

BOOKS REACHING READERS IN TIMES OF COVID-19

Alexandra ZBUCHEA

*National University of Political Studies and Public Administration
30A Expozitiei Blvd., Sector 1, 012104, Bucharest, RO
alexandra.zbucnea@facultateademangement.ro*

Adina SANIUTA

*National University of Political Studies and Public Administration
30A Expozitiei Blvd., Sector 1, 012104, Bucharest, RO
adina.saniuta@facultateademangement.ro*

Bogdan HRIB

*National University of Political Studies and Public Administration
30A Expozitiei Blvd., Sector 1, 012104, Bucharest, RO
bogdan.hrib@facultateademangement.ro*

Abstract

The book market was one of the worst impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in Romania, where it already was a small one and concentrated in urban areas. Although e-books, online bookstores, and digital business models have been part of the book market landscape for some time, the COVID-19 pandemic strongly disrupted it. For a while, in many countries, the book market existed only in its digital form. Therefore, the business, marketing, and communicational processes moved online. The present paper analyzes the email marketing strategies adopted in the Romanian book market and is a starting point for future researches of the communication instruments in the book market. The findings suggest that companies are strongly oriented toward sales and branding is a secondary concern.

Keywords

COVID-19 economic crises; email marketing; newsletters; publishing industry; book market; book marketing; promotional strategies; Romania.

Introduction

The book market in Romania has been perhaps the clearest mirror of society and its evolution in the past century. After a difficult journey towards the status of a stable industry in the Interwar period, the communist era and state-owned publishing houses destroyed this sector of activity. There was no competition, no free market, all titles published were subject to censorship. Books were mainly used as propaganda tools and meant to support the cultural and political approaches of the communist system. After 1990, the Romanian book market experienced the same stages as Romania's economy, with periods of crisis and periods of development. Still, a slow increase and diversification of the market are to be observed. The online book market, as well as the e-book market also slowly increases. Overall, the development of the Romanian book market follows global trends, but at a slower pace (Fruntes, 2015).

After the fall of communism, there was a high interest in publishing the works forbidden previously by censorship or the ones which have not even been submitted for scrutiny,

being considered critical to the communist system (Fătu-Tutoveanu, 2010). The next trend of interest was in foreign authors, especially contemporary ones, who were not valued, translated, and published by the communist regime. Slowly, the number of Romanian authors also increased in time.

The book market developed constantly in terms of the number of titles every year. The strongest growth was registered in the field of arts & entertainment, but still, this is the domain the least developed. Literature, social sciences, and applied sciences are the best-represented domains (Ioncica, Marin-Pantelescu, & Popescu, 2010). The number of copies printed for every title, to picture is quite different from the previous one – the figures fluctuate, showing a changing demand and a sensitive consumer. There are no reliable figures on the sales structure, but data suggests that fiction and children's books lead the market (Ioncica, Marin-Pantelescu, & Popescu, 2010).

The consumption of culture and especially of books, placed at the top of the needs pyramid, has always been subject to the first gusts of economic crisis, the last of which in the period 2008-2012 most severely affecting this industrial sector. The present crises, connected mainly with the lock-down associated with the pandemic, greatly affected the Romanian market, at least in the short-term. And yet it is still difficult to estimate where it will lead and how long the crisis generated by the pandemic will last, as Marin Vidrașcu, the director of the Litera publishing house, states, considering that the two crises are difficult to compare and the decrease in sales at this time is only 30%. (Saiu, 2020).

The present paper investigates the email marketing strategies adopted by the main Romanian publishing houses and book shops in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper is structured as follows. The introduction presents a bird's eye view of the Romanian book market evolution. The next section briefly investigates the impact of the pandemic on the Romanian SMEs and their main adapting approaches. The following part focuses on the evolution of the book market during the pandemic. Next, the role of newsletters is presented to offer some additional points of reference in understanding the specific approaches in the Romanian book market. This succinct section is followed by an explorative investigation of the email marketing strategies of the main actors in the market. The final section presents conclusions and associated discussions.

