

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-106719](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

Today's military services are using digital marketing, among other efforts, to reach Generation Z—known for its use of digital media and whose views about the military have been steadily declining. In fiscal year 2023, several of the military services missed their recruiting goals by tens of thousands.

The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 includes a provision for GAO to evaluate DOD's use of social media and other technology platforms for marketing and recruiting purposes.

This report describes (1) how the military services have used digital marketing efforts to recruit young people; and evaluates the extent to which the military services have (2) developed policies to direct their digital marketing activities and to manage risks; (3) evaluated the performance of their digital marketing activities; and (4) experienced and addressed any challenges associated with funding their marketing efforts.

GAO reviewed DOD and military service studies, guidance, and plans; interviewed agency officials; and assessed military services' efforts against commercial best practices for assessing advertising effectiveness.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making eight recommendations, including that DOD develop a risk management process, and address funding challenges. DOD concurred with seven and partially concurred with one on Army processes to improve marketing funding consistency. GAO continues to believe all recommendations are valid, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-25-106719](#). For more information, contact Alissa Czyn at (202) 512-3058 or [CzynA@gao.gov](mailto:CzynA@gao.gov).

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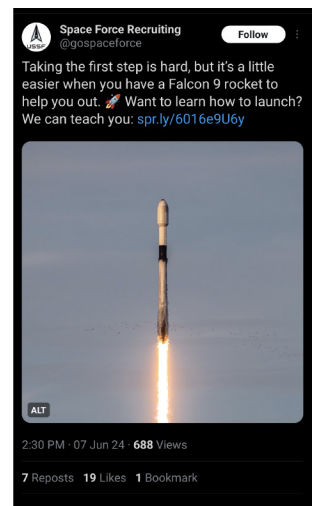
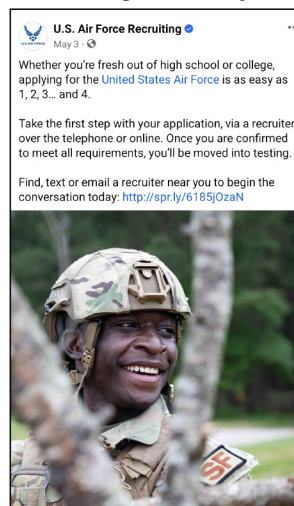
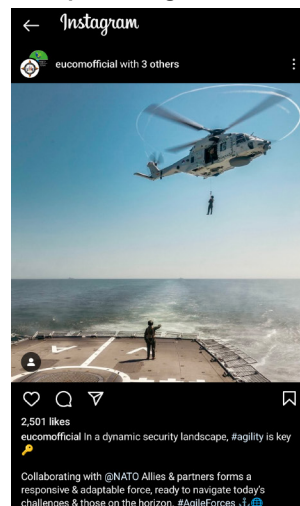
## MILITARY RECRUITING

### Actions Needed to Address Digital Marketing Challenges

## What GAO Found

The military services use multiple digital platforms—Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube, among others—to inform young people and their mentors about career paths and life in the military.

### Examples of Digital Marketing Efforts among the Military Services



Source: U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Space Force. | GAO-25-106719

In reviewing their digital marketing efforts, GAO found the following challenges:

- **Risk management.** While the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps have established strategies for responding to marketing crises or public comments in a standardized way, the Air Force (which includes the Space Force) manages risk on a case-by-case basis. Without a formal process for managing risks, the Air Force may not be positioned to address challenges that arise affecting young people's perceptions of its brand.
- **Strategic goals.** All services have evaluation frameworks that identify their target audience overall as Generation Z—a demographic born in 1997 through 2012. However, some of the strategic goals identified in the Navy's, Marine Corps', and Air Force's marketing plans—such as building a connection to the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics field—do not have specific targets or performance measures for these goals. Without identifying how such progress will be measured, such as defining the aim of each goal, time frames for completion, and responsible persons, it will be difficult for these services to assess their progress and to ensure that stakeholders understand intended outcomes.
- **Funding.** The military services face various challenges related to the timing of funding for their marketing efforts. Without assessing whether to establish and document internal processes to improve the predictability and consistency of marketing fund availability, the military services are missing out on potential benefits that would further enhance their ability to conduct marketing in support of their recruiting mission.