

Branding the Army

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

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How can the Army use branding to assist with meeting recruitment goals? History reveals that the Army can help surmount recruiting challenges by creating and maintaining a strong and consistent brand—one that highlights intrinsic motivations to serve, in a branch unlike any other—while properly leveraging stakeholders as brand ambassadors in a social-media driven world. Through a branding and marketing perspective, this monograph identifies best and worst practices of the US Army's branding campaigns so they may guide improvements for future Army recruiting efforts. To be sure, a comprehensive recruitment campaign should leverage the strengths of incentives, recruiter saturation, and marketing to be successful. This monograph focuses primarily on the marketing and advertising portions of a recruiting campaign, specifically as they pertain to the Army's brand.

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Acronyms

AFQT	Armed Forces Qualification Test
AVF	All Volunteer Force
DOD	Department of Defense
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MRI	Magnetic Resonance Imaging
VOLAR	Volunteer Army

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Introduction

We cannot attract the kind of soldier we need into an organization denigrated by some, directly attacked by others, and halfheartedly supported by many.

—GEN Westmoreland, Address to the Association of the United States Army

The modern era has seen a shift from reliance on conscripts to all volunteer forces in Western nations. While noble in practice, the shift from filling ranks with conscripts to all volunteers adds complexity to recruiting the right personnel for service in a potentially dangerous profession.

The shift to an all-volunteer force (AVF) led to fundamental changes in how the Army viewed itself. Market forces and a consumer audience gained greater influence on the idea of military service. The United States military also had to learn to market itself as any consumer brand would. This monograph will identify lessons learned by the United States Army so they may guide improvements to future Army recruiting efforts. To be sure, a comprehensive recruitment campaign should leverage the strengths and weaknesses of incentives, recruiter saturation, and marketing to be successful. This monograph will focus primarily on the marketing and advertising portions of a recruiting campaign, specifically as they pertain to the Army's brand.

This monograph will begin by describing the recruiting environment surrounding an AVF. It will then define branding and marketing as they pertain to Army recruiting in terms of seeking high quality recruits. It will then follow with an examination of historical Army recruiting campaigns to identify best and worst branding practices. This work will finish with an explanation of the current goals of Army branding and provide insights for how the Army can leverage branding to better posture itself to meet recruiting goals in a resource-constrained and competitive

environment. History reveals that the Army can help surmount recruiting challenges by creating and maintaining a strong and consistent brand—one that highlights intrinsic motivations to serve, in a branch unlike any other—while properly leveraging stakeholders as brand ambassadors in a social-media driven world.

The recommendations of this monograph will require testing that go beyond the limitations of this paper. To evaluate the viability of a future branding strategy, the Army conducts surveys and tests that account for different populations in different political environments across an audience that is representative of the American public. The intent of this paper is to focus the discussion on Army branding in order to spur additional research and testing.

The Challenges of Recruiting an All-Volunteer Force

In 1973, the United States moved to an AVF, creating an existential need for the Army to build a brand that could attract qualified personnel into its force. Prior to this, the Army did not have to work to establish an attractive brand due to its reliance on conscription. Though the Army has always maintained volunteers in its ranks, conscripted soldiers carried the balance whenever those with the propensity to serve numbered too few.

The military's reliance on an all-volunteer force has faced recruiting challenges over the past five decades. This includes the shrinking number of American youth with the ability and willingness to serve. War, qualification standards for service, and the economy are other factors that add to a complex recruiting environment. The Army is not unique in facing these factors, as they pertain to each branch of service.

The pool of candidates who are able to serve is shrinking. Over the years, data shows a steady decline in those who meet minimum military requirements for service. Currently, fewer than

three in ten Americans of military age are able to serve.¹ Examples of issues preventing military-age Americans from service include mental health, physical disability, obesity, criminal history, or aptitude. Further limiting the Army's potential pool of candidates is not only the ability but also the willingness to serve. The prolonged conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan and increased deployment cycles have dampened interest in service as many may view the cost of service as too high. Furthermore, with advances in modern medicine, more people are surviving battle and facing the rest of their lives with resulting physical and/or emotional wounds. The media highlights these stories, which complicates the military's mission to maintain the AVF because they provide visible examples of the potential downside of military service.

Despite the limited population that is willing to serve, the military must pare those numbers down further in pursuit of seeking the best people for service. In the past, the United States experimented with lowering standards to increase the supply of recruits available for service, with poor results. During the Vietnam War, for example, the Department of Defense lowered entrance standards under the Project 100,000 New Standards Program.² The personnel admitted into the program, also known as the "New Standards Men," had a markedly lower physical or mental capacity than more highly qualified service-members. The Army tracked these personnel through their military careers. Results revealed they had a higher failure rate of initial entry training, disciplinary issues, slower promotion rates, and a higher probability of becoming a combat casualty. This historical example shows it is too risky to maintain numbers by lowering standards.³

¹ Carter Ham, "National Commission on the Future of the Army: Report to the President and the Congress of the United States" (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2016), 72.

² Beth L. Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 94-95.

³ RAND Corporation, "Project 100,000 New Standards Program" (RAND, n.d.), 8.

The Department of Defense eventually suspended the program as the Vietnam War came to a close and the military transitioned to the AVF.

The economy also plays a role in recruiting where multiple organizations, civilian and military, seek to maximize high quality personnel. History shows that a poor economy presents a permissive recruiting environment where the cost/benefit analysis of military service becomes more palatable to America's youth. However, a strong economy and more opportunities for advancement in the private sector contribute to a very competitive recruiting environment. That each branch of service competes for the same portion of the American population exacerbates the challenges presented by attempting to induct quality recruits.

These challenges lead to different recruiting environments where the military changes its behavior based on the environment. Each behavior may have budgetary constraints, which hinders the behavior's effectiveness, or long-term effects that can make recruiting more difficult in the future. During poor, moderate, or permissive recruiting environments, the services will generally allocate different amounts of resources to recruitment incentives, advertising, or recruiting infrastructure. Services will increase or decrease spending in advertising and recruiting based on the environment. Particular to permissive recruiting environments, services will typically decrease spending on advertising, which may degrade brand effectiveness and hurt long term recruiting prospects.

In a resource-constrained environment, incentives and recruiter saturation compete with marketing and advertising for funds. Incentives are enlistment bonuses for joining the military. Traditionally, the military uses incentives to entice people into service in the short-term if there is a foreseen shortage in recruits. More recently, the Army offered enlistment bonuses of up to \$40,000

for certain MOSs.⁴ Incentives can be a costly but rapid fix to a recruiting shortfall. The military can use advertising and marketing to discuss incentives.

Recruiter saturation is another method the military can use to bolster recruiting, which can compete with marketing and advertising for dollars. Recruiters are geographically located, so they have area-specific knowledge and can relate to potential recruits. Recruiters take time to train and require some infrastructure to support, therefore increasing recruiter saturation takes time and resources, but it is still an effective option to meet a recruiting shortfall.

