
Shaping the Military Units' Image During Covid-19 Epidemic based on Military University of Land Forces Activities

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article presents information activities carried out by Military University of Land Forces during the coronavirus epidemic. They are presented in the context of the image-building activities of the unit. Analyzes and generalizations were made, which constitute original recommendations for further actions. The subject of the analysis were activities shaping a positive image of the organization during anti-crisis activities.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article uses a research method - an analysis of media reports conducted by the spokesman of the Military University of Land Forces. Additionally, the research method of participant observation was used.

Findings: In the time of a pandemic, information channels and media meeting the requirements of fast and effective communication in emerging threats have been exposed. These determinants are now the most essential to successful Public Relations.

Practical Implications: Recommendations were proposed for building a positive image of an organization such as a military university in the future, but it may also apply to other military units, more broadly - uniformed or paramilitary, participating in crises.

Originality/value: The experience gained in the specific, difficult conditions of the epidemic allows us to propose actions shaping the image of the Armed Forces as a formation serving society in times of peace. To some extent, the article reflects the possibilities for military institutions to participate in the event of crisis and other threats.

Keywords: Military University of Land Forces, Cadets, crisis, epidemic, image.

JEL classification: M31, M39.

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1. Introduction

The topic discussed in the article is to some extent a vivisection of the possibilities and activities of military universities in Poland in the event of a crisis. Based on the actual events and the anatomy of the image-related activities undertaken, it was possible to analyze the experience useful for public relations programs in these organizations (Dojwa and Bodziany, 2013, p. 109). Taking up this topic has certain cognitive and application values, as it enables the formulation of appropriate recommendations for further activity. The anatomy of activities (mainly journalistic activity) of the information department of a particular university has significant cognitive values, useful for shaping a positive image, probably of any organization. It is especially worth looking at the tendencies of using modern media against the background of traditional media, which are largely ignored today. The observed trends are common, as if they suggest what information channels and media can be counted on in cases of the need for quick and effective communication in situations of emerging threats.

2. Characteristics of the Area of Analysis

The Academy of Land Forces Generała Tadeusz Kościuszko is an academic, public university, supervised by both the Minister of National Defense and the Minister of Science and Higher Education. The main goal of the Academy is to educate students in military and civilian studies and to conduct scientific and research activities. The university is entitled to doctorate in the following disciplines: management and national security. It is also a military unit within the meaning of the Act of November 21, 1967 on the universal obligation to defend the Republic of Poland and carries out tasks related to defense. University activities are based on the Act of July 20, 2018 - Law on Higher Education and Science (Military University of Land Forces).

The largest group here are military students - cadets, who study five-year studies at the Faculty of Security Sciences and the Faculty of Management. Preparing future commanders - leaders requires learning real-time data analysis and critical thinking. Future commanders need to understand the risks involved in processing mystified data. Cadets learn to model tactical and logistic activities (Fields of study in Military University of Land Forces). The nature of the university poses requirements related not only to the development of science, modern technologies, education, but also to taking actions related to defense and crisis measures. The education process at the university is supported by intelligent technologies.

3. Operation "Resilient Spring" in the Context of the Activities of the Military University of Land Forces

The first reported case of the corona virus Covid-19 in Poland took place on March 4, 2020. The threat related to the emergence of this disease caused the armed forces,

for the first time after 1989, to become involved in such a large scale for anti-crisis measures. On March 18, 2020, the anti-crisis operation was launched under the code name "Resilient Spring", the main burden of which was taken over by the Territorial Defense Forces (TDF) (Operation "Resilient Spring"). At the peak of the operation, even 5.5 thousand people from Territorial Defense Forces soldiers and cadets from Military Academies were involved in the operation every day (Pietrzak, 2020).

The purpose of this operation was: (...) mitigating the effects of the crisis and strengthening the resilience to the crisis of local communities, supporting all local government and sanitary institutions providing aid (...) supporting the Border Guard and Police (...). In order to rationalize activities under the operation, the people in need were classified and groups of people covered by support were defined. They were (Resilient Spring):

- families of health professionals involved in preventing the spread of the virus;
- combatants;
- veterans of operations outside the country;
- elderly people over 60 years of age;
- disabled people;
- single parents;
- people in quarantine.

