communication is part of the marketing mix along with product, price and distribution.

Marketing communication mix is made of a specific blend of advertising, public relations, personal selling, sales promotions and direct marketing instruments that the institution uses to provide value to the clients and to build relationships with them (Kotler and Keller, 2008).

In a different approach (Shimp and Andrews, 2013) marketing communication instruments are: advertising, public relations, direct marketing, sales promotion, personal selling and online marketing/social media.

According to Kotler and Keller (2008) advertising can be defined as any form of impersonal presentation and promotion of some ideas, assets or services, financed by a nominee holder.

In the context of fierce competition on the market that requires deep customers and potential customers knowledge as well as gaining their trust, educational institutions admit that advertising cannot be the only answer to the complex matter of marketing. Public relations constitute a specific branch of the institution, whose purpose is to probe the needs and attitude of the audience, to work towards meeting those needs, an effort to influence the audience in a positive way (Șerbănică, 2003).

Sales promotion, an instrument of marketing communication constitutes a main component of the promotional activity that can be defined as the amount of techniques specialized, designed and made by the institution in a certain period of time (usually a short one), aimed at causing an increase in sales on both extensive and intensive ways (Anghel, 2009).

Personal selling involves an immediate and interactive interaction between two or more persons, each participant having the opportunity to observe the behavior and reactions of the others. Moreover, it allows the development of relations between the participants that can evolve from dialogue to friendly relationships, the customer being somehow forced to listen and accept the offer (Kotler and Keller, 2008).

Direct marketing can be defined as an interactive marketing system that uses one or more communication media to determine a favorable reaction of the consumer to the proposed offer (Smith, 1999, cited by Popescu, 2003).

In order for the marketing communication of the higher military institutions to be successful good knowledge of both marketing communication concepts and operation and use of its specific instruments is necessary so that the organization and development of a promotion campaign for the educational offer to be effective and to determine a better recruiting process, the target audience to be able to identify the sent message, to assign it to their own needs and to choose one of the military higher education institutions study programs so that all the approved places are occupied by candidates.

Methodological notes

In order to establish the role of marketing communication in the increase of brand awareness for the military higher education institutions on the Romanian educational services market, there have been considered the statistical data concerning the educational offer of the military universities between 2009 and 2014 as well as information concerning the levels of audience registered by the main communication methods (written media, radio, television, online).

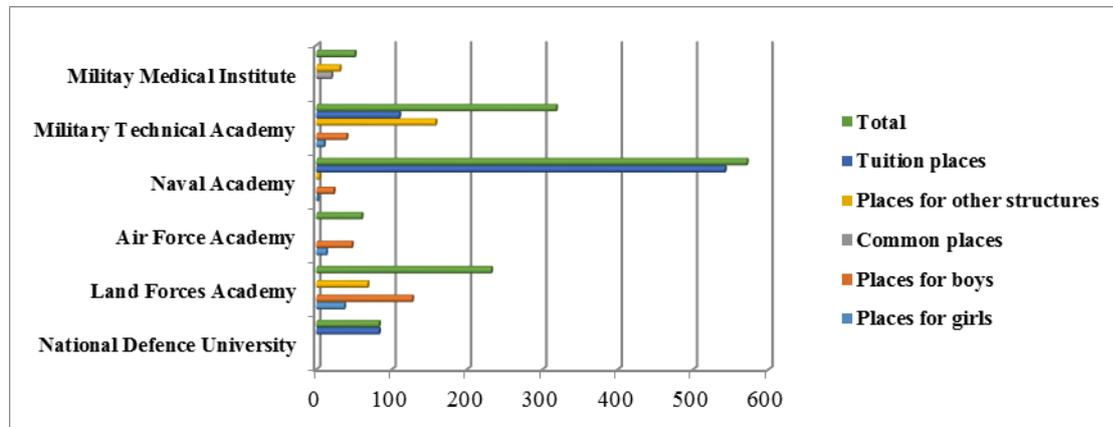
Based on these data, there have been evaluated the demographic characteristics of the target audience of the military education higher education institutions with the purpose to identify the profile of the potential customer as well as how Romanians consumers use the main communication methods and media, in order to find the communication mix able to determine a significant impact of the educational offer promotion campaigns.

Main findings of the research

Through the educational offer, higher education military institutions meet the needs and desires of consumers of educational services, young people aged up to 24 years, both girls and boys, promoting the image of higher military education locally, nationally and internationally.