Inherent Army Recruitment Challenges

The aforementioned challenges pertain to all services. However, there are unique challenges that relate only to the Army. The Army must address these issues to be competitive with its sister services for high quality recruits. The Army has the largest recruiting requirement of all the service branches. “Accessions” is a term that is synonymous with a person brought into the service. In FY2014, the Army’s total accessions requirement for the active, guard, and reserve components was 134,000 out of 252,000 total accessions for the all components in Department of Defense.⁵ A certain percentage of these recruits will be easy to recruit while others will demand increased recruiter time and incentives. As the recruiting missions for each service branch fills up, the marginal cost per recruit will increase. This means that as the pool of potential recruits gets smaller as people join the services, the Army must spend more resources per recruit to fill its

⁴ Army Times, “The Army Is Offering Two-Year Contracts and Cash Bonuses to Grow the Army,” *Army Times*, last modified February 19, 2017, accessed February 19, 2017, <http://www.armytimes.com/articles/the-army-is-offering-two-year-contracts-and-cash-bonuses-to-grow-the-army>.

⁵ Department of Defense, “Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2014 Summary Report” (Washington, DC: CNA, 2015), 7.

recruitment requirements. While this happens to each branch of service, the Army is unique in that it has the largest accessions requirement. At the end of its fiscal year, the Army will have to spend the most resources to meet goals.

The number of military occupational specialties (MOS) in the Army poses another challenge. The Army offers more MOSs than any other branch of service. The breadth of Army specialties prevents it from narrowly focusing its brand to appeal to one specific type of recruit or one particular skill set. Instead, the Army must recruit from a very broad cross section of the American population to ensure that it meets recruiting requirements for each MOS. Additionally, the size of the Army means it will have a larger burden to fill undesirable MOSs.

The public currently views the Army as the generic catchall branch of service.⁶ Though deemed as the strategically most important branch of the military in a 2014 public perception poll, this ranking does not sway young Americans to *want* to join the Army over other services.⁷ In the same poll, respondents viewed the Army as the third most prestigious branch of the military, behind the Marines and the Air Force. The Army's lack of prestige compared to other services can steer highly qualified candidates to other branches of service, leaving many to join the Army only as a back up option.

The Army's prestige is lower notwithstanding its larger combined advertising budget. In 2015, the Active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve advertising budgets totaled \$443 million, which was more than double the advertising budgets of all the other branches of the

⁶ Department of the Army, "Environmental Analysis 2017," ed. McCann World Group (Army Marketing and Research Group, 2016).

⁷ Gallup Inc., "Americans Say Army Most Important Branch to U.S. Defense," www.gallup.com, last modified May 23, 2014, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/170657/americans-say-army-important-branch-defense.aspx>.

military combined.⁸ This is proportionally higher than the other services when taking into account that the Army inducted roughly 130,000 soldiers into its ranks in 2015, while the other services recruited a combined 120,000 personnel. In terms of cost per soldier, the Army spent a total of \$3,400 in recruiting and advertising for each soldier it recruited, compared to \$1,825 for the combined total of the other branches.

The Army's Opportunity for Positive Change

The current political environment is providing the Army a unique opportunity to better differentiate itself from the other service branches. Since moving away from the rush of a massive post-9/11 ramp up, the Army is facing its first significant downsizing of personnel in more than a decade. The Army's current mandate to downsize personnel, along with the lessons learned over the past five decades of recruiting an AVF, provide a timely opportunity to reevaluate its branding strategy to build favorable awareness of military service among a qualified audience. It gives the Army the opportunity to focus more on quality recruits rather than just meeting manning requirements.

The Army has historically used branding and marketing to sway public opinion of military service, with mixed results. During non-permissive recruiting environments, societal factors such as the horrors of war and/or competition from a strong economy proved too much for any marketing effort to overcome. In other cases, often in combination with a more permissive recruiting atmosphere, the ability to attract high quality recruits improved because environmental factors did not overshadow the Army's brand. In either case, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine how

⁸ US Government Accountability Office, "DoD Advertising: Better Coordination, Performance, Measurement, and Oversight Needed to Help Meet Recruitment Goals" (Washington, DC: GAO, 2016), 41.

badly accessions might have suffered absent any marketing effort. History shows that lowering standards is not a viable solution to meet recruiting needs, just as increasing advertising dollars or recruiters is not a viable fix for what is, at heart, a branding problem. Therefore, focusing on the Army's brand is a way the Army can improve the quality of its recruits.

The effectiveness and efficiency of the Army's brand are now more important than ever. The brand must be consistent, timeless, and appeal to a potential recruit's motivations to serve, while also building good will among the rest of the American public. The Army must better differentiate itself from, yet not denigrate, its sister services. Doing so will help to generate a larger audience that is willing to serve in the Army specifically, which may in turn assist in the selection of higher quality personnel for service.

Branding, Marketing, and Sales 101

An examination of branding and its effects is required to demonstrate the important role it plays in the Army's ability to recruit an AVF. A "brand" is the basic building block of marketing and advertising; it is the emotional connection between a product or organization and its intended audience.⁹ A brand serves three general purposes. First, a brand uses language or imagery that encourages the consumer to identify with the brand. Second, it persuades a consumer to choose one product over another. Third, a strong brand reassures a consumer that his or her choice was correct.

"Branding" is the practice of creating an identity to connect an organization with its audience. "Touchpoints" include any medium that affects a consumer's brand awareness. An effective branding strategy uses every touchpoint available to put forth a consistent message to gain

⁹ Alina Wheeler, *Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for The Whole Branding Team* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2013), 2.

consumer loyalty.¹⁰ The marketing community refers to touchpoints as “marketing” which may include, but is not limited to, official communications, advertising, public relations, social media, word of mouth, market research, and even internal communications.¹¹ Building a powerful brand takes time and multiple touchpoints with various audiences. While initiatives may change over time, the brand itself is strongest when it maintains longevity and consistency.¹²

Marketing efforts first begin internally, with an organization’s stakeholders. “Stakeholders” are employees of a company or consumers of the brand who speak from personal experience.¹³ Internal stakeholders contribute to the success of a brand because their association with the organization gives them credibility with people external to the organization.

In terms of the Army, a stakeholder is anyone who is serving or has served in the Army in a military or civilian capacity. Strong branding exists when stakeholders believe in the brand and willingly and sincerely carry its message to potential consumers. In the current age of social media, stakeholders hold more power than ever before over the brand of their organization. In terms of best branding practices, an organization is in a good position to communicate with external audiences once it secures a positive relationship with its internal stakeholders. The external audiences in this situation are primarily the “target market” and secondarily, the “key influencers”.

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹¹ “American Marketing Association Dictionary,” American Marketing Association, accessed January 21, 2017, <http://www.ama.org/resources/Pages/Dictionary.aspx?dLetter=M>.

