

Impact of Social Media Platforms on Military Career Aspirations: The Role of e-WoM in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

This study looks into how social media and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) affect people's desire to pursue careers in the military, particularly in the Punjab area. Social media's impact on consumer behavior and brand engagement has been extensively studied, but its effects on non-commercial decisions—such as job choices in fields like the military—have received less attention. This study investigates how social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube influence public opinions about military careers by examining secondary data from online forums, social media platforms, and government publications. In Punjab, a province with strong historical ties to the military, the study uses a thematic analysis to find important trends and insights about how e-WoM, peer debates, influencer content, and social media interactions shape career goals. The results show that peer-driven information and casual conversations on social media significantly influence military career choices, with influencers and veteran narratives having a particularly strong effect. It has been observed that younger, better-educated people respond better to these social media interactions, which reflects a move away from conventional hiring practices and toward digital-based tactics. By examining how social media and e-WoM influence military career goals in a culturally distinct setting, this study closes a large gap in the literature. There is discussion of the practical ramifications for military recruitment, emphasizing the necessity of increased social media interaction, influencer partnerships, and the production of relatable, real material to draw in prospective recruits. Future research should look into how influencers affect military recruiting, how different e-WoM formats affect different demographic groups, and how different kinds of content affect career choices. This study advances our knowledge of how social media influences public sector, non-commercial career decision-making.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WoM), Military Career Aspirations, Recruitment Strategies

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1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media has revolutionized communication by providing a forum for people to share their thoughts, opinions, and suggestions. As potential hires increasingly rely on electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) as a crucial information source, the aforementioned shift has significant ramifications for professional decision-making. According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), "e-WoM" refers to informal communication that occurs on digital platforms and influences people's thoughts and behavior on a variety of subjects, including career decisions. In the context of military careers, the role of e-WoM has grown in significance as potential recruits seek guidance from peers, veterans, and current service members. Social media users can obtain a multitude of information on military life, job openings, and service members' experiences. This readily available and customizable information allows users to filter content based on their interests and relationships (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). People may discuss issues, ask questions, and seek validation from their networks due to the nature of social media. This encourages communication and involvement. Thus, opinions expressed on these platforms can have a significant impact on how potential recruits perceive the appeal and realities of military duty (Chen et al., 2016).

Because e-WoM is often amplified by social influence and group dynamics, its impact extends beyond individual encounters. Social identity theory holds that a person's social groupings have an impact on how they see themselves (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this case, potential recruits may consult their friends and relatives for guidance, which makes internet remarks even more important. By bringing users together with others who share their interests or experiences, social media's interactive features foster a sense of community and support users' views toward military employment (Dholakia et al., 2004). Furthermore, the impact of e-WoM on military recruitment is especially significant in regions with a long history of military service. While unfavourable perceptions can deter potential recruits, positive experiences veterans provide can increase the attraction of military careers. In light of these factors, military organizations must understand the motivations behind e-WoM and how it influences attitudes toward military professions. Employing social media-driven communication strategies can help recruiters build deeper relationships with possible candidates. To enhance recruitment strategies and foster positive perceptions of military careers among potential recruits, it will be crucial to understand the dynamics behind the evolving information-sharing environment. In conclusion, there are still many unresolved

issues about the relationship between social media, e-WoM, and career decisions that impact military recruitment. Given that prospective recruits are increasingly searching online for training, military organizations would benefit greatly from knowing how e-WoM influences recruits' perceptions. Through the use of this data, stakeholders may more successfully traverse the digital terrain and improve their capacity to draw in and keep talent in a setting that is becoming more and more competitive.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH GAP

When examining the ways in which electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) affects military career choices, a number of significant theories offer frameworks for comprehending the ways in which e-WoM affects attitudes and plans for military vocations. According to the Social Influence Theory, people are influenced by the beliefs and actions of the others in their social networks (Kelman, 1958; Cialdini, 2001). Because friends and family have a big impact on the views of potential recruits, social media amplifies these influences (Wong et al., 2010). Enlistment may be encouraged or discouraged by either positive or negative e-WoM (Gilbert, 2008). Social media's instantaneity amplify this effect (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), confirming how attitudes of dominant social groups influence how people see military jobs (Cialdini et al., 1990). Persuasive messages affect attitudes via two paths, according to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM): the central route, which involves deeper cognitive processing, and the peripheral route, which involves surface-level cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). According to Browning et al. (2013), Holt et al. (2018), and Armitage & Conner (2001), e-WoM affects recruits' opinions, social pressures, and confidence in their ability to meet military demands. Last but not least, the impact of e-WoM is increased when users are exposed to high-quality, reliable content, according to Digital Engagement Theory (Cheung et al., 2009). Since information from reliable sources improves opinions of military careers, credibility is essential (Metzger et al., 2010; Carlson & O'Cass, 2010). To successfully influence recruitment results, military organizations need to produce interesting, reliable material (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010).

