

TRADITIONAL AND MODERN SOURCES OF INFORMATION “SERVING” THE IMAGE OF THE PUBLIC EMPLOYER – A GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *The image of public organizations as employers, including security institutions such as the Polish Army, is an intangible, subjective and changeable aspect, which is shaped, among other things, using modern and traditional communication platforms. The preference of information sources is an important issue in the process of employer branding, as the selection and use of the right sources of information allows to effectively inform target groups, increase the level of knowledge about the attributes of the military as an employer, eliminate misinformation and respond more quickly to image crises. With the above in mind, the purpose of the conducted research was to identify the sources of information about the military used by representatives of three generations operating in the modern labor market, including the search for a relationship between the level of attractiveness of the Polish Army and the sources of information used by the public. The conducted research aimed to show how important it is to know the target groups, their preferences, and needs, in the context of the process of building the image of a public institution as an attractive employer.*

Keywords: image, public employer, information

1. Introduction

The image of an organization as an employer is an area of particular interest not only to organizations from the business community, but also to public institutions, including uniformed services [1]. Security institutions care about the quality of the image is motivated primarily by the link between the image and the sense of security of Poles, showing the relationship of popular public opinion with the attitudes of citizens. The image is subjected to special analysis, and it should be emphasized that it is formed based on information reaching the public – citizens using various communication tools. Knowledge of the sources of information used by the public, which affect the image of security institutions, allows better selection of tools used in employer branding, and used to

promote the attributes of the army and disseminate knowledge about personnel activities, determining the public's sense of attractiveness of the institution as a valuable and desirable employer.

Taking into account both the importance of the Polish Army as a security institution and the role of information sources in the process of shaping the image, the purpose of the conducted research was to identify the sources of information that the public most often uses to enrich their knowledge of an important employer in Poland – the Polish Army. Considering the awareness of the diversity of society in terms of the criterion of generational affiliation, the popularity of individual sources of information among respondents belonging to generations X, Y and Z was verified.

2. Employer Branding of Security Institutions

Security institutions as employers employ almost 2% of Poland's workforce [2], being primarily an attractive place to work for those wishing to fulfill their professional aspirations and pursue a military career, as well as for a whole host of civilian employees for whom the operation of a military unit in their place of residence allows to perform stable and well-paid work. The Polish Army, functioning as an employer in the market, must compete for employees simultaneously with, among others, other uniformed services, as well as private entities that can offer better financial conditions. To win the war for talent [3], the military must take special care of its image as an employer, using a variety of methods, techniques, and tools to influence target groups, i.e. military stakeholders. Even though the term employer branding does not appear in official documents regulating the military's personnel and promotional tasks, all activities that fit into the idea of the concept of employer branding (EB) are implemented in the military. This shows both an awareness of the need to implement activities (such as the creation of an application for soldiers and candidates for service) and to respond to the changes that are taking place in the labor market, among employees who are representatives of different generations, as well as in the environment of the military, viewed as an organization and employer. The need to increase the size of the military, resulting from a number of geopolitical conditions, is associated with the need to devote special attention to employer branding activities, because the level of effectiveness of the implemented activities, including the adequacy of activities to the needs of potential candidates for service, will determine the possibility of the current replenishment of full-time personnel, as well as the achievement of the target state of employment [4].

3. Generations in the Labor Market

Considering the opinion of Haynes and exceeding it concerning the issue of the employer image, changing demographic trends lead to the situation in which in one workspace at least three generations of people could be working alongside each other [5]. The term generation itself means a group of people of similar age or a cohort of persons passing through time that come to share a typical habitus, his and culture, a function of which is to provide them with a collective memory that serves to integrate the cohort over a finite period [6]. Analysing the source literature, it is not easy to find uniformity of views on the time frame determining generational affiliation [7, 8, 9]. Although the timeframe remains a matter of debate, the following ranges can be assumed: generation X are employees born between 1965 and 1980, generation Y are employees born between 1981 and 1997, and generation Z are employees born after 1998. The divergence of views of the representatives from different generations is about workplace preferences, specifics of expected working conditions, the role of work in people's lives, work style, factors motivating people to work, and what is crucial in the context of the article - preferred modes of communication and preferred sources of information.