¹² Alina Wheeler, *Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for The Whole Branding Team*, 3.

¹³ Ibid., 8.

The “target market” is the specific segment of the population that the marketer or retailer identifies as the most likely consumer of their product or service.¹⁴ While the Army’s target market has changed over time, it is generally the 17-24 year old population who are high school graduates, score high on the military aptitude test, and are physically fit enough to meet medical, weight, and fitness standards.¹⁵ Marketing efforts may look to carry the brand to this audience in broad strokes, or tailor specialized communication efforts to subsets within the target audience, such as minorities and/or any youth who excel in certain areas.

“Key influencers” are those whose views may help persuade members of the target market in making the final decision to buy in to a brand.¹⁶ For the Army, this most directly includes parents, but may extend to teachers, friends, clergy, guidance counselors, and coaches.¹⁷ A smart brand tackles any impediment to connecting with its target market, not only directly, but also through its key influencers. Oppositely, key influencers who do not buy into the brand can become an impediment between the brand itself and the target market.

If a brand successfully resonates with stakeholders, the target audience, and key influencers, the target will show up at the point of sale. It is then the job of the sales team, who are also internal stakeholders, to answer any questions and complete the purchase transaction. In the case of the Army, the “sales” team is its recruiters, and it is their job to enlist interested youth.

Best branding practices dictate that sales teams must be committed to the brand generated by the branding and marketing teams, which may at times prove challenging. Branding and

¹⁴ “Common Language Marketing Dictionary,” Common Language Marketing Dictionary, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.marketing-dictionary.org/Target+Market>.

¹⁵ Linda Clingan, “US Army Custom Segmentation System” (Fort Knox, KY: June 1, 2007).

¹⁶ “Common Language Marketing Dictionary.”

¹⁷ Linda Clingan, “US Army Custom Segmentation System.”

marketing teams face the harder-to-measure goal of “building awareness,” whereas the sales team faces more quantifiable accessions targets. For this reason, if the sales team does not feel confident in the power of the brand to help them close deals, they may resort to other tactics that may help them meet numbers in the short-term, but badly damage the brand in the long term. The two groups must work together for the brand to be successful.

Branding and marketing can affect personal reasons for service. Personal reasons are conditions that pertain to one person. An example is a son or daughter considering military service because a parent had a positive military experience. While branding affects a person’s personal reason for service, the Army’s brand is not always the primary decision making element of a person’s reason to serve. However, one can notice clear recruiting deficits when poor marketing practices muddle the Army’s brand image. This paper will describe this issue in greater detail in the historical analysis section.

Environmental issues are external factors that may affect a person’s desire to serve. Examples of environmental factors that branding and marketing will not be able to influence are the unemployment rate, the economy, or the operational environment. However, the Army can use branding and marketing to address certain environmental factors that are not favorable to the recruiting environment. For example, in an environment where young people are motivated to go to college and get a degree, the Army can use marketing and advertising to highlight how it offers programs to assist with paying for college. Otherwise, highly qualified individuals may opt to seek other routes to getting a college education, aside from the Army. To be sure, the Army employs this tactic for catering to high quality recruits.

While branding is not the only factor that affects military recruiting, it is the Army’s main tool for building awareness. It is one of the few factors the military controls to increase its pool of

potential recruits. Therefore, it is requisite that the Army does the best possible job in branding in order to ensure it remains competitive in the recruiting environment.

The Results of Effective Branding

An organization's brand influences how well it does in the market. Effective branding sways the target audience into choosing one product over the other. There are countless historical examples of a company's brand influencing a customer's decision to buy. Highlighting one example demonstrates why the Army should pay close attention to developing its brand.

The "Pepsi Challenge" was a famous marketing campaign Pepsi waged against Coca-Cola to gain more market share in the soft drink industry. Representatives of Pepsi established booths in public places and had random people blindly taste Pepsi and Coca-Cola. Pepsi contended that customers chose Pepsi over Coca-Cola 50% of the time, a far greater percentage than Pepsi's market-share.¹⁸

Though discontinued, the Pepsi Challenge was an effective campaign backed by scientific evidence. In an experiment conducted at Baylor University in 2004, roughly 70 subjects took the Pepsi Challenge while being scanned by magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).¹⁹ During the experiment, a group of subjects took a blind taste test of Pepsi and Coke while another group took the Pepsi Challenge with the brands exposed. The subjects in the blind taste test preferred Pepsi to Coke generally half of the time, and activity in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, the portion of the

¹⁸ Will Wei and Dominic Green, "We Recreated the Pepsi Challenge to See What People Really Like," *Business Insider*, May 3, 2013, accessed December 02, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/pepsi-challenge-business-insider-2013-5>.

¹⁹ Samuel McClure, et al., "Neural Correlates of Behavioral Preference for Culturally Familiar Drinks," *Neuron* 44, no. 2 (October 14, 2004): 379–87, accessed December 02, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2004.09.019>.

brain that feels pleasure, reflected each subject's expressed preference. The group with the brand-cued taste test nearly unanimously preferred Coke. The MRI correspondingly showed activity in a different portion of the brain that modifies behavior based on emotions. The researchers determined that Coca-Cola's branding had a massive influence on the preference of the subjects.²⁰

This experiment showed that branding influences peoples' preferences. To be sure, service in the Army is a larger commitment than picking a soft drink. However, the concept that a strong brand can override a person's physiological response with an emotional preference shows why the Army must develop a strong brand in order to be competitive in both today's and tomorrow's recruiting environments.

Department of Defense Recruitment Standards and the Army's Brand

Understanding Department of Defense (DOD) recruitment standards helps to define the Army's target audience. The DOD uses standardized testing as a means to determine enlistment qualifications for future jobs in the military. The DOD developed standardized testing after it determined that a strong relationship existed between education levels and first-term enlistment completion.²¹ The test is the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). The AFQT gives the potential recruit a percentile score to measure their general intellect compared to their peer group. The score falls into one of six categories; Category I, Category II, Category IIIA, Category IIIB, Category IV, and Category V. People in Categories I and II are the most mentally apt, while Category V is least mentally capable. Potential recruits must fall within the Categories I – IIIB.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Department of Defense, "Population Representation of the Military Services: Fiscal Year 1999" (Washington, DC: CNA, 1999), 2-4.

Category IV recruits require waivers to serve. No branch of service accepts Category V recruits.

Table 1 shows the corresponding percentiles for each category.

Table 1. Armed Forces Qualification Test Categories and Percentiles

AFQT Category	Percentile Score Range
I	93-99
II	65-92
IIIA	50-64
IIIB	31-49
IV	10-30
V	1-9

Source: Official Site of the Armed Forces Aptitude Battery, accessed on December 13, 2016, http://www.officialasvab.com/eligibility_app.htm.

