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DIGITAL RECRUITMENT IN THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECTS MILITARY RECRUITMENT

I. Hinevskyi, group УП-21
Scientific Advisor: ***T. Riabovolyk,*** PhD in Economics, Associate Professor
Central Ukrainian National Technical University

In the 21st century, digital technologies are penetrating all areas of life, including national security. The Armed Forces of Ukraine, undergoing transformation in response to modern challenges, are actively implementing new approaches to communication, particularly in the recruitment process. One of the most promising areas in recent years has been digital recruitment—the use of social media and online platforms to attract recruits to the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In the context of the full-scale war with Russia, the need for rapid, efficient, and targeted recruitment of military personnel has become critical, and social media has become a powerful tool in the hands of the army.

Traditional recruitment methods through military enlistment offices, printed media, or public events still retain their value, but they do not match the speed of the modern information era. In particular, youth—the primary target audience for contract service—mainly consume information through TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook [1].

Social media allows:

- quickly delivering messages;
- shaping a positive image of military service;
- showing the realities of combat work without censorship, but ensuring safety;
- personalizing outreach to specific audiences (for example, IT specialists, medics, drivers);
- encouraging dialogue, dispelling myths and fears related to service.

Units that actively operate in the digital environment, such as the Special Operations Forces, 47th Mechanized Brigade, Military Intelligence Directorate, and others, have shown the effectiveness of recruiting volunteers through a creative, honest, and modern approach in their media. Figure 1 shows how social media affects recruitment into the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine [2].

Modern videos from the front, interviews with soldiers, and documentary series on YouTube (such as “A Little Different”) are changing the public's perception of military service. Young people see the Armed Forces of Ukraine not only as a duty but also as prestige, a profession, and a mission. Instagram or Facebook pages allow for live streams with recruiters, answering questions, forming communities, and spreading application forms for joining units with just a few clicks [3].



Figure 1 – The Impact of Social Media on Recruitment in the Armed Forces of Ukraine

Source: compiled by the author

At the same time, authoritative figures among veterans, military personnel, or volunteers (such as Roman Sinytsyn, Serhiy Sternenko, and others) significantly influence the mobilization mood of the audience, enhancing trust in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Videos like "Hello, my name is Army," "Guard of the Offensive," and others are examples of successful informational campaigns that attracted thousands of volunteers.

However, digital recruitment has certain drawbacks, namely:

- information security, as publishing excessive information can harm operations and put military personnel at risk;
- fake accounts and fraud, which allow malicious actors to obtain personal data;
- distrust of official sources, which has arisen due to an overload of disinformation, as some users do not always perceive official pages as reliable sources;
- information overload, as the vast amount of content online makes it difficult to focus attention on key messages [2].

We believe that to increase the effectiveness of digital recruitment, the following steps should be taken:

1) centralization of recruitment platforms (creating a single portal integrated with social networks, where one can choose a unit, fill out a form, take a test, and get online consultation);

2) training SMM teams in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (preparing professional military communicators who can work with video content, targeted advertising, and crisis response);

3) engaging opinion leaders (military personnel, veterans, and volunteers should become the faces of recruitment campaigns, and their real stories are the best advertisement);

4) interactive formats (quests, simulators, streams from training grounds, drone videos—all of this helps "peek" into military life even before joining);

5) emphasis on specialties (highlighting that the army needs not only infantry but also IT specialists, communications officers, medics, drivers, mechanics, analysts, etc.) [3].

Digital recruitment in the Armed Forces of Ukraine is not just a trend, but a strategic need of the modern military. Social media allows the military to get closer to the citizens, making service understandable, accessible, and attractive. The main task is to be able to present the message correctly, maintain constant contact with the audience, and adapt to its needs. A successful informational campaign on Instagram or TikTok today can save lives on the front line tomorrow.

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