



MILITARY INFORMATION SUPPORT OPERATIONS: RECRUITMENT OF GENERATION Z TO THE ARMED FORCES ACADEMY OF GENERAL M. R. ŠTEFÁNIK

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ABSTRACT

The Slovak Armed Forces could use Military Information Support Operations (MISO) knowledge to influence target audiences and align military goals with national interests. This academic paper examines MISO's ability to recruit Generation Z to the Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik. Therefore, this academic paper examines customized MISO strategies to engage Generation Z, considering their digital fluency, values-oriented perspective, and social media dependence. Digital platforms for precise messaging, values-driven content that resonates with Generation Z's social issues, and influencers and peer advocates for recruitment are vital strategies.

In the theoretical part of the academic paper, we discuss MISO operations and their application in the U.S. Army environment for multiple purposes, including the recruitment process of new military personnel. Subsequently, in the practical part of the academic paper, we talk about Generation Z and the possibilities of integrating knowledge from MISO operations into the needs of the Slovak Armed Forces in the recruitment process of Generation Z to the Armed Forces Academy of General M. R. Štefánik in Liptovský Mikuláš.

The benefits of MISO's involvement in this initiative far outweigh the challenges. By aligning recruitment with Generation Z's preferences and concerns, the Slovak Armed Forces can build a solid and ever-flowing pipeline for cadet flow to the Armed Forces Academy of General M. R. Štefánik in Liptovský Mikuláš. This alignment ensures the recruitment process is practical and relevant to the target audience.

MISO's participation is about improving recruitment and strengthening the military communication strategy in the Slovak Republic's complex information landscape. This strategy aims to precisely target a common shared goal, enhancing the audience's confidence in its effectiveness.

Keywords: MISO, Generation Z, recruitment, Slovak Armed Forces, Armed Forces Academy

INTRODUCTION

Military Information Support Operations (MISO) has evolved into a cornerstone of contemporary military strategies, particularly in an era characterized by information warfare, digital communication, and psychological manipulation. These operations, designed to influence target audiences' emotions, attitudes, and behaviors, are indispensable in conflict zones and peacetime endeavors, including recruitment campaigns and public outreach initiatives. The Slovak Armed Forces, like other NATO members, should recognize the significance of MISO in advancing national security objectives and specific operational aims. As for numerous countries, a critical challenge for the Slovak Republic is recruiting and retaining Generation Z—individuals born between 1995 and 2010—within its military, specifically the Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik.

Generation Z constitutes a distinctive demographic with specific traits that render conventional military recruitment strategies less efficacious. Generation Z, the inaugural cohort raised amidst the internet, social media, and smartphones, is characterized by its digital proficiency, social consciousness, and skepticism towards conventional authority frameworks (Dimock, 2019). Recent studies indicate that this generation prioritizes personal values such

as social justice, environmental issues, and global citizenship (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Thus, military recruitment strategies that do not align with these values and fail to leverage the digital platforms frequented by Generation Z are unlikely to be effective.

The Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik plays a pivotal role in cultivating the future of the Slovak Armed Forces through the training and development of future military officers. Recruitment for this institution is crucial for sustaining a formidable, highly proficient, and coherent armed forces with dignified and strong leadership. Attracting Generation Z to the Armed Forces Academy requires innovative strategies that surpass conventional recruitment methods. With its unique and creative approach, MISO provides a proficient solution by allowing the military to develop customized, culturally relevant messages that align with the distinct traits of Generation Z.

Integrating MISO into the Slovak Armed Force's recruitment strategies may entail several fundamental approaches. Utilizing digital platforms and social media is essential, as these are the principal venues where Generation Z engages and acquires information (Twenge, 2017). The military must formulate targeted campaigns that utilize digital platforms to communicate authentic and engaging messages to this generation. Using popular social media platforms to disseminate narratives of young cadets and their experiences may foster relatability and aspiration among prospective recruits.

Secondly, the substance of these messages must be guided by values. Generation Z is frequently driven by a commitment to effectuate change globally. Therefore, recruitment initiatives should highlight the Slovak Armed Forces' involvement in tackling international challenges, including humanitarian efforts, disaster response, and peacekeeping missions. This corresponds with the tenets of MISO, which aim to shape behavior via strategic, culturally attuned messaging that resonates with the values and concerns of the target audience (Joint Publication 3-13.2, 2011). By positioning military service as a method to impact society and the global community positively, the Slovak Armed Forces can offer a more persuasive argument to Generation Z. For instance; messages could focus on the opportunity to make a difference in the world through military service, or the chance to develop leadership skills that can be used to address global issues.

Furthermore, the utilization of influencers and peer advocates constitutes another essential strategy. Studies indicate that Generation Z is likelier to trust and be swayed by peers and social media influencers rather than by conventional advertising or authoritative figures (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). MISO can foster collaborations with prominent individuals who resonate with the principles of both Generation Z and the Slovak Armed Forces, thereby promoting military service in an authentic and aspirational manner.

Nonetheless, utilizing MISO for recruitment presents particular challenges. A primary concern is preserving the credibility and authenticity of the messages. Generation Z is exceptionally skilled at recognizing inauthentic content, and any efforts to manipulate or coerce through digital channels may be counterproductive, potentially harming the reputation of the Slovak Armed Forces (Pew Research Center, 2021). Furthermore, the legal and ethical ramifications of employing MISO in domestic recruitment initiatives must be meticulously addressed. MISO is primarily intended for foreign audiences, and its application for domestic purposes necessitates compliance with stringent legal frameworks to ensure adherence to national and international law (Joint Publication 3-13.2, 2011).

