

To what extent did the Warriors Wanted advertisement campaign succeed in promoting military service to youth through the glorification of personal, social, and cultural identity?

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The Warriors Wanted United States Army advertisement campaign originated at a time of turmoil for the US Army. Faced with “the most challenging labor market since the inception of the all-volunteer force” (U.S. ARMY RECRUITING COMMAND, 2019), a sharp decline in youth enlistment, and strong opposition against the military’s ongoing foreign interventions (Carden, 2018), the US Army pivoted from the aging Go Army campaign to the new Warriors Wanted campaign to centralize recruiting efforts, reshape the cultural image of the Army, and adapt to the digital age. This transition served as a revolution in military advertising; for the first time the Army would use social media and targeted advertisements to deliver content towards their target demographic: American members of Generation Z aged 17 to 24-years-old. This approach allowed the Warriors Wanted campaign to expose a broader subset of American youth to the adapted military advertising of the 21st century (Fadel & Morris, 2019). This leads to the line of inquiry: to what extent did the Warriors Wanted advertisement campaign succeed in promoting military service to youth through the glorification of personal, social, and cultural identity?

Through an analysis of the advertisements’ use of provocative taglines, subject focal emphasis, sanitized combat imagery, and targeted digital advertising, viewers can see how the Warriors Wanted ad campaign ultimately

succeeded in drawing youth to enlist by presenting the Army as an opportunity for self-actualization empowered by connections to American cultural identity.

The simplistic, bold typographic composition of the words, such as in Figure 1, causes the statements to appear direct and factual, while the use of bright yellow and white colors on the text enhances their visual emphasis, allowing the words to stand out from the background. By presenting culturally salient phrases alongside photos of masculine soldiers in combat uniforms, the advertisements begin to couple the viewer’s perception of positive American cultural values with the Army. This perception is further enhanced by the split color scheme of the taglines, with “we” being colored in white while all the other words are colored yellow, drawing greater attention to the word “we”. This extra emphasis presents the idea that the entire Army, from every warrior to the full fighting force, embodies the positive traits detailed in the succeeding phrase. Together, the phrases and typographic composition create a strong connection between American cultural values and the Army community, an association that appeals to the fledgling identity of youth and presents service as a way to embody prized cultural elements of the American ethos. This use of ethos begins to cultivate a sense of credibility and trust between the viewers and the Army, laying the foundation



Figure 1, taken from the Warriors Wanted advertisement campaign, 1:56

for enlistment.

While the taglines contextualize the actions of the advertisements, the human subjects bring the military messaging to life. In every video and banner advertisement, the subjects are shown in motion with either a tight focal emphasis placed on the soldier or a broad focus on the presence of the military force in open terrain, both of which immediately attract viewer attention to the scenes. Intimate shots depicting combat, skydiving, or rappelling immerse viewers in the action of the masculine armed soldier depicted in the ads (Warriors Wanted advertisement campaign, 1:43). Whereas broad shots of military trucks barreling through an open field with helicopters above, such as in Figure 3, visualize the scope of the Army's strength and technological might.

Both of these stylistic elements present the Army as a capable and unrestrained force able to accomplish any objective, a theme consistent with the culture of rugged individualism associated with masculinity in the United States. This is done to appeal to the personal identity of young male viewers who seek independence and self-reliance as they transition to adulthood. This appeal is enhanced by the depiction of soldiers as placeholders rather than individuals, as evidenced by the rapid subject changes and lack of direct facial imagery present in the ads.

Figure 2 depicts the outline of a soldier backlit by the sun while a narrator states, "When

America needs her best, she sends a soldier" followed by the "Warriors Wanted" tagline (Warriors Wanted advertisement campaign, 1:11). The visual in Figure 2 allows viewers to imagine themselves in place of the imposing faceless soldier as the manifestation of individualism, strength, and protection they are presented as both in the advertisements and the American psyche. This allows youth to view enlisting as a way to personify the masculine social identity of a "warrior" as idolized in American society. This use of pathos appeals to the emotions and cultural values of American viewers, further strengthening the motivation to enlist.

