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BRANDING IN MODERN TERRORISM IDEOLOGY AND
PRACTICE

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Abstract

Terrorism is a complex, multifaceted social and political phenomenon, which provides great opportunities for considering it from the point of view of various sciences and practices. The article attempts to consider terrorism from the point of view of brand management, which is not only of theoretical interest, but also of practical significance. Modern terrorism is not only a military, political and ideological strategy, but also a communication one. The creation and promotion of the brand which should position, explain, and justify the idea is an important component of the advertising policy of terrorist organizations. Brand promotion in terrorism has a lot to do with commercial advertising for consumer products competing in the marketplace with the identical products from other brands. It is no coincidence that the scientific literature attempts to bring the theory of terrorism and marketing into a single whole. However, the illegitimate and destructive nature of terrorism, which produces a product that is dangerous to life and social security has its own characteristics. The article examines the features of branding in terrorism, reveals its functions, and highlights its types. Particular attention is paid to recruiting branding the purpose of which is to replenish the social base of terrorism, besides, its manipulative nature is emphasized. The results of the quantitative method of sociological research allowed us to draw certain conclusions on the basis of which it was concluded that it was necessary to carry out systematic measures aimed at discrediting terrorism and exposing its brand.

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Keywords: Terrorism, terrorist organizations, brand, branding, ideology, manipulation



1. Introduction

Branding as a means of raising the public image of terrorist organizations is not new. Regardless of its true goals, any terrorist organization has always sought to influence the consciousness and behavior of the target audience in their own interests using the most available means.

Nowadays propaganda by action remains an important way of drawing public attention to the activities of terrorists and the media becomes intermediaries in this process. It is widely accepted that there is an almost symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media: Terrorist attacks provide the media with spectacular, emotionally engaging news. Broadcasting terrorist attacks in the media provides an opportunity for terrorist groups to declare their existence, convey their symbolic message and demonstrate their capabilities and binds them to the brand.

It should be noted that there is a dual audience of terrorist organizations to which they are addressing their message – civilians and potential participants. Terrorists must use spectacular acts of violence to perform in front of both audiences. A single attack and the publicity surrounding can create fear in the target audience while simultaneously demonstrating strength to supporters (Weil, 2018).

Modern information and communication technologies have significantly expanded the space for terrorist branding. In addition to online magazines, modern terrorists can use a wide range of media platforms to promote their ideology and distribute educational materials, inspiring supporters around the world. Social media allows terrorist groups to reach target audiences and easily connect with sympathizers, supporters, and potential recruits.

Thus, modern terrorism, claiming global influence, enters into fierce competition not only for attracting material, but also human resources.

2. Problem Statement

Brand promotion in terrorism has much in common with commercial advertising of consumer goods and services that compete in the market with other brands, but at the same time it has its own specific characteristics. If you look at terrorism as a brand, you can see its vulnerabilities. The main difficulty of terrorist branding is advertising and promotion of their specific antisocial “products”, i.e. violence, murder of civilians, and even suicide. Terrorism is deadly both for its objects and for its subjects. Thus, terrorists need an effort to get “consumers” to believe in and support the product.

In order to attract “consumers” these advertising “products” must be wrapped in mythological, religious, ideological packaging, that is, to make them socially attractive. For this purpose, various methods and technologies are used including the development of ideology and the manipulation of consciousness.

In the scientific literature studies are presented on certain aspects of branding. Personal branding study is of great interest as it presents an original typology of terrorist celebrities (Weil, 2018). Group branding is considered on the example of modern terrorist organizations (Freear, 2019; Greaver, 2016; Ligon et al., 2014). It should be noted that studies devoted to individual attributes of terrorist brands (Beifuss & Bellini, 2013) allow us to understand the meaning of symbolic signs and logos. However, it

should be noted that the analysis of terrorist activities from the point of view of brand management is still far from complete and has great heuristic potential.

3. Research Questions

Modern terrorism is a globally recognized brand that differentiates it from other forms of organized violence. In addition, terrorist organizations form and promote their own brand to promote their ideas and to differentiate themselves from other organizations with similar goals.

The word “brand” (from the English mark, stigma) is not so much the name of the organization as its clear, distinct image. A brand is a unique image of a terrorist organization, the values it declares, a complex of associations that it evokes in the audience. Brand attributes are as follows: the name of the organization, its ideology, acts of violence for which responsibility is taken, etc. All this adds up to a single image that arises in the mass consciousness when a terrorist organization is mentioned.

Representations and associations connected with a brand can arise spontaneously, but if an organization wants to evoke specific emotions and a certain attitude towards it in the target audience, it is necessary to launch a branding process, i.e. a process aimed at increasing brand value in the eyes of the target audiences.

