

# Proposition of Strategy for the use of Social Media for the Military Study Programs

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Nikola Prgomet

## Abstract

*This paper deals with the analysis and research of the possibilities of using social networks as a tool for promoting military study programs. By analyzing the situation and social networks, the author reveals the necessity and frequency of using social networks in marketing communication where advertising is the goal, especially when the target public consists of young people. Furthermore, based on the analysis, the author emphasizes the strong need to launch digital marketing of military study programs on suitable social networks, proposes and describes the strategy (mode of operation and management) of this type of promotion. Based on the observed decline of public interest to join the Croatian Armed Forces (CAF), with special emphasis on military study programs, the importance, and shortcomings of promotion at the Croatian Defense Academy is noticed as a potential area for advancement and growth of the institution. This situation is a result of inefficiency of the system to recognize the importance of digital marketing and give it necessary attention and improvement. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a need to turn to and develop new spheres of marketing within the CAF that have not been developed enough so far - primarily referring to social networks and digital marketing.*

## Key words

*Strategy, social networks, digital marketing, advertising military study programs, Croatian Defense Academy, alluring personnel, military study programs*

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## **Introduction**

Social networks have become a necessary part of almost all youth in modern times and are used by billions of people around the world, quickly becoming one of the key applications of our time. Globally, it is estimated that the total number of social media users will increase to 3.29 billion users in 2022, which will amount to 42.3% of the world's population (Appel & Coworkers, 2020). Given the huge pool of potential audience which spends several hours a day using social media, it comes as no surprise that many companies, including colleges around the world, have embraced social media as a core element of their marketing plan.

In academia, social media has also been accepted, and extensive research has been conducted on social media marketing and related topics (Appel & Coworkers, 2020).

Social media is widely understood as an effective mechanism that contributes to a company's marketing goals and strategy; especially in aspects related to user involvement, user relations management and communication. For example, from the perspective of national governing bodies, social media can strategically improve two-way communication between the organization and the public, and accordingly, connect the public with the organization (Alalwan & Coworkers, 2017).

A great advantage of social media is the ability to analyze users, their opinions, and experiences (Jadrić & Kovačević, 2018), which opens the possibility of a selected advertising process exclusively towards the target public. That in turn provides an effective and efficient way of advertising entirely addressed to the target public. For this reason, the price, compared to traditional marketing, is lower while efficiency increases (Yasmin & Coworkers, 2015).

Many studies have shown that most social media users are current or future students. Therefore, social media is a key marketing tool for educational institutions (Jadrić & Kovačević, 2018).

Because of all the above mentioned, it is crucial that the Croatian Armed Forces (CAF) recognize the importance of social media and integrate it as one of the core elements of promotion, marketing and communication - if they want to remain relevant, compete successfully in the labor market, and attract the required new staff.

### **Situation analysis**

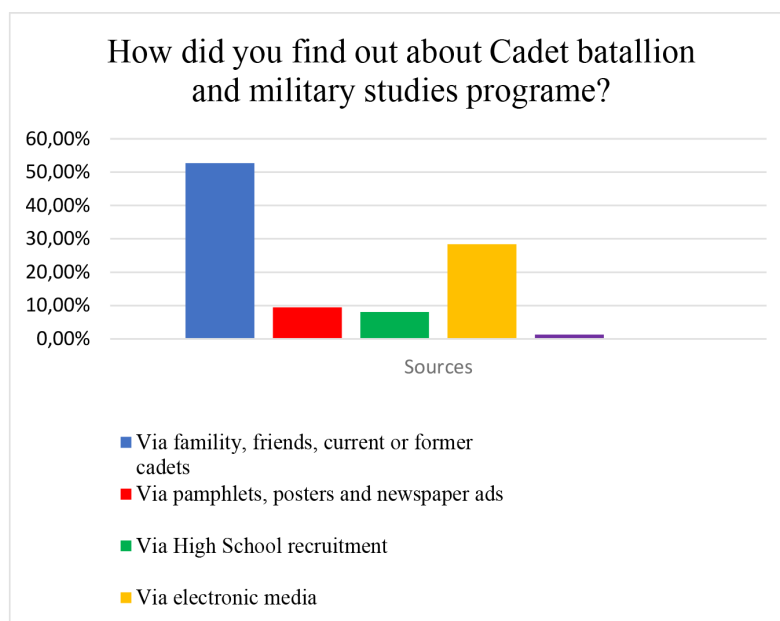
Based on the observed decline of public interest to join the CAF, and with special emphasis on military study programs, a situation analysis was conducted to understand in detail the possible challenges and benefits of this strategy. The analysis was performed using the SWOT method which utilizes 4 qualitative factors in the analytical analysis. SWOT strives to show the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a particular situation with the intention of defining the best strategy to compete in the market. Moreover, a survey was conducted with the 19th Cadet Class to gain a better insight into the situation from the perspective of newly admitted military personnel.

