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Potential Recruits Seek Information Online for Military Enlistment Decision Making: A Research Note

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Abstract

What career information do potential military recruits seek? The Internet increasingly provides a medium for advertising and communication with recruiters and other potential recruits. The authors explored the influence of online information on enlistment decision making. Analysis of recent Army new recruit surveys showed that a sizable proportion of recruits have encountered military advertising or sought recruiting information online. The authors also examined online discussion forums—in which soldiers and prospective soldiers ask questions, trade insights, and vent frustrations—for postings indicating information seeking for enlistment decision making. Potential recruits were most interested in recruiting processes and what to expect from a military lifestyle, seeking opinions and details on job functions, duty stations, and benefits. These findings suggest that potential recruits may seek information online when unable or unwilling to find it from military websites or talking to recruiters.

Keywords

recruiting, enlistment, online, Internet, information seeking, decision making

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Introduction

Online information about military career opportunities has dramatically increased the resources available to people interested in joining the military. Due to the unique institutional context of the armed forces,[1] people may require a particularly great deal of information when considering a military career. Yet, the way in which people gather information about military employment has yet to be studied in depth—a key missing piece in understanding enlistment decision making is how people obtain information with which to choose a career that best fits their values, preferences, and abilities. This exploratory research note thus seeks to uncover whether potential recruits consider online information important in their decision making.

Traditionally, the U.S. military services have relied heavily on mass media advertising and targeted outreach by recruiting personnel,[2] emphasizing self-improvement and material incentives.[3] Less attention was paid to providing information that would permit people to assess their career preferences and fit with the military. Fortunately for military job seekers, such information is increasingly available on the Internet. The U.S. Army in particular appears to have recognized the importance of an online presence, with an official recruiting website, discussion forums, professionally shot YouTube videos, and a popular online video game.[4] Much unofficial, non–Army-propagated information is readily available online as well. For example, soldiers deployed in Iraq post about their daily lives on personal blogs, whereas others offer opinions and analysis of current events.[5] Thus, along with official websites, a great deal of military job-focused content is available to job seekers.

How Do Potential Recruits Use Online Resources for Enlistment Decision Making?

Although a great deal of military career information is available online, it is unclear the extent to which this online information is used and whether it addresses what job seekers want to know. The current research explores, broadly, the process of seeking military career information. Given the importance of matching people with organizations, the Internet would appear a valuable source of information for individuals to learn more about the unique aspects of military service. Thus, this research note explores how potential recruits use the Internet in deciding whether to join the U.S. military, considering the following questions: (1) to what extent do recruits use online resources in deciding to join the military and (2) what types of information are important to people considering joining the military?

First, we analyzed survey data on new Army recruits' exposure to information and advertising sources prior to their decision to contact an Army recruiter and begin the formal process of enlisting. Second, we analyzed how potential military recruits use online resources to obtain specific information about military life and the process of joining the military, focusing on websites that may augment personal

contacts: public discussion forums for recruitment and enlistment issues. On these sites, users post questions about joining or serving in the military and receive responses from other users. Forum users may be prospective recruits but also frequently self-identify as current soldiers, recruiters, or veterans. The content of questions posted on two military recruitment forums was analyzed to determine the types of information sought by forum users. Because this research is primarily exploratory, the method of online forum analysis is designed to categorize posted questions. The relative frequency of questions in each of these categories should provide insight into the qualitative factors that influence the decision to join the military.

Method

Army Survey of New Recruits

Data from the U.S. Army Recruiting Command's (USAREC) Survey of New Army Recruits may address the extent to which recruits view the Internet as an important information source.[6] Previous versions of the survey included questions about recruits' exposure to traditional media (e.g., print, television, and radio) and interpersonal sources of recruiting information (e.g., friends). The most recently available version (2005) of the survey added response options related to online sources. The survey contained two questions specifically relevant to the importance of online information to these recruits.

Exposure to Army advertising. In one question, recruits were asked "Do you remember seeing, hearing, or receiving any advertising or promotional materials before you enlisted? (mark all that apply)." The fifteen response options included, for example, No, Yes, on television, Yes, in a recruiting station, Yes, from a friend, Yes, on the Internet, and Yes, on a military recruiting website.

