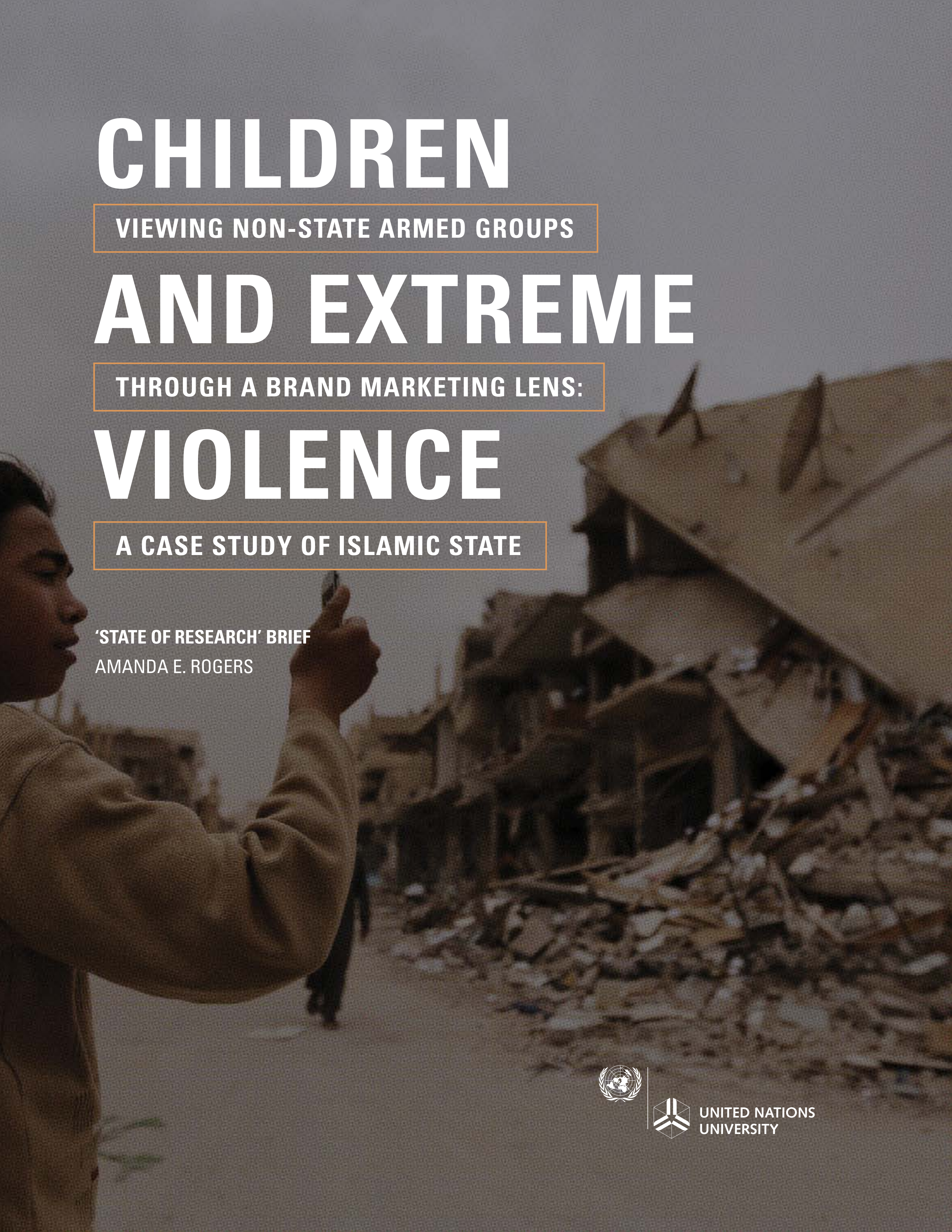

CHILDREN AND EXTREME VIOLENCE

VIEWING NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS THROUGH A BRAND MARKETING LENS: A CASE STUDY OF ISLAMIC STATE

'STATE OF RESEARCH' BRIEF

AMANDA E. ROGERS

UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY

CHILDREN
VIEWING NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS
AND EXTREME
THROUGH A BRAND MARKETING LENS:
VIOLENCE
A CASE STUDY OF ISLAMIC STATE

‘STATE OF RESEARCH’ BRIEF

AMANDA E. ROGERS

UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY

ISBN 978-92-808-9057-0

UNU 'State of Research' Workshop

The United Nations University (UNU), in concert with UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), and the governments of Luxembourg and Switzerland, is leading a research initiative examining child trajectories into and out of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in contemporary conflicts, including those listed as terrorist and characterized as "violent extremist".[1] This project will produce programmatic guidance for preventing the recruitment and use of children by, and effectively disengaging children from, NSAGs that employ extreme violence. As part of an initial desk review process, UNU convened a series of "state of research" workshops to draw upon perspectives, expertise, and experience that traditionally have not been included in United Nations policy and programmatic discussions in this area. To summarize the workshops, build on the empirical findings discussed, and promote cross-learning, UNU has published a three-part "State of Research" series, which, in addition to this brief, includes Insights from Social Science on Child Trajectories Into and Out of Non-State Armed Groups and Insights from Criminology on Child Trajectories Into and Out of Non-State Armed Groups.

On 16 January 2017, UNU hosted a group of scholars and practitioners to discuss how to apply a brand marketing lens to analysing contemporary NSAGs like Islamic State (IS). The workshop was based on the premise that it might be possible to gain additional analytical leverage and deeper understanding when examining recruitment typologies, messaging, and intergroup competition for market share. The workshop brought together academics in communications and psychology; practitioners in brand creation, marketing, and cause campaigns; social media experts and practitioners; entertainment content creators; and experts on NSAGs, among others. This "State of Research" Brief provides a summary of the workshop discussions combined with a limited literature review drawing from the studies and research cited during the workshop. The brief is not a comprehensive review of *all* the relevant work in this area, nor does it examine *all* the factors that influence child association with and exit from NSAGs (e.g., structural factors). Rather, it outlines some robust findings and points of consensus across disciplines and practitioner experiences, focusing on those with implications for understanding child trajectories into and out of contemporary NSAGs.

