

The information needs for adolescents awaiting enlistment into compulsory IDF service, as reflected in internet forums / Rakefet Betzalel

Abstract

The security reality in Israel, since its establishment, dictates a need for sustaining strong armed forces. The IDF Conscription Law requires that every teenager in Israel, upon reaching the age of eighteen, enlists and serves two to three years in various roles, in accordance with the army needs. The sorting and preparation process begins nearly two years prior to the conscription. At this stage, the candidates are summoned to the Recruitment Center and undergo a series of checks and classifications. In that way, the military authorities make sure the conscript's potential and records are compatible with the system needs. The process, taking place in the midst of adolescence, is accompanied by anxiousness and concerns of the candidates regarding their expected military service.

This research has aimed to examine the informational needs of IDF military service candidates (CMSIs) during the period of preparation to conscription, as manifested in designated forums on the internet. One of the presuppositions, which accompanied the planning of research method, was that the expansion of internet usage in all life areas as well as the accessibility and availability of information in any field would lead teenagers to perform vast portions of their information search on the net.

The research methodology was mainly qualitative. The chosen forums were "Fresh" and "Yechida" forums, being of the biggest and most active in the field, as well as provident of structured statistical information on quantity of views and responses. A content analysis was performed, with approximately thousand thread opening questions posted on the forum dealing with pre-conscription for a period of full three months on the "Fresh" forum. The questions were sorted on the basis of topic, and divided into categories for the purpose of producing a scale of information needs, which would clarify the nature of the information required for teenagers on their conscription eve.

In the course of the categories' sorting work, it was found that some questions were inciting more interest than others, and creating a dynamic which yielded threads of many dozens of other responses. In an additional phase, a twenty-five discussion thread sample was selected, adding to a total of 1320 responses. This material embodied a cut of discussion topics giving rise to a symposium of surfers. These threads turned the forum into a platform-like legitimate discussion grounds. Surfers used it for announcing, inquiring and brain-storming ideas and opinions concerning individual-military-state relationship. The responses in these threads were also analyzed and a categorization was formed, reflecting an array of issues with which teenagers were concerned on the ideological level. These were examined in light of written literature on tasks and needs of adolescence in various levels.

The main questions at the basis of the first part of the research were:

1. What are the major information needs of the CMSIs, and what are the questions most occupying them?
2. Which issues, related to their future conscription, incite the most interest and generate the highest rates of participation, engagement and discussion?
3. What adolescence tasks are manifested in the information search at the forum?
4. Is there anything in the behavior of these forums' surfers that is correspondent with behaviors of civil organization pre-admission?

The main findings, in the sorting phase of the opening questions, reflected the fact that the surfers' questions were divided into three groups:

Informative Questions - requests for instantaneous, applicable and functional information were the most common in terms of quantity. Approximately 58% of the questions in this segment were informative. The questions asked dealt with issues of Profile and health, sorting and classification to various units, integration and sorting processes, gear, prerequisites of units and positions, timetables etc.

Organizational Questions - of the 'how' and 'whether' kind, dealt with searching for information to optimize the admission to the organization, under the planning thinking skill. Here, approximately 28% of the questions dealt mainly with the prospects of assignment and admission to a desired position based on the CMSIs traits.

Questions dealing with Refining and Improving the Information Search - 14% of the questions in this segment reflected the use of the forum as a supporting mean of

understanding the information array of the military. This datum also stemmed from the fact that the military authorities do not necessarily provide, on their official publicity channels, the information looked for by the askers.

An additional finding revealed that many questions, asked in the forum, could have been defined as performance of adolescence tasks. Namely, although the forum specifically dealt with conscription and IDF military service, it was used as a mean for performing universal tasks, such as the search for civil and self-identity as well as others.

The questions asked in the discussion threads analysis section were concerned, as aforesaid, with ideological and principal issues, around which multiple response discussions were held and stormy disputes erupted in some.

Several issues which incited interest and served as grounds for charged discussions were identified. The analyzed discussions elucidated that the CMSIs considered approaching the forum as a mean for inquiring and forming a stand, through reading and confronting their stands with those of other surfers on issues related to the quality of service in IDF, the degree of one's contribution to the state, and issues such as the burden distribution with other sectors and more. The rhetoric check of the messages served to prove that respondents regarded the forum as a platform for expressing opinions and a mean for influencing others.

The main questions inciting the surfers' interest were: what are the most esteemed units and to what extent is it justified? What is the reason for volunteering to combat service? The contribution made by the citizen to the state, and that of the state to the citizen, in the context of military service; Motivation and more.

It has been proven that charged issues produced, among others, blunt responses from the surfers, such as disrespect, humiliation, swearing and more. Explicit requests for assistance at times revealed a will to support, encourage and protect the weak in the discussion, although in turn, gained disrespect as well.

Main noticeable characteristics, prevalent among virtual communities, such as incitement and shock creating, were identified. Added to these, was a unique characteristic in the military context - condescendence and disrespect towards the CMSIs. Most predominant of the shared behaviors was the behavior of providing support, and a unique category of lectures on the subjects of military history, heritage, and the ideology of patriotism.

The conclusions of the research were that the inquiry forum for pre-conscription issues served the candidates as a source for obtaining information for the purpose of performing adolescence tasks: being prepared for and understanding the new anticipated everyday reality, examining the ability to influence the process and control the decision making process, discussing and molding the individual and general world-view as part of the process of forming the social, civil and self-identity as well as the personal system of values.

The research has also attempted to assess, within the required limitations, a possible connection between the exposure to various media and the content world of the surfers in the pre-conscription forum. It was proven that some thought-provoking parallels can be drawn between the discussions and reports in the public discourse and the opinions and views expressed in the forums as the world-views of the CMSIs.

Additional conclusion suggested by this research, as in other reviewed research, stemmed from the advantage online forums hold for the performance of teenagers' adolescence tasks. Such a forum serves as human interface and allows the surfers to put forward doubts and quandaries in a manner which produce many and various results, coming from a wide circle of respondents, without the need of being exposed or criticized by adults and friends from their close physical life circle. These advantages encourage teenagers, who prefer to operate under privacy terms, to approach the forum, of all, where they feel the liberty to perform their brain-storming in a controlled manner, as well as express any opinion they have in mind, without the concern of being ridiculed or scorned.

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