

Marketing Trends in the Online Retailing of Books in Romania

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The goal of the research presented in this paper is to identify the marketing trends in the online retailing of books on the Romanian market. The main objectives of the research refer to the exploration of the present trends relative to: (i) book reading in Romania; (ii) online purchasing of books in Romania; (iii) types of online retailers on the market of books; (iv) marketing strategies of the different operators involved in the online retailing of books; (v) performance metrics of the companies involved in the online retailing of books. The research design is exploratory. Based on the research findings, recommendations for the future development of the marketing strategies in the online retailing of books in Romania are envisaged. While there are previous studies relative to the book market in this country, the perspective of e-commerce and social media was rather unaddressed. Thus, the distinctive contribution of the paper consists in the fact that it is among the first to approach the marketing trends in the online retailing of books.

Key words: online trends, marketing of books, e-commerce, social media

JEL classification: M30, M31, L81.

1. Introduction

The market of books in Romania is one with high potential of development on medium and long term. At present, this potential is only partially turned into value. The economic and financial crisis left its mark on the book sales and on the activity of the Romanian editors and book retailers.

Electronic commerce is a common denominator of many companies and buyers. Experts define e-commerce as all types of electronic transactions between organizations and stakeholders whether they are financial transactions or exchanges of information or other services (Chaffey, 2012). The fast pace evolution of e-commerce and social media open new horizons for the different categories of stakeholders such as: readers and purchasers of books, traditional bookstores, modern trade formats (such as hypermarkets) involved in book selling, online stores selling books and publishing houses.

The scientific publications on the marketing trends in the online retailing of books in Romania are scarce. The few publications which refer to the book market (Boscaiu, Isaic-Maniu and Voda, 2007; Nastase, 2012) do not study the present marketing strategies applied by the companies that are active in the online retailing. Therefore, getting insights on this topic was both a need and a research opportunity. The contribution of this paper consists in the design and implementation of the exploratory online research relative to the marketing trends in the online retailing of books in Romania.

The goal of the research presented in this paper was to identify the online trends in the marketing of books in Romania. The objectives of the research consisted in the study of the present trends relative to the following aspects: (i) book reading in Romania; (ii) online purchasing of books in Romania; (iii) types of online retailers on the market of books; (iv) marketing strategies of the different operators involved in the online retailing of books; (v) performance metrics of the companies involved in the online retailing of books.

The type of research was exploratory. The choice of this research design was based on the fact that exploratory research is used to generate ideas when hypotheses are vague or ill-defined (Aaker, et al., 2013). Within this research design, the secondary data analysis was selected as one of the methods of conducting exploratory research (Parasuraman, Grewall, and Krishnan, 2007). The range of secondary sources was diverse. Among the main Web sources explored range the sites of the various types of companies present in the online market of books, online services that provide financial information about companies and specialized sites that rank the Web sites of companies according to the number of visitors and number of “Likes” on Facebook.

The present study is mostly an online research. In essence, online research is the use of computer networks, including the Internet, to assist in any phase of the marketing research process (Burns and Bush,

2005). Due to the research goal and objectives of this study, the data gathering was based on Internet sources relative to the online retailing of books.

2. Book reading and online book purchasing in Romania

A survey conducted by TNS Opinion & Social at the request of the European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture revealed that book reading is the second common form of participation in cultural activities (European Commission, 2013). According to this study, 68% of the EU citizens read a book, compared to 72% that watch or listen to a cultural programme on TV or radio.

Within a period of six years, the percentage of EU citizens that read a book at least once per year declined slightly. According to the previous survey of 2007, this percentage was 71% (European Commission, 2007). Several hypothetical factors that determined this downward trend could be the following: the economic and financial crisis at the end of the years 2000; the propensity of young generation towards entertainment based on the new media; the decreasing importance of culture in the society.