Before proceeding, several caveats are needed: first, although media accounts have focused on the IS "brand", scholarly investigation of branding in relation to IS, and NSAGs more generally, remains scant.[2] The vast majority of available literature on branding and marketing strategies is confined to professional texts designed for commercial practitioners, including academic work in the field of business administration.[3] Most analysis of the IS brand[4] – whether popular media or scholarly accounts – remains circumscribed to media investigations narrowly focused on gratuitous violence in conjunction with social media recruitment.[5] Sensationalist fixation on violence at the expense of "soft power" appeals (i.e., persuasive outreach that offers sympathizers positive incentives) obscures alternative motivations underlying youth attraction to NSAGs such as IS, which commonly offer a sense of belonging and identity rather than simply a chance to join the action. Media analysis tends to focus on recruitment rates, reflecting the assumption that military participation serves as the fundamental driver of NSAG sympathizer behaviour. This narrow focus ignores the bigger question: to what are potential recruits – active fighters and passive admirers alike – responding? What about the IS "brand" proves so appealing? How do other aspects of the NSAG's self-promotion strategy provide a draw beyond violence? In other words, how does the NSAG brand work, and, further, for such a wide range of potential consumers?

---

[1] There is no binding definition of "violent extremist" in international law. The term is used by different actors to describe a wide array of groups and activity. What is "extreme" depends on context, with the result that the term "violent extremist" may have different connotations in different contexts.

[2] Comparatively little research exists on NSAGs' use of branding techniques; the existing literature is primarily confined to the presentation of graphic typologies, with inadequate analytical depth. Exceptions, however, do exist. See Artur Beifuss, Francesco Trivini Bellini, and Steven Heller, *Branding Terror: The Logotypes and Iconography of Insurgent Groups and Terrorist Organizations* (London: Merrell Publishers, 2013); Gina S. Ligon, Mackenzie Harms, John Crowe, Leif Lundmark, and Pete Simi, "The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant: Branding, Leadership Culture and Lethal Attraction", Final Report prepared for the Department of Homeland Science and Technology Directorate's Office of University Programs, award number #2012-ST-061-CS0001 (College Park, MD: START, 2014); Colin P. Parke and Steven Metz, "ISIS vs. Al Qaida: Battle of the Terrorist Brands" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016); Aaron Sarno, "What We Can Learn About Successful PR from ISIS", *Everything PR*, 25 July 2016; Charlie Winter, "The Islamic State Brand: Marketing and Communicating the New Jihadism", *Strategic Sectors | Culture & Society*, 28 April 2016.

[3] Because of the paucity of scholarly attention to the prevalence of marketing and PR usage among NSAGs, a lack of definitional consensus characterizes the application of "brand" to the terrain of non-state actors' media strategies, organizational image, and reputation management. For the purposes of this study, I utilize "brand" to refer to Islamic State's organizational personality, or the distinctive identity of the supposed Islamic utopia to which unparalleled numbers of sympathizers are attracted.

[4] Alana Petroff, "ISIS: The Most Successful Terrorist Brand Ever?" CNN Media, 7 May 2015, http://money.cnn.com/2015/05/07/media/isis-brand-media-twitter/index.html.

1

What Is Branding?

Although "marketing" is often used interchangeably with "branding", the two terms are not synonymous.[6] Marketing denotes the overall process of attracting and retaining a consumer base.[7] While the field of marketing is centred upon the customer, branding is focused on the producer, and involves telling the story of an organization's product and overall promise. A brand refers to "who you are, what you stand for, and what you offer," and differentiates similar objects, personalities, or groups.[8] The concrete elements of a brand (e.g., logos, jingles) ensure that one's product remains distinctive by helping to create and convey the intangible "promise, personality, and positioning" of the product.[9] Brands function as "shorthand marketing messages that create emotional bonds with consumers."[10] A brand, in sum, not only tells the story of a product or organization, but –more critically – must connect with an audience to survive.

Governments and NGOs now increasingly use branding and marketing strategies in order to compete in a globalized marketplace (whether for foreign investors, donor support, or simple name recognition).[11] For example, by promoting an attractive, immediately recognizable brand, states may seek to construct a national identity and create "brand loyalty" among the polity;[12] revitalize their economies after crises;[13] attract professional expat labor; seek foreign investment; draw new immigrants;[14] and promote tourism.[15] NSAGs also increasingly invest in the creation and promotion of unique brand identities, often to differentiate themselves from rival armed groups or promote themselves as viable alternatives to state governments. As such, policymakers cannot afford to ignore branding.[16] To effectively combat and counter the messages of NSAGs, it is critical to analyse and respond to their organizational brand identities and related marketing strategies.

---

[5] Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor, "What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?" The National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2016; Ian Bremer, "The Top 5 Countries Where ISIS Gets Its Recruits", *Time*, 13 April 2017, http://time.com/4739488/isis-iraq-syria-tunisia-saudi-arabia-russia/.

[6] Jaqui Genow, "Marketing vs. Advertising vs. Branding", J. Genow Marketing, 26 May 2016, http://jgenowmarketing.com/marketing-vs-advertising-vs-branding.

[7] Ibid.

[8] According to the American Marketing Association, a brand is "a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers." *AMA Dictionary*, s.v. "brand", https://www.ama.org/resources/Pages/Dictionary.aspx?dLetter=B&dLetter=B

[9] Heidi Cohen, "Branding: Not Just a Logo", 29 January 2011, http://heidicohen.com/branding-logo.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Lisa Cornish, "Your Big NGO Isn't a Big Brand. So What Should Be Your Brand Strategy?" *Devex*, 31 October 2016, https://www.devex.com/news/your-big-ngo-isn-t-a-big-brand-so-what-should-be-your-brand-strategy-88981; Nathalie Kylander and Christopher Stone, "The Role of Brand in the Nonprofit Sector", *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Spring 2012).

[12] Steven Heller, *Iron Fists: Branding the 20th-Century Totalitarian State* (London: Phaidon, 2008), p. 8.

[13] The Israeli state provides one such example; in 2005, concern about the nation's warlike image abroad led government officials to call for a rebranding campaign that sought to position Israel as a cultural hub, rather than a state embroiled in habitual conflict. "Brand Israel" brought together three Israeli government ministries, alongside public relations firms, to galvanize international political support by downplaying references to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and, instead, projecting the state's image as "relevant and modern rather than only a place of fighting and religion". Simon Anholt, *Places: Image, Identity, and Reputation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 57-61; Nathaniel Popper, "Israel Aims to Improve Its Public Image", *Forward*, 14 October 2005; Eli Avraham and Eran Ketter, *Media Strategies for Marketing Places in Crisis: Improving the Image of Cities, Countries, and Tourist Destinations*, (Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2008).

[14] Lee Hudson Teslik, "Nation Branding Explained", Council on Foreign Relations, 9 November 2007, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/nation-branding-explained.

[15] David J. Reibstein, "Improving Economic Prosperity through Nation Branding", *Livemint*, 11 November 2016, http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/6ekBQSPNxQ3aAAcvV2I7QJ/Improving-economic-prosperity-through-nation-branding.html.