Information sources important in enlistment decision. Recruits were also asked How important was each of the following to your decision to see a recruiter about enlisting in the ARMY?[7] They were asked to rate each of eleven items as Very important, Somewhat important, Neither important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant, or Very unimportant. These items included, for example, information from The recruiter who contacted me, Received on the Internet, or From GoArmy.com.

Recruits' answers about (1) military advertising and (2) the relative importance of various information sources served as the two dependent variables.[8] To explore the effect of varying recruit characteristics on both advertising exposure and the importance of various decision factors,[9] the survey responses were analyzed using logistic regressions for each variable across race/ethnic categories (white, black, Hispanic, and other),[10] educational attainment (less than a high school diploma, high school

graduate, any college experience), sex, age, and percentile scores on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT).[11]

Military Recruitment Forums

One drawback of using survey data to understand the effectiveness of advertising efforts and information sources is that the survey selects on the dependent variable—the responses indicate nothing about, for example, the types of advertising exposure or information sources for those who decided *not* to join the military. We, therefore, examined online discussion forums—official and unofficial sites where prospective recruits ask questions, trade insights, and vent frustrations—which can provide a broader range of opinions about the information that potential recruits consider important.[12]

To ensure a representative sample, we analyzed posts from two forums: one from an official website of a military service (the U.S. Army's GoArmy.com[13]) and one from a nonofficial, privately run site about military issues (Military.com[14]).[15] Each of these forums is organized with discrete sub-forums separating discussion for specific topics. Sub-forums focusing on military careers, joining the military, and general discussion about the military were chosen and sampled for discussion threads, indicating that individuals were seeking military career information.

One hundred threads from each website were randomly sampled in January 2007.[16] Initial forum posts—questions or complaints—that initiated new discussion threads were recorded, as the primary purpose of this research was to investigate information seeking. The authors independently coded each of the 200 posts (including both title headings and text) into coherent themes and, together, reconciled the resulting question types.[17] In total, there were twenty-nine types of questions that were then further grouped into six larger categories (see Table 1). The 200 posts were then recoded into these categories (shown under "Categories of Forum Questions" in table 1).

Results

Army New Recruits Survey

Recruits' responses to survey items about (1) exposure to online advertising and (2) importance of various career information sources provide insight into the extent to which online information was influential in enlistment decision making. First, a sizable proportion of the respondents had been exposed to online Army advertising. Table 2 shows, for each information source, the proportion of recruits who reported "seeing, hearing, or receiving any advertising or promotional materials" before they enlisted. Television advertising was by far the most prevalent information source viewed by respondents, cited by approximately 95 percent of all recruits. Of the twelve information sources, the Internet ranked sixth (47 percent) and military-specific websites ranked ninth (37 percent). Fifty-five percent of the recruits had

Table 1. Categories of Forum Questions

Categories of Forum Questions	Types of Forum Questions
Qualifications (formal procedures, eligibility, etc.)	1) Legal issues (e.g., DUI)
	2) Medical issues (health, physical issues)
	3) Education requirements (e.g., GED)
	4) Minimum test scores
	5) Attending ROTC, West Point, OCS
Difficulties/capabilities/challenge/ uncertainty about abilities	6) What to expect (e.g., "What would I be doing?")
	7) How to get in shape
Recruiting processes	8) DEP—including how long until recruit can/ must ship
	9) Underage at entry/contract
	10) Testing procedures
	11) Paperwork
	12) How to get more information
	13) Bonus, loans eligibility
	14) Changing services, prior service return
	15) Recruiter trustworthiness (validity/ reliability of information)
Military lifestyle	16) Career opportunities (civilian and military)
	17) Differences in occupational specialties
	18) Duty station conditions/locations
	19) Housing/benefits/pay
	20) Educational opportunities
	21) Family issues
	22) Training
	23) Deployment
Dealing with influencers	24) Convincing parents, spouses, etc.
Nonrecruiting	25) "Good Samaritans" (e.g., current soldiers offering advice)
	26) "Support the troops" statements
	27) Political statements
	28) Inquiries about other recruits' ship dates/ destinations
	29) Random

Note: DEP = Delayed Entry Program; DUI = Driving Under the Influence; GED = General Education Diploma; OCS = Officer Candidate School; ROTC = Reserve Officer Training Corps.

seen either Army online advertising or military-specific websites and 28 percent reported exposure to both sources of information.