### ***Questionnaire***

Questionnaire was conducted with the 19th Cadet Class, establishing channels of information about military study programs. The population consisted of 72 cadets, aged from 1999 to 2003 (22 to 18 years of age), 16 of them (22.2 %) were female and 5 of them were enrolled in the Military Engineering study program (ME), and 11 in Military Leadership and Management study program (ML&M), 56 (77.8%) were male (22 of them were enrolled in ME and 34 in ML&M). As shown in Table 1, the survey shows that as many as 52.7% of cadets found out about military study programs directly from their family, friends, current or former cadets, 28.4 % through few and outdated profiles, advertising, and websites on digital media.

Only 9.5% of cadets found out about military study programs through promotional, advertising and informational content, such as leaflets, posters, and newspaper ads, which are currently the focus of the promotion of military study programs at the Croatian Defense Academy (CDA)<sup>2</sup> and on which the entire advertising budget is spent<sup>3</sup>. This directly expresses the (lack of) quality of this type of advertising. Only 8.1% of current cadets found out about military study programs from active duty military personnel during rare and short promotional activities in high schools, which were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and consequently led to the inability to go to school in recent years. The other 1.3% learned about military study programs from other sources. Consequently, the enrollment quota for ME study program of 70 study places remained 61,4% unfilled.

Table 2. Bar chart of survey results.



2 The 2021 Military Personnel Recruitment Plan

3 The 2021 Military Personnel Recruitment Plan

**Table 1. SWOT situation analysis.**

Internal factors	
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social networks are the center of communication among new generations and are predominantly used by members of our targeted public.</li> <li>2. With the use of social networks, the cost of advertising decreases significantly, while the reach and efficiency multiplies.</li> <li>3. The ability to analyze users, their opinions and experiences allows precise selection and targeting of public with ads.</li> <li>4. Social networks would bring closer and inform the public about the officer calling and cadet values, which would further boost confidence in the military institution.</li> <li>5. The possibility of uninterrupted application of promotional activities amid the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Non-existence of PR Department of the Cadet Battalion.</li> <li>2. Risk of poor management.</li> <li>3. Lack of interest among personnel for the implementation of digital advertising.</li> <li>4. Inefficiency of the system to recognize the importance of digital advertising and provide it with necessary attention and improvement.</li> </ol>
External factors	
POSSIBILITIES	THREATS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Economical and effective promotion of military studies to the public.</li> <li>2. Influencing and reaching a large number of social media users.</li> <li>3. Possibility of specifying and directing the promotion toward the desired target public, resources are not spent on promotion toward the undesired group.</li> <li>4. Promoting and improving the image and brand of military study programs.</li> <li>6. Informing the public about tenders, qualifications and standards required to enter the cadet service.</li> <li>7. Introducing the public with the workings, activities, perks, and progress of military studies.</li> <li>8. Promoting the values of CAF.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Exposure and vulnerability to security risks (cyber target).</li> <li>2. Superior engagement of the competition (other study programs) that will attract (distract) enrollees.</li> <li>3. Perception of the frivolity of social networks.</li> <li>4. Lack of results.</li> </ol>

## ***SWOT analysis***

As shown in Table 2, the strengths and opportunities for the implementation of this Strategy are relatively large in relation to threats and weaknesses. It can be seen in Table 1 that the current situation does not meet the advertising standards for quality attraction of future CAF officers. The engagement and image of competition, e.g. other faculties and colleges (such as the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing) distracts potential candidates who are not sufficiently informed about relatively new and specific military study programs. Social networks offer a wide range of opportunities that are suitable for the CAF at the level of attracting, promoting, informing the public and building the positive image of the CAF. Based on this analysis, there is a clear need to launch digital marketing on social networks, to pay more attention and allocate resources to the promotion and marketing of the entire CAF with an emphasis on military study programs.