The DOD uses these categories as benchmarks to regulate recruit quality. The DOD benchmark for non-prior service recruits requires that 90 percent must have a high school diploma.²² Additionally, 60 percent of recruits must come from Categories I – IIIA, which comprise the top 50 percent. A recruit is considered “high quality” if they have a high school diploma (a general education diploma does not count) and are Category IIIA or higher.²³ Finally, Category IV recruits can comprise no more than four percent of a fiscal year’s cohort.

Service branches have historically dipped beneath the DOD thresholds during difficult recruiting times. As mentioned earlier, the “New Standards Men” of Vietnam are a historical example of the Army dropping recruitment standards to meet manning requirements. More recently, the Army fell below the 90 percent high school diploma benchmark and relied more

²² Ibid.

²³ Department of Defense, “Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2014 Summary Report,” 16.

heavily on Category IV recruits than any other branch of service during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁴ Additionally, the Army has consistently held the lowest percentage of high quality recruits since FY2003 while also having the smallest percentage of recruits in Category IIIA or higher.²⁵

This quantifiable lower recruit quality over the course of the last decade may have had negative effects on the Army's brand and it contributed to the public perception of the Army as the catchall branch of service. This negative impression may steer high quality recruits to what they perceive as a more competitive environment in the sister services. Additionally, influencers may steer potential recruits to their perceived higher quality branches. The long-term effects of this would be that high quality recruits would continue to seek other branches of services first, until the Army creates a brand capable of countering this perception. Historically, the Army has not always suffered from lower numbers of high quality recruits. An analysis of the history of the Army's brand with an AVF will shed light on best and worst branding practices.

Selling the Army: The History of Marketing Successes and Failures

For the purposes of this paper, the examination of Army marketing will begin in the early 1970s as the nation began the transition from a conscripted military to an AVF and advertising and recruiting efforts moved into a new era. A historical analysis of Army marketing provides insights that give rise to recommendations for how Army can create a timeless brand backed by its

²⁴ Department of Defense, "Recruit Quality Over Time: Quality by FY from 1973" (Washington, DC: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, 2009), accessed December 02, 2016, <http://prhome.defense.gov/Portals/52/Documents/RFM/MPP/Accession%20Policy/docs/Quality%20by%20FY%20from%201973.pdf>.

²⁵ Department of Defense, "Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2014 Summary Report," 16.

stakeholders to inform potential quality recruits that the Army is the branch of service they want to join.

The 1970s: A Steep Learning Curve

In the early 1970s, the conflict in Vietnam and subsequent protests loomed heavily in the minds of the American people. The public remained war-weary as President Nixon moved to end conscription in an effort to heal the rift caused by the war.²⁶ Many within the military establishment, including Army Chief of Staff General Westmoreland, did not believe it was possible to staff an AVF under the best of circumstances, let alone with the requirements of sending combat troops to Vietnam.²⁷ Regardless of the popular opinion of the military, the country's leadership chose to transition to the AVF, which thus increased the need for the Army to re-brand itself.

The Army chose the slogan "Today's Army Wants to Join You!" in 1971 as part of its branding effort during the Volunteer Army (Project VOLAR) campaign. This ushered in a new era where the Army bore the full responsibility for recruiting 100% of its accessions. The Army shifted from an environment where it could forcibly pull people in to service, and through this slogan, the Army sought to demonstrate its evolution into an organization that sought an open conversation about service with volunteer candidates.

The new advertising campaign was part of a larger effort to showcase how the Army was changing to incorporate an AVF. The initial advertising campaign for "Today's Army Wants to Join You" ran for thirteen-weeks during prime time on national television networks. It also included

²⁶ Robert Griffith, *The US Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force 1968-1974*, 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

radio commercials and print advertising.²⁸ The campaign included airtime on 581 television stations and 2,200 radio stations.²⁹ Many of the commercials highlighted how the Army was improving the daily lives of new recruits. The campaign also made an effort to make the highly unpopular combat arms branches seem more attractive. Of the twenty-two commercials aired during the campaign, eleven emphasized service in combat arms while the others highlighted unit-of-choice or station-of-choice options for potential recruits. Finally, the new campaign ran in synchronization with increased signing bonuses.

This new controversial project and its featured slogan was the Army's first attempt to rebrand itself in the new era, but it was not without its critics. Soldiers and veterans groups largely opposed "Today's Army Wants to Join You." Some rejected the slogan simply because it relied on commercial advertising that did not accurately describe army life.³⁰ Proponents of the previous conscription program felt wary of selling military service as a commercial product and doubted the quality of candidates recruited from the new campaign. To be sure, opponents of the Army's new marketing campaign represented a population who generally supported conscription. They would naturally be inclined to oppose a new marketing campaign that supported the AFV. They also felt "Today's Army Wants to Join You" leaned too heavily on monetary incentives, such as signing bonuses, which they believed would attract the wrong people.³¹ General William Westmoreland

²⁸ Ibid., 141.

²⁹ Ibid., 142.

³⁰ Bailey, *America's Army*, 80.

³¹ Mary Chambers and David Vergun, "Army Recruiting Messages Help Keep Army Rolling Along," accessed December 12, 2016, http://www.army.mil/article/322/Army_recruiting_messages_help_keep_Army_rolling_along.

chaffed at the solicitous nature of the campaign.³² Nevertheless, General Westmoreland agreed to proceed with the campaign with the goal of making the Army more palatable to American youth. By comparison, military recruiters favored the campaign because it made their “sell” easier, since the campaign featured unprecedented market saturation with Army advertisements.

Following the official end of conscription in 1972, the Army built upon “Today’s Army Wants to Join You!” with “Join the People Who’ve Joined the Army,” which provided a tougher and more realistic call to service. Although these two campaigns helped the Army meet its recruiting mission from 1973 through 1976, they were not a complete success because they fell victim to a basic branding misstep: they failed to resonate with the Army’s internal stakeholders.

The recruitment campaigns did not live up to what they promised. The “Today’s Army Wants to Join You” campaign promised opportunities for travel and excitement. Members who enlisted felt the Army did not live up to its brand promise. Their experiences as internal stakeholders negatively affected the public’s perception of the Army when the recruits shared their experiences. This was detrimental to the Army’s brand.

By the end of the 1970s, fears about the conciliatory nature of the Army’s new recruiting campaigns and the AVF seemed to prove true. The quality of recruits plummeted, and the separation rate of new soldiers before the conclusion of their three-year term rose by 36 percent while reenlistment rates fell.³³ Financial woes were also detrimental to recruiting as budget cuts, scaling back education benefits, and the failure of entry-level pay to keep up with inflation made Army life seem less desirable.³⁴ Under increasing pressure, recruiters resorted to desperate

³² Griffith, *The US Army’s Transition to the All-Volunteer Force 1968-1974*, 142.

³³ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 173.

³⁴ Chambers and Vergun, “Army Recruiting Messages Help Keep Army Rolling Along.”

unethical measures to meet numbers, which led to news reports of recruits disillusioned by broken promises. The actions of these internal stakeholders, through touchpoints with potential recruits, continued to have detrimental effects on the Army's brand.