Candidates for future officers – cadets educated at military universities have been involved in the fight against the coronavirus on a large scale. This activity was regulated by the decision of the Minister of National Defense, and military students practically strengthened local Territorial Defense Brigades as part of the “Resilient Spring” operation conducted by TDF. Students, but also employees of military universities supported the activities of state administration, services and local governments (Cadets involved in the fight against the coronavirus). The tasks of the students of the Military Academy of Land Forces during the operation “Resilient Spring” are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Support provided by the Military University of Land Forces during the fight against the Covid-19 virus

Helping veterans
Support for healthcare professionals
Helping veterans
Trios, interviews, temperature measurement
Blood haemorrhage
Helping people in quarantine
Food distribution
Distribution of anti-crisis measures
Medical and logistic support for
Nursing Homes evacuation - Crisis Intervention Teams

Source: Own study based on Cadets involved in the fight against the coronavirus.

It is also worth emphasizing that the cadets also responded to the request of the Minister of National Defence to donate blood. The Military University of Land Forces organized a voluntary blood donation campaign in which over 90 liters of blood were collected. The cadets' activities as part of the operation were widely reported in the media (Cadets involved in the fight against the coronavirus). The activity of the Military University of Land Forces command and the press spokesman in these matters, corresponding to the theory (scope) of public relations activities, and conducive to deepening cooperation, and thus the effectiveness and efficiency of work, deserves attention (Black, 2018, p. 183). Information on the cadets' activities was widely described on the Military University of Land Forces' website and in social media - mainly on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

4. Building a Positive Image of the Organization

The subject of the analysis carried out for the purposes of this article were the actions taken to shape a positive image of the organization during the anti-crisis measures (Knecht, 2018, p. 113). The authors analyzed reports regarding the Military University of Land Forces and the activities of cadets (military students) throughout the country. The article uses a research method - an analysis of media reports conducted by the spokesman of the Military University of Land Forces. Additionally, the research method of participant observation was used.

Vivisection was also performed on the basis of participant observation and autopsy of the authors, participants in the activities carried out. They cover the entire duration of Operation "Resilient Spring" supported by military universities. The main external experiences are publicly available information / reports on anti-crisis measures. These were: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, AWL Website, Radio, Television, News websites. The list of media reports concerning the Military University of Land Forces and the activity of cadets during the operation "Resilient Spring", by type of media, is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. List of media reports on AWL during the "Resilient Spring" operation by type of media

Type of media	Number of publications
Twitter	104
Facebook	61
Websites	47
Instagram account of Military University of Land Forces	34
Military University of Land Forces' website	29
Television	6
Radio	3

Source: Own study based on media report of the Military University of Land Forces' spokesman.

As a result of analyzing the above mention list, it should be stated that the main burden of the university's information activity (which is also a military unit) is the Internet and social media. The largest number of publications on university activities took place on Twitter (57 publications - accounts of other entities and organizations, 47 publications – Military University of Land Forces' account). Another information channel were websites (including national and local news websites). The Military University of Land Forces was clearly focused on promoting its activities in social media. A total of 95 posts were published on their own accounts, concerning the activities of cadets (Facebook - 40 publications on the Military University of Land Forces' account, 21 publications - accounts of other entities and organizations), Instagram and 34 reports. 29 posts were posted on the Military University of Land Forces' website regarding activities during the epidemic. The smallest number of reports took place in Telewizja (6) and Radio (3). The analysis did not take into account the traditional press (newspapers).

The use of modern methods of communication by the Military University of Land Forces to build a positive image seems to be the right direction (Materac, 2019). We are currently observing a progressive decline in the effectiveness of traditional promotion instruments. The atomization of the addressees of promotional activities has long been noted in the media market. Contemporary media is characterized by coexistence, rapid development and mutual penetration (media convergence) (Gebrowski, 2007, p. 14-19). In the media market, it is easy to notice the principle of "herd journalism", which should be understood as journalists' interest in the same subject. The same information is often reproduced in different media (Jablonski, 2006, p. 169).

Building a positive image of the Military University of Land Forces is particularly important in the context of recruiting candidates for military studies. Military universities are the "forge" of the future cadres of the Polish Army. Building the image of Military University of Land Forces as an organization that is up to its task in times of crisis encourages potential candidates to join the army - to become a future officer. The key here is to strengthen and stress the image of a cadet - a military student, his attitude in crisis, readiness to act and willingness to help the weakest.

The image of the organization should be treated as one of its key assets, understood as an image or symbol. Referring this definition to the institution, which is the Military University of Land Forces, it should be stated that its image is a collection of thoughts, beliefs and impressions about it in the opinion of the society. The image is a dynamic concept - its creation is a continuous process (Lipinski, 2012, p. 29).

