

The Use of social media In the Processes of Image-Building, Promotion and Military Recruitment: Case Study of The Territorial Defence Forces in Poland

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Abstract

Although somewhat unwillingly, practically all armies in the world use social media to (1) promote military service and recruitment, (2) establish the reputation and positive image of the organisation, and (3) maintain their relationship with already recruited, former or prospective soldiers. This article constitutes a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the use of social media by the Territorial Defence Forces in Poland in 2017–2019, i.e. for the purpose of creating a positive image of the newly-founded formation and maintaining relationships with their supporters and prospective recruits. The research conducted demonstrates (1) the consistency, attractiveness and coherence of communications which meet the criteria of communication via social media platforms, (2) the effectiveness of the implemented communication strategy resulting in an increase of the number of users and their activity and (3) the development of good practices adopted by other branches of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland.

Keywords: social media; media relations, Territorial Defence Forces; recruitment, army, Polish Armed Forces, communication of public institutions in the media

Introduction

Currently it is unthinkable that a public institution would not use social media in their communication with society. Media communication has become one of the fields of interaction with stakeholders and other audience groups - both closer and more distant receivers (Szyszka 2013:22). As such, it has become a space for the development of a civic society and social participation; digital communication tools transform the traditional means of involvement and introduce a new style of public management (Navarra and Cornford 2012:39). American trends clearly indicate that the accounts of local administration and public institutions on social media are currently a more popular communication channel than their existing websites (Mossberger and Wu 2012). The use of social networks by particular institutions such as public administration or administration services, although it does bear certain risks, supports them in achieving their external goals, e.g. establishing public trust, developing social capital, communication with stakeholders, and the possibility of relatively cheap promotion of undertaken activities. This tendency, which might be described as the mediatisation of public life, is common and universal by nature. It is worth noting that it is meant as the mediatisation of politics, religion, fun, security and, in general, the mediatisation of social behaviour. One can observe constantly growing relations between various spheres of citizens' activity and new media, with the media (including social networking sites) gaining the status of semi-independent Institutions of social life, and at the same time becoming an integral part of the functioning of other social and public institutions.

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Taking into consideration the purpose of using social media by institutions and services, the key features are: safety of use, the nature of the medium itself, its popularity, and the characteristics of user groups (Szyszka and Polko 2020). Although trends in this area are changing rapidly, they are worthy of enumeration (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010:59–68). Instagram, the popularity of which is constantly growing, has a typically photographic-visual character and fits well into pop-cultural trends. Twitter is primarily of an informative and debating nature and plays an important role in political communication. YouTube, on the other hand, although it is de facto a video blog, has been profiled to provide access to footage, and is widely used by public institutions, among others, to publish instructional materials. Finally, Facebook, as a service enabling the sharing of information and using persuasion in a multimedia, multi-channel form, as well as a wide range of user interactions, is not only an excellent communication and advertising tool, but also an optimal social communication tool for public institutions (Walotek-Ściańska, Szyszka, and Wąsiński 2014).

While social media have become well established in the canon of tools used to communicate with the outside and inside of public services such as the police, municipal police or tax administration, this process – though not without delay – has also been implemented by armies around the world. Armed forces, like other public institutions, became subject to the rules of the Old Public Management model, market values (the New Public Management model) and e-democracy (the New Public Service model) (Deverel et al. 2014). According to M. Fredriksson and J. Pallas (2013), these factors led armies to include the need to be open to the public and to inform them about their activities (democratisation processes) as well as to place greater emphasis on using modern means of communication to build their image (Polko 2016), enhance visibility and recruit new members of the organisation, in their communication strategies.

Social media can still be seen both as a risk and an opportunity by armed forces. Even if research shows how armed forces can be reinforced by strategic narratives (Hellman, Olsson and Wagnsson 2016), they are still seen by commanders and their political superiors as a potential source of problems. Military decision-makers all over the world are still more likely to avoid communication with society about their operations than to clarify their decisions and the circumstances in which they take action.

R.L. Stein indicates, however, that social media are contradictory to the military institution, and therefore that finding a compromise between the nature of social media and the interests of organisations such as the military is necessary for the continued functioning of armed forces around the world (Stein 2016). It is a fact that throughout the world defence forces are using social media platforms increasingly effectively to educate the populace about their job content so as to entice them to join the organisation. Social Media have the ability to reach sections of society where traditional media are unable to do so due to logistical constraints (Malhotra 2016: 19). They have been in use in armed forces since the Kosovo crisis in 1999 (Nissen 2015: 8). The increasing use and importance of social media, alongside intensifying debate about the reliance on communication for successful operations, tends to put more attention on that developing tool. The fact that social media are effectively and readily used by terrorist organisations like ISIS should not be avoided, and their actions require a counteroffensive in this area as well.

Researchers have paid little attention to how armed forces beyond the US and the UK have dealt with social media (Bjerg 2015; Jones and Baines 2009). Research has mainly focused on whether or not armed forces have been harmed by or have managed to exploit social media, whether they have tried to control social media and to what degree they have allowed personnel to communicate freely via social media (Hellman, Olsson and Wagnsson 2008).

For the Army's audience of potential recruits, social media are especially important. Young adults use social media at higher rates than other groups. Technology use is prevalent among this population, with more than 90 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds owning a smartphone (USA data). About the same proportion use social media (Smith 2017; Perrin 2015). The widespread use of technology suggests that internet and social media use are the norm among potential Army recruits and also among the adults who might influence potential recruits (Wenger et al. 2019: 1).

Although different platforms target different audiences (e.g. Facebook is the most popular among users aged over 35, while younger users are more likely to spread their time across a wide variety of platforms, including Twitter and Pinterest), all technological changes allow individuals and organisations to communicate information to one another in new and creative ways and on an almost real-time basis.