Within the European Union, Romanians are among the least engaged in the cultural activity of book reading. Only 51% of respondents read a book in the past 12 months, according to the above mentioned survey of 2013. Thus, Romania ranks below the average registered in the 27 states of the European Union. There is a significant book reading gap between Romania and the countries ranked at the top of the hierarchy (see table 1).

Top three countries	Average	Bottom three countries
Sweden (90%) Netherlands (86%) Denmark (82%)	European Union (68%)	Romania (51%) Greece (50%) Portugal (40%)

Table 1. Top three countries and bottom three countries in the European Union based on the percentage of citizens reading at least a book annually

Source: Based on European Commission, 2013, p. 12.

The reasons why Romanians did not read a book or did not read more often in the last 12 months were the following: (a) lack of time (49% of respondents); (b) lack of interest (22%); (c) limited choice in the area they live (14%); (d) too expensive (3%); (e) lack of information (2%); (f) other reasons (6%) (European Commission, 2013, p. 30). These findings should be considered with care because they could be affected by response bias due to deliberate falsification by respondents. The systematic errors are inherent in survey research (Balan, 2009). Deliberate falsification bias may be due to respondents' wish to appear more intelligent, not to reveal embarrassing information or to conceal personal information.

Book reading is a cultural activity for one out of two Romanians. This state of fact influences the magnitude of book purchases. In 2010, the bookstore chain Diverta estimated an overall value of book sales of 112 million Euros (Cerban and Ghita, 2011). Since 2010, the size of the Romanian book market did not register significant changes. Nevertheless, there is room for expansion whether more Romanians would become interested in reading and whether book purchasing frequency would increase.

According to a gemiusAudience study, 1.4 million Romanian Internet users declare doing online shopping several times per month (Gemius, 2014a). In 2014, a survey based on the CAWI method on a sample of 1200 Romanian Internet users (of 15+ years) revealed that 69% of the Internet Romanian users made online purchases in the past (Gemius, 2014b). According to the same study, out of the e-commerce sites, Romanians use mostly the online stores (83%), but they also use the sites of classified ads (45%), collective discount sites (32%), online price comparison sites (29%), online auction sites (11%). Books, movies and music are bought by 44% of the Romanian Internet users and by 47% of the female Internet users. Only 24% of Romanian Internet users who did not make online purchases in the past would be interested to buy books, movies and music in the future (Gemius, 2014b).

Book reading is a cultural activity for only one of two Romanians. Almost one of two Romanian Internet users purchases books. At the same time, books do not represent a category able to stimulate online purchasing among the Romanian Internet users that have not made an online purchase. This state of the demand indicates the importance of marketing strategies designed to attract new customers and develop customer loyalty on the book market in the online environment.

3. Emergence of diverse types of online retailers on the market of books

The range of marketing channels on the book market in Romania diversified progressively, including also e-commerce. Based on the exploratory research carried out in relation to the market of books in Romania, a visible trend was identified. In essence, the trend consists in the emergence of a wide range of online retailers. The research distinguished the following types of operators in the online retailing of books in Romania:

a) *online bookstores*. These online stores are not supported by an offline store in the development of customer relationships. Examples of online bookstores are *librarie.net*, *libris.ro*, *librariaonline.ro*, *librariileonline.ro*, *book-land.ro*, *okian.ro* etc. *Librarie.net* is one of the first online bookstores that emerged on the Romanian book market. *Okian.ro* is an online bookstore that focuses on imported books.

b) *online stores of bookstore chains*. A prominent example is *librarie.carturesti.ro*. The online bookstore is owned by Carturesti that was founded in Bucharest in the year 2000. The company defines Carturesti as a “concept store that functions like a bookstore and cultural agent intensely involved in the artistic life of Romania and in social responsibility campaigns” (Carturesti, 2015). The product portfolio includes books, ebooks and other product categories such as stationery, tea and accessories, board games etc. The bookstore *libhumanitas.ro* is also integral part of this category. Another example is the online store *cartepedia.ro* that is administered by One Distribution Company that also owns the Librarium Group which comprises several offline bookstores.