In late 1978, the Army launched its "This is the Army" campaign to in reaction to its recent poor publicity. This campaign was defensive in nature because it had to respond to charges that the Army had been misleading in what it offered.³⁵ It moved away from glossy promotions of incentives and travel, replacing them with a realistic view of army life. Ads and posters were loaded with information, but they were not catchy. They tested well with military stakeholders, but they failed with potential recruits. The Army subsequently missed its recruiting goal by 11 percent in 1979. The Marine Corps advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson, described Army advertising as "a wide-ranging approach but with no single, underlying emotional appeal."

The Army could not continue missing recruitment requirements, and it took steps to reverse its downward trend. The Army increased advertising and recruiter support funds by 26 percent.³⁶ It also standardized and streamlined its recruitment processes, placing an emphasis on the quality of recruits as a key factor.³⁷ In addition to improving resources and recruitment processes, the head of the US Army Recruiting Command, General Maxwell Thurman, pushed ad agency partners to better define the Army brand.

The Army had a steep learning curve in the 1970s with its introduction to branding. Reactionary messaging throughout the decade did not establish a definable brand for the Army.

³⁵ Bailey, *America's Army*, 181-182.

³⁶ Department of the Army, "Recruiting and Advertising in Today's Army" (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1987), 19.

³⁷ Bailey, *America's Army*, 183.

Initial marketing strategies also did not resonate with internal stakeholders. Understandably, the primary purpose of marketing as a recruitment tool is to entice people outside of the military to serve, but a lack of fervor within the Army for its marketing efforts degraded its effectiveness, as shown by disillusioned recruits and less-than-energetic senior leaders. Subsequent recruitment efforts did the opposite. Army stakeholders agreed with the campaign, but it did not resonate with the public. Finally, while marketing was not the sole cause of the Army's recruiting woes in the 1970s, the failure to establish a consistent brand presence may have hindered the Army's ability to meet its recruitment goals.

The 1980s: From Obligation to Opportunity

The overall climate of the 1980s set a stronger stage for military recruiting. An economic recession in the early part of the decade raised youth unemployment while military pay saw its largest increase since the advent of the all-volunteer force.³⁸ Time distanced Americans from the Vietnam War, and, combined with a wave of patriotism inspired by the Reagan presidency, created a more favorable recruiting environment than could be found in the previous decade.

The Army still suffered from a negative public image leading into the 1980s. General Thurman maintained that the Army was still combatting its image as the least-favored service.³⁹ The Army suffered from having no clear identity because of its sporadic advertising campaigns in the 1970s. General Thurman also perceived that the impact of negative press from recruiting shortfalls and "low-quality" recruits led to a poor Army brand. Indeed, a Harris poll found that, at

³⁸ Bernard Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), 502.

³⁹ Bailey, *America's Army*, 190.

the time, 64% of those surveyed believed “the young people the military has been recruiting on a voluntary basis have mainly been those who couldn’t get jobs elsewhere and have not made very good soldiers.” The low high school graduation rates of new recruits in FY1980 also confirmed these sentiments.⁴⁰

Learning from the numerous campaigns of the 1970s, General Thurman wanted to adopt a single message that the Army could unite behind. He also valued market research and knew the task was a challenging one. Young Americans thought highly of military service, but they did not see themselves actually joining the military. Market analysis revealed one approach to overcome this hurdle: market the Army as a technologically savvy organization that offered valuable skills training.⁴¹ As the country grew more technologically advanced, young people recognized the importance of developing their skill sets and were open to the Army as a means of gaining the knowledge needed to become competitive for a later return to the civilian market.

In mid-June 1980, General Thurman met with Army advertising agency N.W. Ayer to preview the proposed “Be All You Can Be” advertising campaign. The aim was to address the Army’s need to grow a skill set that remained competitive with technological advancements. A television ad began with inspirational lyrics about remaining competitive in a changing world as photographs of soldiers representative of all demographics moved across the screen. By the time the music ended, the final appeal to “Be All That You Can Be,” rounded out the ad. General Thurman was crying.⁴²

⁴⁰ Department of the Army, “Recruiting and Advertising in Today’s Army” (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1987), 19.

⁴¹ Ibid., 19.

⁴² Bailey, *America’s Army*, 193.

The Army intended the “Be All You Can Be” campaign to speak to all demographics, and for all jobs in the Army. Choosing an all-inclusive theme gave the impression that the Army was a team and that joining the Army would help a potential recruit meet their maximum potential. The Army aired its new commercials, like the “Today’s Army Wants to Join You” campaign, during prime-time television hours and on radio. In addition, the Army recorded theme music and orchestrated an arrangement for marching bands, which it distributed to more than 13,000 high schools nationwide – for free.⁴³

Recruiters immediately applauded the “Be All You Can Be” campaign. It premiered during college bowl games right after Christmas. The jingle was so popular and effective that “Advertising Age” magazine named it as the number two catchphrase of the 20th century.⁴⁴ Within eight months of its introduction, research showed a major improvement in the public’s perception of the Army. According to the Youth Attitude Tracking Study, a survey that analyzes American youths’ opinions toward the military, the Army was surpassing the Navy and catching the Air Force in positive impressions among American teens.⁴⁵ Quantitatively, the Army saw the highest increase in high quality recruits throughout the decade, outpacing all other branches of service, from its lowest point in 1982 to its peak in 1992.⁴⁶

“Be All You Can Be” successfully met General Thurman’s challenge to develop and market a unifying Army brand. The slogan lasted for two full decades. It heralded a shift in thought from military service as an obligation to service as an opportunity for recruits to better themselves

⁴³ Ibid., 194.

⁴⁴ Chambers and Vergun, “Army Recruiting Messages Help Keep Army Rolling Along.”

⁴⁵ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 194.

⁴⁶ Department of Defense, “Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2014 Summary Report,” 16.

by joining the Army. While the slogan remained constant for twenty years, the overall campaign evolved to address market needs. For example, when researchers discovered young people were more likely to enlist if they saw the Army as a practical step toward future success, the tagline became “Find your future in the Army”.⁴⁷

By the mid-1980s, the Army “Be All You Can Be” ads constantly touted college benefits. The Army’s recruiting command long understood the connection between offering college funds and recruiting “quality” soldiers. While certain people joined the service for specific “military” ideals, the Army understood this percentage of the population was not large enough to staff the all-volunteer force.⁴⁸ Using marketing to offer financial incentives to a specific population with an intrinsic motivation for higher education stood to increase the population of quality candidates, and in fact, led to the Army’s immense recruiting success in the 1980s.

In summary, the “Be All You Can Be” campaign, along with its evolving taglines, developed and reinforced a consistent message that drove American youth to consider the Army as a pathway to success rather than a detour.⁴⁹ Indeed, it assisted with increasing the quality of the force. In fiscal year 1980, only 54 percent of new recruits had graduated from high school, and well over half were Category IV. By 1987, 91 percent had graduated from high school and only 4 percent fell into Category IV.⁵⁰ This suggests that developing a consistent brand amid opportunities created by the overall recruiting environment may have allowed the Army to remain competitive

⁴⁷ Ibid., 195.