In 2015 the British army created its own special force unit known as the 77th Brigade for social media warfare. It is based in Berkshire and comprises reservists and regulars with journalistic skills who are social media savvy (Malhotra 2016:26). According to The Career Transition Partnership (CTP) (the Ministry of Defence working with Right Management) the British Army recruits up to 20,000 people each year. Their target audience is 14- to 24-year-olds, who are statistically the most comfortable with social media, often using it as their main communication tool. Facebook is the main channel for recruitment, as research has shown that 89% of the Army's target audience are users. Their Facebook site "Army Jobs" has over 55,000 followers. The British Army also uses Twitter to engage with its target audience, through its "Digital Pioneers" programme, which enables potential recruits to communicate with serving personnel.

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF), one of the world's most active armies on social media, became famous for the historic precedent it set by announcing the launch of Operation Pillar of Defence (in mid-November 2012) on Twitter (Shavit 2016:7; Polko 2016:153) (see figure 1). For several years, it has successfully been using social media to implement the IDF mediatisation strategy described e.g. by M. Shavit (2016).



Fig. 1: On 14 November 2012 at 6.29 AM the spokesperson of the Israel Defence Forces published the following post on Twitter: (a) „The IDF has begun a widespread campaign on terror sites & operatives in the #Gaza Strip, chief among them #Hamas & Islamic Jihad targets”. Fania Oz-Salzberger, Israeli historian and writer, commented the information: “The first war ever declared on Twitter has just begun”. In the evening, a spokesperson announced: (b) “Ahmed Jabari: Eliminated.”.

Materials and Methods

The use of the social network Facebook by a public, newly created, centralised formation of a military character (the Territorial Defence Forces), with strictly designed priorities for action, which is national security and a communication strategy subordinated to them, is the subject of the research presented in this article. The study analyses the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the TDF's use of social media as a key element in building its reputation and developing public relations from its inception (2017) to 2019. The main objectives of the undertaken analysis were to determine:

- challenges arising from the creation of an image of the organisation in social media and communication with their users at an early stage of its functioning (1 January to 31 December 2017);
- the image and style of communication of a fully established formation (1 January to 31 December 2019);
- verification of the effectiveness of the activities conducted in accordance with the assumptions adopted in the TDF strategy.

The research covered the period between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2019, spanning the first three years of the formation. Context is key in this analysis: The Territorial Defence Forces are the fifth-youngest branch of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland. The TDF consists of paid volunteers who have been selected and verified; it also comprises professional soldiers and soldiers in a new kind of active military service, i.e. Territorial Military Service (TMS). Duty in TMS is served in the area of their residence in two ways – rotational (during field training and exercises) and according to disposition (the remaining time). The basic tasks of the TDF include:

- defence in cooperation with operational armed forces, support forces and elements of the extra-military systems;
- conducting its own unconventional, counter-diverse and anti-landing operations;
- contribution to securing the admission and development of allied support forces in designated areas;
- crisis management;
- information activities (Available online: <https://terytorialsi.wp.mil.pl>).

Two classical methods used in research on mass communication were used in the study: interview and media content analysis, preceded and complemented by a qualitative analysis of unpublished documents. In order to classify and interpret the content of the messages, the requirement of regularity and objectivity was maintained. The research was divided into three stages.

The first consisted of a series of in-depth, partially categorised interviews with the commander of the Territorial Defence Forces, Major-General Wiesław Kukula, and the formation's spokesperson and chief of its press office, Colonel Marek Pietrzak, on strategic solutions implemented by the formation in the area of its activity on social media. This stage lasted from October 2019 until February 2020. As a result of these activities, among other things, the key values, aims and priorities of the TDF's communication were defined. At this stage, it has been established that Facebook plays a key role in media communication, followed – to a lesser extent – by Twitter, other services playing a marginal role and their service not being a priority for the press services, which focus on communicating with professional editors, mainly national broadcasters. On the basis of the above, the formation's Facebook account was qualified for further analysis.

The second stage of research included the quantitative analysis of data on the functioning of the FB fan page of the Territorial Defence Forces. The data has been sourced from the command of the TDF. The reach, activity of followers and other activities that could have been observed on the fan page were analysed.

The third stage included the qualitative analysis of content (texts and iconography) presented on the fan page. They were compared with the assumptions of the communication strategy and juxtaposed with the observed trends: the reach of posts and the activity of profile recipients.

Results

The basic objectives which define the social media strategy of the TDF are (1) creating a reputation (positive image) among a diversified group of recipients (society) – media users; (2) promoting social, training and military activities; and (3) strengthening recruitment activities. The TDF fan page was created on 1 January 2017 – the date the formation was officially established. The first post was published on 3 January 2017. At the moment (data from 31 March 2020) the fan page is liked by 58,112 users and followed by 63,057 users.

Strategic assumptions

The image of the formation on the day of its creation

The establishment of the TDF was met with social and political opposition¹. Due to its subordination (it is not, unlike other branches of the armed forces, governed by the Chief of Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, but by the Minister of National Defence) and controversies sparked by the then-Minister of Defence Antoni Macierewicz, the formation was on one hand accused of depriving other branches of the armed forces of resources and spending them not in line with criteria typical for the army², and on the other hand it had the reputation of a formation that is political and opportunistic and that, as such, might be used by politicians to pursue their ideology, contrary to the original mission of the organisation.

At the same time, the image of the TDF, at the very beginning of its functioning, was burdened with its politically-ideological background; it was far from positive, especially compared to other branches of the armed forces, and its perception by society was conditioned, among other things, by citizens' political sympathies. Public opinion surveys conducted during the analysed period indicated that the respondents had reservations about the new branch of the armed forces. The support for the establishment of such a formation was at around 40–50%, depending on the poll, but those surveyed admitted they were not in favour of the fact that the TDF were treated in a privileged way³. Over time, the situation has changed in favour of the formation, but since its very foundation it has had to work strenuously to maintain a positive image.