c) *online stores of hypermarket chains*. Recently, the modern retail chains of hypermarkets developed online stores for the Romanian consumers. Books have a rather limited presence in these stores. The book offering of the online stores of hypermarkets shows that major modern retail chains decided not to compete frontally (to provide a diverse range of books) with specialized book retailers. For instance, *coradrive.ro* of the hypermarket chain Cora displays only dictionaries and atlases. The range of suppliers is somehow restrained and includes publishing houses such as: Teora, Leda, Lucman, Meteor Press, All, Cartex 2000, Depozitul de carte, Litera etc.

d) *online stores of the publishing houses*. An example is *polirom.ro* that provides buyers direct access to the titles of the publishing house Polirom. The company was founded two decades ago. In March 2015, the online store offered a wide range of about 1,000 ebooks published by Polirom and Cartea Romaneasca.

e) *online stores with diversified product portfolio*. This category includes online retailers with a diversified offering that comprises several product categories besides books. *Elephant.ro* is a representative example of the Romanian online stores that offer a diversified product portfolio. The assortment of this retailer comprises books, clothing items, accessories, perfumes and cosmetics, watches etc. The company started its activity in 2009 as an online bookstore and emerged into a online mall selling ten distinct product lines. *Elefant.ro* has about 600,000 customers, an average daily number of orders of 3,500 and an average order value of 20 euros (Barza, 2014). Books are presented on the site in the same category with media products.

f) *online marketplaces*. In this category, *emag* is a noteworthy representative. In fact, *emag Marketplace* is a system that allows partner companies to display own offers on *emag.ro* (online store owned by the South-African group Naspers). Using a single account, the customer may order products from whatever supplier is present in the system. Deliveries are made directly by the partners of *emag*. The benefits provided to buyers by the *emag Marketplace* are convenience, wide product choice and reliable delivery service. This system is a virtual facilitator. Books are an integral part of the online marketplace. The publishing houses that distribute their products through this channel are: Litera, All, Polirom, Curtea Veche, Nemira, Trei, Rao, Teora, Corint, Leda, Humanitas, Art.

g) *online malls*. In the offline environment, the diversity of retailers that are present in a mall enjoy the advantage of joint attractiveness exerted on customers by the wide offering concentrated under the “same roof”. Convenience, economy of time, wide product choice and comparison possibilities are only some of the benefits sought by customers that visit offline malls. In the online environment, online malls evolved as well. A representative example is *La-Mall.eu* which reunites 300 online stores. In March 2015, visitors of *La-Mall.eu* had the possibility to choose books from the offerings of 18 online market players: online bookstores (like *librarie.net*, *libris.ro*, *okian.ro* etc.); online retailers with

diversified portfolio (like *elefant.ro*); online stores of publishing houses (like *All*, *Curtea Veche*, *Nemira*, *Publica* etc.). The online mall is in fact a supply aggregator that facilitates the relationships between the actual buyers and sellers of books.

h) *sites for online classified ads*. Besides the sellers consisting in organizational players involved in the online market of books, there is a distinct category of book sellers represented mostly by individual persons. They use sites for online classified ads in order to identify buyers for the books they intend to sell. The intense competition for the leading position in the market of online classified ads led to the acquisition of the site *tocmai.ro* by the site *olx.ro* (former site *mercador.ro* until June 2014) and starting with April 2015. At the end of 2014, the two sites totaled 6 million unique monthly visitors, 5 million announcements and revenues of several thousand euros from promotion (Cuncea and Seceleanu, 2015). Part of the media group Naspers, *olx.ro* will very likely become the leader of the sites for online classified ads, according to the number of users that have accounts on the site (after the migration of the accounts from *tocmai.ro* to *olx.ro*).

i) *online auction sites*. The most significant example of online auction site is *okazii.ro*. The platform includes a structured and detailed section called “Bookstore”. There are three distinct sub-sections dedicated to books, respectively: “The most sought”, “Of interest” and “Popular products”. The section of books is presented separately from the music and video games. This approach demonstrates that books are attached higher importance by *okazii.ro*, compared to the sites for classified ads. In 2015, 100,000 euros will be invested by *okazii.ro* (Goaga, 2015). The company aims to maintain its position in the highly competitive online environment, in response to the acquisition of *tocmai.ro* by *olx.ro*. The investment will result in a modern buying experience for users and in support provided to the stores interested to develop a business with *okazii.ro*.