Notwithstanding these challenges, the prospective advantages of integrating MISO into recruitment initiatives are substantial. Using targeted, culturally pertinent messaging, the Slovak Armed Forces can enhance engagement with Generation Z and establish a strong and ever-flowing pipeline of prospective cadets for the Armed Forces Academy. MISO's potential

to build a strong future for the Armed Forces Academy should instill a sense of optimism and hope in the audience. Moreover, MISO's capacity to synchronize with extensive strategic communication initiatives should guarantee that recruitment campaigns are consistent with the military's mission and national goals.

Therefore, this academic paper provides information on MISO and the integration of its tools that could prove to be a valuable instrument for the Slovak Armed Forces to enhance their recruitment strategies with effective engagement with Generation Z to the influx of recruits into the Armed Forces Academy of General M. R. Štefánik in Liptovský Mikuláš.

1 METHODOLOGY AND AIM

The academic paper comprehensively examines the role of MISO and its use for recruiting Generation Z. It utilizes a mixed-method research methodology, which incorporates several qualitative research methodologies. This approach enables a comprehensive approach to the subject matter through qualitative contextual exploration.

In the theoretical part of the academic paper, we discuss MISO operations and their application in the U.S. Army environment for multiple purposes, including the recruitment process of new military personnel. Subsequently, in the practical part of the academic paper, we talk about Generation Z and the possibilities of integrating knowledge from MISO operations into the needs of the Slovak Armed Forces in the recruitment process of Generation Z to the Armed Forces Academy of General M. R. Štefánik in Liptovský Mikuláš.

For both the theoretical and practical parts of the academic paper, we applied the following research methods:

- analysis,
- generalization,
- synthesis.

This academic paper aims to propose new ideas and COA in the recruitment process of Generation Z to the Armed Forces Academy of General M. R. Štefánik. Therefore, this academic paper should be understood as a proposal to apply a different outlook regarding the recruitment process and the adjustment of the environment for the new cadets.

2 MISO IN THE U.S. ARMED FORCES

Military Information Support Operations (MISO) are fundamentally derived from psychological operations (PSYOP), first employed by the U.S. Army during World War I. During that period, "propaganda" was used to sway adversarial forces and civilian populations to attain strategic goals. By the onset of World War II, the term "psychological warfare" was embraced, emphasizing the utilization of media and communication tactics to influence the morale of adversarial forces and the resolve of foreign populations (Paddock, 2010).

The structured implementation of psychological operations in the U.S. military, referred to as PSYOP, gained prominence during the Vietnam War. Throughout this period, PSYOP units employed leaflets, loudspeaker broadcasts, and radio transmissions to diminish the morale of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces. By the 1980s, PSYOP had evolved into a specialized military division responsible for swaying foreign populations by disseminating curated information aligned with U.S. military objectives (Cowan & Cook, 2018).

In 2010, the Department of Defense (DOD) substantially rebranded PSYOP, renaming the function to MISO. The alteration was prompted by apprehensions that the phrase “psychological operations” bore unfavorable implications linked to manipulation, propaganda, and deceit, thereby obstructing collaboration with partner agencies and foreign governments (Joint Publication 3-13.2, 2011). The DOD sought to diminish the stigma associated with influence operations by adopting the more neutral and strategic term MISO, thereby aligning these operations with contemporary communication strategies prioritizing credibility and integrity.

The rebranding of PSYOP to MISO did not fundamentally change the essence of these operations but highlighted their developing function in a globalized information landscape. MISO is characterized as the strategic dissemination of specific information and indicators to foreign audiences, aimed at influencing their emotions, motivations, rational thinking, and ultimately, the conduct of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals (Joint Publication 3-13.2, 2011). These operations remain essential to the U.S. military's capacity to shape perceptions and influence behavior, especially in intricate and asymmetric warfare contexts.

2.1 APPLICATIONS OF MISO IN THE U.S. ARMED FORCES

MISO is a multifaceted instrument utilized by the U.S. Armed Forces across a broad range of operations, encompassing peacetime activities to comprehensive military campaigns. The following are the principal domains in which MISO is actively employed:

- **Combat operations**

MISO is utilized in combat operations to undermine enemy resolve, diminish support for adversarial actions, and promote defections. During the Gulf War in 1991, PSYOP units, later known as MISO, employed radio broadcasts and leaflet distributions to persuade Iraqi soldiers to surrender, leading to the capitulation of tens of thousands of Iraqi troops without direct combat (Cowan & Cook, 2018). This strategy was predicated on the assumption that altering the enemy's psychological state could diminish combat efficacy and preserve lives.

- **Counterinsurgency and irregular warfare**

In counterinsurgency operations, MISO is essential for gaining the support of the local populace. This strategy was prominently utilized during the U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, where MISO was implemented to foster trust with local populations, counter insurgent propaganda, and enhance the legitimacy of U.S. and allied forces. MISO operations in Afghanistan were essential for disseminating information that contradicted Taliban narratives and advocated for peace, stability, and reconstruction to the local populace (Department of Defense, 2011).

- **Stability and humanitarian operations**

MISO utilizes instability and humanitarian operations to cultivate positive perceptions of U.S. forces and disseminate critical information to impacted populations. For instance, following natural disasters or in post-conflict situations, MISO units are dispatched to convey essential information, including the locations of aid distribution centers, medical services, and evacuation routes. These initiatives contribute to stabilizing the situation by alleviating panic, promoting collaboration with military and humanitarian personnel, and curtailing the dissemination of misinformation.