> NSAGs invest in the creation and promotion of unique brand identities, often to differentiate themselves from rival armed groups or promote themselves as viable alternatives to state governments.

In recent years, IS has promulgated a distinctive brand identity: To sympathizers, the group projects an image of strength and solidarity, embodied in the utopian paradise of an autonomous Sunni Muslim state with global jurisdiction. IS portrays itself as both an idea and a territorial entity, reviving the caliphate as a reality rather than a dream to be realized in the future. To its enemies, IS conveys uncompromising brutality and terror. Although IS not the only NSAG embracing branding, it has achieved a degree of success, especially through its use of social media, that observers are eager to emulate and rivals hope to surpass.[17] Copycatting of the organization's communications strategy is likely to increase in the future.[18]

To understand IS's brand, it is important to situate the group, its promise, and its marketing efforts in the context of the evolution of NSAG branding, as well as broader knowledge and experience with product branding. The group's communications strategy most closely parallels those of "Western brands, marketing firms and publishing outlets – from PepsiCo to BuzzFeed – who ply the Internet with memes and messages in the hopes of connecting with customers," rather than other NSAGs.[19] Indeed, "like those ventures, the Islamic State hews to a few tried-and-true techniques for boosting user engagement,"[20] including emotional resonance, brand authenticity, and encouragement of consumer/sympathizer co-production of brand loyalty.

2

Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) and the Use of Branding

It is useful to briefly trace the evolution of NSAG brand creation and marketing strategies to contextualize IS's innovations.[21] While NSAGs have long engaged in what may be loosely described as brand marketing, a few have systematically developed media-savvy, integrated brand campaigns. These efforts have laid the groundwork for IS's brand marketing approach and success. Chief among these influences are Hizbullah; Al-Qaida; and IS's predecessor, Al-Qaida in Iraq.

---

[16] For NSAGs like IS, the field of "nation branding" is particularly important, since the group seeks to market itself as a sovereign political entity equipped to provide members with social services, economic autonomy, and functional governance.

[17] NSAGs learn from each other and adopt successful tactics and innovations – be they military, logistical, or even marketing –employed by other groups,. A good example is the use of trucks and large vehicles in "ramming" attacks used by IS, which has inspired identical methods by numerous non-IS actors to gain similar levels of publicity. Anna Aronheim, "Analysis: Ramming Terror Method Adopted by ISIS Returns in Jerusalem Attack", *Jerusalem Post*, 9 January 2017, http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/ANALYSIS-Ramming-terror-method-adopted-by-ISIS-returns-in-Jerusalem-attack-477847.

[18] Jason Burke, "How the Changing Media Is Changing Terrorism", *The Guardian*, February 25 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/how-changing-media-changing-terrorism; Jennifer Cafarella and Melissa Pavlik, "ISIS's Global Campaign Remains Intact", Institute for the Study of War, 14 June 2017, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2017/06/isiss-global-campaign-remains-intact.html; J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter," The Brookings Institution, Analysis Paper No. 20, March 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/isis_twitter_census_berger_morgan.pdf.

[19] Brendan Koerner, "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War", *Wired*, April 2016, https://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat.

[20] Ibid.

[21] In the 1980s, for example, Peru's leftist guerrilla NSAG Shining Path advertised its brand of communism through a conscientious appropriation of language and imagery that evoked Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, and that incorporated Inca symbolism into the Shining Path visual vocabulary to mobilize "long-standing Indian resentment toward the wealthy and educated white Spanish elites" associated with state power. Jonathan Matusitz, *Symbolism in Terrorism* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), pp. 246-267.

HIZBULLAH From the group's name – which translates as "party of God" – and green emblems (the symbolic color of Islam), Hizbullah has deliberately utilized language, symbols, and imagery to create a unique brand that combines religious devotion and military skill.[22] Hizbullah's embrace of multimedia campaigns promoted its distinctive identity, which helped differentiate the group from its competitors and garner and sustain considerable public support. Its tactical innovations – particularly suicide attacks, combined with video documentation of them – helped lend credence to the group's claim to be the Islamic world's foremost resistance movement and Lebanon's liberator. Hizbullah has expanded its media outreach as part of its efforts to rebrand itself as not just a resistance organization, but a political power, projected through its professionalized media apparatus.[23] This shift to participation in party politics and governance has been accompanied by a successful branding pivot, which has contributed to Hizbullah's emerging image and status as a legitimate political entity in Lebanon.[24]

AL-QAIDA Al-Qaida pioneered the branding of a global jihad, claiming to provide a political and religious base from which the Muslim community could "revitalize long-established Islamist doctrine."[25] The group positioned itself as the standard bearers of "authentic" Islam, morally superior to both the Western powers and the corrupt and tyrannical rulers of Middle Eastern states, and the vanguard organization capable of restoring Islam to its glory days. Al-Qaida's brand was largely built up around its iconic figurehead – Osama bin Laden – and control of its narrative was concentrated in the hands of a few, including Anwar al-Awlaki, the group's philosopher, and Samir Khan, editor of ***Inspire*** magazine.[26] Al-Qaida was a pivotal early adopter of Internet technology for the dissemination of strategic communications as well as organizational planning.[27] Further, the group revolutionized propaganda and conflict by conceptualizing the media as a battle space, arguing that the media war for influence was equally as important as the physical terrain of combat. By publicizing atrocities committed against Muslims worldwide, as well as the violent actions taken as revenge, Al-Qaida hoped to awaken and unite the global ***ummah*** in the struggle to revive the Islamic caliphate.[28] Despite its early branding success, Al-Qaida has in recent years lost significant market share to IS and other groups as its military capacity has faltered, it has failed to connect with youth, it has not utilized new technology and social media platforms,[29] and several of its key brand ambassadors have died. Moreover, "brands need focus and consistency to succeed," but as Al-Qaida gained affiliates its brand became splintered and diluted.[30]

AL-QAIDA IN IRAQ Despite the weakening of the Al-Qaida brand, two of the group's affiliates have helped pave the way for IS innovation. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, which later became an affiliate, known as Al Qaida in Iraq (AQI), was a loose group of militants that sought to repel the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. AQI created its own distinct brand of extreme violence. Whereas Al-Qaida's leaders worried that excessive violence would threaten the group's brand identity as "the good guys", and undercut the organization's fundamental ordering principle of moral superiority, al-Zarqawi saw the coverage of extreme violence as having benefits. AQI pioneered the documentation of graphic brutality – a media strategy that would lead to a split within the Al-Qaida organization[31] – and inspired IS media productions today. For example, al-Zarqawi's passion for snuff film decapitations provoked considerable anxiety within Al-Qaida's central leadership. Combined with the executions of Shiite Muslims, such violence risked alienating Muslims worldwide, running counter to Al-Qaida's preference for unified Islamic resistance to the West, as well as a gradual approach to global conquest.[32]

---

[22] Ibid., pp. 241-245.