In this article, the author tried to identify the features of branding in terrorism and answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the functions of brands in terrorist activities?
- 2) What difficulties do terrorist groups face in promoting their brand?
- 3) How is the terrorist brand value created for the target audience?
- 4) What images and associations exist in the mass consciousness (using the example of university youth) when the word terrorist is mentioned?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study was to identify the features of branding in terrorism and the possibilities of its influence on various target audiences. In this regard the author made an attempt to identify the image of a terrorist that exists in the minds of university youth as one of target social groups.

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the article was the theory of brands (Clifton & Simmons, 2003; Keller, 2003), which set out the key concepts of building and the principles of branding.

In his study the author also used a quantitative method of sociological research of ideas about terrorism and the image of terrorists in the minds of students.

6. Findings

Despite some similarities between the branding of legitimate commercial and political organizations, branding in terrorism has its own specific characteristics, which are determined by the nature of the terrorist activity and the specific “product”.

Terrorism branding is aimed at different target audiences and performs the following functions:

- to specify the differences between a terrorist organization and its existing analogues;
- to broadcast their goals and values;
- to demonstrate their capabilities;
- to gain prominence for the terrorist organization and to draw attention of the world audience to their activities;
- to build loyalty and increase the attractiveness of terrorist activities for potential actors, to attract material and human resources;
- to form group identity and cohesion of members of a terrorist organization.

Various types of branding in terrorism can be distinguished.

Corporate branding makes it possible to concretize the differences between the terrorist organization of the existing counterparts. Besides, the existing corporate culture contributes to the formation and maintenance of group identity among potential or acting subjects of a terrorist organization on which the success of all its activities depends.

Terrorist activity can be associated both with a specific organization and with a person acting as its organizer, ideologist, inspirer or performer. The demonic image of Osama bin Laden who for decades retained the status of number one terrorist became a symbol of terrorism of the twentieth century, a symbol of the enemy of humanity, the inspirer of the war against Western culture. His name and image have also been synonymous with the Al-Qaeda brand and are strongly associated with the 9/11 attacks in the United States. For the Western world Osama bin Laden was the embodiment of the world’s evil, but for Sunni Muslims he may have personified the godly lifestyle of a crusader defending Islam from impurity.

The name of Anders Breivik who committed double terrorist attack (22.07.2011) that killed 77 people is known all over the world. It became the symbol of the lone terrorist and is now a household name. From now on, lone killers in different countries of the world began to be called ‘Breiviks’ adding as a clarification the name of the place where the tragedy occurred.

Recruiting branding is focused on replenishing the social base and involves manipulating the consciousness of the target audience, which reduces the need to use various forms of coercion or the financial costs of recruiting. It includes the development of the brand concept and its attributes, its positioning, its promotion channels and the impact on the audience.

Recruiting branding consists of a number of necessary steps.

1. Definition and analysis of the target audience. This takes into account its social and demographic characteristics, social and economic status, which determine the needs, interests, values, expectations, etc. The content of the unique proposal and the choice of the method and space of communication with the target audience will depend on these characteristics.

2. Determination of the communication strategy, that is, the selection of the most accessible and effective channels and platforms, i.e. various institutions (educational, religious, penitentiary) or social networks. Terrorists are limited in their widespread use of a variety of communication tools and a variety of ways to market available to marketers. However, they are trying to organize their branding by using all means in such a way as to create a synergistic effect.

3. Positioning is a conveying to the audience the rational or emotional motives for participating in terrorism.

Brands must be relevant and appealing to their audience. They should represent social value, be meaningful for the consumer and respond to him. A unique value proposition is prepared for each target audience, i.e. the advantages and benefits most important to it (wealth, power, fame and heroism, etc.). “What inspires today’s deadliest attackers is not so much the Quran as a thrilling deed and a call to action that promises fame and respect in the eyes of friends” (Atran, 2015, par. 9).

The attention and attitude to the brand will depend on what associations and, accordingly, feelings arise upon contact with it. A chain of spontaneously formed associations – violence, fear, murder, or those that terrorists purposefully put into their brand – freedom, justice, etc. will determine the attitude towards the terrorist brand.

Information addressed to the target audience should have the following features:

- accessibility, which is determined by the ability to obtain different information, and its accessibility for perception and interpretation for understanding;
- relevance, i.e. the ability of information to meet the needs and requirements of consumers.

In order for a message to receive an emotional response, it must be simplified, made specific, besides, an attractive label must be attached. Fighters for justice, warriors of Allah, brides of Allah, martyrs, etc. – every fanatic or romantic can find for himself the most attractive label and source of inspiration.

By identifying terrorist activities with struggle, resistance, war or revolution through branding, terrorists try to legitimize their destructive activities in the eyes of their target audience.