The target group in the perception of Military University of Land Forces are young people - potential candidates for military studies. Considering the generational classification, it should be stated that potential candidates for military studies are representatives of generation Z (people born after 1995). Representatives of this

generation acquire most of their knowledge on the Internet using mobile devices. In order to shape the image of the organization among representatives of this generation, one should focus on the following media: Internet, social media and games (computer and smartphone) that enable competition (The image of an attractive brand in the eyes of different generations).

The Military University of Land Forces, basing its activities in the field of building (shaping) a positive image and promoting the attitudes of cadets on the Internet and social media, chose - in our opinion - the right communication channels to reach the target audience. Using the potential of the tools, which were its own accounts on social networking sites and a website, Military University of Land Forces reported on an ongoing basis the activities of cadets under the "Resilient Spring" operation. The positive message was additionally reinforced by the mentions of the university in news websites and accounts of other entities in social media. The Covid-19 pandemic created an opportunity to deepen ties with society through the activity of the military (including military academies) in many fields.

Anti-crisis operations test in practice the military's ability to ensure security. They provide an opportunity to gain social trust and support in everyday activities, including future recruitment and development.

The Military University of Land Forces staffing needs are significant in terms of the selection of the best candidates, which increases the potential of the entire Armed Forces in terms of Human Resource. The positive image of the army, including military universities, undoubtedly helps in this. It is important to acquire organizational talents for the Armed Forces - people with extraordinary abilities, exposed in the intellectual, creative or specific fields (Balcerzyk and Materac, 2019). In the promotional processes of universities, a positive "media hype" is helpful, resulting from the activities of cadets and academies, which is particularly important in reaching a large number of potential recruits.

5. Reporting in the Media of the University's Activities during the Operation "Resilient Spring"

On Facebook, all the cadets' activities were reported throughout the duration of Operation "Resilient Spring". The information was posted on the account of Military University of Land Forces and other organizations. They concerned the provision of medical supplies, support for veterans, Caritas support, training in the field of medical rescue, support for animal shelters, blood donation campaigns, spending holidays in barracks, supporting hospitals, nursing homes, building field admission rooms, and helping people in quarantine.

The cadets during daily service, as part of the operation, were involved in practically all tasks carried out by the Territorial Defence Forces. Actions of cadets from all over Poland were published on Facebook. Their presence in the region,

demonstrating the uniform with the University's emblem, built a sense of brotherhood. The future officers acted on the "front line" (for example, evacuating the charges of Nursing Homes), they spent their holidays in barracks, away from their families, giving a testimony of dedication to society and readiness to act at any moment. Blood donation has been the domain of active military activities for years. Reports in the media on this subject created the image of a soldier, not only fulfilling orders or official tasks, but also being a member of the local community, providing help to the needy, the sick and the weakest. The military is no longer perceived as an organization prepared for the time of war, but as useful at all times, efficient and well-organized at the same time, which has proved in life during the current pandemic that it is an army that responds even in an emergency.

Promotional activity on the Instagram portal concerned the above-mentioned activities. These were posts with high-quality photos and video materials. The range of the relationship was increased (accentuated) with numerous tags. The promotion of the cadets' activities on Facebook and Instagram was carried out throughout the operation. The publications took care of high-quality posts, good photos and transparency of the message. Posts were tagged with slogans, e.g. #poranapchora and #odpornawiosna, which allowed for permanent reference to the phenomenon of participating in the fight against the pandemic. Clicking on the hashtag allows you to move from one publication to the entire range of reports on the topic. Tagging has a dual purpose. On the one hand, it allows followers and those who like a given account to observe the environment in which they operate, inspiring trust and credibility. On the other hand, tagged pages receive notification that they have been tagged in a given publication. This gives you a chance to increase your reach by sharing on other websites, sending their fans to our fan page (Eleven tips on how to promote your Facebook page).

The reports on the websites came from both national and local portals. These were government services (e.g. mon.gov.pl), nationwide information services (eg Polsat News), industry websites (Polska Zbrojna) and numerous local news websites in regions where support was provided by seconded cadets.

The most important information was made available on the university's website, further strengthening the message and highlighting the most important events in a chronological order. The subject of the posted posts was the same as the information posted on social media and messages from Twitter.

The use of several types of media at the same time is a current trend in marketing that allows you to reach a wide audience. A positive image of a cadet is perpetuated in social awareness. Local portals play a specific role here, as they publicize information about the activities of academies that are often distant in "small homelands", making military universities more "tangible and accessible".