Recruits were also asked to rank the information sources they used in their enlistment decision making. Table 3 shows the relative importance of various sources in the decision to see an Army recruiter, a key step in the enlistment process. Personal

Table 2. New Recruits' Sources of Exposure to U.S. Army Advertising

	Mean	*SE*
TV	0.95	0.006
Recruiting station flyer	0.66	0.012
School flyer	0.62	0.013
Direct mail	0.58	0.013
Internet	0.46	0.013
Friend	0.43	0.012
Radio	0.39	0.012
Website	0.36	0.012
Event	0.19	0.010
Movie theater	0.193	0.011
Newspaper	0.163	0.011
N	2,325	

Note: Data weighted by race/ethnicity and gender.

Table 3. Importance of Information Sources to Enlistment Decision

	Mean	*SE*
Recruiter	3.93	0.038
GoArmy.com	3.05	0.035
Friend who enlisted	3.05	0.039
Internet	2.88	0.035
TV ads	2.64	0.033
Flyer	2.50	0.032
Brochure	2.44	0.031
Direct mail	2.42	0.031
Sponsored event	2.33	0.031
Magazine ads	2.31	0.029
Radio ads	2.21	0.028
N	2,576	

Note: Data weighted by race/ethnicity and gender.

contact with a recruiter ranked highest, whereas the official Army website, GoArmy.com, ranked second highest. Other Internet advertising ranked as the fourth most important in recruits' enlistment decision making.

Although the rankings of information sources were of primary interest, we also examined demographic variation in the rated importance of Internet sources. Data on respondent demographics and other characteristics were modeled as predictors of the information source rankings. Table 4 provides regression outcomes (expressed as odds ratios) for four models: two binary logit models predicting exposure to online advertising and recruiting websites and two ordered logit models predicting

Table 4. Logistic Regression Odds Ratios: Recruits' Exposure to Online Information, Importance of Online Information in Recruiting Decision

	Exposed to Internet Advertising	Exposed to Military Recruiting Websites	Importance of Internet Advertising	Importance of GoArmy Website
Black				
Hispanic			.786* (0.09)	
Other race				1.435* (0.23)
Female				
No high school diploma				0.694* (0.13)
Some college	1.434** (0.19)			
College degree or higher	1.546* (0.27)			
Age	0.939*** (0.01)	0.957** (0.01)		1.032** (0.01)
AFQT percentile			0.995* (0.00)	0.994** (0.00)
Online three to six hours per week	1.933*** (0.19)	1.651*** (0.17)	1.786*** (0.16)	1.863*** (0.16)
Online seven to fourteen hours per week	2.015*** (0.24)	1.747*** (0.21)	1.819*** (0.19)	1.888*** (0.19)
Online fifteen to twenty-one hours per week	3.014*** (0.52)	2.241*** (0.37)	2.581*** (0.38)	1.812*** (0.27)
Online twenty-one plus hours per week	1.670*** (0.31)		2.063*** (0.34)	1.616** (0.27)
Intercept	2.311** (0.71)		–	–
Cut 1	–	–	0.434** (0.12)	0.479** (0.13)
Cut 2	–	–		
Cut 3	–	–	2.680*** (0.72)	2.389*** (0.63)
Cut 4	–	–	8.403*** (2.29)	8.636*** (2.31)
Method	Logit	Logit	Ordered logit	Ordered logit
Log-likelihood	−1813.1	−1747.8	−3918.9	−4066.8
Chi-squared	124.0	64.1	110.4	111.1
df	13	13	13	13
N	2,711	2,711	2,668	2,727

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; nonsignificant coefficients not shown.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

the importance of online advertising and GoArmy website in the decision to see a recruiter.