As the stylistic choices of the campaign create positive character associations with the military, the omissions isolate viewers from the horrors of war by presenting a sanitized depiction of armed conflict. At no point do the advertisements depict any entity other than American soldiers. There is never returning fire, enemy combatants, or civilians shown in any advertisement. By omitting adversaries and civilians, as shown in Figure 3, the advertisements remove the need for critical thought in viewers. The purpose of engagement is never explained, the possibility of trauma and death is never entertained, and the association of a common enemy is lost. Further, the omissions rehabilitate the United States Army's image by distancing the organization from historic civilian casualties and human rights violations (Khawaja, 2012) that would contradict the "We do what's right" statement

presented in Figure 1. The sanitized combat imagery causes the viewer to fixate on their role in the infallible Army force depicted in the advertisements without considering the impact of enlistment on their own lives. The lack of resistance further isolates the campaign from directing viewers to fight against a single enemy, instead focusing them on serving and embodying the values of the Army. By building associations with positive character traits and using phrases such as “Those armed with more than good intentions” (Warriors Wanted advertisement campaign, 1:48) the advertisements instill the idea that the Army only fights for noble causes while still exclusively depicting Americans as aggressors, an editorial decision that deeply appeals to the culture of American exceptionalism, moral superiority, and strength. This use of ethos further motivates enlistment by isolating the viewer from unfavorable aspects of military service.

The campaign’s extensive use of internet and social media advertising allowed advertisements to directly engage with their target audience, Generation Z. The use of digital platforms was augmented through the use of interactive content, as shown in Figure 4, to allow viewers immediate access to relevant information and in-person enlistment opportunities. The extensive data-driven ad targeting employed by the Warriors Wanted campaign allowed it to deliver content tailored to the individual viewer, boosting engagement and retention. Banner ads emphasizing military scholarship opportunities would be shown to high school seniors, while ads detailing the signing bonuses of service would be shown to graduates (Rempfer, 2019). This targeted approach allowed the advertisements to exploit economic hardship by presenting the military as the solution to the viewers’ most relevant financial concerns, from paying for college to supporting a family. In addition to personalized financial messages, the advertisements made use of interest-based targeting

to serve content relevant to the skills and interests of viewers, such as showing advertisements depicting tanks to those interested in automobiles (Rempfer, 2019). In effect, this new digital approach allowed the Warriors Wanted campaign to target the basic skills and interests of individual viewers, allowing them to visualize success in specific career fields tailored to their interests, a particularly salient message for youth searching to develop their identity and place in the working world. This use of logos further drives enlistment by presenting service as an accessible choice for financial and career advancement.

The success of the Warriors Wanted advertisement campaign came from its ability to develop a logical progression of thought in viewers that drove enlistment. By building an association between American cultural values and military service, the advertisements created a powerful connection between youth and the Army. This connection is then exploited by the placeholder subjects, which allow viewers to imagine themselves embodying the identity and social traits of a soldier. Meanwhile, omissions isolate the viewer from the realities of trauma and death associated with combat, instead redirecting them towards the action and content of the advertisements. This content is then targeted towards youth on social media platforms, exploiting economic instability and personal interests to drive engagement and further connection. The ultimate effect is a campaign that leads youth to fixate on the manufactured military culture of morality, individualism, and strength as a means to form their identity and realize self-actualization as they mature, while simultaneously isolating them from potential negative aspects of military service. It is this intrinsic identity-based motivation that produces a deep-rooted desire for viewers to become the American warrior demanded by the advertisements, a desire that drives enlistment above all else.



Figure 2, taken from the Warriors Wanted advertisement campaign, 1:14



Figure 3, taken from the Warriors Wanted advertisement campaign, 0:49



Figure 4, taken from the Warriors Wanted advertisement campaign, 0:49

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