Strategic communication assumptions of the formation

Taking into consideration the above conditions, the communication strategy of the TDF from its very conception has assumed contact with society including an intensive use of social media platforms, minimising the involvement of professional media. After analysing the characteristics of the communication behaviour and preferences of the key target group, i.e. young people, Facebook was chosen to be the main channel of communication, followed by Twitter. The formation uses YouTube and Instagram to a lesser degree (content published there is to a large extent a copy of what has already been published on Facebook). The communication strategy was calculated to minimise the role of the institutional 'burden' – the perception of the formation as a centralised and closed military institution. The aim was to create the image of an open organisation 'with

¹ *Spór o powołanie Wojsk Obrony Terytorialnej, Projekt*. Available online: <https://www.tvpparlament.pl/aktualnosci/spor-o-powolanie-wojsk-obrony-terytorialnej-projekt-odeslany-do-komisji/27602107>

² *Nowe przepisy ws. zakupów sprzętu i uzbrojenia dla WOT*. Available online: <https://www.wnp.pl/parlamentarny/spoleczenstwo/nowe-przepisy-ws-zakupow-sprzetu-i-uzbrojenia-dla-wot-co-zmieniaja.22716.html>

³ *Kto jest zadowolony z utworzenia WOT?* Available online: <https://www.rp.pl/Sluzby-mundurowe/170929905-Sondaz-Kto-jest-zadowolony-z-utworzenia-WOT.html>; *SONDAŻ CBOS: Polacy za Wojskami Obrony Terytorialnej?* Available online: <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/544659.sondaz-cbos-wot-polityka-armia-wojska-obrony-terytorialnej-pis.html>;

Polacy za rozbudową armii. Wyniki sondażu CBOS. Available online: <https://www.defence24.pl/polacy-za-rozbudowa-armii-wyniki-sondazu-cbos>.

a human face' actively working for the benefit of local communities, and undertaking numerous intervention and assistance activities in typical situations involving threat or danger. Thus, it was decided to base the visual identity of the formation on visually attractive and dynamic messages and materials, primarily showing the members of the formation – soldiers – in specific actions set in contemporary contexts. We observe frequent close-ups of faces, showing emotions, and the context of 'ordinary people' and 'everyday' life situations. Such images and multimedia, with their positive emotional expression, are definitely more likely to easily reach broad groups of media users, especially young people.

The consistency of communication was another important assumption made when the formation was established. Although the TDF consists of brigades located in particular Polish voivodeships, they do not operate via separate channels, nor do they conduct individual activities on social media platforms; materials are prepared by spokespersons and press offices of commanders of brigades and are subsequently sent to the press staff of the command of the entire formation, where they are also reviewed, accepted and published on social media channels. That the way it communicates is decentralised, hierarchical and highly formal was a deliberate decision aimed at achieving quality and consistency of communications, and promoting the organisation as a unified body [interview colonel M. Pietrzak].

The third assumption was to utilise its own materials and sources, especially graphic and audio-visual materials. The press office of the TDF command prepares materials published on the website and on social media individually, excluding the use of materials prepared by the Ministry of Defence or the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland. Pictures or films used by the office are prepared by the press staff or an outside organisation.

The fourth assumption includes the profiling of communication activities that are strictly in line with the nature of the media used, so that the content presented there is as prominent as it may possibly be, highly ranked and providing for the interaction between users as well as enabling the deepest possible user experience of content consumption.

Quantitative analysis of the functioning of the FB fanpage of the TDF

Table no. 1 presents the number of posts published on the FB fan page of the TDF during the first three months of its existence. 1,147 posts were published during that period, with 218 posts in 2017, 479 in 2018, and 450 in 2019. All posts consisted of graphic material and text (a picture, graphic or film). In the analysed period, 63 films were directly published on the fan page (as opposed to material shared from another source). All updates of the status were originally created by the organisation (they were neither shared nor borrowed from other sources).

Table 1: The number of posts on the fan page per month

month	2017	2018	2019
January	15	9	41
February	12	26	41
March	13	14	52
April	15	35	40
May	28	42	43
June	33	43	44
July	26	41	45
August	15	77	34
September	24	60	32
October	16	43	28
November	13	45	24
December	8	44	26

Although the results presented in the table demonstrate a discrepancy in the number of posts (from 77 in August 2018 to 12 in February 2017), the number of posts published every month was between 20 and 30 over the course of the analysed period, i.e. one post per day. This has been represented graphically in Figure no. 2.

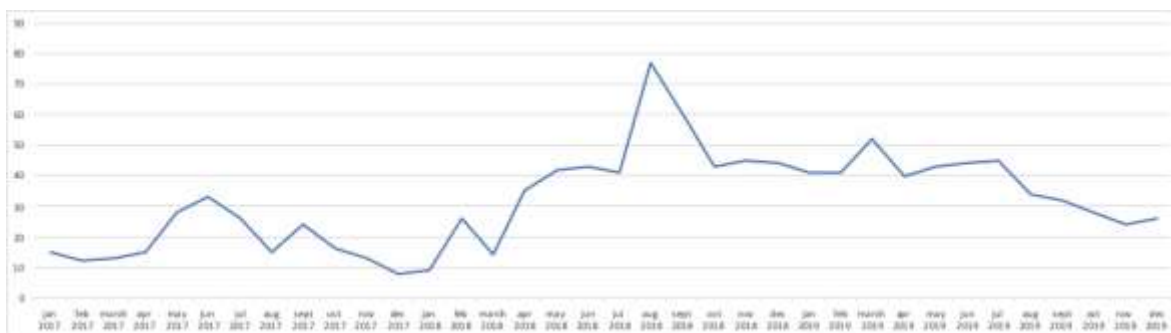


Fig. 2: The number of posts per month in 2017–2019.