Social media has developed into an essential tool for communication and business, giving marketers the ability to interact directly with customers and instantly affect their decisions to buy. According to studies, social media platforms benefit marketers and consumers alike by

encouraging value co-creation activities that help companies adjust and meet the constantly shifting wants of their clientele (Oksi et al., 2016). Additionally, social media gives people a way to create and share electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) messages that have a big influence on how consumers think, especially in sectors like fashion, electronics, and education (Ali et al., 2019). These exchanges, whether via peer recommendations or influencer relationships, have a significant impact on consumer behavior by improving brand impression, engagement, and eventually purchase intention (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2016). Furthermore, the capacity to interact with customers prior to, during, and following the decision to buy has changed the marketing environment and enabled firms to offer ongoing value (Kunja & Gvrk, 2017). Social media, for example, provides consumers with the information they require, like product reviews or feature comparisons, which impact their choices at every turn (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). As a result, companies may swiftly and affordably launch new products, measure market reaction, and affect customer behavior across a large audience by using platforms like Facebook or Instagram (Ali et al., 2019). According to research, marketers may better tailor their strategies to the needs of consumers and increase customer satisfaction and loyalty by having a thorough understanding of social networking sites and their users (Erkan, 2015).

The literature currently available on the impact of social media and e-WoM on career choices is noticeably lacking, especially in non-commercial fields like the military. Although social media's influence on consumer behavior and purchase intentions has been thoroughly studied in the literature (e.g., Zubair & Kaur, 2021; Shankar & Reddy, 2022), little focus has been placed on how e-WoM influences important life decisions like career choices. In particular, nothing is known about how e-WoM affects how people see military employment, a field that is primarily controlled by official recruitment methods. Furthermore, the relationship between social media-driven job decision-making and regional differences—like those observed in Punjab, India, where sociocultural dynamics and military links are prevalent—has not been investigated. As a result, there is a substantial research gap that presents a chance for additional study into how e-WoM influences job choices in this particular setting.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Secondary data sources, such as prior research articles, military and government reports, demographic data, and social media analytics reports, are used in this study's research technique. In order to comprehend current recruiting trends and military perspectives, information was obtained from scholarly resources like JSTOR and Google Scholar in addition to reporting from official government and military websites. Social media analytics from sites such as Statista shed light on user interaction and conversations about job options, especially in the military. Thematic analysis, a qualitative method that finds and interprets patterns in data, was used to examine the gathered information. Understanding the data, categorizing pertinent information about job choices and social media contacts, creating themes like "e-WoM influence" and "military career perception," and honing these themes to make sure they appropriately represented the data were all steps in the process. The study was able to close a major research gap in understanding the function of social media in non-commercial job choices by using this theme analysis to reveal insights into how e-WoM and social media influence career decisions, specifically military recruitment in Punjab.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Significant new information about how social media and e-WoM influence Punjabi youth's desires for military careers was uncovered by the secondary data analysis. These goals have been greatly influenced by a number of platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, albeit the extent of their influence varies according to the type of interaction and shared content. For example, adolescents frequently participate in community forums, share recruitment drives, and follow postings from veterans who share their success stories on Facebook. According to Zubair & Kaur (2021), these conversations have a significant impact and frequently magnify decisions pertaining to one's profession. This is consistent with findings from secondary data, which showed that military forums, Facebook groups, and pages generated a favorable impression of military employment and frequently encouraged prospective recruits to look into additional opportunities.

Instagram, which is well-known for its aesthetic appeal and influencer culture, has a special impact on military career goals. Youth are greatly impacted by influencers who post or tell tales using hashtags like #JoinTheForces or #MilitaryLife, particularly when the content includes inspirational pictures, military training, and first-hand accounts of accomplishment.

The theory of social influence (Ajzen, 1991) states that people are more likely to be swayed by information when it comes from people they respect or trust. Shankar & Reddy (2022), who discovered that Instagram influencers had a big influence on customer behavior, supported this. This idea is applicable to military recruitment since influencer endorsements help people view the military as a respectable and fulfilling career path.

For providing in-depth content, including documentaries, soldier testimonies, and recruitment videos from official military channels, YouTube has become a leading venue. A more thorough examination of military life, including the challenges, benefits, and way of life connected to enlisting in the military, is made possible by YouTube's long-form video. The usefulness of YouTube in delivering in-depth stories that can increase viewers' trust and dependability and result in more robust career considerations was highlighted by research by Choi-Meng Leong et al. (2022). According to the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), people are more likely to develop attitudes through central processing and develop a positive outlook on military vocations over the long term when they interact with detailed, reliable information on YouTube.