[23] "Hizbollah's Syria Cononundrum", International Crisis Group,14 March 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/lebanon/175-hizbollah-s-syria-conundrum.

[24] Zahera Harb, *Channels of Resistance in Lebanon: Liberation Propaganda, Hezbollah and the Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

[25] Matusitz, *Symbolism in Terrorism*, p.171.

[26] In 2010, Al-Qaida launched its English language magazine Inspire (as well as a less prominent sister publication aimed at female sympathizers). Prior to the launch of *Inspire*, jihadist NSAG media typically remained confined to password-protected online chat rooms, and were written in Arabic. Marc Ambinder, "Al Qaeda's First English Language Magazine Is Here", TheAtlantic.com, 30 June 2010, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/06/al-qaedas-first-english-language-magazine-is-here/59006; Julia Cavendis, "Al-Qa'ida Glossy Advises Women to Cover Up and Marry a Martyr", *The Independent*, 14 March 2011, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/al-qaida-glossy-advises-women-to-cover-up-and-marry-a-martyr-2240992.html.

[27] Timothy Thomas, "Al Qaeda and the Internet: The Danger of Cyberplanning", *Parameters* (Spring 2003), pp. 112-123.

[28] Marc Lynch, "Al Qaeda's Media Strategies", *The National Interest* (Spring 2006).

[29] The vast majority of Al-Qaida media in the decade since 9/11 remained inaccessible for a younger demographic, with communications delivered in a speech-like format and filmed with a still camera – lacking the action shots and youth-centered "entertainment" focus that would come to characterize IS productions.

[30] Lynch, "Al Qaeda's Media Strategies".

3

Islamic State's Brand Identity: Organizational Image, Recruitment Strategies, and Reputation Management

Unlike Al-Qaida, Islamic State embraced the idea that graphic violence[33] and an uncompromising anti-Shiite stance (in addition to other al-Zarqawi trademarks such as shrine and heritage destruction) would prove far more effective in inciting Sunni Muslims the world over – shattering perceived apathy in the interest of an active state of war. In addition to its brutality, IS's brand is inextricably linked to its claims to constitute a transnational caliphate, or global Islamic government, to which Muslims worldwide owe religious and political allegiance. The group distinguished itself from Al-Qaida – and burnished its brand – by occupying physical terrain in numerous countries as compared to Al-Qaida's very limited territorial control (e.g., in parts of Yemen). In these areas, IS exercises political, social, economic, and military control. Furthermore, Al-Qaida's willingness to compromise, negotiate, and enter into alliances stands in marked contrast to IS, whose rigid insistence on total obedience renders the IS brand more distinctive and maximalist than other Salafi-Jihadi ideological competitors.[34] Moreover, unlike Al-Qaida, it has cast its brand as one of strength rather than grievance.[35] IS has matched an instantly recognizable, consistent brand identity known through its ubiquitous, iconic black-and-white flag and its anthem, "Dawlat al-Islam Qamat",[36] with a flexible, highly differentiated communications strategy to target different populations. For Westerners and people living in the Gulf, IS highlights its Islamic utopia and autonomous socio-political state welcoming of all Muslims, creating a "common sense of identity among its followers".[37] For local populations, IS has highlighted themes around Sunni anger. [38]

To sell its brand, IS has developed a marketing strategy that combines professional media techniques with a level of decentralized "user-driven" engagement that generates a sense of brand ownership among supporters.[39] To retweet the IS flag, or an atrocity video branded with the ubiquitous logo, is to declare one's allegiance in a low-cost, personal advertisement of brand affiliation. Another example can be found in official publications' depictions of IS recruits burning passports: operating here is influencer strategy, in which "power users" with large social media platforms spread officially approved or produced messages, narratives, and memes, which are then picked up and rapidly shared, catalyzing a viral chain of dissemination.

---

[31] "Al Qaeda in Iraq: Has al-Zawahiri Reined in al-Zarqawi?" The Jamestown Foundation, *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 3, No. 14 (12 April 2006), https://jamestown.org/program/al-qaeda-in-iraq-has-al-zawahiri-reined-in-al-zarqawi.

[32] Bill Roggio, "Dear Zarqawi: A Letter from Zawahiri, and a Constitutional Compromise," *Long War Journal* (12 October 2005). http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2005/10/dear_zarqawi_a.php

[33] To its enemies, IS has promoted the attacks in its name and images of extreme brutality against foes. Koerner, "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War".

[34] Indicative of the degree to which IS carefully manages the emotional resonance and singularity of its brand identity, the group's self-produced anashid (oral chants, a genre shared by many other Islamist NSAGs) vastly outnumber those released by similar NSAGs –compelling evidence of the IS emphasis placed on differentiation in the Salafi-Jihadi marketplace. Nelly Lahoud, "A Capella (Anashid) in Jihadi Culture", in Thomas Hegghammer, ed., *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 42-63.

[35] Petroff, "ISIS: The Most Successful Terrorist Brand Ever?"; Anthony Lemieux, personal communication, 7 July 2017; Rebecca Wilson, personal communication, 7 July 2017.

[36] Alex Marshall, "How ISIS Got Its Anthem", *The Guardian*, 9 November 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/nov/09/nasheed-how-isis-got-its-anthem.

[37] Petroff, "ISIS: The Most Successful Terrorist Brand Ever?"

[38] Imran Khan, "The ISIL Franchise", *Al Jazeera English*, 20 February 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/middleeast/2015/02/isil-franchise-150220152941180.html.

[39] IS has learned from Al-Qaida's mistakes and missteps. It has avoided using the Al-Qaida model of iconic figureheads, opting instead to leverage human capital into a centralized, organizational brand loyalty. Ligon et al., "The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant", p. 25.