Unsurprisingly, recruits who spent more time online were more likely to report exposure to Internet advertising and military websites and more likely to rate these sources of information as important to their enlistment decisions than were recruits who spent less time online. However, the relationship between online time and exposure to military information was not necessarily linear. Recruits who spent fifteen to twenty-one hours online were the most likely to view military information and generally rated the importance of such information highly. Yet, they were statistically no more or less likely to place a high importance on the GoArmy website than were recruits who spent between seven and fourteen hours online or more than twenty-one hours online.

These results indicate some key demographic differences in recruits' exposure to and perceptions of Internet information sources, even when controlling for time spent online. First, recruits with a bachelor's degree or at least some college were more likely than were less educated recruits to have been exposed to military advertising. For example, 55 percent of recruits with a bachelor's degree reported seeing Internet advertising, compared to 45 percent of recruits with a high school diploma or less (results for recruits with some college were statistically similar to those with college degrees).

However, more highly educated recruits attributed no more importance to Internet advertising in their enlistment decision than did recruits with a high school diploma. Of all educational groups, recruits with less than a high school diploma placed the least importance on the GoArmy website. On average, only 33 percent reported that the GoArmy site was "important" or "very important," compared to 42 percent of recruits with at least a high school diploma. Recruits with higher AFQT scores placed less importance on military advertising and the GoArmy website in their enlistment decision (even when education level was excluded from the model), although the difference was small.

Older recruits were less likely to have been exposed to military online advertising and websites. There were no differences in exposure to online advertising or recruiting websites by race or sex, and sex was not a factor in the importance of online advertising or the GoArmy website. Online advertising did appear to be important for Hispanic recruits. The GoArmy website appeared to be more important for "other race" recruits than for whites, blacks, or Hispanics. For example, on average, 51 percent of "other race" recruits cited the GoArmy website as "important" or "very important," compared to only 42 percent of black, white, and Hispanic recruits combined.

Military Recruitment Forums

The sampled forum posts were analyzed to establish categories of questions being asked in military recruitment forums. These grouped categories of recruiting

Table 5. Frequencies of Categories of Recruiting Questions

Categories	Number of Recruiting Questions	Proportion of Total Questions ($n = 151$)
Qualifications	35	23%
Basic training	39	26%
Processes	59	39%
Lifestyle	52	34%
Other recruiting	2	1%
Nonrecruiting	49	NA

questions were expected to provide insight into important enlistment decision-making factors and served as the main measure in determining the type of information sought. Table 5 describes these six categories and lists the number of recruiting questions within each category as well as the proportion of total recruiting posts. Forty-nine of the 200 sampled posts were unrelated to recruiting issues. Frequencies of recruiting questions in each category were therefore calculated using the remaining recruiting posts ($n = 151$).

Recruiting processes. Posts that asked questions related to the process of joining the military were most frequent (39 percent). These tended to be requests for practical information about the procedures involved in joining the military or obtaining specific skills or training. Typical process posts asked questions such as[18]

- "Tomorrow I am going to a recruiter and am very nervous. I have met him before because my [best friend] is in the army. I was wondering what I have to bring to my first meeting and what I should have or know before I go. If you can help that would be great. Thanks."
- "Switching from the guard to regular army ... I was wondering what I would need to do if I chose to go regular Army?"
- "Anyone know what ADA/DT means on the ERB?"

Military lifestyle. Questions about military lifestyle formed the second largest block of posts (34 percent). These were primarily concerned with career, educational, or training opportunities, particular duty stations or military specialties and family issues. Typical lifestyle posts asked questions such as

- "What kind of responsibilities and training does this MOS [96B] require? What kind jobs specialty work will I do?"
- "I am a Navy brat, I know the Navy life. I wanted to know what is like to be an Army wife? What do you go through? Is there as much separation as the Navy?"
- "Do MP's get the same respect as infanttymen, or are they looked down upon?"