The reach of posts (the number of unique users) is another important element of the analysis of the fan page. It should be borne in mind that the reach is influenced by FB algorithms such as Edge Rank, which evaluate how attractive a post is to their audience, which in turn translates into the amount of time they spend using the application. The algorithm especially analyses:

- affinity – the relationship between a potential receiver of the post with its author established through their earlier interactions (reactions, comments, shares, private messages, being in the same places, tagged pictures).
- weight – the weight of the post determined by the compilation of the kind of the post with the number of activities related to it. Equally important is the time the receivers spent on interacting with the post.
- time decay – the freshness of the post, how long ago it was published and how many reactions it provoked during the first hours of its existence⁴.

The organic reach of the analysed post (the TDF does not additionally promote its posts) varies from 0 in the beginning of its existence to 1,000,000 (post dated 7 December 2019). The number of reactions is increasing from post to post. Posts are being viewed by a gradually larger audience. This has been demonstrated in Figure no. 3. The description and qualitative analysis of the content characterised by the greatest scope of the above can be found in the subsequent part of the article.

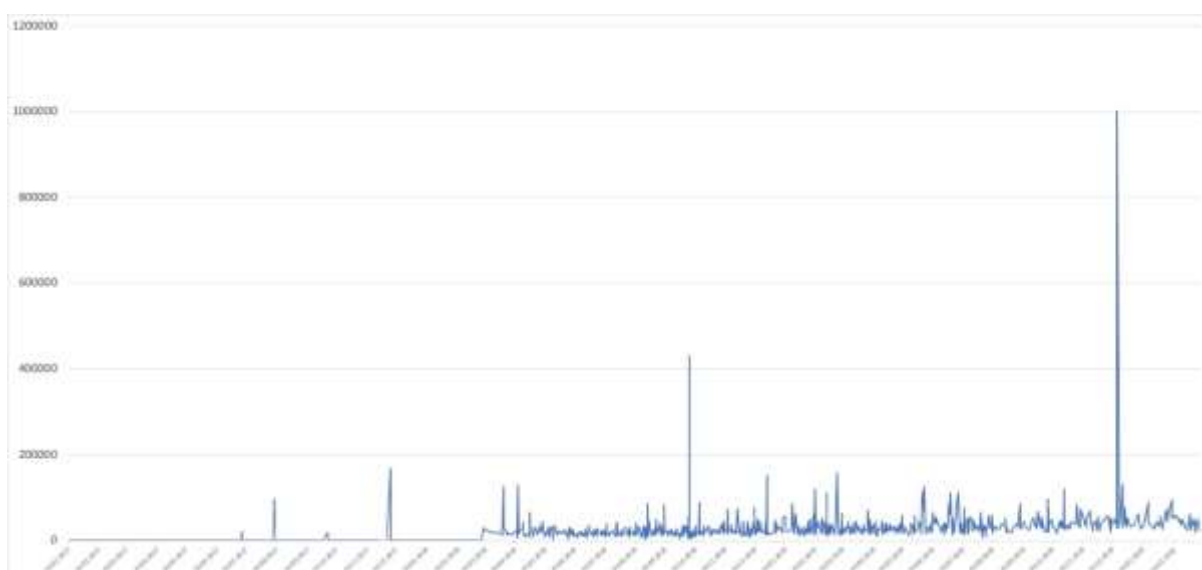


Fig. 3: The reach of posts per month in 2017–2019.

Another subject of the analysis is the activity of users on the TDF fan page. This especially focuses on (1) reactions to posts, (2) comments, and (3) shares of posts.

1. Reactions of users. The reaction button under each post allows users to express their emotions about the content through reactions such as: “thumbs up” (like), love, wow, sad, angry, haha, or care – newly introduced in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure no. 4 represents the reactions of users to posts published on the TDF fan page. The largest number

⁴ Facebook Edge Rank. Available online: <https://socialelite.pl/facebook-edge-rank/>

of users reacted to a post dated 27 September 2018 (7,900), while the smallest number of users reacted to a post published shortly after the fan page was established. The number of reactions is increasing post to post.

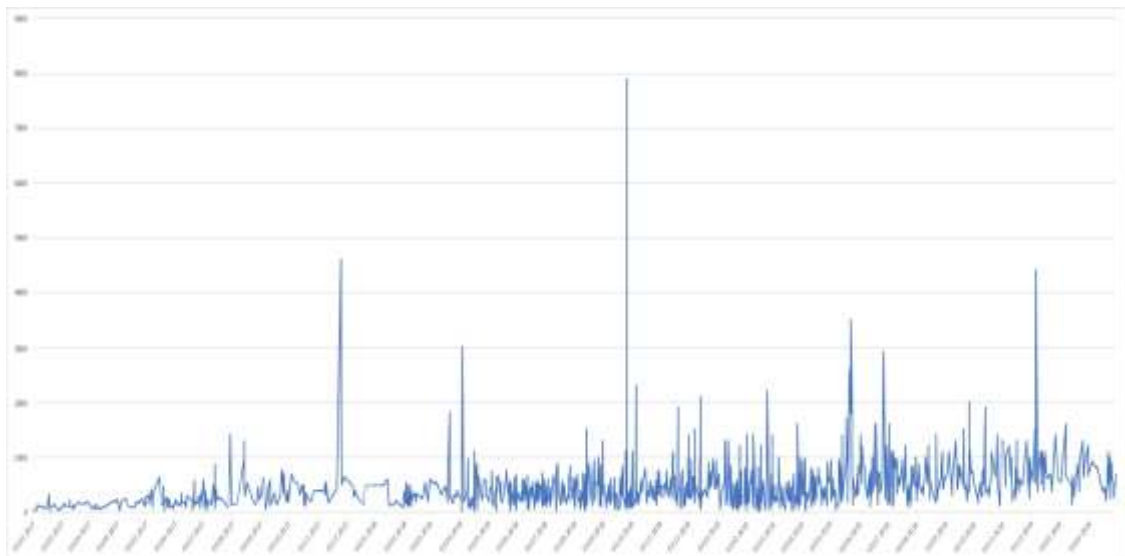


Fig. 4: Users' reactions to posts on the TDF fan page in 2017–19.

