



MILITARY BRANDING AND MARKETING. THE COMPARATIVE CASES OF THE US AND RO FORCES.

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Abstract: *Defense represents an ever-growing market where education and training are crucial parts of the defense resource management process. In order to develop a proper recruitment process, use modern incentives and maintain retention in number of personnel in today's global economy, marketing tools such as branding become even more relevant for the decision makers. It is the purpose of this paper to analyze the tools and marketing techniques used by the US military and compare them to the transition process in terms of military marketing that the Romanian Military is facing. What are some of the advantages of the US model, what are some of the gaps and shortfalls of the Romanian system, what can and cannot be adapted to a European social welfare model and what are some of the minimum requirements in terms of recruitment in NATO are some of the questions that this paper aims to answer.*

Key words: *branding, recruitment, incentives, retention*

Introduction

The employer branding is a key factor to promote an organization and to make it attractive towards the employees. Strong positive beliefs about an employer keeps the stakeholders motivates even in hard times. The quantity and the quality(Collins & Han, 2004) of the candidates is influenced by the perception one gets about the membership in a specific organization and the identity that is given to the team(Lievens, 2007).Since the army is not



compulsory anymore since it is struggling to attract recruits and the number is decreasing ..., therefore a great amount of money goes in the recruiting process which is not sustainable on a long shot. In order to raise the attractiveness of the army as an employer, a branding process has to be undergone. Being a particular domain, the branding process is distinctive from a regular employer branding and the concept is new, since only in the past years due to the high costs and low attractiveness it has become a subject.

1. Military Branding in the US

The military community in US is composed by the following segments: **(1) Active duty:** the average income of each of the nearly 1.3 million active duty military members is more than \$32,000 a year(Lai, et al., MAR. 22, 2017), **(2)Veterans:** Currently, there are over 20 million veterans (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2019) in the US, **(3)Reservists / National Guard Members:** over 450,000 members (Statista.com, 2019) , **(4)Registered dependents and military families:** over 44% of the military have a family. From the U.S. population only 5% of the population over 18 have been active in the military.

The military is not only an important component of the U.S. that impresses through the great number, but it is also a very respected and attractive field, due to the undertaken efforts to maintain a high-quality image of the military service(Ries, 1986). The system is constantly adapting to the times, adopting modern techniques and planning for the future developments(Yanakiev, 2007).Always finding ways to overcome the personnel difficulties and using marketing as a tool to reduce the recruitment costs while achieving a powerful social image and building a force, make the U.S. Department of Defence a suitable role model for the Romanian Army. In order to understand the role of military marketing in the U.S. and its applicability in Romania, there has been performed a desk research to identify the best practices and their applicability.

The financial incentives represent nowadays one important recruiting technique. (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985)considers that there are two reasons to join the army, those being deliberate or emergent. The military have a 35% higher income then the average, The U.S. Department of Defense is spending money on bonuses and retentions, over \$11 billion only from 2006- 2010. Numerous private companies have joined the effort offering reductions to those



However, the financial motivation is effective but not sustainable, moreover when large numbers of people are being involved. To reduce the financial supplements the image the public perception must be improved, to transport the military duty in a trend or even a desire. Past and present military forces are to be used in the campaigns of recruitment and building marketing strategies to reduce the army budget, even though there are strict restrictions in attracting young people between 18 and 22 in the army through marketing campaigns. The aim is to determine the people to see the army as a method to change the future, rather than an option for the poor and uneducated(O'Connor, 2012).

To escalate the attractiveness of the military, series of benefits can be attributed, those being part of the marketing strategy. Among those there are to be mentioned: (1) The migration is a nowadays characteristic which is among the reasons people avoid the army. It can be a disadvantage but, in some cases, USA being one of them, it could be a great advantage, as joining the army expedites the citizenship of the immigrants (Cunha, et al., 2014). (2) Soft skills, and the concept of life-long learning are the new trends that are used by employees to shape their identity and attract employees. The army could also benefit, offering integrated development programs that allow one to prosper more than in other fields(McCullough, 2016). (3) Presenting the army as a boosting opportunity in life and in the career is more appealing to than wrapping it up as a long-term commitment. Emphasizing the personal and professional benefits one can get from the army preparation as well as a smooth transition to the civilian employment if desired. (4) An often mention disadvantage of the army employed is the family life being affected. Branding the army as a family-friendly institution is helping one overcome the fears. There can be added the presentation of the family-opportunities like living on the base, cheaper travelling offers, good schools supported on the base, civilian jobs for the spouse.

