

Original article

Selected aspects of the image of the Polish Armed Forces in the opinion of students of uniformed classes

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INFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

The article concerns the perception of the Polish Armed Forces among youth studying in uniformed classes. The article aims to present the results of a pilot study on selected aspects of the image of the Polish Armed Forces. The paper discusses the importance and the essence of creating a positive image of the army in society. The research methodological assumptions and the respondents' opinions on the image of the Polish Armed Forces as a guarantor of defense were presented.

KEYWORDS

Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland, image, uniformed classes



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Introduction

An institution such as the Armed Forces must continuously take care of its image to be shaped in relation to social expectations and acceptable. Media messages provided by the Polish Armed Forces' press spokespersons present actual events, which favor the emergence of expected feedback and specific reactions.

Public opinion polls from 2019 indicate that 3/4 of Poles positively assess the Polish Armed Forces. Minister of National Defense, Mariusz Błaszczak, said: "this is a good result, but it is a result that could be even better" [1]. It can be concluded that the Ministry of National Defense will make further intensified efforts to improve it. In these endeavors, attention should be paid to young people. Appropriate promotional activities addressed to this group may strengthen the high assessment of the Polish Armed Forces in the long term and encourage them to put on a uniform.

The importance and essence of creating the image of the Polish Armed Forces in society

Image should be considered as one of the organization's key assets. It is understood as a likeness, picture, symbol or imagination. Referring this definition to the institution of the Armed

Forces, it should be stated that their image is a collection of thoughts, beliefs, and impressions about them in the opinion of the society. The image is a dynamic concept – its creation is a continuous process [2, p. 29].

In the last few years, the subject of building a positive image of the Polish Armed Forces has become an important element of the activities of the Polish authorities. The role of the way in which military service was perceived by the society and the fact that the Armed Forces are the guarantor of the defense and sovereignty of the Republic of Poland began to be noticed. That was clearly emphasized during the oath of Territorial Defense Forces soldiers in May 2017 “The nation owes its Armed Forces a reward and respect for sacrificing themselves only for its defense” [1].

The dynamic development of modern forms of information and communication forces all organizations and institutions, in particular, the Polish Armed Forces, to select appropriate methods and tools for shaping the image. The problem was noticed by the Ministry of National Defense and discussed during the conference on the “About the image of the soldier”, held at the War Studies University in April 2019. The Head of the Ministry of National Defense, Mariusz Błaszczak, said: “For the Polish Armed Forces to be modern, modern forms of communication are also necessary. The word “appropriately” means speaking to society using modern means but in understandable language. The point is for society to understand the specifics of service. The point is for Poles to know what the service in the Polish Armed Forces is, how it works, what the tasks that are entrusted to the soldiers are” [1]. The Minister’s allows for an interpretation that goes towards the statement that the military should use modern methods for creating its image and use the latest available forms of communication. In turn, during the workshops on modern forms of communication and the image of the Armed Forces, the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, General Rajmund Andrzejczak, drew attention to the way soldiers were perceived by them and how they were presented in social media. The Chief of Staff asked the gathered committee a few questions about the currently used methods of creating the image of the Armed Forces. They concerned [1] the history of the Polish Arms in the then promotion of the Armed Forces and the actions of individual soldiers in favor of perceiving the entire Armed Forces in society.

The image of the Polish Armed Forces has changed over the years along with Poland’s accession to NATO, foreign missions, professionalization of the Armed Forces and finally its modernization. The military was not always perceived in our society as positively as it is today. Research on the image of the Armed Forces should allow the collection of data necessary to create campaigns promoting the Armed Forces in society.

Research methodology

The article presents the results of a pilot study on creating the Polish Armed Forces image among students of uniformed classes. The main research objective was to obtain initial knowledge about the surveyed community. The study was necessary to precisely define the issues and control the assumed research methods and the questions posed [3, p. 59-61]. The author wanted to evaluate the created questionnaire to improve the effectiveness of the main study. Conclusions from the study are necessary for formulating and verifying hypotheses [4, p. 42].

The method used was a diagnostic survey. The survey was conducted at the turn of January and February 2020 in one of the Opolskie Voivodeship schools. Due to the nature of the research, the school head did not agree to disclose his institution’s data. The survey was anonymous.