The diversity of market players involved in the online retailing of books provides customers the benefits of a wide choice of sellers and products.

4. Marketing strategy trends in the online retailing of books in Romania

The findings of the exploratory research of the online retailing of books revealed the following trends in the marketing strategies implemented by the different types of market players. The major trends are the following:

a) *clear definition of the targeting strategy*. Instead of addressing the entire market through an undifferentiated strategy, there are online bookstores that focus on a specific segment. *Elefant.ro*, the online store with a diversified product portfolio focuses on the specific needs of families. The online store of the publishing house Gama (*edituragama.ro*) focuses on the children segment. The same segment is targeted by the online bookstore *librariacopiilor.ro*.

b) *differentiation by means of the positioning strategy*. Facing an increasing number of competitors, the online bookstores have to differentiate themselves in the eyes of customers. For example, the online bookstore *CumparaOCarte.ro* is positioned as the first online store from Romania that is exclusively dedicated to the discounted books. The specific feature of *CumparaOCarte.ro* is the fact that the discount for a specific title is limited to one day only. The value proposition consists in one-time chance to buy quality titles at convenient prices. The leading online bookstore *librarie.net* is positioned as the widest book offering. The value proposition of the site *cartepedia.ro* refers to the expert advice provided by experience book vendors to the site visitors and book readers.

c) *higher interest in experiential marketing*. There are market players that integrate the online book selling into a wider experience for book readers. For example, on the site of *book-land.ro*, visitors may obtain information about the conferences dedicated distinctly to high school pupils and university students, as well as the *Cooltural* camps for children that are organized by the Association Bookland.

d) *design of a diversified product mix*. The online bookstores tend to offer more than just books. *Librarie.carturesti.ro* includes in its cultural mix various product categories such as: books, music, movies, stationery, tea and accessories, board games, games and toys, bags, school manuals etc. The diversified portfolio increases the store attractiveness. This approach is also specific to *elephant.ro* which started as an online bookstore and then expanded into various categories.

e) *use of price discounts by every market player*. The price discounts are customary for the online bookstores. They are applied almost on continuous basis, not being limited to specific periods

along the year. There is always a range of titles on discount in every online bookstore. The online retailers cooperate with the publishing houses to provide discounts even as high as 90%.

f) *participation in discounting events.* Most players in the online retailing participate in events organized in both offline and online environment, such as Black Friday.

g) *offering coupons/vouchers to potential customers.* *Libris.ro* provides a coupon for 15% discount to all site visitors who register for the online newsletter. *Cartepedia.ro* provides different types of gift vouchers. This practice is widely spread in the online retailing.

h) *organization of contests.* As sales promotion tool, contests are used by most market players. Examples are the contests designed by the publishing houses that are involved in online retailing such as *litera.ro*, *nemira.ro* and *rao.ro*.

i) *provision of free transportation services.* For specified order values, online stores provide free delivery. For instance, *libris.ro* guarantees free delivery through Posta Romana for orders of more than 50 lei. The same online bookstore provides free transportation through fast courier anywhere in Romania, irrespective of the order value. *Book-land.ro* offers free delivery for the first order.

j) *free access to books.* The publishing house Polirom provides readers with free access to electronic versions of books in its online store. The section is called “Online Library”.

k) *distribution of newsletters.* Each site visitor is invited to register for the online newsletter. This is a strategy to attract and maintain customers by tempting them with the latest arrivals, the most prestigious titles and surprising price promotions.