In this respect, IS learned much from predecessor Al-Qaida, which pioneered the practice of disseminating propaganda on the dark web. Al-Qaida members would congregate in password-protected chat rooms, accessible only to a limited number of approved users, where video messaging would first appear. IS, however, turned to social media platforms like Twitter, Ask.FM, and Telegram that enable anonymous sympathizers with no prerequisite credentials.[40] Although it has somewhat relinquished control over defining its narrative, IS "provides an abundance of raw material for 'jihobbyists' to produce their own unofficial propaganda".[41] This approach is particularly powerful because by "marketing with" supporters (as compared with "marketing to") it has created a sense of brand ownership among some supporters that has verged on fandom.[42] An excellent example is the personalization of the IS symbols by the group's supporters. This can be best seen in user-generated popular culture produced and disseminated in support of IS, such as Twitter memes that display the IS flag in cupcake icing, for example, or "selfies" that feature anonymous users holding IS flags in front of recognizable global landmarks. Furthermore, IS has created a viral brand, capable of spreading on its own, with limited direction from its leadership, rendering the group's propaganda immeasurably more difficult to defeat. By "crowdsource[ing] its social media activity – and its violence – out to individuals with whom it has no concrete ties,"[43] the group is much harder to vanquish both as a brand and militarily.

> Islamic State's marketing strategy combines professional media techniques with a level of decentralized "user-driven" engagement that generates a sense of brand ownership among supporters.

4

Elements of Islamic State's Brand Success

IS has proven to be an organization well versed in the application of tried-and-true techniques for the creation, cultivation, and dissemination of successful brand identity. To effectively counter the group's strategic communications, policymakers need to analyse the key elements of the IS branding strategy's success.[44] IS's brand has five key qualities that have helped differentiate it from competitors, and that create an emotional bond with supporters:

1 — Distinctiveness and clarity
2 — Trustworthiness
3 — Authenticity
4 — Relevance for targeted demographic
5 — Cultivation of "legacy" (i.e., intergenerational) consumers

DISTINCTIVENESS AND CLARITY A standout brand differentiates itself from a pack of competitors, and does so through a careful alignment of visual iconography and clear, distinctive voice, which merge to create a brand "personality".[45] IS renders itself readily distinguishable from both Al-Qaida and local rivals like Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham through its logo, replicated across media formats and affixed to all manner of IS-affiliated productions, from on-ground police uniforms and street signs to Internet publications.[46] Within the territories held by IS, moreover, the group controls access to all multimedia production and dissemination channels, harnessing its media sectors to issue a controlled and consistent message branded with the organization's iconic emblem.[47] Strikingly, for example, Nigerian-based NSAG Boko Haram adopted IS-like branding for its own communications in advance of announcing a formal merger between the two groups, indicative of a public relations strategy in which branding constitutes a pivotal element. IS's post-production addition of the group logo to coverage of attacks outside the group's claimed territory ensures that media footage of and commentary on atrocities committed in the West are "branded" with IS's signature. In addition, audiovisual messaging produced by IS regularly juxtaposes images of its territory covered in IS flags with unique, anthem-like ***anashid*** (Arabic oral chants) created by identifiable members of the group, a form of sonic branding that renders the group recognizable in a multisensory capacity.

---

[40] Berger and Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census".

[41] Charlie Winter, "The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy", *Quilliam*, 2015.

[42] Brigitte L. Nacos, "Young Western Women, Fandom, and ISIS", E-International Relations, 5 May 2015, http://www.e-ir.info/2015/05/05/young-western-women-fandom-and-isis/.

[43] Koerner, "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War".

[44] While there is no consensus about the recipe for successful brand marketing, branding practitioners agree that certain elements and factors contribute to brand success (e.g., authenticity).

[45] Dhariana Lozano, "7 Elements Behind Every Successful Brand on Social Media", *Social Media Today*, 14 November 2016, http://www.socialmediatoday.com/social-business/7-elements-behind-every-successful-brand-social-media.

TRUSTWORTHINESS Consistent articulation of the brand's personality over time contributes to the establishment of consumer trust. Not only must the brand's personality consistently come across to an audience, but the promise of the brand – the idea for which it stands – must similarly deliver: "It is the consistent, desired experience that builds trust and trust is the foundation for loyalty and promotion."[48] This holds true no less for NSAG actors than for corporations. Loyalty and trust underpin recruits' emotional attachment to the group; often, those deserting IS territory report experiences vastly at odds with the promise of the IS brand.[49]

IS has promoted its impartial application of sharia law alongside its capacity to govern a stable Islamic state, distinguishing itself from rival groups who advocate a gradualist introduction of religious law. To the first promise, IS propaganda routinely boasts that the organization applies rigid sharia law in all territories under its control, publishing graphic evidence of punishment against lawbreakers within the organization to underscore the point. Perhaps counterintuitively, even when populations living under IS control disagree with the group's ideological orientation and extreme cruelty, public perception of the group's impartial and predictable application of punitive violence provides propagandists with material to parlay into a manufactured semblance of support for "good governance". Stated differently, despite the group's extreme brutality, IS projects an image of egalitarian punishment that can offer comforting stability in the midst of civil war and in contrast to state corruption – until, that is, the population reaches a stage of inevitable alienation. Similarly, IS regularly claims global attacks launched in its name, in conjunction with calls for precisely such violence. By reiterating that IS makes good on threats, the organization emphasizes fulfillment of "product promise."

IS has tried, in short, to portray itself as relevant to the problems faced in daily life, and through delivering on promises (even regarding violence) it builds credibility. Beyond promoting its disinterested but brutal application of sharia, "far more common are portrayals of public-works projects, economic development, and military triumphs, frequently aimed at specific Muslim enclaves throughout the world…to convince prospective recruits of the veracity of the organization's core narrative: that its empire is both stable and inexorably growing".[50] IS's ***Dabiq*** magazine, for example, routinely featured images of IS officials washing the streets, repairing power lines, cleaning drainage ditches, undertaking trash collection, and conducting quality-control patrols to ensure consumer protections.

---

[46] Francesca Trianni, "Inside ISIS and al-Qaeda's Battle for Brand Supremacy", *Time*, 5 February 2015, http://time.com/3695200/islamist-radicals-connections/; P. W. Singer and E. Brooking, "How ISIS Is Taking War to Social Media", *Popular Science*, 22 December 2015, http://www.popsci.com/terror-on-twitter-how-isis-is-taking-war-to-social-media.

[47] Koerner, "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War".

[48] William Arruda, "Why Consistency Is the Key to Successful Branding", Forbes.com, 13 December 2016, https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamarruda/2016/12/13/why-consistency-is-the-key-to-successful-branding/#803b9297bbd9.

[49] "Deserters Describe Life Under ISIL Rule", *Al Jazeera*, 13 October 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/10/deserters-describe-life-isil-rule-161010132353949.html.

[50] Ibid.

In the face of its recent loss of territory, IS has relied on its inherent brand flexibility to try to manage sympathizer expectations. Upon losing the Syrian village after which ***Dabiq*** is named,[51] IS launched a new magazine titled ***Rumiyah*** – designed to appeal to the same group of consumers, but without carrying the symbolic promise of territorial victory.[52] These magazines solicit reader feedback and editorials, suggesting a level of IS responsiveness to the population. This media gesture is mirrored in audiovisual productions, such as news footage of man-on-the-street style interviews in which (ostensibly) random passersby are invited to evaluate IS's performance in a variety of forums.