This article presents the results of consciously selected seven questions from a much larger number in the primary survey, the most important for the problem under consideration. Sixty-five high school students participated in the study. The respondents attended the first and second grades. The classes have a uniformed profile. Out of the questionnaires distributed, three were rejected. Ultimately, 62 questionnaires were used to develop the results and draw conclusions. The distribution of the questionnaires used in the study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of questionnaires used in the study

Number of people participating in the study	65
Number of rejected questionnaires	3
Number of questionnaires used	62

Source: Own study.

Of the questionnaires used in the research results, 37 respondents were boys, and 25 were girls. Male youth participating in the survey constituted 60% of the respondents, and female youth – 40%. Given the place of residence of students of military classes, the results were divided into 50% for towns and villages. Twenty-seven respondents studied in the first grades, which constituted 44% of all respondents, while 35 (56%) were students of the second grade. The characteristics of the research group are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of the research group

Gender	Women	Men
Number of respondents	25	37
Percentage of respondent	40%	60%
Place of residence	City	Village
Number of respondents	32	32
Percentage of respondent	50%	50%
Grade	I	II
Number of respondents	27	35
Percentage of respondent	44%	56%

Source: Own study.

Respondents’ opinions regarding the image of the Polish Armed Forces as a guarantor of defense

In the research, students of uniformed classes were asked for their positive associations with the Polish Armed Forces. The question proposed 12 positive factors (strengths) and left room for the respondents’ own suggestions. Limited selection of up to three factors was introduced. None of the respondents proposed their own factor. The responses were arranged in descending order. The distribution of answers to the question is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of answers to the question: what positive associations with the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland do you have?

Factors / Strengths	Number of indications	Percentage of indications
Tradition	33	53%
History of the Polish Arms	22	35%
The importance of the uniform in society	20	33%
Soldier profession prestige	20	33%
Service as a passion	17	28%
Workplace stability	16	25%
Professionalism	14	23%
Trust	14	23%
Authority	14	23%
High level of training of soldiers	8	13%
Equipment used	5	8%
Modernity	3	5%

Source: Own study.

Among the positive factors, students of uniformed classes most often associate the Polish Armed Forces with tradition (53%), the history of the Polish Arms (35%), the importance of the uniform in society (33%), and the prestige of the soldier's profession (33%). These associations should be used in information campaigns or media reports about the Polish Armed Forces. Young people see the military as an institution with great traditions that must be upheld and cultivated. The history of the Polish Arms is crucial for students of uniformed classes. The heroes of the struggle for the country's independence over the centuries can be role models for the representatives of the young generation. The desire of young people to experience and learn about history can be used in spots, advertisements, posters, books, comics, media reports, promotional materials, or computer games. The importance of the uniform and the prestige of the soldier's profession should be understood through its elitism. Currently, not every citizen undergoes military training, which additionally adds to the uniqueness of the soldier profession.

The study attempted to find out the opinions of students from uniformed classes regarding negative associations with the Polish Armed Forces. The question suggested 8 factors (weaknesses) and left room for the respondents' own suggestions. The question restricted the selection of a maximum of two factors. None of the respondents proposed their own factor. The responses were arranged in descending order. The distribution of answers to the question is presented in Table 4.

Among the negative factors associated with the Armed Forces, the respondents most often pointed to the post-Soviet equipment used by the Armed Forces (60%). The fact is also noticed by the Ministry of National Defense, which is successively introducing new weapons and military equipment. Young people are aware of the importance of unifying equipment to the standards of the North Atlantic Alliance. It should be emphasized that Poland is modernizing its military equipment and adapting it to the requirements of the current battlefield.

Table 4. Distribution of answers to the question: what negative associations with the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland do you have?

Factor / Weaknesses	Number of indications	Percentage of indications
Post-Soviet equipment	37	60%
Frequent separation from family	25	40%
Organizational backwardness	22	35%
Danger of performing the profession (occupational risk)	19	30%
Negative interpersonal relationships	8	13%
Low level of soldiers' training	6	10%
Armed Forces upkeep	2	3%
No professionalism	0	0%

Source: Own study.