l) *providing own recommendations of book titles.* The sites of the various market players provide their own recommendations of titles. A direct approach consists in site sections entitled “book titles that received prizes”. An indirect approach is a section of “most popular titles”.

m) *use of blogs.* The market players involved in online retailing created blogs to stimulate the communication with current and potential customers. *Librarie.carturesti.ro* developed a blog with the sections: “Chronicle”, “Events”, “Interviews” and “News”. In its blog, *nemira.ro* initiates the communication with site visitors through short articles and information about the latest titles, news, events, interviews and book reviews. Visitors are invited to leave comments.

n) *creation of Facebook accounts.* Most companies involved in online retailing are present on Facebook. However, few succeeded to gather a significant number of fans and reached a high number of appreciations.

o) *setting-up clubs.* *Litera.ro* created “Modern Teacher’s Club”. This club is an online platform that aims to facilitate the communication among teachers, as well as between teachers, authors of school manuals and the parents of children.

p) *importance granted to recommendations from experts.* *Libhumanitas.ro* has a distinct section entitled “The Recommendations of the Book Vendor”. Similarly, *Cartepedia.ro* presents “The recommendation of the day” made by an experienced person who is book vendor. This site section is entitled “Customized book vendor”/” Our book vendors”.

q) *making buying suggestions.* *Librariile Humanitas* provide additional value to the site visitors by showing for each book, other titles that were bought by the customers who chose that specific book.

r) *stimulation of the readers’ reviews.* An increasing number of market players encourage readers to present their reviews. For example, in the case of each book, *Librariile Humanitas* invite site visitors to write their review.

The findings show strategies involving a mix of traditional and social media tools.

5. Trends in the performance of companies involved in the online retailing of books

Among the **performance metrics** of marketing strategies may range those expressed in absolute and relative terms computed on the basis of the following indicators: **company turnover**, **profit** and **profit margin**. Even if such metrics are the result of all the activities deployed by a company, they also incorporate the effects of the marketing strategies applied in the online environment.

Based on data from *Risco Servicii Finaciare*, the performance metrics that characterize the major players in the online retailing of books in Romania are presented in table 2.

Company name	Year 2013			Year 2013/Year 2010 (%)		
	Turnover (lei)	Profit (lei)	Net profit margin (%)	Turn-over	Profit	Net profit margin
Direct Client Services (company that administers <i>librarie.carturesti.ro</i>)	49,241,103	-43,542	-0.09	177.87	9.47	5.42
Universal Online Promotion (company that administers <i>elefant.ro</i>)	28,802,441	-5,604,540	-19.46	3,895.29	725.55	18.63
Polirom Publishing House	20,506,142	1,746,250	8.52	112.35	188.98	168.38
Librarie.Net (company that administers <i>librarie.net</i>)	15,138,620	979,914	6.47	188.24	98.82	52.47
Librariile Humanitas	14,274,508	-30,960	-0.22	113.09	n.a	n.a
Libris (company that administers <i>libris.ro</i>)	12,213,436	107,110	0.88	244.06	250.34	103.53
One Distribution Company (that administers <i>cartepedia.ro</i>)	9,095,235	-902,959	-9.93	967.68	104.14	10.76
Prems Librexim (company that administers <i>okian.ro</i>)	6,747,972	76,297	1.13	119.77	22.70	18.96
Nemira Publishing House	6,542,004	10,082	0.15	125.97	11.76	9.09
RAO Publishing House	4,477,294	4,906	0.11	284.33	1.43	0.50
All Publishing House	2,361,639	100,710	4.26	70.95	32.08	45.17
MG Net Distribution (company that administers <i>librariaonline.ro</i> and <i>librariileonline.ro</i>)	2,234,279	20,412	0.91	196.34	46.65	23.64
Compania de Librarii Bucuresti	1,539,068	-83,162	-5.40	24.05	n.a	n.a
BookLand Store (company that administers <i>book-land-ro</i>)	1,509,774	108,828	7.21	n.a	n.a	n.a
Editura Economica	389,918	-234,234	-60.07	54.83	n.a	n.a
Curtea Veche Publishing House	65,774	22,243	33.82	926.78	1,82.38	116.78

Table 2. Performance metrics of companies involved in the online retailing of books in Romania

Source: Based on Risco Servicii Financiare, 2015. Note: n.a. Not available.