Islamic State gives customers a stake in the brand, transforming a passive consumer into a stakeholder with an investment in its success.

AUTHENTICITY Related to the concept of trust as well as consistency of delivery, authenticity proves critical to the successful positioning of a brand.[53] Brands that come across as authentic are more likely to gain customer loyalty. Authenticity can help create an emotional attachment to the brand (i.e., encourage consumers to identify themselves with the product), and may lead consumers to spread the brand image as a form of their own personal expression.[54] This participatory approach to marketing, whereby IS markets its brand together with the consumer – as opposed to a top-down approach – allows end users to participate in brand definition. Participatory marketing is increasingly embraced by corporations to target younger demographics, often involving the creation of "memes, letting the audience caption those memes, getting them to enter into a sweepstakes or contest, asking them to share your content", essentially creating a "pipeline of connected pieces" that your best marketer – the consumer – will continue to spread organically.[55] Just like many lifestyle brands, IS gives customers a stake in the brand, transforming a passive consumer into a stakeholder with an investment in its success. IS's divergence from the top-down model of Al-Qaida messaging has encouraged sympathizers to contribute to brand dissemination, and allowed a subculture to flourish around official IS propaganda production.

RELEVANCE The perceived authenticity of materials created and disseminated by consumers is closely correlated to the concept of relevance. Is the brand relatable and relevant to the organization's desired target demographic?[56] Importantly, being responsive to consumers means increasing the attention devoted to psychological needs of target demographics, particular for luxury goods, lifestyle brands, and experiential purchases that reaffirm one's desired identity. Just as "consumers can use [commercial] brands as a relevant mean[s] of self-expression and also as a lifestyle 'beacon'",[57] so too can NSAG brands become a living part of their own personal expression. To display an IS flag on one's Twitter avatar, for example, or to purchase a hoodie emblazoned with IS's logo can serve as a means by which a young person demonstrates rebellion and participates in countercultural identification in opposition to dominant culture – a lifestyle affiliation via negation.

IS exhibits considerable familiarity with this element of branding, notably through its embrace of "narrowcasting – creating varied content that caters to niche audiences."[58] IS appeals to potential sympathizers resident in the Muslim world, for example, differ markedly from calls issued to Westerners. For markets based in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, IS "is associated with one key attribute. Representing Sunni anger, much the same way Coca Cola is about sharing a moment with friends. That's a powerful advertising message."[59] To a potential recruit located in the United States, however, the group produces "literature and videos that emphasize its alleged utopian aspects, particularly the freedom from any trace of religious persecution."[60]

---

[51] *Dabiq* takes its name from an apocalyptic prophecy in which Muslim armies will face down Crusaders (i.e., the Western powers) in a Syrian village of the same name. Throughout its propaganda, IS portrays this eventual showdown as inevitable, even while reminding readers that setbacks are within the scope of the prophecy – reinforcing the idea that territorial losses in the present do not discredit the group's claims.

[52] Waleed Abu al-Khair, "After Dabiq Defeat, ISIL Launches 'Rumiyah'", *Central Asia News*, 25 January 2017, http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2017/01/25/feature-02.

[53] Matt Orlic, "The 7 Key Elements of a Successful Personal Brand", *Entrepreneur*, 12 September 2016, https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/280268.

[54] James A. Muncy and Shelby D. Hunt, "Consumer Involvement: Definitional Issues and Research Directions" in Thomas C. Kinnear, ed., *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 11 (Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 1984), pp. 193-196.

[55] Douglas Rushkoff, "Generation Like", PBS Frontline, 18 February 2014.

[56] Arruda, "Why Consistency Is the Key to Successful Branding".

[57] Munteanu Claudi Catalin and Andrea Pagalea, "Brands as a Means of Consumer Self-Expression and Desired Personal Lifestyle", *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 109 (2014), p. 103.

[58] Koerner, "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War".

CULTIVATION OF "LEGACY" / INTERGENERATIONAL CONSUMERS Marketers, eager to ensure life-long brand longevity, are eager to tap into the youth consumer base. Targeting children and youth, however, poses both challenges and opportunities for marketers. To date, IS has proved particularly adept at navigating these obstacles and building a significant base of support with youth and children.

The importance of knowing one's audience is key for successful branding, an aspect of messaging especially key for attracting a youth audience.[61] Children and youth

> *"HAVE ALWAYS BEEN IMPORTANT TO BRANDS BECAUSE THEY TEND TO BE EARLY ADOPTERS AND BECAUSE, TRADITIONALLY, THEIR BRAND PREFERENCES AREN'T YET FIRMLY DEFINED. MARKETING TO CHILDREN CAPITALIZES ON DEVELOPMENTAL PHASES THAT ALLOW FOR STRONGER EXPLOITATION OF PERSUASIVE MESSAGING. CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF EIGHT, FOR EXAMPLE, LACK THE ABILITY TO DISTINGUISH ADVERTISING FROM OTHER FORMS OF INFORMATION, RENDERING THEM LESS PRONE TO UNPROMPTED SCEPTICAL ANALYSIS. ADOLESCENTS, HOWEVER, PRESENT A MORE COMPLICATED PICTURE; THEY ARE MORE SCEPTICAL THAN CHILDREN AND ADULTS, AND DON'T LISTEN TO WHAT THE MEDIA AND OLDER GENERATIONS ARE TELLING THEM IS COOL."* [62]

As "digital natives," who are conversant with multimedia technology from an early age[63] and who avoid traditional advertising,[64] youth use peer-to-peer communication – particularly via social media – as a "collective filter" to determine what products to consume.[65] These youth communication habits have, by necessity, driven advertisers to social media platforms and stimulated innovative "guerrilla" marketing campaigns to bypass widespread scepticism.[66] Despite their inherent scepticism and resistance to traditional top-down advertising,[67] adolescents are particularly susceptible to emotional appeals, especially those that impact group identity.[68] Likewise, appeals that play up excitement or danger often tap into a demographic-specific predilection for risk-taking behavior, which together exert a disproportionate impact on adolescents struggling to define their own identities vis-à-vis wider social groups.