- **Peacekeeping and diplomatic initiatives**

MISO is frequently employed in peacekeeping operations to bolster diplomatic initiatives and foster peaceful conflict resolutions. MISO messages in these contexts aim to promote adherence to peace agreements, alleviate tensions among conflicting parties, and strengthen the overarching objective of cultivating enduring stability. This variant of MISO is executed in close collaboration with U.S. embassies and the Department of State to ensure alignment with diplomatic goals (Joint Publication 3-13.2, 2011).

- **Cyber and digital operations**

As the digital information age has progressed, MISO has progressively transitioned into the domain of cyber operations. The U.S. military employs digital platforms to instantaneously convey messages and counteract adversarial propaganda. This entails utilizing social media, websites, and other digital platforms to shape the perceptions and behaviors of foreign populations. Digital MISO is proficient in combating misinformation campaigns and influencing the global narrative to align with U.S. strategic interests (Joint Publication 3-13.2, 2011).

- **Interagency and multinational cooperation**

MISO is not exclusively a military instrument but is also incorporated into broader U.S. government communication strategies. The DOD synchronizes MISO operations with other entities, including the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development, to guarantee that communications are consistent with U.S. foreign policy goals. Multinational collaboration is crucial in NATO operations, where MISO is instrumental in enhancing interoperability among allied forces and formulating messages that align with the objectives of international coalitions (Cowan & Cook, 2018).

MISOs have historically been essential to the U.S. military's endeavors to shape public opinion, sway foreign audiences, and manage perceptions in conflict areas. The strategic utility of MISO has extended beyond battlefield operations and counterinsurgency to include recruitment. The U.S. Armed Forces confront difficulties sustaining sufficient recruitment figures, especially among younger demographics; consequently, MISO has emerged as an effective instrument for enticing prospective soldiers by developing targeted, culturally relevant, and values-oriented communications.

- **Digital platforms and social media in MISO recruitment campaigns**

MISO has been integrated into recruitment efforts primarily via digital platforms and social media. Per the DOD's Joint Publication 3-13.2, MISO aims to convey accurate, culturally relevant messages to affect the attitudes and behaviors of target audiences (Department of Defense, 2011). Recruitment entails utilizing popular social media platforms the target audience uses, such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, to develop targeted campaigns that captivate younger demographics in their primary online environments.

The U.S. military has progressively redirected its recruitment efforts towards digital platforms to engage Millennials and Generation Z, who are more likely to interact with digital content than traditional media (Pew Research Center, 2021). The U.S. Armed Forces initiated its "What's Your Warrior?" campaign, which extensively employed social media and digital content to highlight the diverse career opportunities within the military, encompassing cyber operations and engineering (U.S. Army, 2019). By showcasing diverse roles, the campaign contested conventional views of military service, depicting it as a viable avenue for combat positions and advanced technical and specialized careers that resonate with the interests of younger demographics.

MISO also contributes to refining the tone and content of these digital campaigns. Messages are designed to resonate with individuals while also addressing the concerns of parents, educators, and peers, who frequently impact prospective recruits' decisions. MISO operations guarantee that recruitment messages are pertinent and compelling by comprehensively analyzing the target audience's values, interests, and fears. Content highlighting leadership, educational advantages, and community service significantly appeals to Generation Z, who prioritize purpose-driven careers and personal development (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

- **Values-driven messaging and the appeal to civic duty**

MISO operations prioritize creating values-driven messages that resonate with potential recruits' sense of civic responsibility, social justice, and personal growth alongside digital engagement. Generation Z is notably recognized for its dedication to societal issues, including environmental sustainability, social equity, and global humanitarian initiatives (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Consequently, recruitment campaigns highlighting the military's involvement in disaster relief, peacekeeping operations, and international assistance initiatives are expected to succeed tremendously.

MISO improves recruitment initiatives by ensuring that the messaging corresponds with the fundamental values of the target demographic. The Army's "Warriors Wanted" campaign exemplified the contributions of U.S. soldiers in assisting communities during natural disasters, notably the hurricane relief operations in Puerto Rico in 2017. This form of communication resonates with the principles of younger generations, who perceive the military not solely as a mechanism for national defense but as an entity capable of positively contributing to global and humanitarian initiatives (Twenge, 2017).

MISO operations also create messaging highlighting the personal and professional development opportunities the military offers. This encompasses emphasizing educational advantages, including the G.I. Bill, which allocates financial resources for service members' higher education, alongside prospects for leadership enhancement and skills training in advanced domains such as cybersecurity and engineering (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020). MISO positions military service as a conduit for personal and professional development, aligning recruitment narratives with the ambitions of younger generations that emphasize flexibility, skill acquisition, and enduring career opportunities.

- **Influencers and peer advocates in recruitment campaigns**

MISO operations acknowledge the significance of peer influence and social validation in the decision-making processes of younger recruits. Studies demonstrate that Generation Z trusts endorsements from peers and social media influencers more than conventional authoritative sources (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Consequently, the U.S. Armed Forces have progressively utilized influencers and peer advocates to endorse military service.

MISO accomplishes this by choosing influencers who align with the values and interests of target demographics. These influencers may comprise active-duty service members who disseminate their personal experiences on platforms such as YouTube or Instagram, providing an insider's perspective on military life. Through the presentation of relatable and authentic narratives, these influencers elucidate military service and motivate others to contemplate enlistment.