Business response in times of crises – the case of SMEs

Each crisis comes with both challenges and opportunities. It is a good time to accelerate, to embrace change, and to reconsider the way the business is structured. In the following, we shall present an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Romania and how SMEs responded to it. COVID-19 pandemic has led to a decrease in overall business activity, with a negative influence on the operating income, profitability, and liquidity position of SMEs operating in Romania.

The research agency MKOR conducted a study on 243 Romanian companies (67% small enterprises, 22% microenterprises, 8% medium companies, and 3% large ones), which revealed that:

- 91% of the Romanian companies are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a negative medium impact of 10.2% for 2020. At the European level the expected decrease is -7.5%;
- 95% of the companies took survival measures and 90% of them reacted immediately after the start of the emergency rule, at the beginning of March;
- the companies that had already registered decreased incomes by the 1st of March 2020 in comparison to the 1st of March 2019 estimate a decrease for this year too;
- the level of trust in the state institutions is low: 2.7 points from 7;
- 12% of the interviewed companies have decreased the salaries with an average of 37%;
- 47% of the companies are pessimistic with regard to the evolution of their business; these are operating in the most impacted industries: real estate, tourism, transport, services, education, culture, and HoReCa and they expect a negative evolution of 43% for 2020;
- 13% of the companies are reserved, with an expected decrease of 15%; these companies operate in FMCG and financial services;
- contrary to the expectations, 40% of the companies are optimistic and they expect an increase of incomes with 30%; these companies are acting on the pharmaceuticals market, energy industry, agriculture, and healthcare. (MKOR,2020)

The major impact of COVID-19 on the local market is expected to be in short term due to low demand, interruptions in the supply chain, and the low ability of the SMEs to access financial resources. Based on the markets dynamic, the experts of the big four consultancy companies expect a stagnation during the summer and after an evaluation of the impact the crisis had on their businesses, the leaders and their teams will identify new strategies and 2021 will be characterized by a return of the positive evolution of the economy (EY, 2020).

During the lockdown, there appeared an interesting phenomenon that is barely met when we talk about businesses: solidarity between companies, especially for those most affected by the lockdown. Platforms like Marketing for Good, IMMpreună, lots of independent consultants, and also consultancy and lawyer companies have offered knowledge and consultancy for those companies in need. Also, communities of consumers shown solidarity for the small businesses and they promoted their products and services on their social profiles and encouraged their followers to support local entrepreneurs.

Although many companies are affected, the crisis accelerated the digital transformation of lots of SMEs. They moved online not only to promote their goods but also to sell them. Also, due to the interdiction to open the restaurants, the businesses in this sector chose the home delivery, through their platforms and network of couriers or choosing a third-party food delivery platform. For example, a large local restaurant chain launched at the beginning of July 2020 its order and delivery of food platform. The owner stated that the crisis was the most important driver in deciding to add a new function to their business.

In addition, another important outcome of the crisis that is beneficial for the business ecosystem is the start of the digitalizing part of the local and central administration.

Nevertheless, some entrepreneurs are rather optimistic than worried about the future. They are ready to embrace change and to adapt to the new digital economy more than ever. Companies that managed to prepare for the crisis and efficiently organize company

operations at the initial stage of the crisis will primarily consider not cutting the costs, but sustaining and even increasing their revenues. Such companies will be among the first to overcome the current crisis and they will become the main drivers of the economic recovery as well (Prohorovs, 2020).

The Romanian book market in times of the COVID-19 pandemic

The book market was significantly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic all over the world. Not just the closure of book shops was a factor. Some other factors were related to the economic evolution, while others to the personal evolution of readers. From the beginning of the pandemic, McKinsey (2020) has developed a world-wide survey on consumer sentiment and behavior investigating, among other aspects, the expected spending for books/magazines/newspapers in the next two weeks compared to usual. Data shows great variations between the 45 countries in the survey (Romania is not one of them), from a net decrease of 61% in Central America and Carraibe to a 13% increase in Turkey. Besides this country, only Korea registered a net increase, of 3%. These figures are not optimistic for publishers.

The Romanian book market is one of the smallest in Europe and Romanians are not frequent readers (Zbucnea & Hrib, 2019). Nevertheless, data show a slow constant increase of the market (Negrescu, 2018). Most of the books were sold, until 2020, through traditional bookshops, even if an increase of online booksellers has registered. Therefore, the closure of book shops due to the pandemic impacted strongly the book market.