For 2014-2015 academic year, the educational offer of the military higher education system contains 62 places for girls. The Military Medicine Institute, the other structures that are part of the defense, public order and national security system, and tuition fee system do not stipulate separate places in the educational offer, and at the admission exam both genders can participate, their delimitation being made in descending order of their averages.

Figure1. The educational of the military higher education system for 2014-2015 academic year



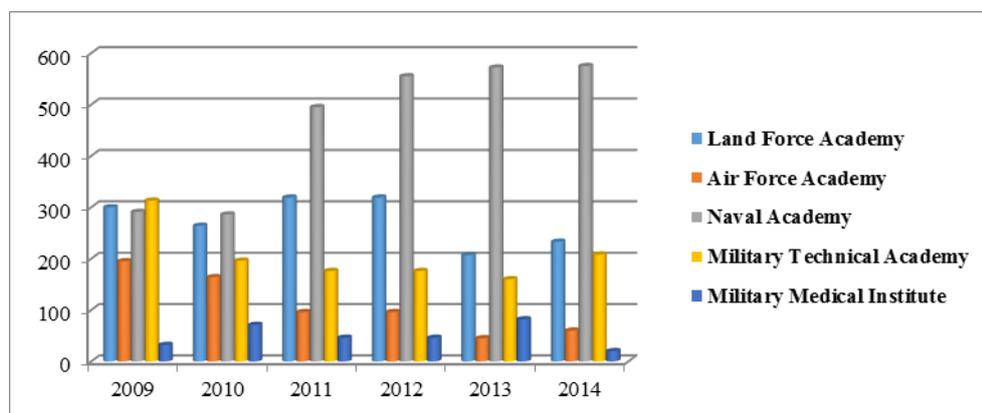
(Source: Ministry of National Defence)

For initial recruitment and selection of candidates, the Ministry of Defence has specialized structures in territory, information offices, recruitment and selection as well as three regional centers and national orientation centers (Alba-Iulia, Breaza, Campulung Moldovenesc), which promotes educational offer and ensure real and correct information about the study programs of military educational institutions.

This ensured the accurate and timely information to potential candidates concerning the educational offer of military education institutions and selection of the candidates by testing their physical, psychological and medical abilities, based on standards and criteria established by the Ministry of National Defense.

Between 2009 and 2014 the educational offer has consisted both of budget-funded places and tuition places. Naval Academy is distinguished from the other military education institutions through a considerable number of tuition places for the candidates of the Marine Civil Department.

Figure 2. The evolution of the educational offer of the military higher education institutions between 2009-2014



(Source: Ministry of National Defense)

From the total number of registered candidates for admission to the military higher education institutions in 2014, graduates of military high schools represent 16.02%. This finding is determined by the number of students attending the military high schools.

In 2014, according to the statistics, 315 teenagers (58 girls and 257 boys) have graduated a military high school. These people have been informed about the educational offer of the military higher education institutions, both through the communication channels used by these institutions to promote their offer and through the information and advice given in the military high schools.

The educational offer concerning the curricula of the military higher education institutions is made known public at least six months before admission through promotion activities in country's schools and high schools, but the military high schools represent the basis for the selection of candidates.

A great importance is given to the activities allow the military higher education institutions to present their educational offer and in this regard students from regional high schools and from military high schools can visit these institutions.

The educational offer and the image of the military higher education institutions are being promoted by teachers and students through their participation to educational fairs.

Informing the potential candidates for admission is also possible through the media (local radio and television stations, local press), through the regional centers of selection and guidance and through district military centers.

The Internet represents a valuable tool of communication in which information reaches millions of consumers in real time. It has a fundamental impact on how institutions communicate with their customers and suppliers and on how consumers find information and services (Orzan, 2007).

The communication environment is commonly used by military higher education institutions to increase awareness concerning their educational curricula, the results obtained by the candidates and students, and other information that the target audience can easily access.

Through their websites or web pages, military higher education institutions make available information about their curricula, the offered diplomas, academic and research staff, facilities for students and any other aspects for the interested public.

The presence of these institutions in the virtual market is an effective and easy means of communication with the clients or potential clients and the interest for the Internet expressed both by the population and especially by the institutions is growing continuously (Popescu, 2008).

The number of Internet users from Romania increased from 1.7 million, in 2002, to nearly 6.5 million, in 2013.

According to a study made by the Romanian Audit and Circulation Bureau (BRAT), Romanians spend an average of about 4 hours online (230 minutes). The same study indicates that people spend more time online than watching TV, which is used during an average of 202 minutes per day, while the radio is used less, about 112 minutes per day.