(5) Having a health and a life insurance represents a great cost in many countries, where this could represent an attractive bonus, especially if it extends to the family as well. (6) Qualifying exigency leave and military caregiver leave (7) A useful method to bring the army closer to the people is through is through the association with well-known brands. The product placement of the products appealing the target-group in specific public participations are appealing them, as well brands directly promoting the military lifestyle is building a modern and attractive image.



(8) The uncertain future and the pension system are a raising concern. Offering veterans benefits might also be used as trigger.

1.2. Volunteer force

In a stable to turbulent environment the loyalty (Stroh & Reilly., 1997) is the key element to keep the employees dedicated. To achieve this stage, the professional and personal needs have to be fulfilled. Each army as every company are found in different stages of development, which determinates the size, the possibilities and the needs. It has to be known, weather it is a stage of development or it has reached maturity, the resources the army hat at its disposal and the performance it wishes to have compared to the present and the past one. The own strategies based on those criteria, as well as the marketing objectives (Neubauer, et al., 2015).

Consolidating a strong image is closely related to the public events and manifestations, where civilians learn about the army, understand the positive effects that the military education has for one's lifeMost likely, the civilians are learning about the military service during social events, parades, media, news and entertainment.....memorial occasions annually observed on Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, and Armed Forces Day, few American citizens willingly desire to serve in the armed forces in comparison to the country's population Moreover, the great number of the US military - 37 million members, veterans and life partner, made it a distinct target for the marketing efforts. Companies invest time and resources to understand the military behavior, knowing that the military people spend more money online due to relocation and mobility reasons, they tend to spend more on vacations, change their homes twice so often as a civilian and 95% of those admit being loyal to a brand they choose, so they can address them directly by offering them reductions. Thus, they support the military but at the same time develop their business, as the military people earn with 35% more than the average American. More than 90% of military and their families focus their shopping on the companies who offer military discounts, where 75% of the purchase decisions done by military is based on the word of mouth.



2. Military Branding in Romania

To understand the branding that the Romanian Army does, one must first take a look at the Romanian military education system.

Romanian citizens can follow a carrier as NCO and officers, by completing a military high school or a training program for professional soldiers and military personnel.

Graduates of gymnasiums can study Military College. After finishing their respective studies, the graduates will be admitted to one of the higher education military institution or will continue their post-graduate military training as NCOs.

There are two types of formation for officers and NCOs, direct formation and indirect formation.

Direct formation of active officers and NCOs is realized by graduating College and academic studies or post graduate studies organized by military education centers, according to the rules and laws of the Ministry of National Defense.

Indirect formation of active officers and NCOs means realizing different types of indirect formation for officers and NCOs realized by civilian institution of higher education which has the necessary qualifications from the Ministry of National Defense. Recruiting candidates that will be indirectly formed is necessary for the Ministry of National Defense, in accordance with Romania's needs, due to a gap in overall personnel both military and civilian working inside the MoD.

Filling this gap is a key necessity for institution inside the MoD, like the Department for Human Resources, who have to deal with a shortfall in numbers for citizens not joining the army in recent years. The drop has increased ever since military service has stopped being mandatory in Romania by law.

The drop in number of candidates was constant after the shift from the communist regime in 1989. The Department of Human Resources inside the MoD had to take measures and the alarming situation was first evaluated at the beginning of the year 2000, when Romania was on its path to joining NATO. The analysis was realized to study the impact on short, medium and long term as the consequences of the drop would not affect just the military education system,



but also the future human resource that would become available as working personnel inside the MoD.

If in 1977, during the communist regime there were 4 candidates for one place in military academies, at the end of the 90's there were just 2 candidates for one place in the academies. The drop meant a failure for the Romanian recruiting system, with no realistic adjustment to Romania's social, economic and political direction. Marketing and branding of the Romanian Army was poor or non-existent and the changes produced by a more dynamic market were not taken into consideration at the time (Alexandrescu, 2009).

At the end of 1999, the first marketing strategy, to promote the military career was developed by the Romanian Armed Forces. An emphasis on joining military education and training as well as becoming part of the MoD personal was made, the strategy highlighted the advantages of a military career compared to a civilian one. It was the first such strategy in which the military profession was presented with advantages, in a realistic but favorable manner, to try and convince citizens to join the army. Recruiting offices were developed all over the country, all of them having to take part in this new marketing strategy. While it did not have a major success in bringing citizens into the army, this strategy had a major impact in increasing the visibility of the military career on the Romanian labor market (Alexandrescu, 2009). The promotions continued with an emphasis on the military profession for those who would choose to become part of Romania's modern and professional army, something that Romania as a country had not experienced before the end of the Second World War.