2. Users' comments to posts published in the fan page. Commenting on posts is valued higher by Facebook algorithms than just reacting to them because it requires more time of a particular user than merely scrolling through their newsfeed, which translates to more time spent in general using the application. The post with the most comments was published on 27 September 2018 (1,000 comments). The number of reactions is increasing post to post. This has been represented graphically in Figure no. 5.

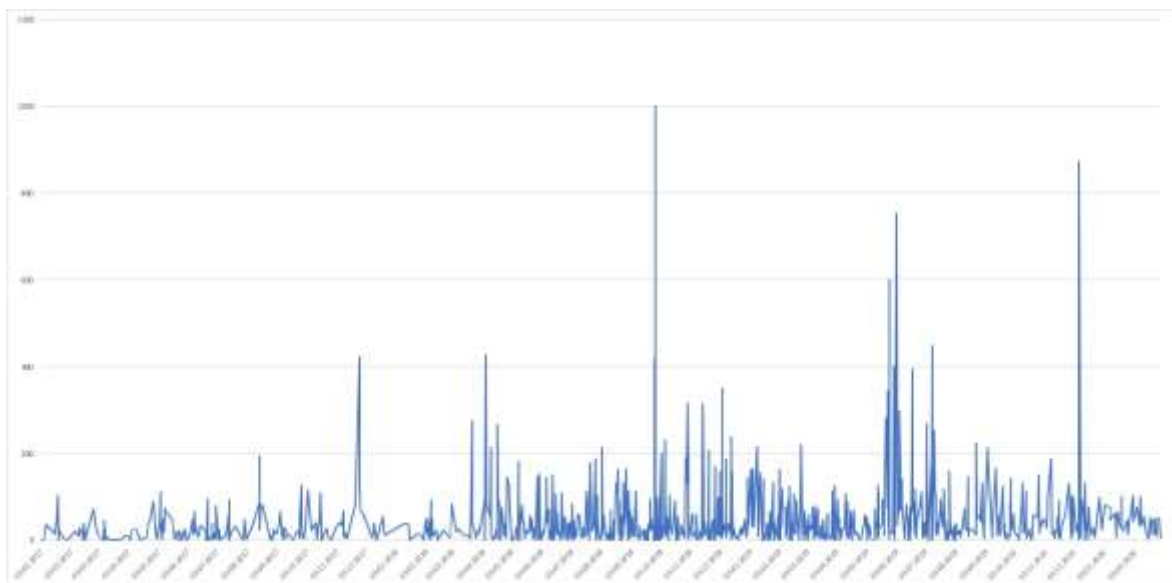


Fig. 5: The number of comments under posts in the years 2017–19.

3. Sharing posts. Sharing a post published on the fan page of an organisation indicates that the sharing person identifies themselves with the institution and content it publishes. Therefore, it is the strongest kind of activity among Facebook users. The post with the most shares was published on 27 September 2018 (1,700 shares). The second largest number of shares was three times lower. The tendency increased over the surveyed period. Data for the period 2017–19 is presented in Figure no. 6.

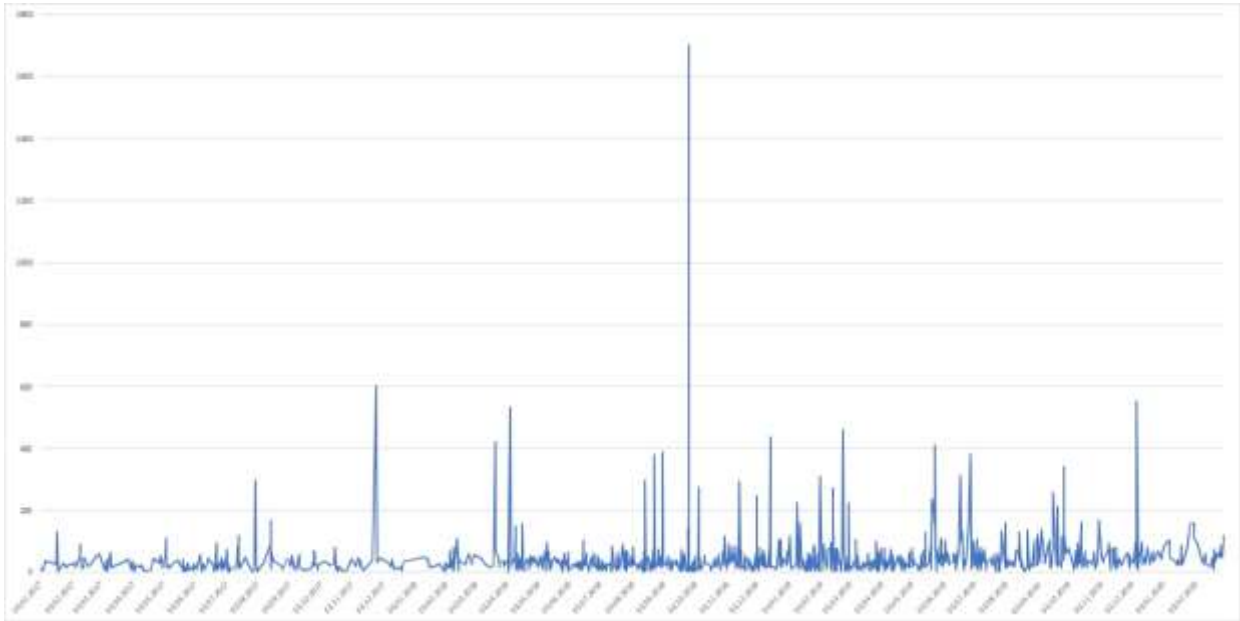


Fig. 6: The number of times posts from the TDF fan page were shared in the years 2017–19.