4. Traditional and Modern Sources of Information

Information is defined as “a transferable intangible good that reduces uncertainty” [10] or as “a factor that reduces the degree of ignorance, enabling a person (...) to have a better knowledge of the environment and to carry out purposeful action more efficiently” [11]. Sources of information, in turn, are the material from which information is drawn to satisfy specific information needs. In a broader sense, sources of information can be documents, people or institutions. Sources of information in the context of the process of shaping the image of the organization as an employer have a special role and are

directly related to the so-called platforms of communication. In the practice of EB activities, a division is used between traditional sources, such as the press, radio, books, television, and modern sources. Modern sources of information have emerged with the development of new technologies and the so-called information society, and include websites, or profiles on social networks, as well as increasingly used applications. Modern communication platforms, on the one hand, are characterized primarily by easy accessibility, but on the other hand by the difficulty of verifying the veracity of the information contained therein, the source of which is sometimes unverified. Getting to know the sources of information from which information is drawn on, for example, potential job candidates about an employer – such as the Polish Army, allows more precise reaching out to target groups of employer branding efforts, and thus deliberately shaping the quality of the image of the employer – a security institution. The multiplicity of information sources and the frequency with which they are used illustrates the importance of communication and information activities, and thus the enormous information needs of

the public, including employees and candidates for service.

5. Research Results

5.1. Research Methodology and Sample Structure

Fulfilling the purpose of the research – that is, to obtain the opinions of Poles on the sources of information they use to expand their knowledge of the Polish Army as an employer – involved the use of a diagnostic survey method implemented using the CAWI technique. The research was conducted on a sample of 384 Poles in 2022. The research included 126 representatives of Generation X, 146 of Generation Y and 112 from Generation Z. The structure of the research sample reflected the structure of the general population by gender, generational affiliation, and province - place of residence.

5.2. Sources of Information in the Opinion of Generations

During the research conducted, both traditional and modern sources of information about the employer, the Polish Army, were analyzed. Table 1 shows the scale of use of each source by the respondents.

Table 1 Sources of information about the army as an employer

Sources of information	Generations		
	Z	Y	X
Polish Army website	41.96	39.04	25.40
Websites of Military Recruitment Centers	16.07	12.33	6.35
Ministry of Defense website	23.21	26.03	19.05
Websites of military universities/schools	16.07	19.18	17.46
Official profiles of the Polish Army and military units on Facebook	22.32	17.81	7.14
Official profiles of the WP and military units on Instagram	17.86	9.59	5.56
Official profiles of the WP and military units on Twitter	8.04	8.22	5.56
TV program wojsko-polskie.pl	12.50	17.12	19.05
Television programs – information	27.68	34.93	44.44
Information obtained from friends and family	28.57	27.40	26.98
Civilian employees or former employees of the Polish Army	14.29	10.96	8.73
Soldiers of the Polish Army or former soldiers	8.04	13.01	11.11

Sources of information	Generations		
	Z	Y	X
Open days of military units	8.93	14.38	10.32
Recruitment fairs	14.29	7.53	7.14
Laws and regulations	16.07	10.27	7.94
Book publications (including historical ones) and magazines	9.82	11.64	16.67
Websites of pro-defense organizations	8.93	11.64	7.14
None of the above	25.00	13.70	19.05

Source: Own research results.

According to the research results, the most common sources of information among representatives of Generation Z were the Polish Army website (41.96%), information obtained from friends and family (28.57%), television programs – information (27.68%), and Ministry of Defense website (23.21%). Considering Generation Y, the representatives declared that they use the Polish Army website (39.04%), Television programs – information (34.93%), information obtained from friends and family (27.404%), and the Ministry of Defence website (26.03%). Different results were obtained while analysing Generation X. To obtain information about the military as an employer the respondents reached for television programs – information (44.44%), information obtained from friends and family (26.98%), Polish Army website (25.40%), Ministry of Defense website and TV program wojsko-polskie.pl (19.05%). Taking into consideration all generations also important, in the opinions of respondents, were the so-called verified sources of information, i.e. information obtained directly from soldiers and former soldiers themselves (10.94%) and current and former military personnel (11.20%). Importantly, 12.76% of respondents stated that book publications and magazines were also sources of information about the military. To obtain information about the military as an employer 11.20% of respondents also reached for laws and regulations and 9.38% drew information from job fairs.

To verify the preferences of representatives of each generation, including men and women, in using traditional as well as modern sources of information, V Cramer and Phi coefficient were calculated, thus identifying statistically significant relationships between nominal variables. The article shows only statistically significant relationships and therefore those for which the p-value was less than 0.05.