The book market suddenly declined by up to 75%, and the only sell increase only partly covered his gap (Macovicuic, 2020). Some figures even show a decline of 85% (Federația Editorilor Europeni, 2020). In June 2020, online book sales counted for 40% of the market in Romania.

Therefore, the publishing houses have had to adapt very fast and turn completely online in the first stages of the pandemic. Not only sales and promotion moved online but also most processes. In this new context, the publishing houses' newsletters have become the main drivers of customer experience and sales. Reading increased during the pandemic, but this was not exclusively reflected in book sales. More downloads from online libraries are also registered. Overall in Europe, the increase in online sales did not compensate in full the decrease of sales in book shops (Federația Editorilor Europeni, 2020).

In qualitative research developed during the first stage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania consisted of interviews with popular Bookstagrammers and three actors' representative for the book market and the online environment (Hrib, 2020). This study investigates changes in readers' behavior as well as the perception of publishing promotion campaigns. An interesting perspective on the strategies during the pandemic was offered by @jurnaluluneicititoare: "It seems to me that there are three big strategies that I have seen these days. The first is the example that I consider a great "*not like this*" - Cărturești bookstore, which announced an apocalypse and began to mourn its imminent disappearance. Given that we were still assaulted by bad news (...), such a negative message seemed terribly inappropriate. I don't dispute their reality; yes, they

may have to close many bookstores, maybe even all of them. But they could not convey such a fatalistic message in a gloomy period anyway. The second would be "*we adapt and continue*" - here I would include almost all the rest of the authors, publishers, and bookstores, who continued their communication as before, with the difference that they also announced some protection measures taken in the warehouse. (...) The third and last would be the communication style of the Nemira publishing house, which has become extremely proactive & ready to support the #student initiative. They launched podcasts and a series of free materials to support people: children's toys, coloring pages for adults. They moved their reading club online and did so more often. They started sending a super nice newsletter every month, where they don't focus on news and offers. They have invested time & energy to tell us that they are with us and want to make this period as pleasant as possible, even if it means that they will not always talk about their books. They have become even nicer to me after these communication campaigns and it seems to me that they are the ones who have adapted the best. Especially since they had a campaign ready for this period anyway (they had already announced *Books are magic* before the pandemic), which they managed to adapt perfectly". (Hrib, 2020)

The conclusions of the cited study do not show a significant fluctuation in book purchases as a whole, but rather a forced migration to online bookstores. Also, the amount spent on buying a book remained somewhat constant, as did readers' favorite genres. These results are not representative of the book market overall, but for the segment of influencers in the book industry. They might be extrapolated to book lovers, but cautiously.

The role of newsletters

Newsletters bring various types of benefits both for companies and customers (Zbucea & Mocanu, 2013). The added value of email marketing consists mainly of brand development, interactivity, and engagement with customers, information, and, of course, stimulates sales. All these depend both on the content and design of the newsletter, as well as on the marketing strategy associated. The success of email campaigns is determined through various metrics (Zbucea & Mocanu, 2013, pp.308-309). Data analytics, such as website traffic, newsletter generated flows, or even e-book reading behavior could help publishers take more efficient business decisions (Cox, 2019).

One of the main objectives of email marketing is increased sales. Nevertheless, there is no straight connection between the interest of consumers in newsletters and their buying behavior (Zhang, Kumar, & Cosguner, 2017). Also, marketers have to take into consideration that long-term profitability is connected to an optimum number of emails, a higher or lower number determining a negative reaction (Zhang, Kumar, & Cosguner, 2017). Nevertheless, newsletters contribute to increased sales (Sahni, Zou, & Chintagunta, 2016), some studies showing that email marketing has the highest impact on sales among the digital marketing tools (online advertising, SEO, social media, etc.) (Yasmin, Tasneem, & Fatema, 2015, pp.75-76). Also, email marketing has a positive impact on customer loyalty (Merisavo & Raulas, 2004) and customer flows (Negoiță, Purcărea, & Popescu, 2019), which are drivers of sales.