In recent years, the military has collaborated with prominent online influencers and content creators to engage broader audiences. The Air Force partnered with esports influencers to advocate for cybersecurity and information technology careers, acknowledging these fields' appeal to tech-savvy Generation Z individuals interested in gaming and digital

professions (U.S. Air Force, 2021). This collaboration illustrates how MISO operations can modify recruitment strategies to align with prospective candidates' interests and digital behaviors.

3 GENERATION Z

Generation Z, often termed Gen Z, is the demographic cohort that follows Millennials, typically encompassing individuals born from the mid-to-late 1990s to the early 2010s. As the inaugural generation immersed in the internet and smartphones, Gen Z demonstrates a unique array of traits influencing its conduct, perspectives, and societal impact.

The most defining characteristic of Gen Z is their identity as "digital natives." Having been born into an era dominated by smartphones, social media, and the internet, they are more familiar with technology than any preceding generation. A Pew Research Center study revealed that 95% of teenagers in this demographic possess a smartphone, and 45% report being online "almost constantly" (Pew Research Center, 2018). This perpetual connectivity has rendered Gen Z proficient in multitasking across diverse platforms, devices, and social media applications. Gen Z's digital proficiency extends beyond social networking; they adeptly utilize technology for education, employment, and entertainment.

Generation Z values authenticity and transparency in personal relationships and interactions with brands and public figures. Having been raised with access to nearly boundless information, they possess a keen ability to identify insincerity and are less susceptible to conventional advertising techniques. Instead, they react to content that appears authentic and individualized. This generation is drawn to influencers and celebrities who are transparent about their experiences, challenges, and achievements. For brands, corporate social responsibility, ethical practices, and transparency have become indispensable for acquiring and maintaining the loyalty of Gen Z consumers (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Social justice is paramount among Generation Z's values. They fervently advocate for various issues, encompassing climate change, racial equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender equity. This generation is more inclined to adopt progressive perspectives than earlier generations. A 2020 study conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) revealed that 62% of Gen Z voters endorsed Joe Biden in the 2020 U.S. presidential election, signifying a liberal inclination in their political preferences (CIRCLE, 2020).

Furthermore, Generation Z has actively organized and endorsed international movements such as Black Lives Matter, March for Our Lives (gun control), and Fridays for Future (climate change). The extensive utilization of social media has enabled this generation to mobilize rapidly and efficiently, with platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok functioning as essential instruments for activism and disseminating awareness. Their dedication to social causes is substantive; they ensure accountability for effecting change in themselves and others (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Generation Z is more willing to engage in mental health discourse than preceding generations. They have been nurtured in an environment where discussions regarding mental health have become progressively normalized, facilitated by the proliferation of mental health awareness campaigns and an expanding corpus of research that underscores the significance of psychological well-being. A report by the American Psychological Association (APA) indicates that Generation Z exhibits the highest levels of stress and mental health concerns among all generations, with 91% acknowledging the experience of at least one physical or emotional symptom associated with stress in the previous year (APA, 2019).

The heightened stress can be ascribed to various factors, including economic instability, academic demands, social media comparisons, and apprehensions regarding the future, such as climate change. Nonetheless, their transparency regarding mental health issues has cultivated a culture of empathy and reciprocal support. Platforms such as TikTok have evolved into centers for disseminating coping strategies, offering peer support, and dismantling stigmas associated with seeking therapy or alternative forms of assistance.

Generation Z values education, yet they adopt a more adaptable and pragmatic approach than Millennials. Many Gen Z individuals express skepticism regarding the worth of conventional higher education, especially in light of escalating expenses and the student debt crisis. Consequently, they are more inclined to explore alternative educational pathways, including online courses, vocational training, and coding boot camps. A survey conducted by Pearson Education revealed that approximately 59% of Gen Z participants consider skills-based learning more significant than a college degree (Pearson, 2018).

Generation Z prioritizes work-life balance, job security, and opportunities for professional advancement in their career aspirations. In contrast to Millennials, frequently labeled as job-hoppers, Generation Z generally pursues stability while simultaneously anticipating that employers provide flexibility and prioritize their well-being. A Deloitte report (2020) revealed that 77% of Gen Z participants stated that a company's position on diversity, equity, and inclusion would affect their employment choices, demonstrating their socially conscious perspective.

Generation Z's consumer behaviors mirror their values. Conscious consumers are more inclined to buy from brands that reflect their ethical standards, particularly those emphasizing sustainability, ethical labor practices, and social responsibility. A study by McKinsey & Company revealed that 73% of Gen Z respondents expressed a willingness to pay a premium for products from companies that endorse causes they value (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). They are increasingly predisposed to acquire second-hand items and engage in the circular economy, motivated by their commitment to environmental sustainability. Generation Z is transforming the retail environment by demanding tailored brand experiences. They favor direct engagement with companies via social media and prioritize user-generated content, including reviews and testimonials, over conventional advertising. This generation also adopts the gig economy, with numerous individuals pursuing side hustles or entrepreneurial endeavors in conjunction with their main career trajectories (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

4 COURSES OF ACTION IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS OF GENERATION Z

Generation Z constitutes a novel cohort of prospective candidates for military academies globally, including the Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik in Liptovský Mikuláš. To successfully recruit Gen Z as cadets, it is essential to acknowledge their distinct traits, values, and communication preferences. This generation is digitally adept, socially aware, and pursues authenticity and purpose in their professions. In Central Europe and the Slovak Republic, comprehending these characteristics within the framework of recent global and regional developments—such as the war in Ukraine, NATO's evolving role, and heightened national security concerns—is imperative.