Other negative associations of students in uniformed classes were frequent separation from the family and organizational backwardness. Military service is characterized by frequent soldiers' departures on missions, training grounds, or exercises. The military service should not be understood as ordinary work – it is a sacrifice for the homeland and society. The term organizational backwardness in the Armed Forces can be explained by its hermetic nature. Not everyone is aware of the great changes that took place in the Polish Armed Forces after our country joined NATO structures. An information campaign should be carried out on real changes in the Armed Forces in terms of equipment, training, leadership, international cooperation, and human relations to make the perception of the military different in this aspect. The modern solutions from allied armies are implemented and borrowings from the civilian environment are introduced. It is worth noting that no respondent indicated the lack of professionalism in the Polish Armed Forces. Students of military classes are aware that a Polish soldier is a well-trained “professional”, who fulfills his/her duties with passion and commitment.

The purpose of the next question was to obtain information on the factors that have the greatest impact on the image of the Polish Armed Forces as a guarantor of defense in the opinion of students from uniformed classes. The question suggested 16 factors and left room for the respondents' own suggestions. The question restricted the selection of up to four factors. No respondent suggested a new factor. The responses were arranged in descending order. The distribution of answers to the question is presented in Table 5.

Students of uniformed classes believe that the image of the Polish Armed Forces as a guarantor of defense is mainly created by the cooperation with allies (60%), membership in NATO (53%), and participation in overseas missions (38%). Moreover, young people indicated that the level of training of Polish soldiers (38%), equipment owned by the Armed Forces (33%) and the location of military units in the country (30%) play a critical role in the aspect of ensuring the defense of the Republic of Poland.

Cooperation with allies takes place mainly through the presence of Poland in NATO and the implementation of two initiatives by allied troops stationed in Poland: NATO (eFP) and American (Atlantic Resolve) [5]. Young people are aware that “membership in the Alliance remains one of the Polish security policy's main pillars. By implementing the tasks resulting

Table 5. Distribution of answers to the question: what factors have the greatest impact on the image of the Armed Forces as a guarantor of defense?

Factor	Number of indications	Percentage of indications
Cooperation with allies	37	60%
NATO membership	33	53%
Participation of the Polish Armed Forces in overseas missions	26	43%
Training level of Polish soldiers	23	38%
Equipment owned by the Polish Armed Forces	20	33%
Distribution of military units on the territory of the country	19	30%
Presence of allied forces in Poland	17	28%
The process of modernization of the Polish Armed Forces and purchase of new equipment	16	25%
The size of the Polish Armed Forces	12	20%
Promotion of the Armed Forces	9	15%
Cooperation with military classes	9	15%
Media reports	8	13%
Historical events and reconstructions	8	13%
Importance of the Polish Armed Forces in the region	6	10%
Campaign: Become a soldier of the Republic of Poland	3	5%
Military cooperation with pro-defense and paramilitary organizations	3	5%

Source: Own study.

from Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which provides for assistance from other allies in the event of an armed attack on any member states, NATO is a guarantee of our country's security" [6]. The respondents are also aware that an essential element to guarantee our country's security is strong Armed Forces, the foundation of which are well-trained soldiers armed with the most modern equipment. Students of uniformed classes also indicate that the distribution of military units in the field is of great importance for our country's defense. Currently, deploying troops in the country is being reduced by the organization of the Territorial Defense Forces brigades and the creation of the 18th Mechanized Division on the eastern flank.

Later in the study, the respondents were asked to provide information on the sources of obtaining knowledge and information about the Polish Armed Forces. The question suggested 13 sources of obtaining information about the Armed Forces and left room for own suggestions. Both the media and other forms of communication and knowledge transfer were indicated. In the question, the choice of up to three factors was limited. No respondent suggested a new factor. The responses were arranged in descending order. The distribution of answers to the question is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Distribution of answers to the question: where do you get the knowledge and information about the Armed Forces?

Source	Number of indications	Percentage of indications
Websites	37	60%
Television	26	43%
School activities	26	43%
Meetings with soldiers	22	35%
Social Media	20	33%
Mobile promotion teams of the Polish Armed Forces	9	15%
Friends	9	15%
Through WKU/WSZW	6	10%
Press	6	10%
Books	6	10%
Family	5	8%
Visits to Military Units	3	5%
Radio	3	5%

Source: Own study.