## **Communication goals**

Communication goals are achieved in accordance with a clearly defined vision and mission from which they arise.

### ***Vision***

Promoting and branding military study programs in building competent officers of the Armed Forces through a comprehensive approach that combines challenging education in the field of military skills and realistic training that is competitive at the global level and recognized as the state-of-the-art within the Republic of Croatia and abroad.

### ***Mission***

Digital advertising seeks to inform, influence, and engage the target audience through social networks using the content that conveys the values of cadets and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia in order to recruit

personnel, promote and brand military study programs as state-of-the-art and competent study programs in a modern and efficient way.

### *S.M.A.R.T. goals*

**Specific.** Gaining followers on social networks that are used to publish interesting, entertaining, and informative content of cadet everyday life and training, through which we can inform, advertise, and promote military study programs and influence the target audience to transfer values, improve public image of the CAF and recruit candidates to military study programs that are reporting a long-term decline of interest.

**Measurable and Achievable.** Increase awareness of the public and target audience of military study programs, conscription, and the Armed Forces, and increase the application for enrollment into the cadet service by at least 25% in comparison to previous years.

**Relevant.** Advertising and the use of social networks to improve the public image. Informing and branding have never been more relevant than today when all serious organizations abandon outdated and ineffective traditional ways of advertising and turn to modern social networks as the primary way of advertising and promotion. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a need to turn to and develop new areas of marketing within the CAF that have not been sufficiently developed so far.

**Time-bound.** It is necessary to open the profiles and start online advertising as soon as possible, and to analyze the fulfillment of goals and efficiency each year after the enrollment of the new cadet class.

### **Target audience**

According to the 2021 Military Personnel Recruitment Plan, a target audience intended for advertising and recruitment to military study program involves both male and female candidates between the age of 13 to 22 who are located on the territory of the Republic of Croatia and nurture patriotic values. It is

desirable that candidates possess military and sports-like relevant interests and hobbies. Furthermore, the promotion is aimed at gymnasium high school graduates, but also at schools with deficient professional occupations (technical vocational high schools) that provide sufficient prior knowledge for successful enrollment in military study programs.

### **Social network analysis**

Today we cannot ignore the necessity and wide application of social networks in marketing communication in which the main goal is advertising and improved internal communication, especially when it comes to the target audience consisting of young people<sup>4</sup> (Jadrić & Kovačević, 2018). The exceptional importance of using social media for the purpose of promotion and everyday communication has also been recognized by the academia, to which they are now an indispensable part of the marketing plan. Ultimately, it is the students who are at the forefront of adopting new communication technologies<sup>5</sup> (Quan-Haase, 2007.). This is the reason why social networks, as an example of new technologies, have been most accepted by generations of high school and university students<sup>6</sup> (Jadrić & Kovačević, 2018). Social media are becoming a central communication tool, especially among the younger generations who use them to express views and opinions, share events and create groups with similar interests (Jadrić & Kovačević, 2018).

Therefore, we analyze the following most popular social networks to determine the most favorable for the promotion of military study programs:

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4 Korištenje društvenih mreža u marketinškoj komunikaciji hrvatskih visokih učilišta, 2018.