The proposed course of action (COA) utilizes MISO to target and engage Generation Z. MISO effectively utilizes PSYOP to affect attitudes and behaviors via meticulously designed communication strategies. This COA will employ MISO to develop a compelling recruitment campaign that aligns with Gen Z's values, digital behaviors, and perspective while considering the distinct security landscape in Central Europe.

4.1 SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Generation Z supports causes that resonate with their principles, including climate change, social justice, and national defense. Considering the geopolitical tensions in Central and Eastern Europe and the Slovak Republic's strategic position as a NATO member, a campaign highlighting the purposeful nature of military service will resonate with this generation. Possible COA activities could include producing video content disseminated via popular social media platforms that showcases authentic narratives of the Slovak Armed Forces soldiers and cadets. These narratives should highlight how service at the Slovak Armed Forces, including the Armed Forces Academy, enables contributions to peace, stability, and national defense against external threats, including Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Social media campaigns should concentrate on purpose-oriented communication that corresponds with contemporary issues regarding regional security, cybersecurity, and the protection of democratic principles. They should also emphasize the capacity of cadets to effectuate tangible improvements in safeguarding the future of the Slovak Republic and the European Union.

Campaigns should integrate themes of resilience and leadership, illustrating how the Armed Forces Academy cultivates technical and physical competencies, character, discipline, and leadership abilities.

A video series showcasing cadets participating in training exercises, accompanied by captions such as "Safeguarding our future." could assume the leadership your nation requires. Incorporate national symbols such as the Slovak Republic's national flag and NATO imagery. In addition, allusions to historical Slovak military figures, including General M. R. Štefánik, could be included to instill a feeling of patriotism and belonging in the target audience.

4.2 APPEAL TO TECHNOLOGY SAVVY AND CAREER-ORIENTED

Generation Z is not only proficient in technology but also exceptionally career-oriented. They prioritize education that imparts practical skills and facilitates career opportunities. The Armed Forces Academy can leverage this by providing information on advanced technology, cybersecurity, and leadership training available in their military education. Considering Slovakia's continuous defense technology and cybersecurity advancement, this is a logical alignment.

The COA might initiate a focused information campaign on popular social media platforms highlighting the technological advancements in military education. The campaign should emphasize programs in engineering, cybersecurity, unmanned aircraft systems, and military intelligence.

Collaboration with Slovak tech influencers and renowned military technology specialists to produce content demonstrating the integration of advanced technologies with conventional military training could stir the interest of the tech-savvy.

Providing online workshops and webinars with Armed Forces Academy professors, alums, and active military officers to discuss the academy's technology programs and career paths in cybersecurity, engineering, and leadership could be integrated into the recruitment process.

A video series, "Modern Warriors," disseminated on popular social media platforms, could showcase cadets acquiring knowledge in unmanned aircraft system technology,

cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence applications in defense contexts. This should elucidate the tangible career advantages and prospects within the Slovak Armed Forces and beyond.

4.3 EMPHASIZE PHYSICAL FITNESS AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Generation Z is dedicated to self-enhancement and personal growth, especially mental well-being and physical fitness. Military service provides an avenue for personal development, physical fitness, and discipline, which should be emphasized in the recruitment strategy.

Therefore, one of many possible COAs could include advertising the academy's physical fitness training and wellness initiatives on popular social media platforms where cadets are depicted participating in physical training, collaborative exercises, competitions, and outdoor adventure pursuits.

This could also include engaging well-known fitness influencers or personal trainers who resonate with Gen Z to advocate for the benefits of military life on mental and physical health. In addition, a fitness challenge campaign could allow prospective participants to engage in virtual or in-person physical activities, including obstacle courses or fitness assessments. The campaign should include opportunities to visit the academy or win military-themed merchandise.

For example, a fitness challenge shared on popular social media platforms titled "Train like a cadet " involving participants engaging in physical drills modeled after the Armed Forces Academy could successfully depict the Academy's possibilities for fitness and promote physical fitness and personal development. The campaign could feature brief videos of cadets engaging in strength training, navigating obstacle courses, and performing cardio exercises.

4.4 SHOWCASE SOCIAL, FINANCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

For Generation Z, pragmatic considerations such as financial stability and educational prospects are essential to decision-making. The Armed Forces Academy offers significant advantages, including education, monthly payments, diet, accommodation, sports complex, and career placement assistance post-graduation. In addition, the surroundings of Liptovský Mikuláš provide opportunities for both summer and winter sports with additional curricular courses and extracurricular activities conducted by the DEPT of Physical Education and Sports that are worth mentioning and promoting.

The most important COA to address recruits should be developing comprehensive, all-encompassing content that elucidates the financial and educational advantages of enrolling in the Armed Forces Academy, including complimentary tuition, assured employment, leadership enhancement, and global study prospects via NATO and EU initiatives.

One of the critical narratives could emphasize the Armed Forces Academy's international collaborations and overseas training opportunities, especially with NATO and allied nations and Erasmus + possibilities, which resonate with Gen Z's global perspective.

Illustrative content could be disseminated via popular social media platforms, such as infographics depicting the fully funded opportunities for education at the Armed Forces Academy, accompanied by videos of cadets engaged in international exchange programs such as Erasmus + or joint training exercises with NATO allies.