A number of NSAGs, such as IS and Al Shabaab, have clearly learned the lesson that "it's the brands that are giving teens a chance to participate in the creative process that are winning."[69] IS, however, has embraced this approach more than any other armed group. IS communications conventionally begin with a centralized message pushed by a limited number of prominent, recognizable figures whose credibility encourages more tertiary sympathizers to similarly spread the message – a snowball effect that contributes to rapid viralization of organizational communication.[70] This open approach encourages sympathizer participation through social media sites (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and Ask.FM), allowing user-driven content creation that renders the brand far more accessible to a wide variety of potential followers. Allowing sympathizers to tailor their content to fit the version of IS that appeals to them has helped the group gain support from a diverse array of populations. Ultimately, IS's user-driven engagement has created "something akin to an open source operating system...a vague ideological platform upon which people can construct elaborate personal narratives of persecution or rage,"[71] or even acceptance. Some IS recruitment typologies aimed at young people seek to capitalize on intergenerational friction and the angst that is near universal in adolescence by portraying joining IS as an act of rebellion against one's parents and traditional power centers at large.[72] This marketing tack – both in its messages and approach – is particularly powerful to youthful audiences for three reasons: First, the IS themes of challenging authority play into youth rebellion against dominant cultural values.[73] Second, a "marketing with" approach balances an adolescent's seemingly contradictory needs for both social validation and a sense of individual identity. Third, the participatory marketing model fosters peer-to-peer communication, which in turn lends authenticity and credibility to IS's brand for young people.

---

[59] Khan, "The ISIL Franchise".

[60] Koerner, "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War".

[61] Lozano, "7 Elements Behind Every Successful Brand".

[62] Issie Lapowski, "Why Teens Are the Most Elusive and Valuable Customers in Tech", *Inc.*, 3 March 2014, https://www.inc.com/issie-lapowsky/inside-massive-tech-land-grab-teenagers.html.

[63] It is worth noting that the generational gap between youth and their elders' rates of media/technological familiarity does not differ substantially between the West and Arab world. Juan Cole, "Arab Millennials Will Be Back", *The Nation*, June 30 2014, https://www.thenation.com/article/arab-millennials-will-be-back; William O'Connor, "What Do Arab Millennials Want?" The Daily Beast, July 1 2014, http://www.thedailybeast.com/what-do-arab-millennials-want; T. J. Raphael, "Millennials Are on the Rise in the Middle East", PRI, 2 July 2014.

[64] Millennial distrust of traditional advertisements demonstrates a dislike for "the pushy, disingenuous nature of commercials and [they] will do anything within their power to skip, fast forward, and even block any content that even hints at advertising". Lauren Friedman, "Millennials and the Digital Experience: Getting Your Digital Act Together", Forbes.com, 8 February 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurenfriedman/2017/02/08/millennials-and-the-digital-experience-getting-your-digital-act-together/#77851d5a730d.

[65] Daniel Newman, "Research Shows Millennials Don't Respond to Ads", Forbes.com, 28 April 2015, https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielnewman/2015/04/28/research-shows-millennials-dont-respond-to-ads/#56c54f615dcb.

[66] David M. Boush, Marian Friestad, and Gregory M. Rose, "Adolescent Scepticism toward TV Advertising and Knowledge of Advertiser Tactics", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1994), pp. 165-175.

[67] Tamara F. Mangleburg and Terry Bristol, "Socialization and Adolescents' Scepticism toward Advertising", Journal of Advertising, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1998), pp. 11-21.

[68] Cornelia Pechmann,, Linda Levine, Sandra Loughlin, and Frances Leslie, "Impulsive and Self-Conscious: Adolescents' Vulnerability to Advertising and Promotion", *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2005), pp. 202-221; Elizabeth Moore and Richard J. Lutz, "Children, Advertising, and Product Experiences: A Multimethod Inquiry", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2000), pp. 31-48.

[69] Lapowski, "Why Teens Are the Most Elusive".

5

Countering NSAG Branding: Implications for Multilateral Organizations

Islamic State's success at recruitment demonstrates considerable brand marketing prowess, which constitutes the prototype upon which future NSAGs will construct their own strategic communications. Further, IS "got that way by diligently analyzing how the West manufactures and consumes information. To chip away at what they've created, we must now learn from them".[74] To date, the international community has largely failed to mount an effective communications response. This is largely due to the lack of careful study of the IS brand marketing and communications ecosystem; contrived, inauthentic, reactive narratives; a failure to deliver on the international community's own brand promise; and inadequate knowledge of the target audience.[75] Similarly, the international community has failed to appreciate that there is "no one counter narrative, nor is there any one audience that needs targeting".[76]

A number of the observations and points of consensus highlighted by the workshop have potential policy and programmatic implications. The suggestions below are not comprehensive; rather, they highlight some interesting and fairly general considerations for counter-brand marketing and communications efforts related to the protection of children from NSAG recruitment that may be applicable across contexts.

UNIFIED BRAND MESSAGING One of the greatest challenges the international community has in providing an alternate message to IS is the difficulty of creating a unified brand when there are so many stakeholders. Although IS claims a multitude of affiliates throughout the world, subsidiary branches exhibit a cohesive adherence to the group's overarching brand consistency – a level of cohesion likely difficult for multilateral organizations. This is particularly problematic within the UN system, where a large number of actors (e.g., Member States, departments, agencies, and funds) each operate with different mandates, limitations, and bureaucratic objectives. The United Nations needs to consider its core brand, and its decentralized and inconsistent brand messaging efforts must be addressed and rectified. Given its extraordinary success blending together an overarching umbrella message (e.g., the utopian state) with targeted messaging that renders the parent brand palatable to a host of diverse constituents (e.g., families in the Arab world, Western recruits), IS's core brand marketing approach is worthy of study, and potentially even imitation, by international actors.

---

[70] "Applying a Brand Marketing Lens for Analyzing Non-State Armed Groups that Employ Extreme Violence," State of Research Workshop, New York, NY, 16 January 2017.
[71] Koerner, "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War".
[72] "Applying a Brand Marketing Lens for Analyzing Non-State Armed Groups that Employ Extreme Violence."
[73] Nacos, "Young Western Women, Fandom, and ISIS".
[74] Koerner, "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War".
[75] Amanda Rogers, "Think Again, Turn Away…From Lousy Public Diplomacy", Middle East Research and Information Project, 21 October 2015, http://www.merip.org/"think-again-turn-away"…from-lousy-public-diplomacy.
[76] Winter, "The Virtual 'Caliphate'".