5 University Students' Local And Distant Social Ties: Using and integrating modes of communication on campus, 2007.

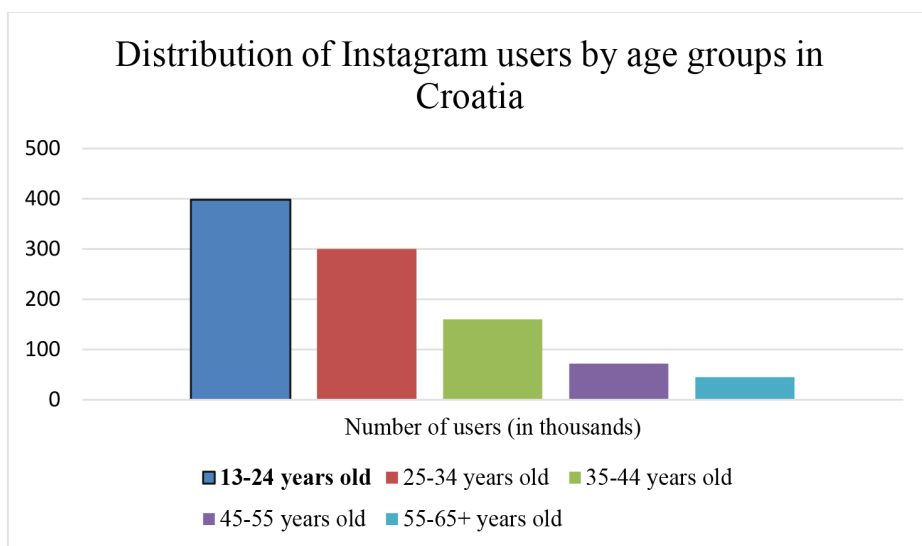
6 Korištenje društvenih mreža u marketinškoj komunikaciji hrvatskih visokih učilišta, 2018.



## Instagram

Instagram is currently the most popular network for editing photos and videos<sup>7</sup> (Arbona, 2018.). According to Instagram's available data from 2018, more than 970,000 Croats use Instagram, but this number is growing rapidly day by day. 520,000 (54%) of them are women and 450,000 (46%) of them are men. The most common age group is 13-24 years of age - as many as 398,000 (41%) users<sup>8</sup> (Arbona, 2018.), which largely coincides with the target audience for military study programs. The distribution by age groups can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Distribution of Instagram users by age groups in Croatia (Arbona, 2018)



<sup>7</sup> <https://www.arbona.hr/blog/drustveni-marketing/infografika-koliko-je-instagram-korisnika-u-hrvatskoj/722>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.arbona.hr/blog/drustveni-marketing/infografika-koliko-je-instagram-korisnika-u-hrvatskoj/722>

The possibilities, advantages and usefulness of Instagram as a platform for interaction and informing the public in an attractive, relevant and modern way was recognized by the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Croatia, which has its own Instagram profile called „ministarstvoobrane“ (<https://instagram.com/ministarstvoobrane>). The shortcomings of the Instagram page “ministarstvoobrane” is its specific name and posts that attract and are aimed mostly at people who are already members of the CAF.

Instagram, as the most relevant and practical social network extremely popular among young people in Croatia, is ideal for promoting military study programs. It is imperative to consider the possibility of establishing an Instagram profile.

### *Facebook*

Currently, Facebook is the largest social network in Croatia. It is used not only by individuals, but by organizations too, to convey their messages<sup>9</sup> (Arbona, 2019.). This is the most widely used social network, which is proven by the total number of active users in Croatia - it reached as many as 1,900,000 users (900,000 of them are women and 930,000 are men). With regard to age, the most active users in Croatia are aged 13 to 34 (1,102.000. 58%). Most are teenagers and students (30%) who are precisely the target population for enrollment in military study programs, while the lowest number of users is in the oldest age group - over 55 years of age (8%)<sup>10</sup> (Arbona, 2019.). The distribution by age groups can be seen in Figure 4.

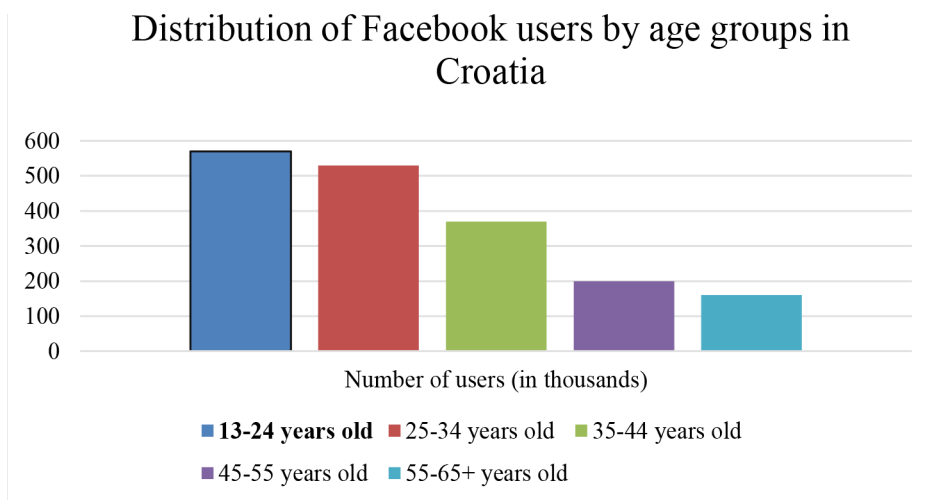
Facebook, as the most widespread social network among young people in Croatia, is suitable for promoting military study programs. However, the aging of users and the gradual loss of relevance of Facebook should be taken into account. The possibility of opening a Facebook profile should be considered.