Branding in terrorism is based on the manipulation of consciousness and, along with an open message to the target audience it includes a coded signal that appeals not only to the mind, but also to instincts, emotions, and feelings causing the desired images and mental states. More importance is attached to the use of intangible brand attributes: narratives, frames, myths, linguistic techniques, i.e. metaphors, euphemisms, false analogies, semantic distortions, attractive verbal labels, etc.

Thus, the products of terrorist branding are not only actions and ideas that are positioned to the target audience, but also implicit values and meanings.

As a result of recruiting branding the consumer should develop an attitude towards the brand that determines the level of personal identification with it. It manifests itself in the following: 1) brand loyalty or identification with its community; 2) behavioral intention to participate in terrorist activities.

Youth are one of the target groups of terrorism. Young people, both men and women, are often used for support, recruitment and warfare. Terrorist groups use young recruits as support, recruiters, propagandists and fighters (Darden, 2019).

In the context of the topic under study a survey was carried out aimed at identifying the idea of both terrorism and the image of a terrorist in the minds of university youth without the connection with any terrorist organization.

The sample survey was attended by 250 students of the Volgograd State Polytechnic University aged 18 to 23 years. The obtained results are in Table 1.

Table 1. Perceptions of terrorism

Choose the characteristics that in your opinion fit the definition of terrorism.	Survey N= 250
1. Abuse.	54.5 %
2. Intimidation.	63.6 %
3. The last resort to political goals.	40.5 %
4. Race for power.	24.4 %
5. A form of struggle for freedom, justice.	3.3 %
6. Protest against the existing political system.	28.1 %

Depending on the frequency of selection, the proposed characteristics were distributed as follows: intimidation (63.6 %); violence (54.5 %); an extreme means of achieving political goals (40.5 %); protest against the existing political system (28.1 %); race for power (24.4 %); form of struggle for freedom, justice (3.3 %). Thus, the respondents noted, first of all, the essential features of terrorism (intimidation and violence), its instrumental nature as an extreme means of achieving political goals, protest against the existing political system, and the race for power. The overwhelming majority of respondents do not consider terrorism as a form of struggle for freedom and justice. The results are in Table 2.

Table 2. Terrorist image

Who is a terrorist?	Survey, N= 250		
	Agree, %	Disagree, %	Difficult to say, %
1. Most terrorists are mentally ill people	50	24.3	25.7
2. A terrorist is a person who deliberately makes his choice	35.5	21.9	42.6
3. A terrorist is a warrior who fights a war	21.5	45.4	33.1
4. A terrorist is a revolutionary	13.6	60.4	26
5. A terrorist is a fighter for freedom, justice	3.3	81.1	15.6
6. A terrorist is a religious fanatic	41.7	16.8	41.5
7. A terrorist is a criminal	94.3	1.2	4.5

50 % of respondents unequivocally consider terrorists to be mentally ill people, and 35.5 % define a terrorist as a person who consciously makes his choice. A terrorist as a warrior is considered by 21.5 % of respondents, a revolutionary – 13.6 %, and a fighter for freedom and justice only 3.3 %. However,

attention is drawn to a certain percentage of respondents who could not give an unambiguous answer on these points.

A terrorist as a religious fanatic is defined by 41.7 % of respondents, which is due to the nature of modern terrorism. Despite the degree of loyalty shown by the respondents, the absolute majority (94.3 %) consider terrorists to be criminals.

7. Conclusion

The article attempted to consider the concept of branding in relation to the phenomenon of terrorism. The study made it possible to draw certain conclusions regarding its role and features.

1. With the advent of new information technologies, branding as a means of enhancing the image of terrorist organizations has expanded its possibilities of influencing the consciousness and behavior of target groups in their own interests.

2. Branding in terrorism performs different functions due to the illegitimate nature of its activities and the presence of different target groups for which it is intended.

3. Despite the points of contact with branding of legitimate commercial and political organizations, branding in terrorism has its own characteristic features which are determined by its specific and antisocial product. Great importance is attached to the intangible attributes of a terrorist brand, i.e. ideas and values that can influence the consciousness and behavior of the target group. Thus, branding in terrorism is symbolic and manipulative.

4. Study of the image of terrorists in the eyes of university youth revealed a predominantly negative attitude towards the brand of terrorism and its subjects. However, given the vulnerability of young people to radicalization and recruitment, there is a need for anti-terrorism activities that clarify the true nature of terrorism and form a strong immunity to the influence of terrorist brands.

The following activities are also proposed as work to build resilience to violent extremism: support of young people to participate in public life and to express themselves more effectively; elimination of factors underlying radicalization such as marginalization and a search for the sense of belonging (Freear, 2019).

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