Marketing and branding changed quickly, after 2004 when Romania joined NATO and the Romanian Army started to be influenced in terms of marketing and branding by the Alliance examples and the American examples as well.

In the following 15 years the Romanian Army shifted in terms of clothing, branding, applying symbols, logos and emblems, from the soviet outdated style, to a modern NATO and American style.

When the Romanian Army joined the theaters of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, other incentives started to appear for personnel that wanted to join a professional army, like high



salaries, that could outmatch those on the civilian market. In 2007 for example, Romania had 1700 active military personnel in theaters of operations, of which 597 were in Iraq alone.

Having a professional army did bring some disadvantages in terms of numbers. Before 1990 Romania had around 300.000 personnel, which dropped under NATO requirements to around 100.000 in 2001 and is currently in 2019 around 75000. Cumulated with an advantageous reformed pension system, the drop of personnel still increased and the demand for marketing in order to increase retention is bigger than ever.

Attracting personnel to work inside the MoD has to major incentives. The first is related to economic incentives. After the economic crisis in 2009-2010, there is an increase in demand for citizens wanting to join the Military, as the Military provides a safe job, undetermined contracts and salaries that are close to the medium salary in the country. Therefore an increase of students joining the military academies can be observed and taking just the Airforce Academy into example, in 2019, compared to 2018 the number of students joining the academy has doubles overall, the first significant increase in number of students for this higher education center in over 20 years.

Another reason for the increase in students joining the military academies is the increase in branding that the Military does, in terms of socializing campaigns with civilian population, communication with the medias, actions undertaken in Romania's national day, factors that have made the Army the most trusted institution in the country in 2019, as it can be seen in **Figure 1**.

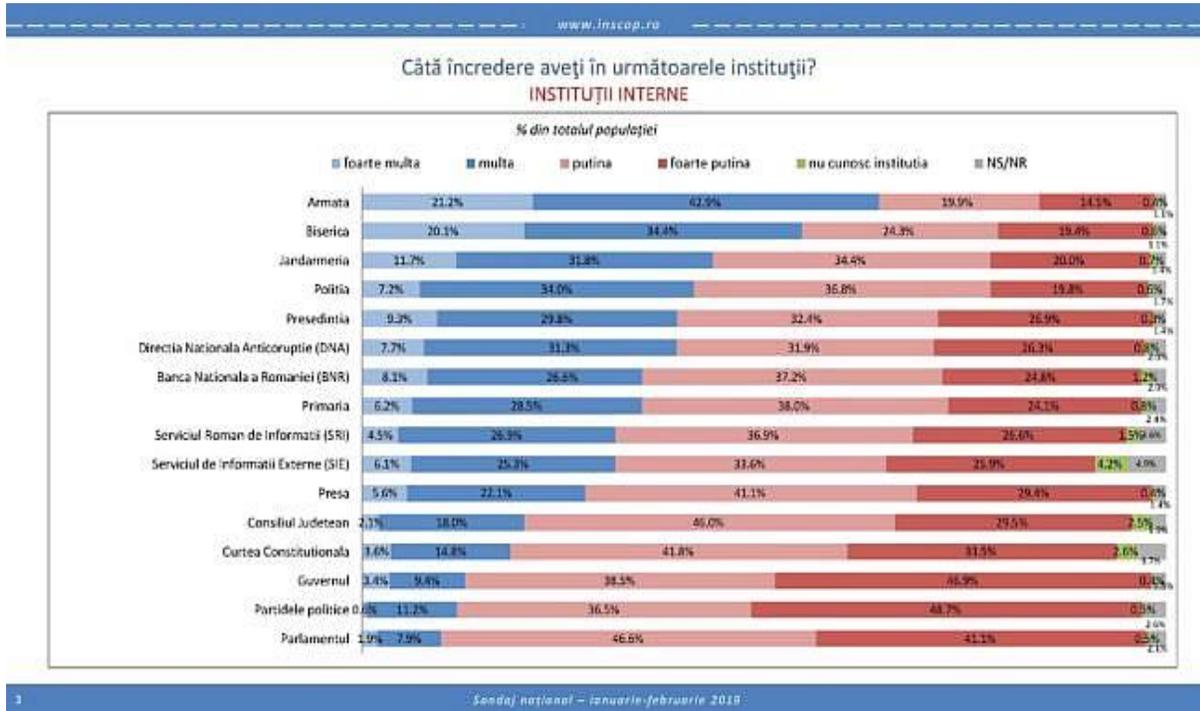


Fig. 1 Trust in Public Institutions in Romania, January February 2019. Source: www.inscop.ro

The increase in trust for the Romanian Army is also helped by being part of NATO. NATO has a long history of marketing and branding, mostly inspired by the American model presented in the first chapter of this paper. In terms of marketing, the Romanian Army has somehow been forced to reform to follow the NATO example and that of member states which has helped the positive view of both the Romanian Army and NATO by Romanian citizens.