A previous investigation (Zbucnea & Mocanu, 2013) revealed that newsletters were mainly seen as a secondary channel of sales. This was in relation to a loose marketing strategy, both in terms of content and frequency. Newsletters of the most important publishing houses were rather informative and formal. Having this in mind, the next section investigates the email marketing approaches of the main publishing houses and book shops in Romania to understand the evolution of the strategy.

How to keep customers engaged? Focus on the Romanian publishing industry

Methodology

Between April and May 2020, we developed an explorative investigation of the newsletters of the most important and dynamic Romanian publishing houses and book shops to map the way the book market addressed the customers through newsletters during the COVID-19 pandemic. This analysis allows us to understand their strategies and how to deal during times of crises when relationships with customers and restricted to the online environment.

The initial sample consisted of 24 publishing houses and groups (without sub-brands) and 15 book shops. In the case of sub-brands (divisions specialized in children's books or specific genres, for instance), the publishers issue a common newsletter strategy. Both publishing houses and book shops have been selected considering the following criteria: dimensions (Barbu, 2019; Vasiliu, 2018) and dynamics. The latter item was defined by the advertising campaigns run at the end of March and beginning of April on Google (9 publishing houses and 10 book shops) and Facebook (11 publishing houses and 5 book shops). An additional condition was to offer the possibility to subscribe to a newsletter on their websites.

From the 24 publishing houses, 12 confirmed the subscription to the newsletter. In the case of the 15 book shops, 8 confirmed while it was not possible to subscribe online to one of them. Three publishing houses and one book shop asked for additional information on the subscriber (not only name and email address). One publishing house and two book shops presented the confidentiality rules. Five publishing houses and two book shops offered discounts or other benefits for subscription to the newsletters. These figures suggest a certain lack of professionalism in handling newsletter subscriptions and/or some technical deficiencies.

The final sample consisted of 13 publishing houses and six book shops (presented in Table 1). Considering the dimensions (Barbu, 2020) in terms of annual turnover (more than 1 mil. EUR for large, between 1 mil. and 500.000 EUR for medium and less than 500.000 EUR for small), the sample comprises mostly large companies.

Table 1. Structure of the sample

Publishing house	Dimension	Book shop	Dimension
ACT & Politon	Small	Bookidz.ro	small
ART	Large	cartepedia.ro	medium
CarteaCopiilor	Small	Carturesti	large
CH Becks	Medium	Compania de Librarii Bucuresti	Large
Herald	Medium	Libris.ro	Large

Humanitas Fiction	Large	okian.ro	Small
Litera	Large		
Nemira	Large		
Polirom	Large		
Publica	Large		
Rao	Large		
Trei	Large		
Univers Enciclopedic	Medium		

To chart emailing marketing strategies on the Romanian book market, we analyzed the following items: number, frequency, and content. The number of emails is an important factor to shape the attitude, the image, and the behavior of customers. Too rare contacts, as well as too frequent ones, might not lead to positive outcomes for the company. A stable frequency is a sign of a content management strategy, therefore, it is a precondition of successful communication.

Content is a complex item. It mainly refers to the type of messages and how many of them are included. Messages could be informative (announces on new releases or to the company, for instance), commercial (meant to directly stimulate sales), branding (aiming to develop the brand), or customer-oriented (providing added-value for customers, having cultural or educational value, for instance). The content of a newsletter might range from simple (containing one type of messages) to complex (containing several types of messages). The content might be also characterized by short (one message) to long (including a large number of messages, requiring from the readers to scroll down). The tone of voice is another descriptor of the content. It could be defined in several ways, but for less subjective evaluation and considering that the market investigated is not a complex one, we chose only two dimensions: formal and personal approach. Another monitored aspect is the ratio between text and image.

Special attention is given to messages and actions related to the COVID-19 pandemics.

The undergone content analysis has some specific limitations. Besides having a relatively small sample of companies, some of the most dynamic publishing houses are not present. We subscribe to their newsletter, but we have not received it. A second aspect to consider is that maybe some of the newsletters issued by companies went in the spam folder or some specific bulk email, therefore, maybe not all messages entered our corpus. Another limitation is related to the great difficulty to grasp the type of message transmitted, some of them being difficult to be included in the considered categories.

