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# ISIS MARKETING STRATEGY TO RECRUIT MEMBERS: ISIS COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS IN INFORMATION OPERATIONS

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*ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the marketing strategy of ISIS to recruit its members including locals and expats. It illustrates the military information support operations and technical tools used by insurgents while focusing on the recruitment strategy.*

*The marketing analysis illustrates the recruitment strategy in marketing including opening new markets and expanding existing markets as compared to guerrilla recruitment locally and globally. It provides an overview of the use of information operations by ISIS and it concludes with a description of the recruitment strategy.*

*KEYWORDS: ISIS, insurgents, marketing strategies, Information Operations, military information support operations, cognitive dimensions*

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Information plays a vital role in military operations, and the new trends in warfare have resulted in an increased use in the information operations in the command, control, and execution of military operations.

Information Operations are vital in modern warfare as it includes a wide variety of military operations that aims at influencing beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies. According to the Joint Publication 3-13, “Information operations (IO) are described as the integrated employment of electronic warfare (EW), Computer network operations (CNO), psychological operations (PSYOP), military deception (MILDEC), and operations security (OPSEC), in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own.”<sup>1</sup> It integrates the application of force and the employment of information with the goal of affecting the perception, emotion, and attitude of adversaries. With this definition in hand; the IO includes a wide variety of military tools related to the information operations and aims at ensuring a competitive advantage in the information environment. “The information environment is the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information. This environment consists of

<sup>1</sup> “Joint Publication 3-13, Information Operations”. Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 2006. 10. <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=461648>, Accessed on 12 August 2019.

three interrelated dimensions, which continuously interact with individuals, organizations, and systems. These dimensions are known as physical, informational and cognitive”.<sup>2</sup>

The term IO has been evolving and the definition has been changing due to ambiguities in the definitions provided. More clarity can be found by separating the functional domains of the IO: the technical domain and the functional domains associated with the PSYOP/MISO.<sup>3</sup>

One of the main producers of actions within the IO is the PSYOP. “Psychological Operations are planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behaviour of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of psychological operations is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behaviour favourable to the originator’s objectives.”<sup>4</sup>

“Information operations are marketing communications”<sup>5</sup> since marketing as in information operations aims to influence a target audience. This paper illustrates this metaphor through an in-depth analysis of recruitment strategies of insurgents and more specifically of ISIS.

Marketing management is the art and science of choosing target markets and acquiring, maintaining, and growing customers through creating, delivering, and communicating superior customer value.<sup>6</sup> While there is a clear match between the objectives of marketing and information operations, the question lies in how the processes of each are correlated. This will help analyse how insurgents utilize the marketing communication strategies in their recruitment of new members.

The aim of this study is to point out the recruitment strategies of insurgents and more specifically of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), while comparing this strategy with the marketing strategies used in the business world. It utilizes the concepts of commercial marketing strategies to understand insurgency operations. This paper analyses the Ansoff growth matrix<sup>7</sup> with the insurgents’ recruitment strategies. Furthermore, it analyses the relationship between insurgency operations and marketing strategies to identify linkages that can help uncover the behaviour of insurgents.

## INFORMATION OPERATIONS VS. MARKETING STRATEGIES

To be able to utilize civilian advertising and marketing in the IO, an analysis of the parallelism between both should be examined. This section compares the IO with the marketing to be able to utilize the concepts. The analysis includes the comparison of the objectives, environment, target group, and strategies of both fields.

<sup>2</sup> “Joint Publication 3-13, Information Operations”. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Porche I. R. et al. *Redefining Information Warfare Boundaries for an Army in a Wireless World*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013. [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/MG1100/MG1113/RAND\\_MG1113.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/MG1100/MG1113/RAND_MG1113.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> “Strategy for Operations in the Information Environment”. Department of Defense, USA. June 2016. <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/DoD-Strategy-for-Operations-in-the-IE-Signed-20160613.pdf>; “Joint Publication 3-13, Information Operations”. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Trent, S. and Doty, J. L. “Marketing: An overlooked aspect of information operations”. *Military Review* 85/4. 2005. 71.