One major corner stone for the trust of positive image of NATO in Romania happened in 2010. Following the economic crisis of 2008-2010, NATO has become the most trusted international institution in Romania, surpassing the European Union, as it can be seen in **Figure 2**.

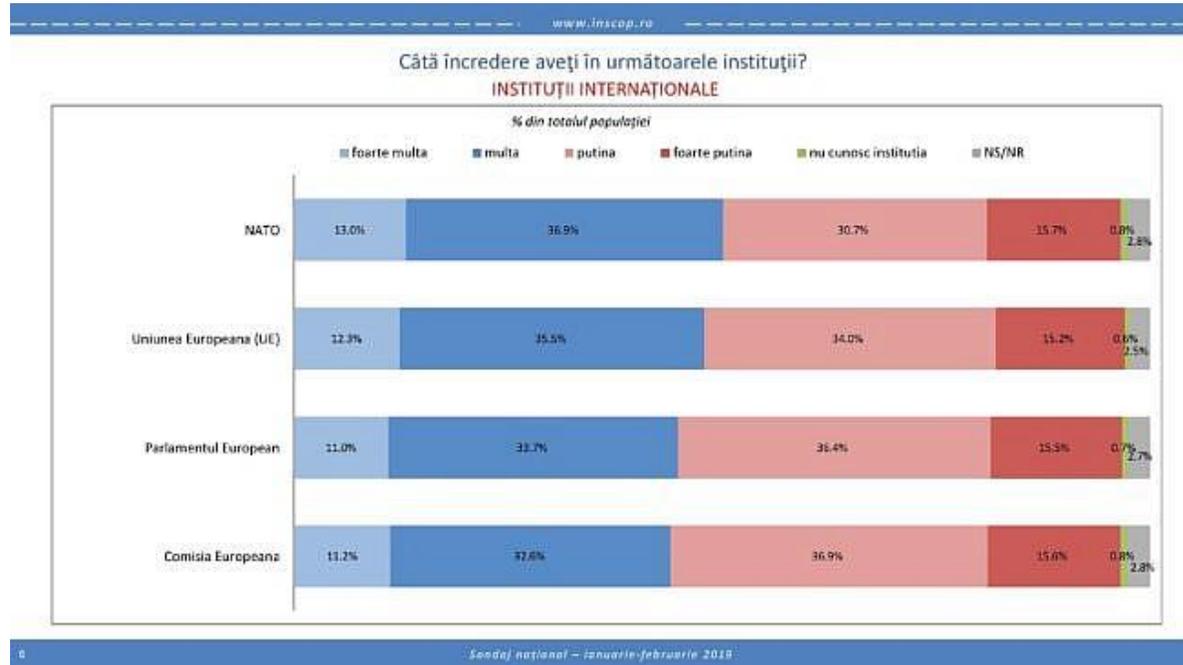


Fig. 2 Trust of International Institutions in Romania. January-February 2019. Sources: www.inscop.ro

The latest campaign by NATO that also involves the Romanian Army is the #WEARENATO marketing campaign, which was launched in all allied states as well as in Romania, with the objective of bringing closer the image of the alliance and the citizens in the member states. The specific target for the campaign is the young generation, with marketing efforts concentrating on teaching pupils and students where the campaign is present about the importance of NATO in protecting the population and the territory of the member states. Allied troops presented in Romania have joined the campaign to try and deliver a positive message about the role and objectives of the organization. In Romania, besides the MoD, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Ministry of Education have helped develop the campaign and get as many students as possible involved.



Conclusions

Like any transition countries that has come out of the communist regime, Romania has a consistent gap compared to other member states of NATO, especially the US.

It can be said that the Romanian military marketing system is still under development and still has a lot to go, until it can match that of the US.

However, due to economic and social conditions, the Romanian Military marketing system has managed to identify the correct incentives to attract citizens into joining military positions.

NATO with its experiences and initiatives in marketing can only help the Romanian national military marketing system in becoming better and more attractive. The fact that NATO is one of the most trusted institutions in Romania represents an advantage as well.

Finally, the marketing and branding system of the Romanian Army is needed more then ever to fill the many gaps of personnel in the system. Through different policies and innovation, marketing in the military will remain a major focus and a place for improvement in order to serve the needs of the Romanian Armed Forces

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