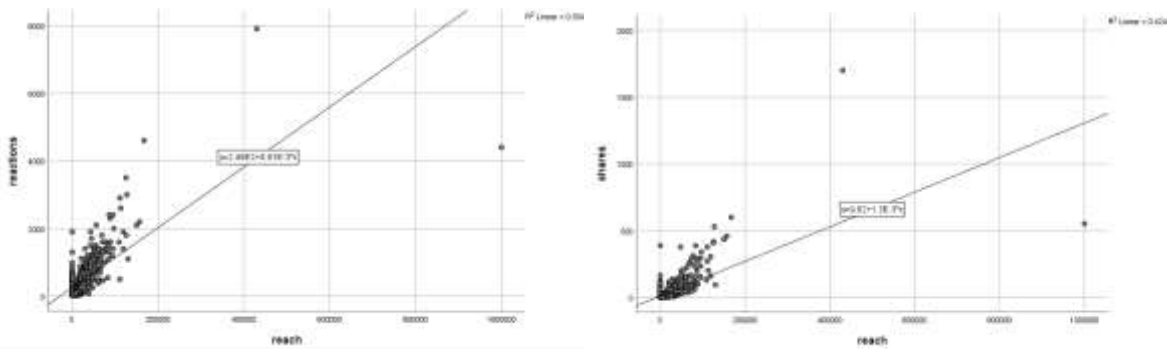
The Anova test demonstrates a relation between the reach and reactions as well as between the reach and comments and the reach and shares. Indeed, there is a close correlation between the variables summarised – between reach and reactions, reach and comments, and reach and shares. This is presented in the following equations:

$$F(1.1125) = 1141, p = 0.001, \beta = 0.710 \quad (1)$$

$$F(1.1125) = 737, p = 0.001, \beta = 0.629 \quad (2)$$

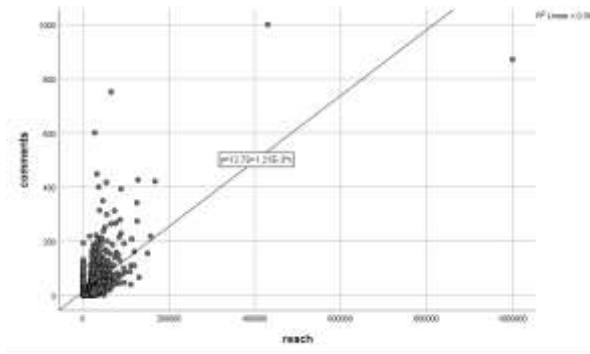
$$F(1.1125) = 827, p = 0.001, \beta = 0.651 \quad (3)$$

The chart representing the spread and the match line are presented in Figure no. 7.



(a)

(b)



(c)

Fig. 7. The spread chart with the match line for variables: (a) reaction/reach; (b) shares/reach; (c) comments/reach.

Qualitative analysis of the functioning of the FB fanpage of the TDF.

The qualitative analysis of the TDF Facebook fan page demonstrates certain tendencies, a full understanding of which is possible only after they are perceived through the prism of a qualitative analysis of the content published on the fan page. Just as in the case of the reach and the activity of users, the posts characterised by the highest result in both of these categories for the purpose of finding a cause of this phenomenon were analysed.

Table no. 2 represents 10 posts with the largest reach in the years 2017–19. Figure no. 8 presents six out of 10 of these posts presented in the form of a graphic distributed over a reach scale.

Table 2. 10 posts on the fan page with the largest reach

date	Value of the reach	Title/description of the post	remarks
07.12.2019	1,000,000	The first day of the "16"	A film shot during training
27.09.2018	430,000	A reference to Gen. Grot-Rowecki	A film promoting military service – a post with a historical reference
26.11.2017	167,000	Two and a half kilometres of TDF soldiers	A post about the army oath of TDF soldiers – a post with a picture
24.02.2019	157,000	The "train the trainers" rule	A post with a film about Mobile Training Teams
15.12.2019	150,000	Shooting practice	A post with pictures taken doing a test at a tactical loop
12.12.2019	130,000	Double service	A film showing a soldier-nurse
05.04.2018	127,500	In the name of courage – a promotional clip	One of a few clips promoting values related to the TDF
22.03.2018	125,700	Territoriality – a promotional clip	One of a few clips promoting values related to the TDF
24.05.2019	125,000	95% Soldiers tackling a flood	A post with a picture – one of the few presenting soldiers counteracting a flood
02.02.2019	119,000	Swearing-in	A post with a picture
14.10.2019	119,000	A TDF soldier and teacher	A film featuring a TDF soldier who is a teacher, on Teacher's Day