Information about the turnover and profit generated solely by the online business units of the companies involved in the online retailing of books is not publicly available. The financial data presented in Table 2 reveal several aspects. Firstly, the profit margins in the retailing of books are rather low. Secondly, from the profitability standpoint, the companies that are present only in the online retailing of books (without offline bookstores) do not stand out from the rest of companies that are involved in the online retailing of books (besides being active in the offline book selling). The company Librarie.Net that ranks first in the hierarchy of companies present only in the online retailing of books (without offline bookstores) reached a net profit margin of 6.47% in 2013. In comparison, MG Net Distribution - another company that is present only in the online retailing of books - registered a net profit margin of 0.91%. Thirdly, high turnover is sometimes associated with losses, not with profits. Examples in this respect are Direct Client Services (that administers *librarie.carturesti.ro*) and Universal Online Promotions (that administers *elefant.ro*). These losses are the result of investments in business development. For instance, in the case of *elefant.ro*, the turnover increased about 39 times in the period 2010-2013 with the expansion of the product portfolio.

Another example of **performance metric** related to the marketing strategies of market players in the online retailing may be the **number of unique visitors** attracted by the online stores. The investigation of data provided by *traffic.ro* led to the ranking of major sites involved in the online retailing of books in Romania. The site *traffic.ro* of the company NetBridge was selected based on two reasons. The former consists in the availability of data on free basis (not confidential). The latter is the fact that *traffic.ro* is one of the two major systems of online traffic measurement. At present, *traffic.ro* monitors 51,000 Romanian active sites. In addition, *traffic.ro* is member of the Web Analytics Association, the international body that regulates the monitoring of the online traffic. The other system of online traffic measurement is SATI (The Study of Internet Audience and Traffic) of BRAT (Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit). The SATI data

are available on commercial bases.

The data considered were those relative to the number of unique visitors the sites had in each month of the period December 2014 – February 2015. The data are presented in table 3.

Rank	Site	Number of unique visitors		
		December 2014	January 2015	February 2015
1	www.polirom.ro	75,060	91,539	77,438
2	www.nemira.ro	40,040	35,656	3,606
3	grupulcorint.ro	14,456	18,265	17,641
4	printrecarti.ro	10,209	13,013	13,840
5	editurauniversitaria.ro	7,471	12,526	9,209
6	edituradaksha.ro	3,695	3,953	3,802
7	www.meteorpress.ro	3,624	4,212	4,022
8	www.lumeacartii.ro	2,215	2,943	2,516
9	www.anticariat-academic.ro	2,482	2,914	2,153
10	www.librariilealexandria.ro	2,201	1,958	1,859
11	www.universenciclopedic.ro	1,869	1,999	3,034
12	www.tritonic.ro	1,783	2,315	1,897
13	www.edituradacia.ro	1,226	1,848	1,566
14	www.ideea-europeana.ro	1,157	1,557	1,257
15	www.librarieonline.net	850	984	1,038

Table 3. Ranking of major sites involved in the online retailing of books in Romania, based on the number of unique visitors

Source: Based on data from *traffic.ro*, 2014 and *traffic.ro*, 2015.

The data available on *traffic.ro* reveal several trends. Firstly, the top of the 15 sites dedicated to book retailing that are visited by the highest number of unique visitors is dominated by online stores of publishing houses. The top 15 also includes few online bookstores (*www.printrecarti*, *www.lumeacartii.ro*, *www.librarieonline.net*). Secondly, there are large gaps between the sites included in top 15. Category “A” sites registered more than 20,000 unique visitors per month, while category “B” sites between 10,000 and 20,000 visitors and category “C” below 10,000. Most sites are in the category “C”. This situation has a direct impact on the sales value of those sites. However, these data are very likely affected by systematic errors generated by the incomplete list of sites monitored by *traffic.ro*.