Basic training. More than a quarter of the posts (26 percent) had specific questions about basic training. Many of these were concerned with what to expect and how to prepare, but some forum users were interested in obtaining information about how long a recruit would expect to wait before shipping out for training. Typical basic training posts were as follows:

- "Hello, I was wondering if someone could give me an idea of the schedule you'd have in Basic, I'd like to know how many hours of sleep you get, and what exercises you do, stuff like that, so I can be more used to it before I join. Thanks. (I'm looking to be 11B, if that helps.)"
- "I am trying to lose weight as well of increase the length of time/distance I can run before I enlist. To do this, should I be running daily, or every other day?"
- "Does anyone know how long Basic Training + Jump School for the 82nd Airborne will last?"

Recruiting qualifications. A slightly smaller number of posts (23 percent) were concerned with the qualifications for joining the military or obtaining specific training. Many of these requested information about physical standards and aptitude test scores, but a nontrivial number (seven of the forty-three) asked about obstacles imposed by prior legal problems, particularly arrests and convictions for driving under the influence of alcohol. Typical qualifications posts asked questions such as

- "Is a waiver available for MP if I had a DUI about four years ago?"
- "I have a green card, but am not a citizen. How does this affect my ability to join/contribute? I am disheartened to learn that I might be only able to enlist not join as an officer."
- "I got my [aptitude] test scores back and I made a 48 overall. Is that good or not?"
- "My older brother wants to enlist in the Army, but tore a ligament in his ring finger and pinky of his right hand and has no movement in them. Is he still eligible to enlist or can he get a waiver?"

Other recruiting concerns and nonrecruiting posts. Other recruiting considerations included questions about patriotism/duty and how to deal with parents or other family members. Finally, nonrecruiting posts offered messages of support for troops as well as various political statements.

Discussion

People interested in joining the military may derive particular advantages from the expansion of the Internet as a career information resource. This study explored (1) the importance of online information sources in enlistment decision making and (2) the types of online information that are sought. First, results from an Army survey showed that a large proportion of new recruits saw military advertising

through the Internet, although not nearly as many that saw or heard military advertising in more traditional media. Exposure to online advertising was stratified by education level, age, and AFQT score. In general, recruits reported that information from the Army's official recruiting website, GoArmy.com, was as important to their decision to contact a recruiter as encouragement from friends who had already enlisted and almost as important as recruiter-initiated outreach. Second, analysis of posts in recruiting forums revealed a wide range of requests for information. Military forum users were most concerned about the processes of joining the military itself (e.g., necessary steps, incentives available for specific jobs). Questions about the military lifestyle (e.g., what it would be like to work in a specific job or to be stationed overseas) were also prevalent.

Several themes emerge from these findings. First, the Internet is a significant source of information for people who were successfully recruited into the Army. Not only was there broad exposure to online advertising—about half of the respondents reported seeing online advertising, a figure that rose with greater overall Internet use—but recruits also weighed information from GoArmy.com heavily in their decision to take the first practical steps toward joining the Army. The finding that GoArmy.com was at least as important as information from friends in the Army suggests that Internet resources supplement personal networks for military information. These resources may be particularly important for military job seekers (and for the military services themselves), as interested applicants have fewer firsthand sources of information on which to base their enlistment decisions.[19]

Some demographic differences in the survey results cannot be explained simply by differences in time spent online. For instance, recruits with greater education or higher AFQT scores were more likely to have seen military advertising online. Recruits with greater education or aptitude are considered more desirable, as they exhibit better job performance and are more likely to complete their first term of service.[20] Yet, these recruits seemed not to attribute more importance to this information, which may represent missed recruiting opportunities for targeting this desirable group. The most requested information categories of recruiting questions from the forum analysis (i.e., recruiting processes and military lifestyle) suggest topics that may deserve more prominence in reaching these recruits. In addition, when compared with either black or white recruits, Hispanic recruits and those who self-identified as "other race" (presumably, Asians and Native Americans) attributed greater importance to, respectively, online military advertising and GoArmy.com in particular. Possibly, members of more collectivist cultures (i.e., Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans) value institutional aspects of military service that are easily discerned from official sources.