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9 <https://www.arbona.hr/blog/drustveni-marketing/facebook-i-instagram-u-hrvatskoj-zanimljive-statistike-2019/2832>

10 <https://www.arbona.hr/blog/drustveni-marketing/facebook-i-instagram-u-hrvatskoj-zanimljive-statistike-2019/2832>

Figure 4. Distribution of Facebook users by age groups in Croatia (Arbona, 2019)



## TikTok

The fastest growing and latest social network is TikTok which focuses on sharing short user videos, from genres such as dance, comedy and education lasting from 15 seconds to three minutes. It is most popular among young people aged 10 to 29 which coincides with required target audience. Statistics from September 2020 confirm growth by 75% and having 33 times more users than the competition<sup>11</sup> (Doyle, 2021.).

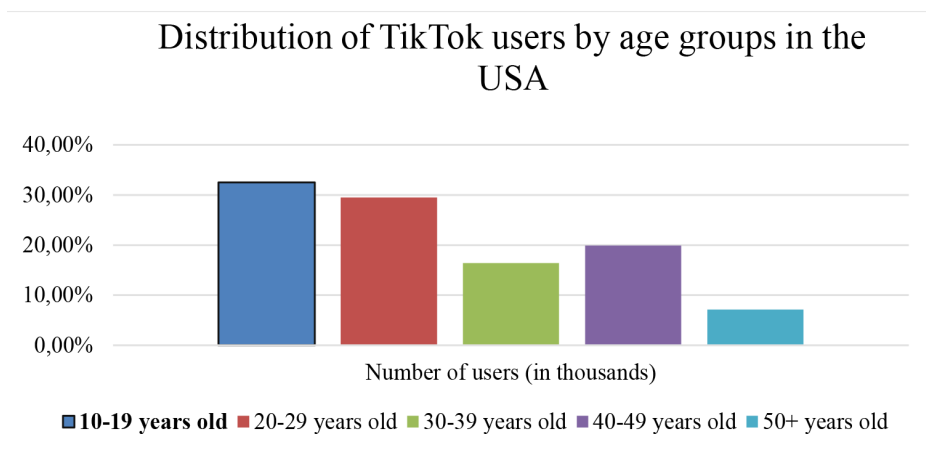
One in six U.S. residents was a regular weekly TikTok user at the time, and in the second quarter of 2020, it was the highest-grossing app on the App Store<sup>12</sup> (Doyle, 2021.). At this time, it is not yet possible to know the number and age distribution of users in Croatia because the statistics are unknown. Advertising tools on this app that provide user demographics are not yet

11 <https://wallaroomedia.com/blog/social-media/tiktok-statistics/>

12 <https://wallaroomedia.com/blog/social-media/tiktok-statistics/>

available. But available official statistics show more than a billion active users a month worldwide. To better understand the distribution of active users of other social platforms: Facebook - 2.9 billion, YouTube - 2.2 billion, Instagram - 1.4 billion, TikTok - 1.0 billion, Snapchat - 500 million, Pinterest - 480 million, Twitter - 397 million<sup>13</sup> (Doyle, 2021.). Distrubution of users by age groups in the USA is can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Distribution of TikTok users by age groups in the USA (Doyle, 2021)



However, it should be borne in mind that TikTok, although the fastest growing and full of potential, has the image of a frivolous social network, which could damage the reputation of the Armed Forces. Also, TikTok is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance whose shareholding is also owned by the Chinese government known for trying to spread its soft power and geopolitical influence through its own companies. Despite its global reputation as a security risk, most cybersecurity experts believe the risk is the same as with other social networks<sup>14</sup> (Johnson, 2021.)