⁴⁸ Robert Goldich, “Recruiting, Retention, and Quality in the All-Volunteer Force” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1981), 66.

⁴⁹ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 196.

⁵⁰ Department of the Army, “Recruiting and Advertising in Today’s Army,” 20.

for high quality recruits throughout the 1980s, even when the recruiting environment became less permissive during the latter part of the decade as the unemployment rate dropped.

The 1990s: An Army for Good

As effective as the “Be All You Can Be” campaign was, by 1990, the recruiting environment was once again changing. The Persian Gulf War of 1990 – 1991 was the first war to test the all-volunteer force. Since the conflict was highly televised, the Army pulled all advertising because it feared media coverage of the ugliness of war would drown out the messaging of Army recruitment efforts.⁵¹ The US Army Recruiting Command also thought media coverage would resurrect the Vietnam-era fears of conscription and the gruesome nature of combat, which would undermine the more positive characteristics they sought to associate with Army service throughout the previous decade: college tuition, skills training, and relevance to a civilian career.

Other world events affected the future of the US Army. The 1990s saw the dissolution of the United States’ biggest threat, the United Socialist Soviet Republic. President George H.W. Bush prepared to reduce defense spending and Army strength as a result, giving the Army a unique opportunity to refocus recruiting on quality rather than quantity.

The military drawdown in the early 90s, in combination with the Army pulling its advertising during the Gulf War, hurt the Army’s long-term recruitment prospects throughout the rest of the 90s. These actions gave the impression that the Army was no longer hiring.⁵² Recruiting in the 1990s also suffered because of a booming economy as the nation’s unemployment rate

⁵¹ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 245.

⁵² Lawrence Kapp, “Recruiting and Retention in the Active Component Military: Are There Problems?” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2002), 15.

reached record lows. Finally, in a budget-constrained environment, the Army had to identify how to recruit high quality candidates who had traditionally taken the most effort to recruit. The result was that the Army steadily increased recruiters and advertising expenses throughout the late 90s.

In addition to increasing recruiters and its advertising budget, the Army repositioned its brand to describe itself as a promoter of social change. While the Army maintained the successful “Be All You Can Be” motto, advertisements focused on providing upward mobility for female and minority demographics.⁵³ The Army also marketed itself as an organization that developed strong, principled men and women. To be sure, the Army opened more MOSs to females during this decade. This focus on diversity in the Army shifted the view of the Army’s brand from a warfighting organization to that of an organization meant to improve the social fabric of the United States. Furthermore, Army operations throughout the 1990s confirmed the social change narrative with the increase of long-term humanitarian missions.⁵⁴ With the push toward broader inclusivity, the Army sought to reach out to other demographics who may not have previously considered military service an option, thus expanding the pool of potential recruits.

Despite the fact that the Army was advertising an unprecedented level of equal opportunity and inclusion, rebranding the Army as an engine for social change met with mixed results. Some perceived the Army as a purveyor of social experiments, which they felt threatened military effectiveness and national security.⁵⁵ However, signaling that the rebranding had an effect, all female demographics and the Hispanic male demographic saw an increased propensity to serve

⁵³ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 206.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

across the decade.⁵⁶ This shows that changing the way the Army brands itself can affect who is willing to serve. The greater diversity also fed into the Army's brand as a more inclusive branch of service. However, though the Army's re-branding was successful for increasing the propensity to serve in the female and Hispanic demographics, the Army still had recruiting challenges throughout the late 1990s. Its brand did not increase the propensity to serve in the populations that made up the bulk of the force throughout the decade: white and African American males.

The Army struggled to meet recruiting missions throughout the late 1990s. Between 1993 and 1998, the Army increased advertising dollars from \$34 million in FY93 to \$112 million in FY99 (in constant FY2000 dollars). Furthermore, the Army increased the number of recruiters from 4,368 to 6,331 during the same timeframe.⁵⁷ Despite increases in recruiter numbers and advertising, the Army missed its recruiting requirements in 1997 and 1998. According to the 1998 Youth Attitude Tracking Survey, overall youth propensity to serve remained steady throughout the late 1990s while advertising awareness dropped during the same timeframe.⁵⁸ Along with a non-permissive recruiting environment brought about by the strong economy of the late 1990s, the Army's brand did not resonate enough with American youth. Therefore, before the decade concluded, the Army pivoted from the troubled "social change" narrative.⁵⁹

The Army ended the 1990s knowing it needed to move the brand in a new direction, but it also wanted to learn from the failings of the previous decade. To this end, analysts offered multiple

⁵⁶ Kapp, "Recruiting and Retention in the Active Component Military: Are There Problems?" 9.

⁵⁷ US Government Accountability Office, "Military Personnel: Services Need to Assess Efforts to Meet Recruiting Goals and Cut Attrition" (Washington, DC: GAO, 2000), 6.

⁵⁸ Department of Defense, "Youth Attitude Tracking Study 1998: Propensity and Advertising Report" (Washington, DC: Defense Manpower Data Center, 1998), 3-21, 5-9.

⁵⁹ Bailey, *America's Army*, 205, 225.

explanations for the recruiting shortcomings of the previous years. There were fewer young people in the general population, which decreased the number of people available to serve.⁶⁰ Compounding this fact, more youth opted to go to college throughout the 1990s.⁶¹ Finally, research showed that youth had begun to hear “Be All You Can Be” not as an inspirational call to action, but in the tone of a nagging parent.⁶²

The 2000s: An Army in Crisis

The following decade introduced a very difficult recruiting environment for the Army. The attacks on September 11, 2001 spurred the Bush administration to deploy troops in the Global War on Terror. While the wave of patriotism that swept the country created a temporary permissive recruiting environment, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had long-term effects on the Army’s brand and its ability to recruit.⁶³ The expansion of each branch of service during the decade increased the demand for recruits. Though aided by the economic downturn of the late 2000s, meeting Army recruiting requirements still proved difficult as key influencers of potential recruits recommended military services less and less as the decade progressed.⁶⁴

Army leadership perceived that the “Be All You Can Be” campaign suffered from its own success. The recruiting slogan was, by far, the most recognized Armed Service recruiting slogan

⁶⁰ Kapp, “Recruiting and Retention in the Active Component Military: Are There Problems?” 8.

⁶¹ Ibid., 13.

⁶² Bailey, *America’s Army*, 239.

⁶³ US Congress, “Recruiting, Retention, and Future Levels of Military Personnel” (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, 2006), 26.