Another significant finding is that individuals, including potential recruits, are seeking a wide range of military career information, indicating a greater need for available information than is currently met by official sources. People are using the Internet to inform their assessments about what it takes to join the military and what they can expect as a member of the armed forces. Along with military recruits, people who

choose not to enlist are increasingly able to find specific military information, perhaps, contributing to a narrowing civil–military culture gap. The current analysis of recruiting forums has identified several types of sought-after information that these job seekers perceive as important yet unavailable. Information categories such as recruitment processes and uncertainty about abilities are not necessarily anticipated by the existing enlistment literature, much of which deals with socioeconomic and normative factors. These additional dimensions illustrate how complex the enlistment process—and consequently the enlistment decision—has become.

The results from this study, thus, broaden the picture of enlistment decision making by indicating the types of information individuals use to develop more complete assessments of the burdens involved in joining the military. These may include, for example, time and effort to complete the recruiting process, the relative attractiveness of various career options, and qualitative aspects of life both in the basic training period and in daily life as a soldier. In contrast to those more frequently requested, some categories of information may be readily available, such as specific benefits of joining the military. For instance, relatively few questions (16 of 200) directly addressed the financial aspects of joining the military, perhaps, because official materials already cover this information fairly completely. Thus, rather than contradicting the intrinsic/extrinsic paradigms of enlistment decision making, knowledge of what specific information is sought extends these theories, examining how prospective applicants develop their own sense of the relative merits or benefits of different career opportunities.

The relative frequencies of recruiting questions in these information categories can also inform the armed forces about where recruitment information efforts fall short of what applicants feel they need to make an informed decision. Analysis of the recruiting forums suggests that potential recruits are unable or unwilling to find desired information simply from military websites or talking to recruiters. In fact, some forum users explicitly stated that they were seeking verification of information they had received from recruiters. The fact that job seekers may be apprehensive about "official" military career information is important because, for example, adolescents cite lack of information or even trustworthy sources as barriers to informed career decision making.[21] Consequently, people who are more comfortable searching for specific information on the Internet may be turning to military forums, as indicated by the current results.

Finally, this analysis represents a novel methodological contribution to military recruitment research. Existing studies on enlistment propensities and motivations rely in large part on self-report as the basis of their decision-making models.[22] By contrast, use of the Internet, an increasingly rich and nearly ubiquitous communication medium, constitutes a behavioral, naturalistic approach.[23] Analyzing actual requests for military career information provides a direct look at the issues people find important when making enlistment decisions. Such online research into information-seeking behavior may help to validate existing models of enlistment decision making by confirming the types of information, including values and motivations, that potential recruits consider important.

Future Research Directions

This study has provided an initial step toward understanding information-seeking processes for military careers. The novel use of online forum data, however, involves several potential limitations. First, it is not possible to discern user demographics from anonymous online interactions. However, although these data cannot establish relationships between population segments and their occupational preferences, the simple fact that such topics are discussed indicates that they are of concern to potential recruits. Second, the sampled forum posts represent a "snapshot" in time. The concerns of potential recruits may be unique to a period when the United States was engaged in simultaneous, extended conflicts (e.g., questions about the likelihood of deployment) and when the civilian employment outlook was relatively strong. These results should thus be generalized to different geopolitical or economic contexts with caution. Finally, while the categories of recruiting questions may be suggestive of the relative importance of decision-making factors, they may just as easily reflect the relative availability of information or that asking questions about stigmatized personal issues (e.g., drug use) is more easily done online.

Further research on this topic could thus continue to examine online forum activity but extend beyond recruiting questions to also consider responses—their accuracy, contradictions, and respondents' biases or motivations. Additional differences may be found between active-duty soldiers and reservists, between Army soldiers and those in other military services, or between enlisted soldiers and commissioned officers, given the present variation by education level. The extent to which age, education level, or socioeconomic status affect online access (i.e., "digital divisions"[24]) may also highlight important differences in military information seeking. The importance of such research should only increase, as both Internet resources and access expand in schools, homes, and on mobile devices. Finally, today's adolescents—who increasingly spend more time online, including socializing[25]—will soon become tomorrow's online job seekers.