<sup>6</sup> Kotler, P. and Keller, K. *Marketing Management*. 14<sup>th</sup> ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2012. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ansoff, I. H. “Strategies for diversification”. *Harvard Business Review* 35/2. 1957. 113-124.

## Objectives

In order to understand the objective of IO, the concept itself should be elaborated and analysed. IO is currently considered the key to successful operations; it uses different activities and capabilities to produce the intended effect. “The target of Information Operations is to influence the adversary decision maker and therefore the primacy of effort will be to coerce that person into doing or not doing a certain action.”<sup>8</sup> In accordance with AJP-3.10, Information Operations comprise “a staff function to analyse the IE, plan, synchronize and assess IA to create desired effects on the will, understanding and capability of adversaries, potential adversaries, enemies and NAC approved audiences in support of Alliance mission objectives.”<sup>9</sup> By definition, IO includes both offensive and defensive activities.<sup>10</sup>

In general, all definitions of IO state that it aims at affecting adversaries’ (target group) decision-making through different capabilities to shape and influence the information environment. It uses all means of influence so that the targeted group behaves in accordance to their plan.

According to Kotler, marketing is “the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires. It defines, measures, and quantifies the size of the identified market and the profit potential.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the American Marketing Association (AMA) defines marketing as “the set of activities, institutions and processes for creating, communicating delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients.”<sup>12</sup> These two definitions of marketing along with the many different definitions available present four main activities of marketing: Creating the process, Communicating, Delivering and Exchanging or Influencing.

The objectives of both fields include physical, emotional and cognitive influence of the targeted audience to achieve the desired mission. It includes the ABC model of attitude including: Affective component that involves feelings and emotions, Behavioural or conative component, and Cognitive that involves a person’s belief about an attitude object. They are both directing the targeted audience to act in accordance to their views. They are both working in the same structure: Create, Communicate, Deliver, and Exchange.

## Environment

Whether it is an IO or a marketing field, analysis of the environment is much needed to start the initiative. In order to start an operation, an analysis of the self and the other party is needed. An analysis of the environment is critical, execution needs to be based on the physical aspects within the environment, the information available, and most importantly a

<sup>8</sup> Armistead, L. *Information Operations: Warfare and the Hard Reality of Soft Power*. Washington D. C.: Brassy’s, 2004. 8.

<sup>9</sup> NATO Standardization Agency (NSA). “AJP-3.10: Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations”. 2015.; “Draft MC 0422/6: NATO Military Policy for Information Operations”. Working version as of 11 Sept 2018. NATO. 4. [https://shape.nato.int/resources/3/images/2018/upcoming%20events/MC%20Draft\\_Info%20Ops.pdf](https://shape.nato.int/resources/3/images/2018/upcoming%20events/MC%20Draft_Info%20Ops.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Armistead. *Information Operations...*

<sup>11</sup> Neeraja, B., Chandani, A. and Mehta, M. “Marketing: Past, Present and Future Theoretical Framework”. *International Journal of Advance Research in Computer Science and Management Studies* 1/6. 2013. 198-201.

<sup>12</sup> “Definitions of marketing”. American Marketing Association. <https://www.ama.org/the-definition-of-marketing/>

psychological analysis of the adversary. The question is: how is the environment defined in both fields?

The Information Environment (IE) is the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information.<sup>13</sup> According to NATO, the information environment consists of three domains: cognitive, virtual, and physical. The cognitive domain is where decisions are made, virtual domain is where intangible activity occurs and technical tools facilitate communication, and physical domain is the space where physical activities occur. The environment goes beyond the physical dimension to reach the cognition and emotion of decision makers.<sup>14</sup>

Different elements are incorporated in each of these environmental domains. The physical environment includes human beings, command and control facilities, paper-based media, info-communication assets, computers etc. The information/virtual dimension is based and composed of information collected, processed, stored, disseminated and protected. The cognitive dimension includes the minds of individuals who receive and respond to the information.<sup>15</sup> Information Operations use various means of physical environment to shape a targeted information environment to be able to change the target's cognitive dimensions.