⁶⁴ Department of Defense, “June 2008 Influencer Poll” (Arlington, VA: Joint Advertising, Market Research, and Studies, 2010), 11.

when the campaign ended.⁶⁵ To be sure, the Army's advertising budget in 2000 was \$181 million, compared to a combined total of \$174 million for the sister services.⁶⁶ This gave the Army's marketing and advertising efforts more market saturation than the other services. The campaign suffered from such a well-known brand image that pundits compared it to wallpaper or background noise.⁶⁷ The American public learned to tune out the military's most recognized recruiting slogan.

By 2000, the Army had missed its recruiting goals in two of the three previous years.⁶⁸ Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki believed the time was right to make changes to the Army's brand. Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera supported Shinseki's sentiments and pushed for a new advertising campaign that he believed would better sell the Army to the American public.

In response, the Army launched the "Army of One" campaign as a massive rebranding effort. The advertising campaign premiered during an episode of "Friends," rather than during a sporting event, as was common for other Army advertising campaigns. The intent was to cater to a younger audience for military service, since the previous tactic of airing new ad campaigns during key sporting events only catered to an older male population.⁶⁹ In an interview with CNN, Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera pronounced the new campaign as one geared toward a younger

⁶⁵ Department of Defense, "Youth Attitude Tracking Study: 1999 Propensity and Advertising Report" (Washington, DC: Defense Manpower Data Center, 1999), 5-15.

⁶⁶ US Congress, "Recruiting, Retention, and Future Levels of Military Personnel," 9.

⁶⁷ Bailey, *America's Army*, 239.

⁶⁸ Louis Caldera, "CNN Transcript - Early Edition: Army Secretary Louis Caldera Discusses New Recruiting Slogan - January 10, 2001," interview by Linda Stouffer, January 10, 2001, accessed April 01, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0101/10/ee.10.html>.

⁶⁹ James Dao, "Ads Now Seek Recruits for 'An Army of One,'" *The New York Times*, January 10, 2001, accessed April 01, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/10/us/ads-now-seek-recruits-for-an-army-of-one.html>.

generation of Americans who did not want to lose their identity because of joining the Army.⁷⁰ The Army tailored the campaign narrowly to its target audience of potential recruits, 18 to 24 year olds. Additionally, the advertising company charged with executing the campaign enlisted the help of other advertising experts who specialized in speaking to the African American and Hispanic communities.⁷¹ Notably, the campaign did not take into account the opinions of the family members who influence the potential recruit's decision to join.

The "Army of One" campaign, much like the Army's recruiting campaigns in the 1970s, met harsh criticism. Many argued the "Army of One" slogan worked against the teamwork approach of the Army. USA Today conducted a marketing and advertising poll on the Army's new recruiting campaign and found mixed results. While younger generations were more favorable to the ad than older generations, the campaign had below average results when compared to other campaigns.⁷² Subsequent editorials decried the slogan for the same obvious reason that everyone else criticized it – "An Army of One" was incongruent with the mission of the Army.⁷³ Further, Army recruiters were not convinced of the new campaign. The venerable "Be All You Can Be" campaign had deep roots within the recruiter community.⁷⁴ Switching to a new seemingly self-contradictory recruiting slogan did not make much sense to them.

⁷⁰ Caldera, "CNN Transcript - Early Edition: Army Secretary Louis Caldera Discusses New Recruiting Slogan, January 10, 2001."

⁷¹ Dao, "Ads Now Seek Recruits for 'An Army of One.'"

⁷² Michael McCarthy, "USAtoday.com - Critics Slam Army Ads," last modified April 16, 2001, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/advertising/adtrack/2001-04-16-ad-track-army.htm#more>.

⁷³ Bob Garfield, "New Army Ad Is Strong -- If You Totally Forget We're at War," last modified November 16, 2006, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://adage.com/article/ad-review/army-ad-strong-totally-forget-war/113151/>.

⁷⁴ Bailey, *America's Army*, 243.

The “Army of One” campaign was more than a recruiting slogan. Army leaders said the criticism did not account for new branding tactics unveiled with the campaign.⁷⁵ In order to counter youth visions of the Army as an organization that stripped them of their identity, the “Army of One” campaign featured an interactive website where potential recruits could see the experiences of individual soldiers.⁷⁶ The Army also launched a computer game, “America’s Army,” to spark interest in joining the Army. These efforts were new innovative ways for the Army to shape its brand for the upcoming generation.

Under the “Army of One” campaign, the Army met its recruiting goals every fiscal year from 2001 through 2004. The attacks on 9/11 boosted military recruitment for 2001 and 2002. An additional wave of recruits joined the service with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, but by 2004, finding enough recruits to fill boots was increasingly difficult.⁷⁷ Media coverage of casualties, soldier misconduct, reports of wounded soldiers not receiving proper treatment, and soldiers forced to stay beyond their terms of enlistment created a difficult recruiting environment that the Army had to overcome.

The long-term effects of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were detrimental to the Army’s recruitment efforts. The Army missed its recruitment goal in 2005.⁷⁸ In addition to missing its goal, the Army had to enlist the overall lowest quality of recruits since the early 1980s.⁷⁹ With the

⁷⁵ Chambers and Vergun, “Army Recruiting Messages Help Keep Army Rolling Along.”

⁷⁶ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 243.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁷⁸ US Congress, “Recruiting, Retention, and Future Levels of Military Personnel,” 5.

⁷⁹ Department of Defense, “Recruit Quality Over Time: Quality by FY from 1973.”

ongoing wars, prospects for Army recruiting were not going to get any better. The Army shelved its “Army of One” campaign.

In the end, the “Army of One” campaign was doomed to fail for the same reasons recruitment campaigns did not succeed in the 1970s: “Army of One” failed to unite internal stakeholders. The slogan’s multiple meanings confused people inside and outside of the Army. Recruiters missed their old, faithful “Be All You Can Be” motto. The “Army of One” motto also did not resonate with the older generations outside of the Army who were the key influencers on those who were of military age. Though the Army introduced new tactics to change the Army’s brand by using a computer game and a website with individual experiences, these innovative techniques could not overcome the suspicions of an unsupportive crowd. The Army dropped the “Army of One” slogan, as well as the ad agency that created it. By November 2006, the Army was ready to launch a new advertising campaign with a new ad agency partner.