13 <https://wallaroomedia.com/blog/social-media/tiktok-statistics/>

14 <https://www.businessinsider.com/is-tiktok-safe>

## *YouTube*

YouTube is a popular online video sharing service where users can upload, view and rate videos. At the same time, YouTube is the second most visited site on the web, right after Google, and is visited by about 2.2 billion unique active users per month.<sup>15</sup> (Newberry, 2021.). One of the main reasons YouTube manages to maintain its dominant position in the industry is because of its availability. YouTube makes it easy to share your content with a large audience, and it is used by many armed forces and ministries of the world, including the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Croatia, as well as the *Hrvatski vojnik* magazine. However, due to the technical complexity of maintaining the YouTube page and making video content, the current setup of the YouTube page, which is to be managed and edited by cadets without the help of professional director and editors, is not possible, but it is imperative to consider its establishment in the future.

In conclusion, launching profiles on social networks by the CAF and CDA would enable to reach a completely new audience of hundreds of thousands, even millions of users. These profiles offer the most advanced, interactive, and relevant way to promote and inform the public by using low resources and paying small costs.

According to the presented data, the most represented age group of users completely coincides with the target audience for recruitment to the cadet service and enrollment in military study programs. In addition, each of these social networks provides a modern algorithm for adjusting and directing ads to a specific target audience according to the desired parameters (e.g. interests, opinions, occupations, gender, age, etc.).

On the other hand, users of traditional forms of media and advertising are not the desired age group suitable for advertising. Digital marketing is used by various armies of the world, even those in the region, with incredible success. The CAF must adopt modern ways of promoting if they want to attract new generations of soldiers and cadets who are increasingly tied, more and more exclusively to digital media.

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15 <https://blog.hootsuite.com/youtube-stats-marketers/>

Therefore, based on all that has been said so far, the most appropriate course of action is to launch an Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook page with the priority of opening an Instagram page under the unique name which would be used across all platforms for easier recognition, accessibility and visibility.

## **Social network management**

Social networks such as Instagram and Facebook would primarily serve as a tool to promote and inform the public and target audience about military and patriotic values, benefits, advantages, and opportunities of military study programs, and would give a direct and attractive insight into the work and life of cadets and their challenging academic and training program.

### *Promotion implementers*

Due to the non-existence of the PR department of the Cadet Battalion, the Cadet Council and cadets showed the initiative to organize and maintain social networks. By establishing a Promotional Task Group within the Cadet Council, cadets who pass all the required training and security checks (defined below) will be in charge of maintaining social networks by committing to:

- promote the Cadet Battalion and military study programs,
- collect and conceptualize content that will be subject to all the necessary controls prior to publication,
- regular publication of authorized content, images and videos showing the unique and special program of training and education of future officers through the KADET program,
- interact and inform users on the issues of cadet service and military study programs,
- put an emphasis on the promotion of scarce military study programs.

All activities on social networks must be carried out in accordance with the Act on Service in the Croatian Armed Forces, the Ordinance on Service and the Ethic Code of Conduct of Military Personnel in the CAF, the most important of which is the following:

- to protect the honor and reputation of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia,
- to represent and not deviate from the attitudes and values of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia,
- controlled and approved distribution of information in public space,
- to act solely in accordance with orders and approving requests in accordance with the given orders.

### *Operationalization*

Content should be published on social networks regularly and continuously, but the number of publications on a weekly or monthly basis may vary depending on activities, training phases, tasks, and all events conducted by the Cadet Battalion, and would be included in the long-term and short-term publication plan. The number of publications and advertisements on social networks would be increased after the public call for admission to the cadet service, by accepting applications for military study programs on the web page <https://www.postani-student.hr>, at the beginning of each school and academic year, at other times crucial for high education enrollment, or during other appropriate events organized to promote and inform the public and target audience about military study programs.

The social media posts should contain various content, images, and videos that in an attractive, modern, and realistic way show all the activities and tasks of cadets and military study programs, from academic, training, protocolary, humanitarian, sports, etc. In case it would be impossible to establish a professional PR Department or a team that would manage the promotion in cooperation with the cadets, content intended to be published on social networks would be collected primarily from the Cadet Photography Task Group that would photograph and produce the required content. Also, the content can be borrowed from the Croatian Defense Academy photographers or taken from the existing photo database of the *Hrvatski vojniki* magazine with their consent and approval.