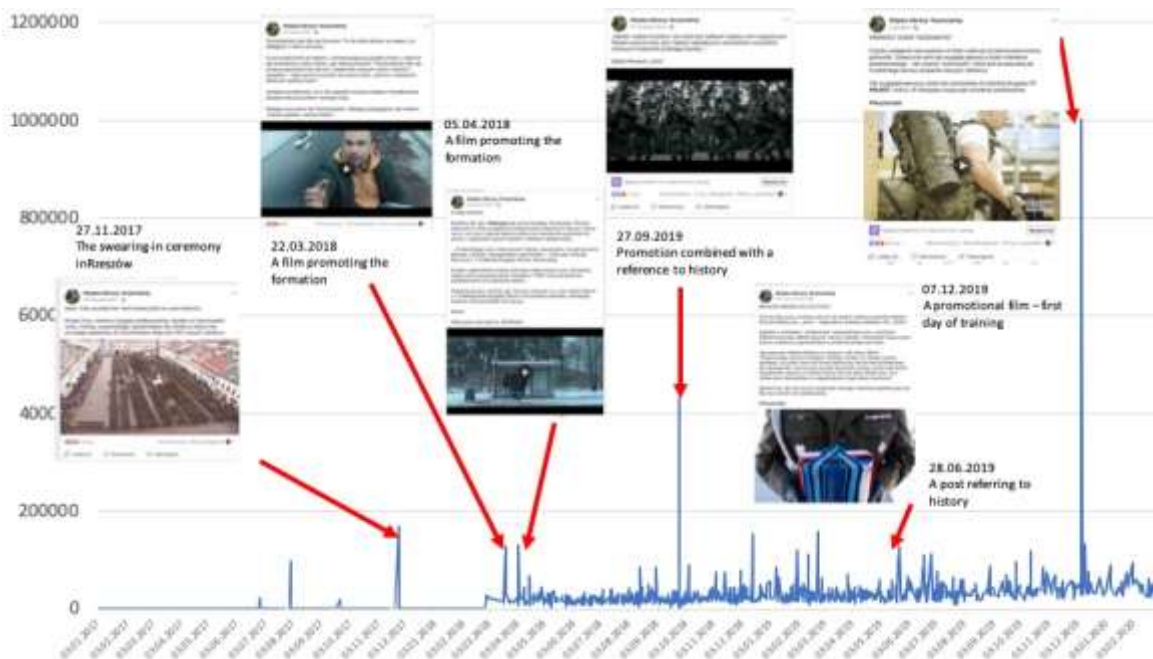


Fig. 8. The reach of posts on the fan page in the period 2017-19 and the posts with the largest reach

Table 3: 10 posts on the fan page with the largest number of reactions

date	Value of the reach	Title/description of the post	remarks
27.09.2018	7,900	A reference to Gen. Grot-Rowecki	A film promoting military service – a post with a historical reference
26.11.2017	4,600	Two and a half kilometres of TDF soldiers	A post about the army oath of TDF soldiers – a post with a picture
07.12.2019	4,400	The first day of the "16"	A film shot during training
24.05.2019	3,500	95% Soldiers tackling a flood	A post with a picture – one of the few presenting soldiers counteracting a flood
05.04.2018	3,000	In the name of courage – a promotional clip	One of a few clips promoting values related to the TDF
28.06.2019	2,900	A hero returning home	A post with a picture taken during the return of the ashes of Cpt. R. Białous
23.05.2019	2,400	Another day of supporting local communities	A post with pictures showing soldiers supporting flood survivors
22.05.2019	2400	Helping flood survivors	A post with a picture – soldiers helping flood survivors
07.10.2018	2,300	A swearing-in ceremony in Silesia	A film – a report from the swearing-in ceremony in Katowice
24.02.2019	2,200	The "train the trainers" rule	A post with a film about Mobile Training Teams

Table 4: 10 most commented posts in the fan page.

date	Value of the reach	Title/description of the post	remarks
27.09.2018	1,000	A reference to Gen. Grot-Rowecki	A film promoting military service – a post with a historical reference
07.12.2019	871	The first day of the "16"	A film shot during training
02.06.2019	751	A post with a puzzle	A post with a puzzle requiring the readers to name the specialisation of a pictured soldier
26.05.2019	600	Mother's Day	A material with pictures compiled into a film about mothers in the TDF and mothers of soldiers
09.07.2019	448	A swearing-in ceremony in Lesser Poland	A post with pictures from the swearing-in ceremony in Cracow
05.04.2018	426	In the name of courage – a promotional clip	One of a few clips promoting values related to the TDF
26.11.2017	421	Two and a half kilometres of TDF soldiers	A post about the army oath of TDF soldiers – a post with a picture
26.09.2018	417	The introduction of the TDF badge	A post with a picture
31.05.2019	400	The bloodstream of a TDF soldier	A post with pictures promoting the idea of blood donation among soldiers
19.06.2019	393	Zero tolerance for drinking alcohol on duty	A post with a graphic informing users about the expulsion of soldiers who drank alcohol while on duty

Table 5: 10 most shared posts in the fan page.

Date	Value of the reach	Title/description of the post	remarks
27.09.2018	1700	A reference to Gen. Grot-Rowecki	A film promoting military service – a post with a historical reference
26.11.2017	598	Two and a half kilometres of TDF soldiers	A post about the army oath of TDF soldiers – a post with a picture
07.12.2019	550	The first day of the "16"	A film shot during training
24.02.2019	458	The "train the trainers" rule	A post with a film about Mobile Training Teams
15.12.2018	435	Shooting practice	A post with pictures taken doing a test at a tactical loop
22.03.2018	416	Territoriality – a promotional clip	One of a few clips promoting values related to the TDF
24.05.2019	408	95% Soldiers tackling a flood	A post with a picture – one of the few presenting soldiers counteracting a flood

28.06.2019	377	A hero returning home	A post with a picture taken during the return of the ashes of Cpt. R. Białous
24.08.2018	376	Supporting the daughter of a soldier	A post with a picture and a graphic
27.09.2019	339	The TDF festival	A post with a graphic in a picture

As has been shown in the above comparison, three of the posts have been ranked in the top 10 with respect to the generated reach as well as the number of reactions, comments and shares. This has been presented in Table no. 6. Their content has been included in Figure no. 8. Furthermore, a few of the posts have been named in the top 10 in three or four of the categories analysed.

Table 6: Posts in the top 10 of all categories analysed.

Date	Position in the ranking: reach/reactions/comments/shares	Title/description of the post
26.11.2017	167,000/ 4,600/ 421/ 598	Two and a half kilometres of TDF soldiers
27.09.2018	430,000/ 7,900/ 1000/ 1700	A reference to Gen. Grot-Rowecki: the history of military service
07.12.2019	1,000,000/ 4,400/ 871/ 550	The first day of the "16"



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 8: Three posts from the TDF fan page that have been named in the top 10 in all of the analysed categories: (a) post dated 26 November 2017; (b) post dated 27 September 2018; and (c) post dated 7 December 2019.