The “Army Strong” campaign shifted from a sense of self-identity to an identity of strength. The slogan intended to demonstrate how the Army made people better, particularly in a time of war. Learning from the misstep of the “Army of One” campaign, the “Army Strong” campaign provided inspirational words for potential recruits and their key influencers. The slogan “There’s nothing on this green Earth that is stronger than the US Army, because there is nothing on this green Earth that is stronger than a US Army Soldier” courted potential recruits, while “You made them strong, we’ll make them Army Strong” catered to a potential recruit’s influencers.⁸⁰

The Army has not missed a recruiting goal since 2005. To be sure, the Army had to lower its standards during the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to meet recruiting goals,

⁸⁰ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 252.

particularly from 2007-2009. The result was a lower quality recruit cohort throughout the remainder of the decade.⁸¹ This came at a time when youth unemployment was relatively high during the economic downturn in the late 2000s, yet the quality of recruits choosing to join the Army did not rise to mirror the unemployment, as it had historically done.⁸² To combat the trend in fewer high quality recruits, the Army increased recruiter numbers, signing bonuses of up to \$20,000, and its advertising budget.⁸³ ⁸⁴ Despite the effort, recruit quality continued to miss its marks. Each branch of service saw a drop in recruit quality because of environmental factors, but the Army saw the largest decrease of all of them, particularly from FY2003 to FY2007.⁸⁵ As youth unemployment and commitments to Iraq and Afghanistan waned, the overall quality of recruits began to stabilize, but the Army remained the least competitive branch of service for high quality recruits.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrate an important limitation of branding. The non-permissive recruiting environment created by the military's commitments throughout the "Army Strong" campaign overshadowed the Army's branding attempts. Though branding can aid recruitment, it cannot always surmount extreme environmental factors. What is difficult, if not impossible, is to identify what recruiting numbers would have been if the Army did not try to brand itself at all.

⁸¹ Department of Defense, "Recruit Quality Over Time: Quality by FY from 1973."

⁸² Department of Defense, "Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2014 Summary Report" (Washington, DC: CNA, 2014), 18.

⁸³ Bailey, *America's Army*, 257.

⁸⁴ Fox News, "Thousands of Americans Choose Army for \$20,000 Signing Bonus," last modified September 1, 2007, accessed April 01, 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2007/09/01/thousands-americans-choose-army-for-20000-signing-bonus.html>.

⁸⁵ Department of Defense, "Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2014 Summary Report," 16.

As of 2010, Army Regulation 601-208 defines the Army's branding strategy. It states that the objective is to highlight service opportunities to potential service members and those who influence them.⁸⁶ More than just a logo and slogan, the Army brand seeks to meet specific objectives. It seeks to support recruiting efforts by reaching the highest possible number of potential recruits, emphasizing educational opportunities, and shaping the marketing environment by building an enduring brand that stands up to changing environmental factors.⁸⁷

The decreasing population that is willing and able to serve is one changing environmental factor that may lead the Army to rely more heavily on "careerists," or people who are willing to serve longer, rather than on one-time enlistees. This could necessitate a shift in Army marketing as a stepping stone to a successful future. Significantly, a person must first decide to join the Army before making the decision to stay for a career.

Recommendations

The Army may build upon the following suggestions to hone its branding and marketing efforts to recruit quality personnel. First, the Army must ensure that its brand is consistent with a recruit's reasons to serve. The campaigns of the 1970s first made this move by trying to place the Army alongside recruits as forming a team. This instinct was correct as the Army tried to move away from a reputation as an autocracy, but failed because it was unable to live up to its brand promise. In the 1990s, Army "social good" campaigns failed, in part, because they strayed too far from a core call to patriotic duty: the typical military recruit did not view humanitarian missions as

⁸⁶ Department of the Army, *AR 601-208 The Army Brand and Marketing Program* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2010), 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

a patriotic responsibility. The “Army of One” campaign of the 2000s failed because it was too confusing. It tried to recognize its target’s growing desire for individual recognition, but in doing so, it abandoned the perception that joining the Army was akin to joining a team.

Second, the Army brand must remain true to the nature of the organization. It should embrace Army traditions and culture, and stand up to scrutiny. A major reason why the marketing campaigns of the ‘70s failed was because the public viewed them as falsely portraying what the Army offers. The Army is not, in fact, all travel benefits and excitement. Such false promises degraded the trust of the American public and an onslaught of negative media coverage damaged the Army brand.

The “Be All You Can Be” campaign of the 1980s is the Army’s most successful to date. It was patriotic. It accurately represented the Army, and even went one step further; it leveraged a perceived weakness of the Army and turned it into a strength. As the largest service branch, the Army had to answer the charge that it was the generic catchall branch of service. With the “Be All You Can Be” message, the Army successfully repositioned itself as the greatest provider of opportunity for recruits.

Moving into the 1990s, the Army further built upon this promise by positioning itself as an avenue to learn advanced technical skills that would also be competitive in the civilian job market. These campaigns spoke to intrinsically motivated individuals who, in a desire to better themselves, also bettered the Army. Furthermore, the Army recognized college education as being closely associated with self-improvement.

The Army should continue to market itself as providing a path to higher education. More specifically, the wave of future warfare is likely to lean heavily on evolving cyber/electronic actions. Offering skills/training in those fields may be more effective in drawing soldiers seeking

self-betterment. Even though there is an unspoken rule among the service branches not to denigrate each other because they are all working toward the same goal of recruiting for service to country, the Army can strengthen its brand by continuing to differentiate itself from the Marine Corps, Air Force, and Navy.

History shows that the Army also needs to be clear and consistent in its branding. Marketing executions can change over time, but branding is the emotion the organization evokes in its audience, and it should not change. As the Army worked to find its voice over the past number of decades, campaigns changed too frequently, went dark altogether, or the message was lost on the audience, such as with the “Army of One” campaign of the 2000s.

Growing access to the Internet has also complicated the Army’s control of its brand messaging. The Army has worked to keep up with new and increased avenues for touchpoints, but the Army has encountered challenges with the evolution of social media and availability of information. The Army should identify its messaging hierarchy, where advertisements and public events espouse a call to service and intrinsic motivations while discussing incentives and benefits in a recruiter’s office. The Army should be purposeful in making these decisions. A strong brand will get people to walk into a recruiter’s office. An effective recruiter will get them to join the Army.

Another part of the Army’s need to stay true to itself in order to maintain a strong brand includes a commitment not to lower recruitment standards. While this practice may help the Army meet numbers in the short term, it has the potential to damage the organization’s respectability. Furthermore, as the lower recruitment standards of the Vietnam era first revealed, lower-quality recruits are a danger to themselves and others. Although environmental factors may overwhelm an organization, a strong brand should help to ameliorate heavy losses.

The Army should also seek to better control its brand. Foremost, the Army must ensure brand stakeholders are onboard and empowered in marketing campaigns. In the age of social media, everyone has a voice. If a brand's stakeholders do not believe its promise, the target audience and their influencers will also find trouble in believing the brand promise.

The campaigns of the '70s failed due to internal dissension and lack of internal support. The importance of recruiters is paramount in the branding, marketing, and sales process because they are the last point of contact a potential recruit has before deciding to enlist. The success of the "Be All You Can Be" era of Army recruiting shows the power of a campaign where the message can stand on its own and receive the full buy-in of recruiters.

The Army should never give up control of its message to outside sources such as the media or sister services. In the early 1990s, the Army made the mistake of pulling advertising out of fear that media coverage of the Persian Gulf War would drown out recruitment efforts. Going silent released control of the narrative and confused the American public into thinking the Army was no longer hiring for years to come. Furthermore, while all of the service branches combine to form the United States military, the Army should never miss an opportunity to speak for itself.

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