

Religion as Brand: ISIS and Al-Qaeda as Sub-brands of Islam

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Abstract: *Theorists emphasize the significance of the conceptualizing phenomena before any quantification in the scientific work process. The role of analogy among all human-beings' cognitive tools in the process of problem solving and concept creation is undeniable according to experts. Accordingly, this paper defines the analogy of "religion as brand" as an analogical model to shed light on political and religious marketing aspects of two terrorist organizations and religious brands in the Middle East. The concept of "ISIS and Al-Qaeda are sub-brands of Islam" was extracted from this metaphorical structure. The paper illuminates different branding attributes of these two terrorist groups through reviewing approximately fifty first-hand and second-hand materials on the issue. This review reveals how Islam functions as a master-brand and nourishes these two brands ideologically. The analogy entails a variety of attributes among which five aspects of branding including communication, brand mythology, competition, attracting social and symbolic capital, and brand promise are discussed and religious associations which endorse these two groups' political functions are examined.*

Keywords: Religion, Brand, Analogy, ISIS, Al-Qaeda

Introduction

The relationship between religion and market has been the main focus of many studies, from arguments on supply and demand for meaning as a commodity in the religious marketplace¹ to critical approaches on the emersion of religious brands such as churches and consumer goods based on capitalist culture.²

The first precondition in researching a phenomenon is the concept which is defined and appropriately operationalized³ or, as Sartori warns,

¹ Finke and Stark, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*

² Einstein, *Brands of Faith, Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age*.

³ Sartori, *Social Science Concepts, a Systematic Analysis*.

“concept formation stands prior to quantification.”⁴ One of the cognitive tools in creating concepts is the analogy, the role of which human scientists have approved in creating knowledge⁵, developing theories⁶, and revealing generic properties of phenomena.⁷ Isaiah Berlin even believes that thinking without metaphors is impossible⁸, and Rosenthal asserts that metaphors and analogies are central features of the social scientific enterprise.⁹

Accordingly, by considering the analogy of “religion as brand” as the structural metaphor, this article presents the idea that “ISIS and Al-Qaeda are sub-brands of Islam”¹⁰ as its hypothesis. Sub-brands are brands connected to a mother brand¹¹, parent brand¹², or master-brand¹³ and augment or modify the associations of that mother/ parent/ master brand. Masterbrand, parent brand, and mother brand are different interpretations of the same strategic concept in brand management. Sub-brands stretch a primary frame of reference from the mother brand to add an attribute association, application association, a signal of prosperous novelty, and a brand characteristic.¹⁴ Swystun also defines a parent brand as the leading brand in a brand family. It is the master, primary brand, and it takes on an endorsing function for one or more sub-brands. Even though a sub-brand has its name and visual identity, marketers design it to leverage the history and equity of the masterbrand and stretch it into a new category, benefit, or target.¹⁵

To prove its hypothesis, this review paper takes a comparative approach to religion and brand by referring to both first-hand and second-hand references. The article reviews approximately fifty references as second-hand references to reveal how these two groups utilize Islamic narrative to communicate to their audience and endorse their brands in association with Islam as the master-brand. First-hand materials also include statements by Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden from Al-Qaeda and Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi from ISIS and propaganda materials including videos.

⁴ Sartori, “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics,” 1038.

⁵ Black, *Models and Metaphors*.

⁶ Gick and Holyoak, “*Analogical Problem Solving*.”

⁷ Pinder and Bourgeois, “Controlling Tropes in Administrative Science,” 649.

⁸ Berlin, *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays*, 158.

⁹ Rosenthal, “Metaphors, Models, and Analogies,” 297.

¹⁰ Extracting concept from structural metaphors is based on Lakoff and Johnson theory on metaphors which will be explained in the next part.

¹¹ Gopal and Rajagopal, “Architecting Brands.”

¹² Kotler et al., *Principles of Marketing*.

¹³ Swystun, *The Brand Glossary*.

¹⁴ Gopal and Rajagopal, “Architecting Brands.”

¹⁵ Swystun, *The Brand Glossary*, 94–113.

resulted in dispersed opinions in publications and made it challenging to sum up the discussions and achieve a comprehensive insight. On the other hand, terrorism and its complexities made the analysis more complicated.

In terms of theory and practice, the paper entails a variety of implications. As it was explained, theorists and philosophers believe in the role of analogy in the process of thinking and creating novel concepts in social science. The analogical approach in this paper not only extends the field of study theoretically but paves the way for academicians to extend the theory in this field through other attributes of this analogical model. The Ashura ceremony in Shi'i tradition, for example, can be studied as a reach system of signs and this is merely one of myriad.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Razieh Mahdiah Najafabadi: She started her academic life in design studies with a concentration on branding science. However, religion was always a major concern in her mind. In the path of her studies, she came to the point that these two phenomena (brand and religion) follow similar mechanisms in influencing human beings. This was the starting point of her major project called "religion as brand," obtaining an MA in Social Studies with a focus on this project. She is working on a book called, *Religion as Brand: An Analogy to Reconceptualize Religion*.

ⁱ World Islamic Community

ⁱⁱ Arabic word meaning old and in expression, we can translate it to the leader

ⁱⁱⁱ The concept of waiting for Mahdi in Islamic Culture

^{iv} The Savior in Islamic Tradition

^v Unbeliever

^{vi} The house of Islam/Peace

^{vii} The house of War

^{viii} unbelieved people

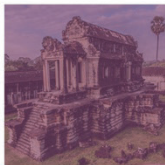
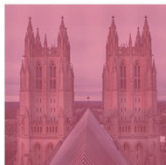
^{ix} Concept of Martyrdom in Islamic culture

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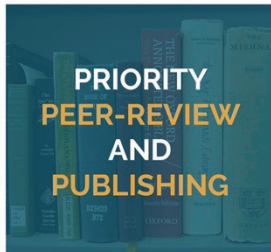
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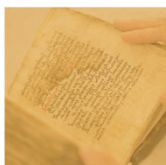
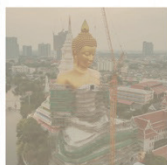
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