Quantitative aspects of the email marketing strategies in the Romanian book market

The analysis took into consideration two months, April and May. In March the physical book shops were closed. In the second half of March, the companies had the necessary time to adapt and start to implement new email marketing strategies, and maybe also new business strategies. In the middle of May, book shops have been reopened, signaling the start of the return to “normal” business practices.

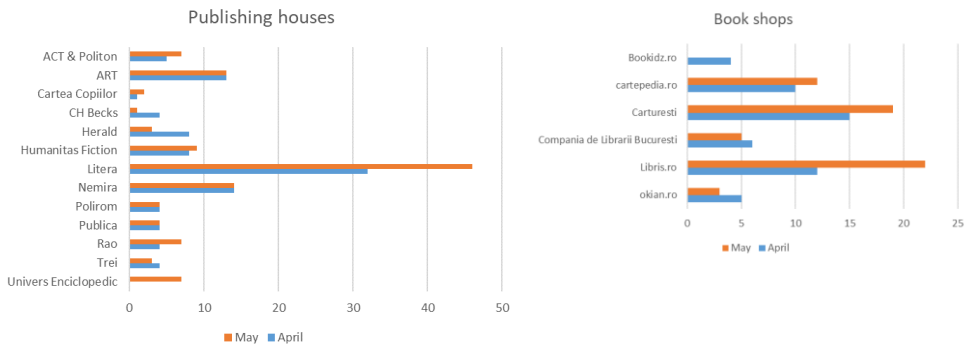


Figure 1. The monthly number of newsletters issued by each company

As Figure 1 shows, only a few companies distribute a more consistent number of emails. The publishing house that stands out in quantitative terms is Litera Publishing House. Systematically, it issues two or even three emails per day to underline important campaigns and stimulate customers to answer. Usually, the second newsletter reminds the readers of the approaching end of a sale campaign.

We can document a small increase in email marketing efforts, observing that in most cases there is a slight increase in the number of messages emailed in May compared to April. The small number of newsletters emailed by most companies suggest that they do not perceive email marketing as a strategic approach, neither to increase sales nor to develop the brand.

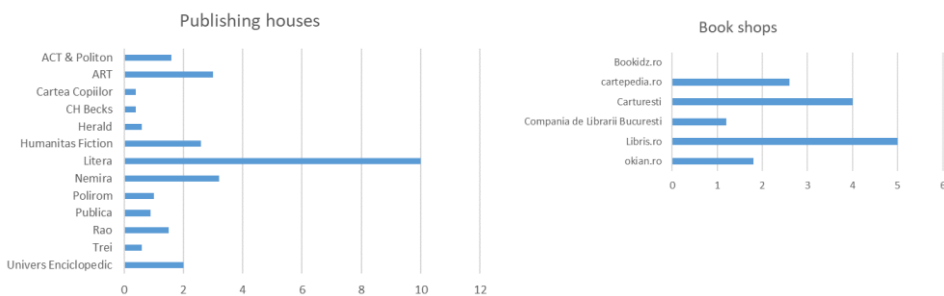


Figure 2. The May weekly frequency

Figure 2 shows that the most “communicative” companies are Litera Publishing House, Libris bookshop, and Carturesti book shop chain. Litera stands out by emailing almost daily newsletters, with many double newsletters per day. Only three companies (Art, UniversEnciclopedic, and Compania de Librarii Bucuresti) issue their newsletters regularly, on the same days of the week. This suggests that newsletters are seen as opportunity tools, they are emailed when needed, in a flexible approach.

It is interesting to compare these findings with an analysis of the email marketing approach undergone by the publishing houses seven years ago (Zbucnea & Mocanu, 2013). Overall data seems similar – only a small number of companies use intensively

newsletters to reach their audience. The greatest change in the approach along the years has been registered by Litera Publishing House.

Content of the email marketing strategies in the Romanian book market

The content analysis determines a clearer image of how newsletters have been used by publishers and booksellers to survive and even thrive during the COVID-19 pandemic. By far, the most frequent message of the newsletters has been "sales" (almost 85% of the newsletters presented some forms of promotional offers).