- (a) The photo of the post shows one of the first military oaths in the Territorial Defence Forces. This is also the first time that drone photography has been used; the distant perspective emphasises the impression of a huge number of recruits gathered in the square (when in reality there are 500 people). A smaller town, located far away from military units and testing ranges, was chosen on purpose (the event took place on the market square) in order to attract the attention of the local community (where military events, parades, etc. are rare in contrast to metropolises). A catchy title was also used. The material generated a huge number of favourable and positive comments (mainly expressing best wishes, thanks and declarations of support/closeness), and received a particularly large number of local shares. Never again would 'oath' posts enjoy such popularity.
- (b) The film showing scenes of Territorial Defence Forces training, with a historical quote – General 'Grot' Rowecki's motto. At the same time, 'Grot' is also the name of the rifle used by the formation and which is shown in use multiple times in the film. The material was shot in a style reminiscent of the extremely popular 'Wataha' series broadcast on Netflix, which is characterised by high quality and very good post-production. Attention is drawn to the dynamic action, smooth narration and intriguing music. The film presents the scenes of Territorial Defence Forces training in a very attractive way, and the ideological message itself – i.e. promotion of the formation – can be regarded as hidden and unobtrusive.
- (c) The first film showing a para-factual account of what the first day of the 16-day basic training looks like – from the moment of entering the military unit up until the evening. Typical techniques of 'improving' the image of a military formation were used – showing the point of view of the recruits (as ordinary people and young people) as well as various forms of activity and joint action. Subsequent films in the series presented other selected elements of the training. The principle of a series was used – the films refer to the popular convention of video tutorials. The multimedia demonstrate, step by step, e.g. how to enlist in the formation, what the recruitment process looks like, what formalities need to be fulfilled, what to take to the training, what the subsequent days look like, what the Territorial Defence Forces equipment looks like, etc.

Discussion

The approach to social media platforms demonstrated by the Command of the Territorial Defence Forces has gone beyond the model implemented in the contemporary Polish Armed Forces. None of the remaining branches of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland follows a clearly defined strategy of utilising the potential of social media platforms, and examples of their application tend to vary significantly, often failing to meet the criteria of the optimal use of social media (Polko 2020).

The upward tendency indicated in the results related to the published posts, reactions of users, their comments and shares proves that the organisation is organically developing its audience, reaching them ever more effectively. A significant, positive relationship between the increase of the reach and activities of users in the three fields (reaction, comments and shares) shows that the profile is managed in a consistent way and that the content published therein meets both the

expectations of its users and the criteria of FB algorithms. A regular but not too frequent activity in the profile (one or two posts per day), using its own graphics, pictures and films (the latter being published directly on the fan page instead of sharing content from other sources), and responding to comments all help establish an image of the organisation, providing support for its recruitment activities and promoting territorial military service. The variety of published posts in terms of their technical nature (from materials with one photo through collages of photos and graphics, and films) and substantive nature (systematic presentation of the formation's tasks, guides for recruits, competitions, and promoting patriotic attitudes, among other things, by referring to historical events, as well as promoting pro-social attitudes, e.g. blood donation), showing the organisation through its members and external stakeholders (e.g. veterans of the Second World War, whom the TDF supports; and aid and charity activities) produce a diverse but consistent image of the institution. The three most popular posts in the discussed period, showing the swearing-in ceremony, the training day and the reference to the heroes of the Second World War, are a confirmation of the consistently implemented, coherent and at the same time effective concept of image building and communication with the audience via Facebook.

Conclusions

The first three years of the TDF's social media activities might be treated as a closed chapter of shaping the strategy and practice of using social media for the purpose of creating an image, recruiting members and promoting military service. The strategy of publishing both informative and persuasive messages remains consistent; the vast majority of posts (as assumed) are characterised by positive emotional expression, maintained in a uniform, youth-friendly style, and refer to values perceived as noble (patriotism, service, sovereignty, training, independence, and effort). However, exaggerated emphasis or bombast is avoided; the messages, both thematically and stylistically, are immersed in the present day, connected with the perspective known or close to the recipient. The messages, both thematically and stylistically, are embedded in the present day and related to specific actions undertaken by the TDF, i.e. connected with the "here and now" perspective known, close or at least relevant to an average viewer.

Importantly, actions of a highly formalised and hierarchical nature, which is obvious in the case of communication conducted by military institutions, are characterised by high dynamics, thus triggering typical mechanisms of reaction and interaction with the users of the medium (recipients), which in turn translates to their reach and effectiveness.

The communication activities undertaken should be appreciated in terms of their effectiveness in the context of information links being built and their community bonding potential. This thesis, however, applies mainly to users who have a positive attitude towards the newly established formation. Unfortunately, at this stage it is not possible to unambiguously assess the absolute effectiveness of communication activities, e.g. how large the group of recipients and users of the TDF fan page who were initially negative towards the formation or had a neutral attitude towards it is. Another interesting research challenge is to determine what the role of social media in the recruitment process is, namely what role this communication channel (along with other motivators) played in the recruitment of new TDF members.

In March 2020, at the moment of writing this article, the formation has started crisis communication through FB (and its other social media channels) in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. It primarily concerns the area of promoting activities undertaken by the organisation for the purpose of educating society and protecting the safety of individuals and communities. During the current crisis – the COVID-19 pandemic – analysing and confronting the actions taken by the TDF in the area of responding to an actual threat and their activities in media channels is a particular research challenge. Such a comparison, due to the unprecedented scale of the crisis, may be a kind of test and verification of their effectiveness and coherence, which is why the authors have decided to conduct such research.

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