The e-WoM investigation also showed that opinions about military vocations are significantly influenced by the information's source. Positive evaluations and anecdotes from peers, influencers, and veterans have a significant impact on military goals, especially when the source is seen as reliable. Peer-driven evaluations and suggestions have a significant impact on career-related choices, especially in high-stakes occupations like the military, claims Fred Chan (2022). According to the expectancy-value theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), people's perceptions of the importance of military jobs and their expectations of success are impacted by the comments and viewpoints they get from reliable sources. People are more inclined to seek a military career when their e-WoM is in line with these expectations, but negative e-WoM, though less frequent, can discourage interest.

Additionally, the data revealed a number of important insights about the kinds of content that arouse military ambitions. For example, it was discovered that formal recruitment ads, influencer endorsements, and inspirational success stories all struck a deep chord with young people. People frequently base their conduct on the experiences and behaviors of others, especially those they look up to or consider role models, according to the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). When it comes to military recruitment, social media influencers and

veterans who share their personal narratives act as role models, inspiring young people to enlist in the military.

Secondary data also demonstrated how various platforms affect Punjab's youth. The most influential platforms were found to be Instagram and YouTube, especially for younger viewers (ages 18 to 25), who are more visually oriented and interact with video content more regularly. This pattern is consistent with research by Shankar & Reddy (2022), which demonstrated that younger audiences are more receptive to visual media. Positive e-WoM about military vocations has significantly increased since 2020, especially on YouTube and Instagram, suggesting that young people in Punjab are becoming more interested in this line of work.

Lastly, it was discovered that the impact of social media and e-WoM on career goals was moderated by demographic variables such as age and educational attainment. Positive e-WoM and social media content about military careers were more likely to influence younger people (ages 18 to 25) and those with higher education levels, indicating a relationship between these demographic characteristics and social media influence susceptibility (Zubair & Kaur, 2021). Additionally, the research points to the possibility of complex interactions between these components, as demonstrated by the moderated mediation formula (Hayes, 2013):

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 M + \beta_2 X + \beta_3 XM + \varepsilon$$

where **Y** represents military career aspirations, **M** represents e-WoM, **X** represents social media platform usage, and **XM** represents the interaction between e-WoM and platform usage. This formula highlights how the interaction between platform usage and the impact of e-WoM can further explain variations in career aspirations.

To sum up, the secondary data analysis produced important results about how social media and e-WoM affect Punjabi military career desires. Peer-driven and influencer material, together with the distinct functions of various platforms, have a significant impact on how people view and choose jobs in the military. The study offers valuable information about how social media can be used to attract people for the military, especially in non-commercial industries like the military.

5. Conclusion

The study's conclusions highlight how social media and e-WoM have a significant impact on military career goals, especially for young people in Punjab. According to the study's main findings, social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have a big impact on how people view military careers. Peer-driven conversations, influencer endorsements, and visual content all have a big impact on how traditional recruitment processes work. Official recruitment materials frequently fall short of the degree of trust and emotional involvement that influencers and veterans who post success stories on social platforms seem to elicit. This is further enhanced by peer talks, which offer genuine perspectives on the difficulties and benefits of military life. Crucially, the study shows that younger, better-educated people respond especially well to this kind of social media content, indicating that military recruitment tactics need to change to accommodate this group's internet consumption patterns. By addressing a major knowledge vacuum about the influence of social media on non-commercial sectors, like the military, particularly in a culturally different region like Punjab, this study significantly advances the body of knowledge on e-WoM and career decision-making. This study offers a fresh perspective by investigating the impact of e-WoM on military career goals, whereas the majority of the literature to date has been on consumer behavior, brand engagement, and commercial decision-making. It offers a fresh viewpoint on hiring in fields where formal communication has always predominated and offers insightful information about how informal, peer-driven social media interactions can influence important life decisions. Based on these results, practical suggestions for military recruitment tactics include maximizing participation on the most popular youth-oriented platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram. In order to produce engaging, genuine material that captures the positives and pitfalls of actual military experiences, military recruiters should work with reputable influencers and veterans. Military groups can combat unfavorable opinions and draw in new recruits by promoting positive e-WoM. Recruitment efforts may also be improved by creating online forums where veterans and active military personnel can communicate with potential applicants. This work could be expanded upon in a number of ways in future research. Examining the precise role influencers play in influencing military recruitment, particularly how their audience engagement, credibility, and content style affect prospective recruits' decision-making processes, could be one topic of study. In order to further customize recruitment tactics, another line of inquiry would look at how e-WoM

affects different demographic categories, such as gender, socioeconomic status, or educational background. Further insights into improving digital recruitment efforts may also come from examining the ways in which various forms of social media content—such as textual posts vs video testimonials—influence opinions about military jobs. This would help us better understand how career decisions are changing in the digital age, especially in non-commercial sectors like the military.

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