Analyzing the content of newsletters is a difficult task in terms of placing the message to a category: informative, customer-centric, etc. Obviously, the ultimate aim of companies is to increase sales, therefore, commercial. For instance, many newsletters simply present new releases or book covers, but simultaneously offer a discount. Reading recommendations are meant to increase sales for those books/authors. Some publishers would "present" books, while others would "recommend" them. In the first case, the approach is more distant, impersonal, while in the second situation the customer seems to be put in the center of the communication process, added-value for the customer being sought. Having this in mind, the results in Table 3 should be considered in somewhat relative terms.

Table 2. Type of content

	Informative	commercial	branding	customer-oriented
Publishing houses				
ACT & Politon	10	2	1	
ART	4	6	7	17
CarteaCopiilor	4	2		
CH Becks	1	4		
Herald	4	7	3	2
Humanitas Fiction	15	3	2	4
Litera	2	68	15	6
Nemira	4	22	6	4
Polirom	2	8		2
Publica	1	6	2	1
Rao	4	10		5
Trei	3	3	2	1
UniversEnciclopedic	1	6		1
Book shops				
Bookidz.ro	1	3		
cartepedia.ro	2	23	2	1
Carturesti	3	33	8	4
Compania de Librarii Bucuresti	6	6		3
Libris.ro		31	7	3
okian.ro		8		

The study reveals that in the past 7 years the email marketing strategies of the Romanian publishing houses have become more complex, but the basic approaches did not evolve significantly (Zbucea & Mocanu, 2013). Nevertheless, more attention is given to offering additional value to the customers. The main aim of newsletters is primarily commercial. It seems that companies operating in the Romanian book market do not understand the branding opportunities of the newsletter.

As expected, companies with more intense communication also have the most complex one, combining various types of messages, having a more personal approach to the tone of voice. In most cases, companies include several messages (book presentation, news, discounts, or promotional campaigns, etc.), therefore, the emails tend to be long and include both images and texts. Among the longest emails are those of the ART publishing group which includes recommendations and news associated with all the publishing houses included, as well as updates on various campaigns and projects, such as activities for children, "Pauza de citit / The reading break", etc. The Litera newsletters are also long, containing in many cases several promotions. At the opposite approach is the Okian book shop – its newsletter contains only one visual with a general promotion, leading to the website of the company.

Another aspect we investigated is the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic inside the newsletter. We had expected frequent mentions and reactions to the pandemic, of great concern both for the book market and for the society. Nevertheless, in most cases, the mentions are in low number and superficial. There is a general presence of #stayhome hashtag, but in most cases, it is under a suggested general umbrella: "since you stay home, read more". Figure 3 presents some of the campaign proposed in this context.



Figure 3. Promotions contextualized to COVID-19 pandemic

A more complex campaign was developed by Cărturești. The Book shop encouraged parents to browse (and buy) the offer of books, games, and other items that would help readers go through the pandemic (Figure 4).

carturesti.ro Contactează-ne Despre noi Librăriile noastre

Cum lucrezi cu copilul acasă?

Kit de supraviețuire pentru părinți și copii

Când locul de joacă și biroul se suprapun nu pentru că așa vrei tu, ci pentru că nu se poate altfel, când lecțiile la joacă, la concert, la teatru sau la film sunt limitate, când nu mai ai parte nici măcar de meciuri de fotbal în weekend, noi te putem ajuta. E adevărat că nu-ți putem livra răbdarea de care tu și picuți aveți atâtă nevoie zilele astea, dar îți putem livra rapid câteva unelte de petrecut timpul împreună, câteva instrumente foarte utile de alungat plictiseala sau de ținut copilul ocupat cu folos până termină videoconferința pe care tocmai ai început-o.

Figure 4. Campaign to stimulate sales

Some publishing houses presented the changes in their activity, some related to the office processes, some others related to the distribution system meant to ensure the safety of the readers. But these have been rare messages. For instance, Nemira included at the end of its newsletter such a visual (Figure 5).

STĂM ACASĂ ȘI CITIM!