Another **performance metrics** that characterizes the online marketing in the book market is the **emotional involvement** of followers/fans on social networks. For the retailers which are present on Facebook, the number of “Likes” is an indicator of emotional involvement (see table 4). However, the number of “Likes” is only an imperfect performance indicator. Firstly, the qualitative character of this metric is not directly correlated to the actual purchasing behavior. Secondly, the account on Facebook belongs to the corporate retail brand, not only to the business unit involved directly in the online selling of books.

Company	Facebook	“Likes”
Librariile Carturesti	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/Carturesti	221,813
Elefant.ro	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/elefant.ro	183,536
Libris.ro	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/libris.ro	53,041
Editura Nemira	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/ed.nemira	41,049
Okian.ro	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/Okian.ro	37,768
Editura All	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/editura.all	20,911
Librarie.net	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/librarie.net	20,905
Editura RAO	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/rao.editura	16,601
Curtea Veche Publishing	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/CurteaVechePublishing	13,000
BookLand	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/targdecarte	12,415
www.polirom.ro	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/pages/wwwpoliromro	5,504
Cartepedia	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/cartepedia	2,068
Compania de Librarii Bucuresti	https://ro-ro.facebook.com/clbsa	1,182
LibrariaOnline.ro	https://www.facebook.com/librariaonline.ro	649
Librariile Humanitas	https://www.facebook.com/librariilehumanitas	274

Table 4. Ranking of major sites involved in the online retailing of books in Romania, based on the number of “Likes” on Facebook on 27 March 2015

Source: Based on data from Facebook.

The companies involved in the online retailing of books register relatively small numbers of “Likes” on Facebook. Only Librariile Carturesti and elefant.ro succeeded to attract several hundred thousand “Likes”. In fact, the two market players have leading positions from the turnover standpoint. Based on this metric, Carturesti ranks the sixth among the retailers present on the Romanian market, the first being Lidl with more than 1,500,000 “Likes” (Socialbakers, 2015). Possible causes of the low levels of this metric for most players may be a low investment in online marketing on social networks such as Facebook and a lack of interactivity and dynamism in building relationships with the online communities.

As regards the performance metrics relative to the activity of companies involved in the online retailing of books, the exploratory study does not provide indications of direct correlations between the number of unique visitors and the number of “Likes” on Facebook on one side and turnover, respectively net profit margin, on the other side.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Book reading is not a common denominator of all Romanians. In addition, online book purchasing attracts less than half of the Romanians who buy on the Web. Thus, a significant demand potential could be expected to develop in the future, on medium and long term.

The existence of a diversity of types of players shows that online retailing is in the early growth stage and that market is not concentrated. This situation reveals the interest of book retailers (that also have an offline presence) in increasing their competitiveness being where their customers like to be, respectively in social media.

The marketing strategies in the online retailing incorporate both classical strategic tools and modern tools facilitated by the access to social media. Performance metrics are rather incomplete and less relevant.

Several recommendations may be formulated based on the findings of the exploratory research. Firstly, the increased competition in the online retailing of books will require the identification of more sustainable points of differentiation than the range of titles and the book prices/discounts. Secondly, experiential marketing may “pay dividends” to all companies that want to address the more complex needs of customers. The synergetic mix of online and offline tools may enhance readers’ response. Thirdly, the paradigm of online marketing focuses on the communication initiated by customers, rather than by online bookstores. The online communities created by readers will become the norm. Fourthly, the site design should be improved to capture to a higher extent the attention of visitors. Ultimately, innovativeness and creativity in designing the marketing strategies could increase buyer loyalty towards the online bookstores.

The development of more dynamic and interactive marketing strategies in the online retailing of books may open new horizons to both vendors and readers.

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