Analyzing the sources of information, the research shows that websites were significantly more often used by representatives of generations Y and Z (V Cramer 0.15), information was drawn from official profiles on social networks by Poles aged 18-25 (V Cramer 0.21), while Instagram was mainly a source of information for people aged 26-44 (V Cramer 0.21), and less often for representatives of generation X (V Cramer 0.16). Men were significantly more likely to obtain information about the military as an employer from the television program wojsko-polskie.pl (Phi 0.10). Those aged 18-25 obtained information about the military less often from TV programs – news relative to the other respondents (V Cramer 0.20). Current or former soldiers were also an important source of information for representatives of generations Z and X (V Cramer V 0.16). Thus, it can be indicated that representatives of each generation show different preferences in the use of both modern and traditional sources of information. The differentiation of source preferences is also evident among women

and men, which should cast a shadow on the image policy and EB strategy adopted in the military.

5.3. Attractiveness of the Military and Sources of Information

The research also sought to verify the hypothesis that there is a relationship

between the sources of information used by the public in Poland and the level of attractiveness of the military as an employer. The attractiveness of the military was analyzed first (Figure 1).

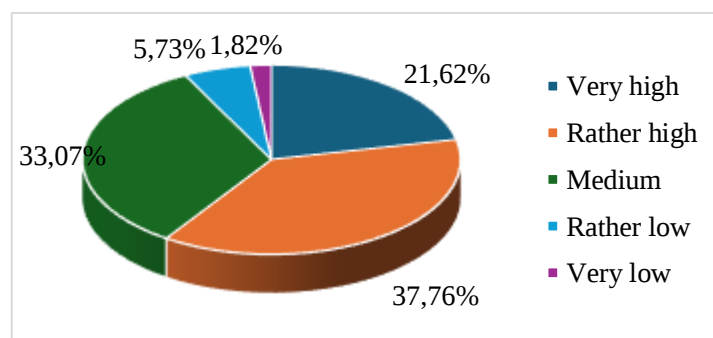


Figure 1: Level of attractiveness of the military as an employer
Source: Own research results.

According to the research results, a very high and rather high level of attractiveness was declared by 59.38% of respondents (including 61.20% of generation X representatives, 65.07% of generation Y respondents and 50% of Generation Z respondents). One in three respondents indicated a medium level, and only 7.55% of respondents rated the military's attractiveness as an employer low and definitely low.

Statistical analyses show a correlation between the level of attractiveness of the military and the use of information sources, which are: military websites (V Cramer 0.25), the wojsko.polskie.pl program (V Cramer 0.25) and close friends (V Cramer 0.17). The three revealed sources of information correlating with the level of attractiveness of the military as an employer should be an object of particular interest since it is with the use of the indicated sources that the social perception of the military as an employer can be influenced most quickly.

6. Conclusions

Shaping the image of the military as an attractive employer in Poland requires the use of both modern and traditional sources

of information in the EB process. The revealed due between the level of attractiveness and the three indicated sources of information illustrates how important each source is in the process of building the military's image. Knowledge of the preference of individual sources by representatives of the three key generations in the market reinforces the need to use both traditional and modern information sources simultaneously in the EB process of the military, without narrowing down only to modern sources. Modern sources of information are fraught with a higher probability of being used in the disinformation process, which further demonstrates the importance of monitoring both formal and informal sources to ensure the reliability of information about Poland's key security institution.

Based on the results of the conducted research, it is reasonable for the Polish Army to prepare a website dedicated to candidates for service and soldiers, containing a chatbot, i.e. a computer program whose task is to conduct conversations with the use of a computer that replicates human behaviour, automating answers to repetitive questions. The introduction of such a solution would

especially allow representatives of Generation Z and Y to obtain information about the army as an employer using the solutions preferred by the youngest generation.

Another action contributing to building a positive image of the Polish army is to increase the scale of the use of soldiers in the promotion of the army as an employer, which is particularly important in the context of the sources of information for representatives of all generations. Taking into account the social importance of direct sources of information - information from

soldiers and civilian employee's troops, the scale of their involvement in promotional activities should be much greater. Moreover, increasing the number of publications in the form of articles containing interviews with soldiers, as well as the bigger involvement of soldiers in job fairs, may have a significant impact on the image of the army as an employer.

The diversification of information sources about the Polish army requires special supervision to maintain the consistency of messages and compliance with the adopted vision and mission.

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