NOI NE LUĂM TOATE MĂSURILE NECESARE SA ÎTI TRIMITEM CĂRȚILE ÎN SIGURANȚĂ

- DEPOZITUL NEMIRA E DEZINFECTAT ÎN FIECARE ZI
- COLEGII ÎȘI IAU TOATE MĂSURILE DE IGIENĂ ȘI FOLOSESC MĂNUȘI ȘI MĂȘTI DE PROTECȚIE
- CĂRȚILE SUNT AMBALATE ÎN ACESTE CONDIȚII DE SIGURANȚĂ ȘI DATE FIRMEI DE CURIERAT CARE ÎȘI IA PROPRILE MĂSURI DE PRECAUȚIE
- CĂRȚILE AJUNG LA TINE AMBALATE

Mulțumim că ești alături de noi și în această perioadă!

Figure 5. Nemira Publishing House - health security measures

Among the more original and consistent approaches, we mention the following:

- Humanitas Fiction presented all new releases in the time of pandemic under the hashtag #Continuăm (we continue);
- Trei Publishing House, which has a consistent series of psychology books and psychological thrillers and, organized in partnership with Cărturești book shop and the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Trauma several online psychological workshops (Figure 6);
- Herald Publishing House proposed a series of parenting workshops to help parents and teachers cope with the changes related to the pandemic (Figure 6);



Figure 6. Online workshops to help cope with the COVID-19 pandemic

- ACT & Politon offered a free audio-book entitled "Jurnal de vremuri încercate,,";
- Polirom published the book of the Italian writer Paolo Giordano: În vremea contaminării";
- Nemira published an e-book entitled "Izolare", including the experiences of some Romanian authors during the pandemic;
- Arthur Publishing House (part of the ART Publishing Group) started #RefugiulPerfect - a series of imaginary dialogue meant to show the importance of reading and leading to book recommendations;
- Libris developed a cause-related marketing campaign to support hospitals.
- Nemira launched "Books are magic – Terapia prin povești" campaign, probably the most complex initiative of the Romanian publishing houses in times of Covid-19, meant to help readers cope with the pandemic.

Even after the reopening of physical book shops, online events continued to be offered in the book market. The number of online book fairs, as well as anniversary days, increased.

Conclusions and discussions

The study shows an increase in the professionalism of the Romanian publishing houses, but still, there is a gap between a few dynamic and strategic editors/ book shops and most companies in the market. Still, the main approach is focused on financial incentive and brand development is not a concern. Differentiation strategies are also scarce. This approach is connected with the perspective of the book industry of the readers. The projected reader profile is a price-driven customer. Almost no other incentive is offered, loyalty approaches not related to financial benefits are also lacking.

Interestingly, the perception of the public of the marketing campaigns of the publishers fit their messages – it is focused on discounts. The same word was highlighted as the main trait of the Romanian publishers in qualitative research focused on the Bookstagrammers and other representative actors for the book market and the online environment analyzing the reading behavior (Hrib, 2020). The perception of publishing promotion campaigns was synthesized in the following words: *discounts, sales, offers*. One answer that expresses more precisely the perception of the promotion campaigns is that of @cristianchinabirta: "The only change seemed to me to be the development of campaigns with big promotions, one after the other, which shows some *despair*. That would be the word."

Considering this framework, it would be difficult for Romanian publishers and book shops to develop a credible and appealing brand. We recommend significant changes in marketing approaches, towards a consistent brand design and development.

The promotion campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic succeeded in maintaining a core public, the loyal buyers of some publishing houses / online bookstores. This explains that the presence on the market of the main players remained stable to some degree even if the closure of physical book shops determined radical decreases in sales. The lack of systematic communication of smaller players and their inertia to adapt, along with the lack of physical exposure through large book fairs and book launches, will probably determine in the next few years the concentration of the book market around medium and large players, but also the development of the self-publishing or vanity publishing system.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been also a trigger to consider new ways to market and to develop programs that promote reading and the importance of it. If during the last year we have seen inertia in many sectors as the sales and the positive evolution were organic, now each company should have a plan B to be prepared to face a crisis, and not only economic or financial. The book market can find in this crisis a hook to promote the reading of books as an essential source of knowledge for both individuals and companies.

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