All collected content planned for publication would be included in the long-term and short-term publication plan, and sent for approval, refinement,

and correction to the PR Department and Intelligence Section (POPIS) of the CDA. It is necessary to assign and appoint an active duty military officer for promotion affairs who would be in charge of close cooperation with cadets through directing, suggesting and approving content with the aim of unhindered cooperation between cadets and the command structure. Approved content would be posted on social media in a timely manner in accordance with the publication plan and schedule.

The social networks Instagram and Facebook also offer a sophisticated advertising algorithm at an affordable price, which is adjustable to many parameters for selecting the desired target audience and targeted advertising. Social networks of military study programs would use these tools for most effective advertising.

### ***Qualification program***

The introduction of a training program for promoters is necessary to provide accurate and precise information to inform the public, and to acquaint cadets with the duties and responsibilities of promoters. Each cadet involved in promotion, editing or maintenance of social networks would have to undergo a specialized course together with an intelligence officer and a PR Department to gain the appropriate skills and knowledge needed to perform the duties of a social media manager. This type of training would define all the authorities, duties, limitations, and conditions for advertising and running the profiles on social networks.

Also, as part of better and more professional performance of promotional duties, cadet social media leaders should take courses in photo editing, graphic design, web design and / or digital marketing in order to establish better, more effective and professional management of social networks. The courses could also be developed in cooperation with other universities.

### **Required resources**

For successful implementation of this strategy, as well as for long-term maintenance and advertising on social networks, it would be vital to establish a separate and professional PR Department that would conduct promotion



in cooperation with cadets, but at the very least, an official IT equipment is needed, including official laptops, servers and mobile devices that would serve exclusively to prepare content and maintain social networks in order to prevent security threats and data leaks. Furthermore, it is necessary to create a separate email and web addresses for profiles on social networks. Moreover, purchase of cameras for the Photography Task Group is crucial so that the quality of the publications is on a professional level. A budget is also needed for paid advertisements on the social networks Instagram and Facebook in accordance with the Armed Forces budget.

A prerequisite for quality promotion are well-trained promoters, so it is considered desirable to send cadets to the courses already mentioned. By investing in cadets as future officers, we train versatile members of the Armed Forces who will have the opportunity to act throughout the CAF system to promote the collective as a whole and create the brand of the Croatian Armed Forces.

## **Conclusion**

Based on this paper, I conclude that the launch of digital marketing through social networks is vital for the very survival and progress of military study programs, if they want to remain competitive and recognized in the plethora of other study programs. Based on the conducted survey, the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the current method of promotion is evident, as well as the urgent need to modernize the channels of communication to the public and target audience. Social networks undoubtedly provide a cheap and very effective solution for informing and attracting new participants to military study programs, whose built-in advertising tools provide an unrivaled service. The analysis of social media has clearly shown that the average demographics of social network users completely overlaps with the desired target audience for recruitment to the Cadet project, but the biggest advantage is the easy possibility of further narrowing the target audience using social media advertising services which offer the best selection algorithm. This algorithm enables the adjustment of all parameters of the target audience, from the exact target age, gender, level of physical fitness

to personal interests, etc. This “selection” of the target audience reduces the cost of advertising because ads are not shown to everyone, but only to the target audience, which entails a lower risk of not meeting academic and psychophysical criteria. The investment in marketing pays off many times over through the quality and work of the individuals we have attracted in this way. Investing in digital advertising is an investment in the future of the Armed Forces which would pay off in a number of ways, from the initial cost-effectiveness to the reduction of opportunity costs.

In addition, social networks provide a unique opportunity to easily and quickly connect with hundreds of thousands of users and share informative content about the life and work of cadets, improving the visibility, reputation, and transparency of the Armed Forces in public.

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### **About the author:**

NIKOLA PRGOMET (nprgomet@unizg.hr) graduated from the Split Maritime High School in 2019. He has been a member of the Croatian Armed Forces since 2019, when he joined the cadet service by enrolling in the Military Leadership and Management study program at the Dr. Franjo Tuđman Croatian Defense Academy. Since December 2021, he has been the Vice President of the Cadet Council, a representative body of cadets, in which he actively participates and develops various projects aimed at improving the quality of military study programs. Prgomet is an exemplary cadet with excellent results in both the academic and training part of military studies. In April 2021 he was awarded for his above-average results in performing training activities and other tasks.