According to the results presented, 45 % of the Internet users are aged between 25 and 44 years and 19 % are aged between 14 and 24 years. 49% of Internet users in Romania are male, while the remaining 51% are women.

According to the study of Monitoring Investment in Advertising (MIA) for press, radio, online media and all visual environments encountered outside the house, which are outdoors or other public spaces (the classic advertising panels, advertising in common

transportation means, subway stations, buses, exhibition spaces inside a store, TV screens places in intersections), made by the Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit (BRAT) in 2012, the total advertising for the four means was worth about EUR 656 million.

In comparison, in 2013, about 580 million euros were invested in advertising using press, radio, online environment or outdoor visual environments.

The standard advertising accounted for about 71% of the total advertising, while promoting media products (press, websites, radio or TV stations) by self-promotion or cross-promotion generated approximately 19% of the total volume of advertising.

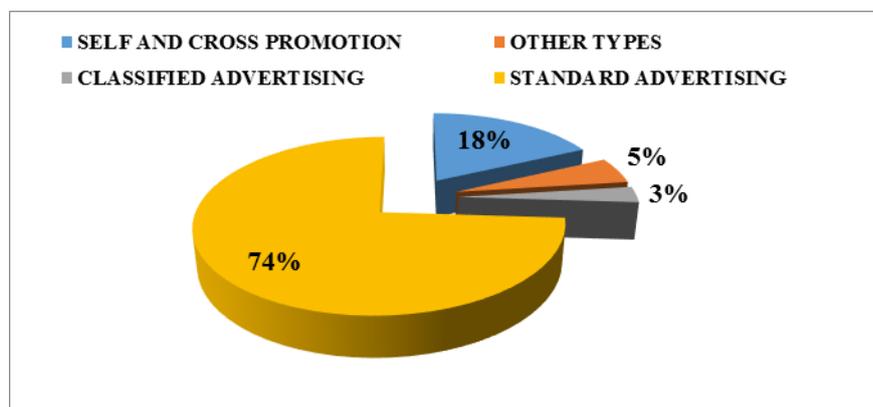
Classified advertising are about 4% of the total obtained in 2012, and media partnerships and pro-bono campaigns totaled an approximate value of 6%.

In 2013, standard advertising represented about 74% of the total volume of advertising, while promoting the media products (newspapers, websites, radio or television stations) by self-promotion or cross-promotion has been about 18% of the total volume of advertising.

An analysis of the International Advertising Association, citing Zenith Romania report, estimates that local advertising market will grow with 2.8% by the end of 2014, mainly as a result of expansion of the digital environment (+12%). It is expected that, by the end of this year, the total investment in the media to reach the amount of \$ 394 million.

According to the source (Zenith Optimedia report - Advertising Expenditure Forecasts), the Internet remains the only type of media found increasing in Romania, the media performance segment making a major contribution to this increase, because in 2013 the Internet reached a rate of 12 % of the total advertising consumption in Romania.

Figure 3. Advertising in 2013



(Source: Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit)

According to Ilie (2014), at the beginning of 2013 there was a decrease in the volume of advertising, comparing to the last six months of 2012, respectively 12%.

The second half, instead, generated an increase of 48% compared to the first half, reaching to 112.9 million lei (EUR 25.7 million), according to the data contained in the study of ROADS (Romanian Online Advertising Study).

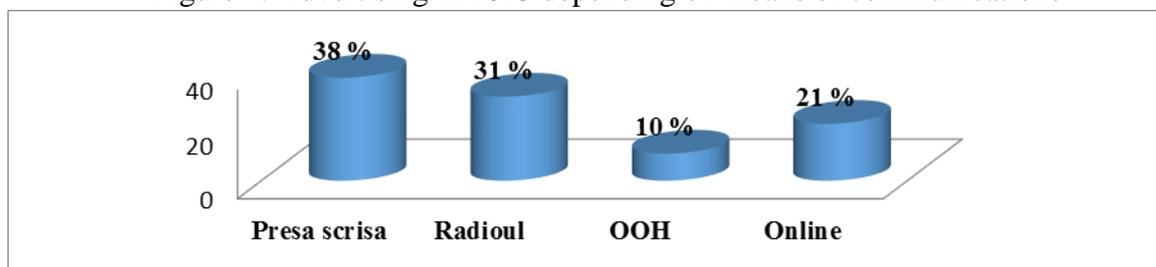
From the study elaborated by Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit in 2013 one can observe the seasonal evolution of the investments in advertising on each communication environment, with maximum values recorded in July, for online environments radio and

press. In this period the military higher education institutions organize and conduct the admission examination.