Among the various sources of obtaining knowledge and information about the Armed Forces, the respondents most often indicated websites (60%), TV (43%), classes at school (43%), meetings with soldiers (35%), and social media (33%). Therefore, it can be concluded that the Armed Forces' promotional activities aimed at representatives of the young generation should be directed on the Internet and on TV. During Internet promotion, a special role should be attached to social media. Classes at school and personal contact with soldiers play an important role in gaining knowledge and information about the Armed Forces. It is important that school classes on military issues are conducted by people with real knowledge of the Polish Armed Forces. Education for safety teachers could be, for example, retired soldiers or teachers serving in the Territorial Defense Forces.

The next question was to examine the respondents' opinions on the impact of the history of the Polish Arms on the current perception of the Polish Armed Forces? The question was closed and had five variants of answers: definitely yes, yes, hard to say, no, definitely not. The distribution of answers to the question is presented in Table 7.

The influence of the history of the Polish Armed Forces on the current perception of the Polish Armed Forces is noticed by 58% of the respondents. As many as 32% of students from uniformed classes answered yes, and 26% definitely yes. A large proportion of the respondents gave the answer difficult to say – 32%.

This question is closely related to the question about positive associations with the Armed Forces, where 35% of the respondents indicated the history of the Polish Arms. Young people are aware of the role that the military played in the history of our country in the fight for independence.

Table 7. Distribution of answers to the question: do you think that the history of the Polish Arms influences the current perception of the Polish Armed Forces?

Response variants	Number of indications	Percentage of indications
Definitely yes	16	26%
Yes	20	32%
Hard to say	20	32%
No	4	7%
Definitely not	2	3%

Source: Own study.

The image potential of the Polish Armed Forces is inextricably linked with the military ethos, understood as a set of values. It is easily identifiable and cumulative. The values promoted within its framework are important both soldiers and society [7, p. 158]. Undoubtedly, the tradition of the Second Polish Republic had an influence on building the ethos of the Armed Forces. It is sometimes mythologized, although due to the attitude shown by the Columbus generation during and after the war, it allows for the formulation of the statement that it is the foundation strengthening the image of the Polish Armed Forces [7, p. 158-159].

Then, it was examined whether students of uniformed classes would like a famous person to take part in the “Military challenge” and become a soldier for one day, reporting on TV, YouTube, or social media. The question was closed and had five variants of answers: definitely yes, yes, hard to say, no, definitely not. The distribution of answers to the question is presented in Table 8.

Among the students of military classes, the proposal of the unconventional form of promotion included in this question was highly appreciated. As many as 55% of the respondents answered definitely yes, and 28% yes. The total number of positive responses reached 83%. “Military challenge” is a project that is part of the Campaign: Become a soldier of the Republic of Poland, within which, during the summer holidays, every Saturday, it was possible to “join the Polish Armed Forces for one day” in indicated units [8]. It should be concluded that this form of promotion of the Armed Forces would have a measurable impact on the young generation’s representatives. Famous actors or TV presenters could be involved in

Table 8. Distribution of answers to the question: would you like a famous person to take part in the “Military Challenge” and become a soldier for one day, reporting on TV, YouTube, or social media?

Response variants	Number of indications	Percentage of indications
Definitely yes	34	55%
Yes	17	28%
Hard to say	3	5%
No	5	7%
Definitely not	3	5%

Source: Own study.

its implementation – coverage on Television. An interesting action may be the employment in this role of a famous Youtuber or Influencer, who impacts tens of thousands of fans. Big brands appreciate the power of such an influence. In their posts, influencers advertise products, promote services, or encourage participation in social events and undertakings [9]. Currently, influencers on their accounts (You Tube, Instagram) have several million subscribers or followers. The modern media also allows people to interact on a post, facilitating the formation of feedback loops [10].

In the next question, an attempt was made to learn about the opinions of students from uniformed classes regarding the positive image of a Polish soldier. The question was closed and had five variants of answers: definitely yes, yes, hard to say, no, definitely not. The distribution of answers to the question is presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Distribution of answers to the question: do you think the image of a Polish soldier is positive?