4.5 ALIGN RECRUITMENT EFFORTS, NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS AND PATRIOTISM

The war in Ukraine and overarching security issues in Eastern Europe are significant in the public awareness of Central Europe. Generation Z in the Slovak Republic, akin to their counterparts in the region, are aware of these security threats and the overarching influence of military power in preserving national and regional stability. The Slovak Armed Forces could leverage this sense of national obligation.

Creating a "Defend your future" initiative could appeal to Gen Z's civic duty toward their nation and region. Highlighting the Slovak Republic's significance within NATO and the necessity of a robust military to safeguard its borders and democratic principles. Additionally, the production of patriotic videos and digital advertisements depicting cadets engaged in NATO joint exercises, aiding disaster relief initiatives, and safeguarding the Slovak Republic's sovereignty against external threats could address Gen Z's sense of security awareness and provide them with a possibility to participate in the stability and security of the future. This could be executed with the engagement of notable Slovak personalities (military veterans, athletes, or musicians) to convey impactful messages regarding the significance of national service, particularly during periods of increased geopolitical tension.

4.6 UTILIZE INFLUENCER AND PEER-TO-PEER RECRUITING

Generation Z is influenced more by their contemporaries and relatable influencers than by conventional authority figures. Therefore, the recruitment strategy must integrate peer testimonials and influencer marketing to establish trust and relatability.

A possible COA could be to enlist male and female cadets as "ambassadors" who disseminate their experiences via popular social media platforms under the auspices of the Armed Forces Academy. These ambassadors would produce vlogs, posts, stories, and videos depicting their daily experiences at the Armed Forces Academy while being both professional and relatable. The relatability of information is essential because Gen Z is sensitive to the credibility or unreliability of information given to them. Collaboration with popular Slovak influencers and personalities specializing in sports, fitness, technology, education, and consequential promotion of the Armed Forces Academy through their content could positively impact the Academy's image. Subsequently, organizing virtual Q&A sessions, enabling prospective recruits to engage with cadets in real-time, and offering a forum for open inquiries and concerns to be addressed by peers could contribute to the image of openness to attract recruits.

5 ENVIRONMENT ADJUSTMENT

One thing is using MISO to attract the current generation to become cadets and future military officers. Another one is to keep them interested after enlisting to become cadets at the Armed Forces Academy. To enhance the Armed Forces Academy's appeal and efficacy for Generation Z cadets, the environment must embody the values, skills, and preferences that align with this generation. Generation Z cadets emphasize the need to consider mental health, adaptability, technological proficiency, collaboration, and purpose-oriented employment. Consequently, modifying the academy's environment to address these requirements can improve engagement, training results, and overall satisfaction of everyone involved.

In the academic paper, we propose the following environmental modifications, initiatives, and enhancements to foster a military atmosphere conducive to Generation Z:

- **Integration of technology**

Smart classrooms are transforming educational settings by integrating advanced technologies, including interactive smartboards, virtual reality simulations, and augmented reality. These tools provide a more dynamic and pragmatic method for training, especially for topics that gain from immersive learning experiences. By implementing virtual and augmented reality, educators can develop a more immersive and interactive pedagogical approach, which is particularly advantageous for technologically proficient cadets. These innovations enhance interactivity in learning, connecting theoretical concepts with practical applications.

Alongside smart classrooms, online learning platforms are revolutionizing educational delivery. These platforms offer hybrid or fully online options for theoretical subjects, facilitating flexible access to study materials, assessments, and assignments. This flexibility enables students to learn independently and according to their schedules, accommodating diverse learning styles and requirements. Moreover, creating a digital platform for autonomous learning and skill evaluation empowers students to assume greater control over their educational experience, promoting independence and self-discipline. Both smart classrooms and online learning platforms substantially enhance the modernization of education, aligning it with the requirements of contemporary learners.

- **Collaborative and creative spaces**

Collaborative workspaces are essential for promoting teamwork and facilitating the exchange of ideas, especially in settings that cater to Generation Z's preferred working style. These open environments offer an informal yet functional setting, facilitating unrestricted collaboration and idea exchange among individuals. To enhance their efficacy, such spaces should be furnished with indispensable tools such as whiteboards, ergonomic seating, and dependable Wi-Fi connectivity. Organizations can foster collaboration and innovation by establishing these informal yet practical spaces, enabling cadets and students to participate in substantive discussions and inventive problem-solving.

Makerspaces provide innovation laboratories alongside collaborative workspaces, enabling cadets to experiment with advanced technologies, including robotics, engineering, and 3D printing. These experiential settings would allow cadets to implement their theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios, providing them the chance to address practical military challenges. Engaging in projects that require creativity and critical thinking enables cadets to cultivate the problem-solving skills vital for contemporary military and engineering endeavors.

A crucial element of contemporary learning environments is the facilitation of peer-led workshops. These sessions allow junior soldiers to assume mentoring roles, imparting their strengths and expertise to their colleagues. Organizations can improve knowledge dissemination and promote a culture of reciprocal learning by enabling cadet-led skill workshops. This peer mentoring method enhances camaraderie among cadets and empowers them to assume greater responsibility for their education, fostering a more cohesive and competent workforce.