High values of the investments in advertising have been recorded also in November, when military higher education institutions, after the opening of a new academic year, start a new campaign to promote their educational offer to the public consuming educational services.

Regarding the volumes invested in advertising on each environment monitored by Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit in 2013, the press amounted about 38% of total volumes, the online environment 21%, radio communications 31%, and OOH (out-of-home) advertising 10%.

Figure 4. Advertising in 2013 depending on means of communications



(Source: Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit)

Concerning the press, Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit states that the publication that drew the greatest amount of advertising from the advertisers in 2012 was *The Financial Newspaper (Ziarul Financiar)*. The first 10 publications regarding the volume of advertising can be analyzed in the table below. These publications have drawn together about 31% of the total amount of advertising found in the press.

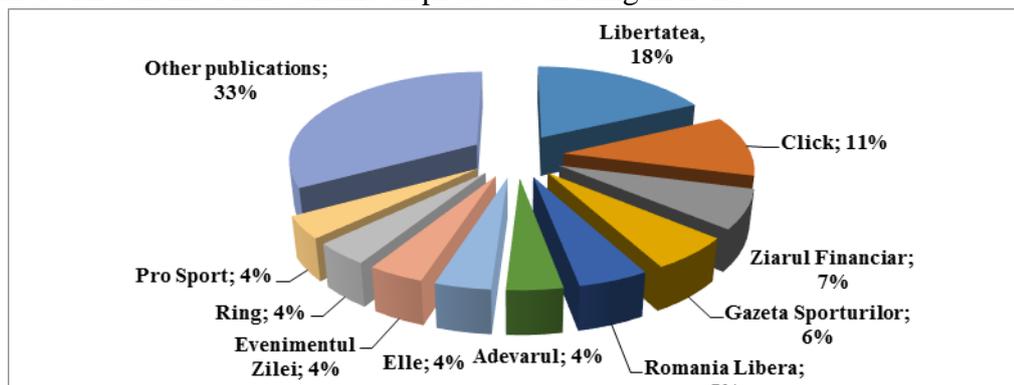
Table 1. The distribution volume of press advertising in 2012

Publication	Amount invested EUR	Amount invested %
ZIARUL FINANCIAR	9.130.768	5,46%
GAZETA SPORTURILOR	6.904.082	4,13%
ADEVARUL - EDITIE NATIONALA	6.030.052	3,60%
CLICK	5.500.470	3,29%
LIBERTATEA - EDITIE NATIONALA	5.497.480	3,29%
ROMANIA LIBERA	4.946.135	2,96%
PRO SPORT	3.392.365	2,03%
EVENIMENTUL ZILEI - EDITIE NATIONALA	3.308.174	1,98%
JURNALUL NATIONAL	3.294.203	1,97%
ELLE	3.172.201	1,90%
OTHER PUBLICATIONS	116.145.833	69,41%

(Source: Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit)

For 2013, the same source, Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit, concerning the press, ranks first the newspaper *Libertatea*, as the publication that drew the greatest amount of advertising from customers. Compared with 2012, in 2013, the newspaper called *Libertatea*, along with its additional publications reported an increase of 183% in advertising investments.

Graphically, the distribution volume of advertising in press, in 2013, is as follows:
Figure 5. The distribution volume of press advertising in 2013



(Source: Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit)

Regarding the radio advertising in 2012, the advertising distribution volume drawn by the most important eight radio stations in the country is as follows:

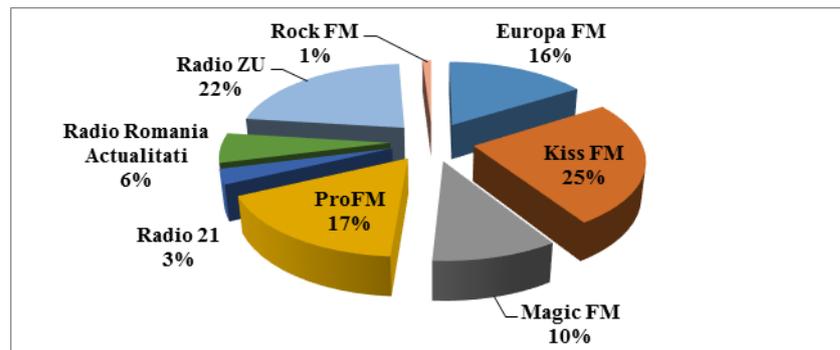
Table 2. The distribution volume of radio advertising in 2012