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Notes

1. See Goffman (1961) and Moskos (1977). As the proportion of veterans shrinks, people may have fewer personal contacts for firsthand knowledge about military service (see Carlson and Andress 2008). However, increasingly similar attitudes about the military between civilians and military in the post-9/11 era may have offset this trend, suggesting a narrowed civil–military culture gap (see Rohall, Ender, and Matthews 2006).
2. See Rostker (2006).
3. See Padilla and Laner (2001).
4. See Zavis (2007) and Elliott (2006).
5. See Hockenberry (2005).
6. This survey collects information about recruit demographics and advertising exposure and motivations for joining the Army. It is administered annually to a random stratified sample of active-duty personnel who have recently enlisted in the Army or accepted a commission as an officer. Army reservists are surveyed separately and their responses are not reported here. The response rate in 2005 was 39.7 percent. To ensure that survey data were demographically representative of new Army recruits, the results were weighted using gender and race/ethnicity information (these weights were provided with the survey).
7. Note that the decision to see a recruiter is a key step in initiating the formal enlistment process but is not the actual enlistment decision itself.
8. To indicate the source of exposure to Army advertising, responses other than ''no'' were coded into fourteen dichotomous variables indicating whether a recruit was exposed to each source of information. The order of important information sources was retained by assigning numbers to each (e.g., 1 = *Very unimportant*, 5 = *Very important*). Information sources were then ranked according to their mean scores. Ordinal logistic regression analysis was used to explain demographic variation in advertising exposure and relative importance. An ordinal measure of respondents' Internet usage was coded as (1) less than three hours per week, (2) three to six hours per week, (3) seven to thirteen hours per week, (4) fifteen to twenty-one hours per week, (5) more than twenty-one hours per week.
9. Media exposure—particularly to online media—and the relative importance of advertising in military recruiting may vary across demographic groups. See Dertouzos (2009).
10. This information was provided by the Army and does not differentiate between white and non-white Hispanics or specify what is meant by ''other race.''
11. The Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) is a standardized reading and math aptitude test that is used to determine the eligibility to join the military and to qualify for certain military occupations. Recruits' AFQT scores were appended to their survey responses prior to the Army's distribution of the data.
12. The advantages of analyzing information from these forums are twofold. First, computer-mediated communication affords anonymity, which may produce more honest or truthful responses than survey, interview, or focus group data (see Lowry and Nunamaker 2003). Because such forums are public and anonymous, there should not be differences between them due to, for instance, privacy concerns of posting on an official website. For this reason, as well as to ensure a representative sample, their data were not analyzed separately.

Second, the open-ended content in these forums is well suited to the exploratory nature of this research. Similar approaches have profitably used online search behavior to examine job seeking in general (see Jansen, Karen, and Amanda 2005).

13. https://forums.goarmy.com/forums/index.jspa.
14. http://forums.military.com/eve.
15. Army-related websites for active-duty personnel were chosen to ensure that the population was most similar to that from which respondents in the survey of new recruits were drawn. Military.com was chosen because it was the highest ranking result of a Google search using the keywords "military" and "forum."
16. Each sub-forum displays a certain number of threads (e.g., twenty-five or fifty) on a page and then displays enough pages as necessary for all threads. Within a sub-forum, the appropriate number of page numbers (in proportion of the sub-forum's posts to the total forum's posts) was randomly selected. Finally, threads within each page were randomly sampled.
17. First, each author read through the entire set of sampled posts and created categories to describe the nature of recruiting information sought (e.g., length of basic training, civilian career opportunities). Each post was then coded as a "recruiting question" to indicate whether it fits into each of these categories. A post could be coded as belonging to multiple categories but was only coded once for any given category. Next, the authors discussed each post one by one, reconciling differences where possible.
18. The text of the quoted posts is presented exactly as on the websites.
19. See Note 1.
20. See United States Congressional Budget Office (2006).
21. See Julien (1999).
22. See, for example, Segal (1986).
23. For an example of other online behavior research, see Rosenbloom (2007).
24. See Fox (2005).
25. See Valkenburg and Jochen (2009).

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