The Twitter portal has the most information on cadets' activities under the "Resilient Spring" operation. The reason for this is the specificity of the operation of this tool. Twitter is a social networking site that provides a microblogging service in which the main carrier of information is short entries, usually one sentence long (Micro blogging). This tool is often used by institutions, public figures, publicists and journalists (Diep, 2011). Information on cadets appeared basically on two accounts - the Military University of Land Forces and the Territorial Defence Forces. Thanks to this type of social media, information about Military University of Land Forces' activities reached recipients in a very short time. They were tagged to enlarge their reach. The largest amount of information on anti-crisis measures was published on Twitter.

There were six mentions of the Military Academy of the Land Forces during the operation "Resilient Spring" in Television. They included both local news programs (TVP3 Wrocław, TVP3 Kielce) and nationwide programs (TVP News, Raban Studio, Okiem Wiary). In the above-mentioned programs presented Military University of Land Forces (including the academic chaplaincy within its framework) in a positive way. Future officers of the Polish Army were presented as people who are ready to act, help and organize charity events. Radio information about the activities of cadets concerned the blood donation campaign, support for the construction of a field hospital by cadets and a charity campaign - support for the Orphanage by cadets carrying out tasks in 14 BOT. The above actions warm up the image of the soldier and emphasize the fact that future officers are not indifferent to the harm of others. They are ready to support society every day in every way.

6. Conclusions

In the past, the image of the army was built by armed clashes in defense of borders, population, and often offensive wars, bringing gains in the form of new territories, etc. Today, hybrid wars, operating in smaller territories, known to the countries involved, dominate. The army is armed, perfected according to the theory of deterrence, not of initiating wars, but of avoiding them. Nowadays, the maintenance of the army is associated with the development of the level of technology available, which in some cases are aimed at ensuring development and life for future generations.

The image and approval of the army are mainly related to the knowledge of its mission and achievements in the everyday life of the population. This is, among others what society is currently experiencing from the military in the pandemic. One of the reasons for the military's activity outside the barracks are crises that constantly plague the population, such as floods, natural disasters or the pandemic in question. One of the reasons for modern support for the military is its ability to cope with and recover from crisis situations. One of the determinants of the effectiveness of military operations, now and in the future, is its image - it is important that it is accepted by the society. The armed forces should be understood as a strong, efficient

and empathetic organization for the time of peace - capable of ensuring it. Actions in times of crises are an "occasion" to prove the essence of the modern army understood in this way.

Generally, one should act towards disclosing this character of the army. The analysis of the military's activities - practically on the anatomy of the activities of the university (military unit) in the time of a pandemic - is a "litmus test", an experience of the effectiveness and approval of the population for the peaceful behavior of the army in a situation of supporting society in need. Our recommendations include, among others, professional programming of public relations activities in the army and its formal planning, having an appropriate service in the organizational structure, disseminating the essence, idea and importance of this activity for the army itself, often positively proven, e.g. in the field of economy, politics, science, administration (Knecht, 2009, p. 9).

The use of modern methods of communication by the military community to build a positive image seems to be the right direction, which is proved by the analyzed information and promotion activity of the university. We are undoubtedly observing a progressive decline in the effectiveness of traditional promotion instruments. Hence the search for new solutions and adaptation of emerging highly desirable innovations. On the media market, atomization of the recipients of promotional activities can be noticed. Contemporary media also coexist, they are characterized by rapid development and mutual penetration. In the media market, it is easy to notice the principle of "herd journalism", which should be understood as journalists' interest in the same subject. Although it has a generally pejorative tinge, this time it is useful for focusing on an "emerging opportunity" to tackle a socially important topic. It is important from a social point of view, the promotion of a new, modern character of the army.

The journalistic activity of the information division of the analyzed university has significant cognitive values, useful for shaping a positive image of any organization. It is cognitive to say that military universities, directing their promotional activities mainly towards young people (representatives of the Z generation), are part of the general tendency to use traditional media to a lesser extent.

Stating the trend for the widespread use of social media is not revealing, but it confirms the changes that have been taking place in the media market for several years. It should be emphasized that military institutions are not indifferent to these changes. Military students come from all over the country. Delegating cadets to the locally operating brigades of the Territorial Defense Forces caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to promote universities in local, often distant communities directly. The cadets' actions were additionally publicized in the local media, which additionally strengthened the effect of positive media hype. In the time of a pandemic, information channels and media meeting the requirements of

fast and effective communication in emerging threats have been exposed. These determinants are now the most essential to successful Public Relations.

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