- **Emphasis on well-being and mental health**

To effectively alleviate stress and enhance mental well-being, it is imperative to establish on-site mental health professionals and peer support programs. By providing prompt

access to mental health services, institutions can guarantee that individuals obtain timely assistance for their emotional requirements. Alongside professional care, peer support programs can foster community and offer a secure environment for cadets to share their experiences. Workshops centered on resilience, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence can augment mental well-being by providing cadets with the tools to manage stress and address challenges more effectively. These proactive measures are essential in cultivating a healthy, supportive environment where cadets can flourish mentally and emotionally.

Alongside mental health, physical fitness is a fundamental aspect of overall well-being, especially in military or training environments. Although conventional physical training holds significance, Generation Z prioritizes diversity in fitness regimens. Integrating innovative fitness techniques with traditional exercises is advantageous to satisfy these preferences. Yoga, functional fitness, and high-intensity interval training (HIIT) offer varied methods for sustaining physical health, delivering mental and physical advantages. Yoga enhances flexibility and mindfulness, whereas functional fitness and HIIT prioritize strength, endurance, and agility. By diversifying fitness offerings, institutions can accommodate various interests and improve cadets' overall fitness experience.

Establishing recreational outdoor areas for cadets to unwind and socialize during their leisure time is equally significant. Designated zones, including obstacle courses, sports courts, and outdoor leisure areas, provide cadets with physical exertion, amicable competition, and social engagement opportunities. These recreational areas offer a necessary respite from training demands, enabling cadets to relax and connect with their colleagues in a casual, outdoor setting. By enhancing both physical and social well-being, these environments facilitate a comprehensive approach to training, encouraging a healthier, more balanced lifestyle for cadets.

- **Interactive and gamified training**

Combining gamification techniques into military training provides an interactive and stimulating approach to improving learning and skill acquisition. Integrating reward systems, leaderboards, and interactive simulations can enhance the motivation and immersion of training. In this context, gamification may encompass tactical video games or scenario-based challenges that simulate real-life decision-making under duress. These methods promote cadet engagement, foster critical thinking skills, and facilitate the application of theoretical knowledge in practical, frequently high-pressure scenarios. Incentive structures and leaderboards introduce a competitive aspect, motivating cadets to pursue excellence while promoting camaraderie and collaboration.

An essential component in modernizing military training is the improved utilization of virtual reality (VR) combat simulations. These simulations offer cadets a more genuine and immersive experience, enabling them to rehearse combat scenarios in a controlled yet realistic setting. Virtual reality technology allows trainees to encounter scenarios replicating the intricacies and stresses of actual combat, rendering the training both educational and captivating. This immersive experience enhances technical and tactical skills while fostering the mental resilience required to manage the pressures of real combat scenarios. Consequently, VR combat simulations can markedly improve the efficacy of military training by providing practical experience in a secure yet demanding environment.

Alongside gamified training techniques and VR simulations, forming an e-sports club or team centered on military strategy games can further augment teamwork and strategic cognition among cadets. This initiative engages Generation Z's fascination with digital games while enhancing essential military competencies, including communication, planning, and strategic decision-making. Participation in military-themed e-sports enables cadets to cultivate

leadership abilities and improve their capacity for effective teamwork. This approach merges the allure of e-sports with the cultivation of practical military skills, rendering training more captivating and pertinent to the interests of younger generations while simultaneously fulfilling the fundamental objectives of military education.

- **Modernized living quarters**

Transforming traditional military barracks to accommodate the needs and preferences of Generation Z cadets necessitates a transition from conventional dormitories to more modern, dorm-style lodgings. The revised living quarters should emphasize improved privacy features, providing cadets with an augmented sense of personal space in a typically communal setting. Shared spaces that promote social interaction and collaboration can be preserved, yet they must be complemented by areas that facilitate solitude and relaxation. Moreover, dependable Wi-Fi connectivity is crucial in contemporary accommodations, as digital access is a primary concern for Generation Z. Given the significant focus on technology and continuous communication, reliable internet access has transitioned from a luxury to a necessity, enabling cadets to maintain social and academic connectivity.

Incorporating thoughtfully designed recreational spaces is essential for fostering a healthy equilibrium among work, relaxation, and social interaction. These recreational areas may include video game stations, lounges, and serene study environments. Cadets are provided with diverse opportunities for relaxation and recreation, allowing them to decompress after intense training, participate in social interactions with peers, or concentrate on solitary study in a tranquil setting. The designated areas promote camaraderie and social interaction while offering cadets essential opportunities to rejuvenate mentally and physically, ensuring a balanced lifestyle throughout their training. This comprehensive approach to lifestyle and leisure fosters a more conducive and efficient environment for education and growth.

- **Sustainability and purpose-driven initiatives**

Advancing environmentally sustainable practices in military training settings is essential to resonate with the values of Generation Z, characterized by a pronounced environmental awareness. Recycling programs, renewable energy utilization, and water conservation initiatives can substantially diminish the environmental impact of military installations while aligning with the principles of younger cadets. Adopting these practices signifies a dedication to environmental stewardship and instructs cadets on the significance of sustainability in personal and professional contexts. By integrating sustainable practices into their daily routines, cadets can cultivate habits promoting long-term environmental conservation, enhancing their status as responsible global citizens.

Incorporating community service initiatives into military training and promoting sustainability can give cadets an expanded sense of purpose beyond their conventional duties. Facilitating cadets' participation in humanitarian and environmental initiatives enables them to enhance the welfare of the communities they assist, whether through disaster relief, environmental restoration, or various social service projects. These experiences can enhance cadets' comprehension of their societal roles, underscoring the significance of service in both military and civilian spheres. Through the promotion of community service, military institutions can cultivate in cadets a sense of purpose and responsibility that transcends their immediate military obligations, contributing to the development of well-rounded leaders who are both proficient in their profession and mindful of their influence on the surrounding world.