PROACTIVE, NOT REACTIVE Communication strategies for dealing with the threat of terrorism and "violent extremism" are often too narrow and reactive in nature. The focus is usually on countering propaganda by groups like IS. By failing to appreciate that propaganda is only part of NSAGs' strategic communications and adopting a solely reactive posture, the international community is operating from problematic assumptions and a position of weakness. Instead, the international community needs to take a holistic assessment of NSAG communications in order to understand, identify, and *then* counter the appeal of NSAG messaging. Even more important is the need to adopt a proactive communications strategy. It is crucial to avoid ceding control of the ideological terrain in a way that accepts the enemy's terms: for this reason, simply advancing theological narratives as counter theological narratives to those of IS and related groups may not, in fact, constitute the best strategy. To be more effective, the United Nations and other international actors need to think more broadly and proactively, developing a strategic, integrated, and long-term communications strategy that is not limited to trying to debunk the current narratives of NSAGs. This communications strategy needs to anticipate how to message in the up-stream, pre-recruitment phrase through the post-involvement and post-conflict phases.

FORGET MYTH BUSTING Common to many communications strategy discussions about countering NSAG messaging is the concept of myth busting – i.e., highlighting the discrepancies between NSAG propaganda and reality. For example, since IS boasts of creating an Islamic utopia – safe, well functioning, and dispassionately administered – it is often suggested that evidence to the contrary would undermine these messages. Tweets of potholes or video of IS abuses, however, are more likely to put their recipients on the defensive than dissuade them from supporting IS, given the human tendency to seek out information that reinforces our beliefs and discount information that runs counter to them.[77] Part of the problem the myth-busting approach poses arises from messenger credibility:[78] in the case of the "Think Again, Turn Away" campaign, a social media countermessaging campaign, the messages came from a Twitter account administered by the US Department of State, leading recipients to discount them. Hostile audiences, in fact, may prove more resistant when offered information designed to persuade, a phenomenon known as the "backfire effect".[79] In addition to challenges related to confirmation bias and messenger authenticity, myth busting is unlikely to succeed if the needs of the target audience remain unmet.

AUTHENTIC AND RELATABLE BRAND MESSENGERS Authentic and relatable brand ambassadors are important in establishing credibility with consumers, particularly the youth demographic. Communications strategists should seek out and cultivate credible sources without compromising their identities (and exposing them to security risks), and, when necessary, allow more credible partners to take the lead in public messaging. Counternarratives from credible sources pose a thorny challenge for this reason, and must be handled with an eye to projecting an organic sense of message authenticity. IS deserters, for example, pose precisely such a challenge due to the organization's long reach. Careful consideration must be put into assuring defectors' security, which is necessary to encourage them to speak on record and identify themselves – less their narratives risk outright rejection as potential fabrications by state security.

---

[77] Eric Rassin, "Individual Differences in the Susceptibility to Confirmation Bias", *Netherlands Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (2008), pp. 87-93.
[78] Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, "When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions," *Political Behavior*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2010), pp. 303-330.
[79] Under certain conditions, however, new research suggests that the "backfire effect" may be mitigated. "Walking Back the Backfire Effect", On the Media, WNYC, 21 July 2017.

UNMET NEEDS Even if the myth buster convinces consumers that a NSAG has failed to meet its promise to supporters, unless it is able to step in and fulfill the promise, consumers will still have the same unmet needs. Counternarratives alone cannot compensate for the very real appeal exerted by offers like security, provision of basic needs and public services, material incentives, or a sense of community belonging. Rather than trying to defeat groups like IS with punchy brand messages, the international community would be well served to think about the needs of people who are supportive – actively and tacitly – of armed groups like IS, what those groups promise, and what realistic alternatives the international community can provide.

CLOSING THE REALITY GAP Even though myth busting is not thought to be an effective countermessaging strategy, it is important to consider the potential gap that exists between messaging and reality. This is particularly important for the United Nations. When, for example, the United Nations promotes value messages – for instance, its dedication to protecting human rights – but local United Nations partners remain silent in the face of human rights violations, the United Nations loses credibility and trust. This is even more important when thinking about youth, who are particularly sensitive to hypocrisy.

RESTORING TRUST AND CREDIBILITY Closing the reality gap is one part of re-establishing trust and credibility with consumers. The United Nations and its partners could acknowledge their roles in some of the issues that are at stake (such as shortcomings in the provision of security, for example), demonstrate empathy via engagement with criticism of previous policy, and try to reshape their reputations by being transparent. Messaging alone will not work, however, and narratives need to be aligned with actions.

ENGAGEMENT AND INTERACTION Part of the success of IS brand marketing is due to its entangled marketing approach: it markets its brand *with* consumers, rather than marketing to them. Adolescents and youth are particularly attracted to brands that engage them and make them feel part of a community, and at the same time allow for a personalized experience. United Nations communications strategies and marketing campaigns could capitalize on this approach if they successfully create a stake in the brand for consumers. The challenge for the United Nations and other international partners is to move consumers from "clicktivism" to sustained engagement, activism, and advocacy, giving individuals opportunities not only for expression but action.

About UNU's Workshop Brief Series and Acknowledgements

This research brief is part of a three-part series that UNU has published in the lead-up to the release of an edited volume examining why and how children become associated with, are used by, and exit non-state armed groups in contemporary conflicts, including those listed as terrorist or characterized as "violent extremist". The analysis and research presented in this brief feeds into the larger desk review published as part of the volume – forthcoming in late 2017. The volume includes three conflict case studies: Syria, Mali, and Nigeria – that examine the factors that influence child trajectories into and out of NSAGs. The volume features a chapter exploring the thorny legal questions that arise in contemporary conflicts, particularly around the legal limits of the humanitarian response and how legal obligations to uphold the rights of children stand up when viewed as being in tension with national security legislation.

This brief would not have been possible without the generous support of a number of scholars who participated in the workshop and/or reviewed the brief, including Richard Atwood (ICG), Lindsay Branham (NOVO), Garrett M. Broad (Fordham University), Emile Bruneau (University of Pennsylvania), Anna Doan (Vertic), Yarrow Dunham and Mara Revkin (Yale University), Paul Evans (UK Home Office), Alex Kassirer (Flashpoint), Anthony Lemieux (Georgia State University), Jess Minhas (I'll Go First), Chris Scwhartz (We Are Bill), Kunaal Sharma (Columbia University), and Alexandra Siegel (NYU). Many others were kind enough to provide guidance, suggestions, and references along the way. The collaboration with the academic community represented by this workshop – and the resulting brief – exemplifies UNU's mission to bring the latest rigorous academic research and innovative approaches into the United Nations system, to inform policy and programmatic discussions on how to address the peace and security challenges of the day.

NOTES

PALMYRA, SYRIA A boy takes a picture with his mobile phone of damaged buildings during his visit to the city of Palmyra, Syria.

Cover photograph by Omar Sanadiki / REUTERS
Cover design by Bob Miller