Response variants	Number of indications	Percentage of indications
Definitely yes	9	15%
Yes	37	60%
Hard to say	14	22%
No	2	3%
Definitely not	0	0%

Source: Own study.

The vast majority of the students of military classes believe that the image of the Polish soldier is positive. As many as 60% of the respondents answered yes, and 15% – definitely yes. Neither person replied definitely not, which further underlines the approval of soldiers in society.

A positive image of a soldier is particularly important when we assume that each soldier is an ambassador of the Armed Forces [7, p. 155]. Considering the institutional framework of the soldier profession: “a professional soldier may be a person with Polish citizenship, with an unblemished reputation, whose faithfulness to the Republic of Poland is beyond doubt, having appropriate qualifications and physical and mental capacity to perform professional military service” [11, Art. 2]. A positive reception of soldiers in society is necessary to ennoble this difficult profession and has an impact on the recruitment process to the Polish Armed Forces.

The analysis of the collected research material allows for the formulation of conclusions that can be used in future research and constitute the basis for creating recommendations for the promotion of the military among students of uniformed classes.

Conclusions

The analysis of the collected research material influenced the correction of the questions in the survey questionnaire. Working hypotheses were verified and made more detailed. The effectiveness of the methods and techniques used in the study was assessed. The collected research material was used not only to change the research methodology, but conclusions of a cognitive nature were drawn from it.

The positive associations of the military in young people concern traditions that should be upheld and cultivated. The history of the Polish Arms is essential for students of uniformed classes. These two elements must be the foundation of the promotional activities of the Armed Forces among students of military classes.

Negative associations about the military among young people are evoked by the post-Soviet military equipment used in the Polish Armed Forces. Nonetheless, it should be noted that it is being gradually replaced by modern means of combating domestic and foreign production.

In the opinion of students of military classes, a factor that guarantees the security and defense of our country is cooperation with allies and membership in NATO.

The main sources of knowledge and information about the Armed Forces for students of military classes are websites, television, classes at school, meetings with soldiers, and social media. The promotional campaigns of the Armed Forces targeted at this group should be developed on three levels:

- on the Internet using the entire spectrum of social media,
- on TV,
- through personal contact between young people and soldiers as part of school activities.

The image potential of the Polish Armed Forces is inextricably linked with the military ethos, understood as a set of values. It is easily identifiable and cumulative. The values it promotes are significant for both soldiers and society.

Among students of military classes, the proposal of an unconventional form of promotion, which is to use a famous person to take part in the “Military Challenge” and become a soldier for one day and report on it on TV, YouTube, or social media, was highly appreciated.

The vast majority of students of military classes believe that the image of the Polish soldier is positive. This is particularly important when it is assumed that each soldier is an ambassador of the Armed Forces and has an impact on their promotion.

Research on the image of the Armed Forces is currently of great importance. Their promotion is particularly vital in the context of developing the Territorial Defense Forces and the creation of the 18th Division. The positive image of the military significantly translates into encouraging potential candidates to put on a uniform. The society’s good opinion about the organization is one of the determinants of choosing an employer. Currently, the military must compete with entrepreneurs in the labor market to acquire talent for military service. The determinants of taking up a job or commencing service in uniformed formations have changed due to the generation conditions. Creating a positive image of the military among young people, and mostly students of uniformed classes, may be an important element in their development of the Polish Armed Forces.

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Conflict of interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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Biographical note

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Wybrane aspekty wizerunku Sił Zbrojnych RP w opinii uczniów klas mundurowych

STRESZCZENIE

Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy problematyki postrzegania Sił Zbrojnych RP wśród młodzieży uczącej się w klasach mundurowych. Celem artykułu jest prezentacja wyników badań pilotażowych dotyczących wybranych aspektów wizerunku Wojska Polskiego. W pracy omówiono znaczenie i istotę kreowania pozytywnego obrazu wojska w społeczeństwie.

Przedstawiono założenia metodologiczne badań oraz zaprezentowano opinie respondentów dotyczące wizerunku Sił Zbrojnych RP jako gwaranta obronności.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Siły Zbrojne RP, wizerunek, klasy mundurowe

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