- **Career development and personal growth**

Leadership and personal development workshops are crucial for providing cadets with the skills required to excel in both military and civilian professions. These workshops should concentrate on developing diverse competencies, including public speaking, time management, and financial literacy. Acquiring these life skills guarantees that cadets are adequately prepared for leadership positions in the military and proficiently equipped to manage their future careers beyond the Armed Forces. Public speaking is essential for effective communication and leadership, whereas time management guarantees productivity and efficiency in personal and professional domains. Financial literacy equips cadets to make informed decisions regarding their finances, a crucial skill that will serve them throughout their lives. Leadership workshops are essential in equipping cadets for various career paths by cultivating these skills.

Alongside personal development, professional networking is essential for equipping cadets for future career success. Forming relationships with military and civilian mentors, career coaches, and industry professionals can give cadets essential insights into prospective career trajectories and opportunities within the Armed Forces. These relationships assist cadets in navigating their career aspirations, providing counsel on effectively aligning their skills and interests with potential positions. Engaging with industry professionals beyond the military enhances cadets' comprehension of the civilian job market, equipping them with the necessary tools and connections for a seamless transition into civilian careers, should they opt for that path. Military institutions can enhance professional networking, enabling cadets to cultivate a robust support system that aids in attaining their long-term career objectives, both within and outside the military.

- **Flexible and individualized learning paths**

Customized training programs that provide specialized tracks or electives effectively cater to the varied interests of cadets, offering a more individualized educational experience. Military institutions can accommodate their cadets' interests and professional aspirations by providing cybersecurity, diplomacy, intelligence, and international relations courses. This method amplifies the cadets' autonomy regarding their education and motivates them to assume responsibility for their learning journey. Cadets are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and invested in their studies when they can pursue fields that correspond with their interests. Customized training also readies cadets for specialized military positions, providing them with the requisite skills and knowledge to excel in their selected domains.

Integrating case-based learning into the curriculum alongside specialized electives enables cadets to examine real-world geopolitical or tactical situations. This learning approach compels cadets to utilize theoretical knowledge in practical scenarios, enhancing critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Through participation in real-life scenarios, cadets acquire the ability to assess intricate information, contemplate various viewpoints, and devise effective solutions. This method enhances their analytical skills and equips them with the decision-making challenges they will face in their military careers. Case-based learning connects classroom instruction with real-world application, ensuring cadets are adequately prepared to confront the challenges they will encounter as future military leaders.

CONCLUSION

This academic paper thoroughly examines how MISO can transform the recruitment strategies of the Slovak Armed Forces to engage Generation Z. It acknowledges that Generation Z is a distinct demographic characterized by unique values, interests, and

technological proficiency. They are not merely prospective recruits. They represent the future of the Slovak Armed Forces, which necessitates careful cultivation, creativity, and a profound comprehension of their motivations.

This academic paper aims to propose new ideas and COA in the recruitment process of Generation Z to the Armed Forces Academy of General M. R. Štefánik. Therefore, this academic paper should be understood as a proposal to apply a different outlook regarding the recruitment process and the adjustment of the environment for the new cadets.

This generation, nurtured in the era of the internet, social media, and global awareness, prioritizes authenticity, social justice, and a sense of purpose. They are motivated not by conventional appeals to authority or obligation but by messages that align with their aspiration to make significant contributions to society and the world. MISO, originating from psychological operations and modified for contemporary communication environments, provides a strategic instrument for the Slovak Armed Forces to leverage these motivations effectively. Through the utilization of precise, values-oriented messaging on social media platforms, the promotion of peer-to-peer and influencer advocacy, and the alignment of military service with issues pertinent to Generation Z—such as global peace, security, and environmental sustainability—the Slovak Armed Forces can establish a strong and ever-flowing recruitment pipeline. This approach will enable potential recruits to perceive military service not as a strict, authoritarian obligation but as an avenue for personal development and global influence.

The academic paper also acknowledges that integrating MISO into recruitment presents challenges. The necessity for authenticity, adherence to legal frameworks, and the prevention of manipulation are all crucial factors to consider. Nevertheless, the prospective advantages significantly surpass the challenges. The incorporation of MISO into recruitment initiatives can augment the attractiveness of military service and fortify the overarching communication strategy of the Slovak Armed Forces in a multifaceted, information-centric environment.

This endeavor transcends mere statistics or strategies; it pertains to transforming a military institution and, consequently, the future of the Slovak Republic. It is essential to acknowledge that today's youth—Generation Z—possess the potential to shape the future's security, stability, and leadership. By interacting with them on their terms, honoring their values, and demonstrating that military service corresponds with their aspirations for an improved world, the Slovak Armed Forces can develop soldiers and leaders who will advance the nation in peaceful and tumultuous times.

This paper ultimately instills hope. It prompts us to perceive recruitment as a transactional and transformative process. It suggests that, with appropriate tools and methodologies, we can motivate young individuals to perceive military service not merely as an obligation but as an opportunity to contribute to a cause greater than themselves. By doing so, the Slovak Armed Forces can ensure the robustness of their personnel and the allegiance and commitment of an entire generation.

“Change is the law of life, and those who look only to the past and present are certain to miss the future.”

- John F. Kennedy

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