Radio stations	Amount invested (EUR)	Amount invested (%)
KISS FM	26.749.407	31,34%
RADIO ZU	21.863.025	25,61%
EUROPA FM	11.535.903	13,52%
PROFM	11.424.986	13,39%
MAGIC FM	7.188.833	8,42%
RADIO ROMANIA ACTUALITATI	3.573.971	4,19%
RADIO 21	1.552.208	1,82%
ROCK FM	1.466.782	1,72%

(Source: Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit)

In 2013, all radio stations reported an increase concerning the advertising volume; *Radio 21* and *Romania Actualitati* doubled their advertising volumes, but *KissFM* remains the radio station that drew the biggest advertising volume.

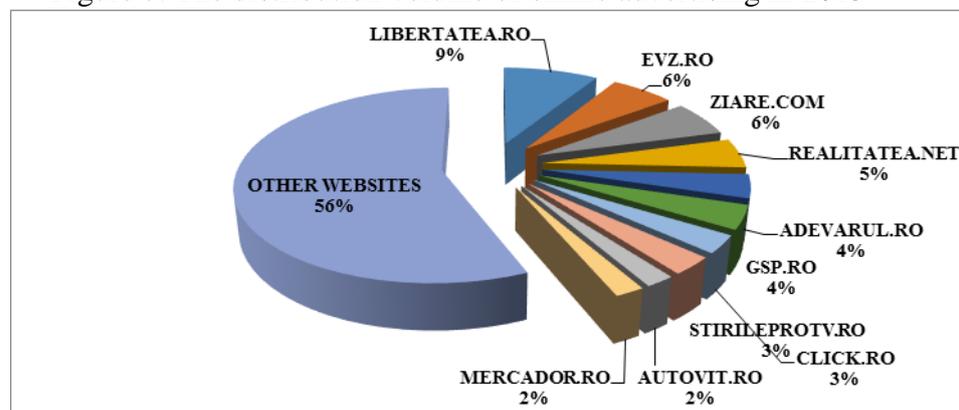
Figure 6. The distribution volume of radio advertising in 2013



(Source: Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit)

Data presented by Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit in their study for monitoring the advertising investments in the online environment during 2013, indicates that, in case of websites, the first two positions, regarding the advertising volume drawn from the customers, are occupied by *libertatea.ro* and *evz.ro*, followed by *ziare.com* and *realitatea.net*.

Figure 7. The distribution volume of online advertising in 2013



(Source: Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit)

Conclusions

An efficient marketing communication of the military higher education institutions allows potential consumers to choose freely, it inspires them gives them the possibility to accomplish their wishes regarding their studies and professional career.

The conducted research shows that the target audience of the military higher education institutions is represented by young people, boys and girls from the entire country, military or civilian high-schools graduates.

The most effective channels or media for promoting the educational offer of the military higher education institutions are the online environment, written media and radio.

Although the information presented in the external evaluation of the academic quality reports in the military higher education institutions and in the annual reports presented by the rectors show that the communication media used by these institutions are local radio and television stations, local media and the online environment, data provided by the research of the transmission media and the evolution of the advertising consumption registered by

Transmedia Romanian Audit Bureau, recommends the use of media that benefits from a high volume of advertising: written media such as Libertatea newspaper-18% of all advertising space in 2013 and the Ziarul Financiar newspaper-9.130.768 EUR-consumed advertising space in 2012, Radio stations such as Kiss FM 26.749.407 EUR-consumed advertising space and the online environment-website Libertatea.ro-9% of all advertising space.

The main reason in this direction is represented by the high number of consumers to whom one can send messages related to the educational offer of the military higher education institutions. On the other hand, the overall audience of communications media and vehicles must be considered in close relation to the demographic profile of the target for these institutions so that, ultimately, marketing communication mix will include those environments or those carriers, which are able to resonate with the target audiences suited to the mission and to the marketing objectives pursued by the military institutions of higher education on the educational services market.

In conclusion, a promotion campaign that aims at promoting the educational offer of the military higher education institutions, the military career and the image of the military educational system should use communications media and vehicles by combining promotion through written media-Libertatea, radio stations-Kiss FM and the online environment-adevarul.ro and by choosing the right timings for delivering messages and capturing the targeted audiences.

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