The marketing environment is categorized in two main domains: internal and external; the external domain includes both micro-environment and macro-environment. The internal environment includes personnel, money, and resources within the organization. The micro-environment includes the stakeholders and customers, it includes the elements that have direct effect on the particular organization's operations. The macro-environment includes the political, economic, technological, social, cultural, and legal competition; it affects the microenvironment of the organizations within the same market.<sup>16</sup>

Although the categorization and analysis of the environment in both fields seem to be different, they both consider the same factors. The internal environment discussed in the marketing environment includes the physical and mental environment of the IO; the micro environment encompasses the physical and information environment of the IO; and the macro environment includes the political, economic, technological, social, cultural, legal and competition factors. The two fields work beyond the physical environment to affect the cognition of the customers and adversaries.

## Strategies

IO planning is a process that examines external and internal planning requirements; it includes steps to carry out the mission from the conception through execution and follow-up assessment. Steps include assessment, planning and execution.<sup>17</sup> PSYOP uses the SCAME

<sup>13</sup> "Strategy for Operations in the Information Environment". Department of Defense, USA. June 2016. 3. <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/DoD-Strategy-for-Operations-in-the-IE-Signed-20160613.pdf>. Accessed on 14 August 2019

<sup>14</sup> "Draft MC 0422/6: NATO Military Policy for Information Operations".

<sup>15</sup> Haig, Z. and Hajdu, V. "New Ways in the Cognitive Dimension of Information Operations". *Revista Academiei Fortelor Terestre* 22/2. 2017. 94-102. DOI: [10.1515/raft-2017-0013](https://doi.org/10.1515/raft-2017-0013)

<sup>16</sup> Kotler and Keller. *Marketing Management*.

<sup>17</sup> Nissen, T. E. *Tactical Information Operations in Contemporary COIN Campaigns: research paper*. Copenhagen: Royal Danish Defense College, 2011. <http://www.fak.dk/publikationer/Documents/Tactical%20information%20operations%20in%20contemporary%20COIN%20campaigns.pdf>

technique to analyse the propaganda of the opponents. This includes analysing the *Source* that is the individual, organization, or government that sponsors and disseminates the propaganda; the *Content* that includes what the propaganda message says along with the objective of the message; *Audience* or target group of the message could be apparent, intermediate or unintended groups; *Media* that is the medium used and the capacity to use the medium; and *Effects* that is the most important but most difficult aspect of the propaganda that studies the impact of the propaganda.

Marketing strategies are identified and plans are developed to be able to execute marketing operations. These plans help identify models and ways to bring the product or service to the market. One of the well-known models is the 4P model that has been developed by E. Jerome McCarthy<sup>18</sup>. *The 4Ps are the product or service, place, price and promotion*. This helps ensure putting the right service in the right place. The strategy as such helps understand what the product or service can offer and how to plan for a successful product offering. According to this model, the customer is the focal point; the value of the product is measured in accordance with the customers' perceptions and the goal is to accomplish customer satisfaction and loyalty.<sup>19</sup>

"They decide, detect, deliver, and assess [IO] targeting cycle is, in fact, similar to the process many advertising agencies use: discover, define, design, and deliver."<sup>20</sup> This indicates similar technique in strategizing for both fields.

## INFORMATION OPERATIONS BY INSURGENTS

Although IO is a term that originated for the United States Military, this paper applies the term for the insurgents' operations. Insurgents use technical and psychological mechanisms in their operations; they have developed their own strategies that have been promoted and adopted by other insurgents. "Insurgents are rational, strategic actors who attempt to optimize the distribution of their attacks overtime in such a manner that the insurgents preserve their resources while maximizing the anti-war..."<sup>21</sup>

Insurgency is the most prevalent type of armed conflicts. "Insurgency may be defined as a struggle between a non-ruling group and the ruling authorities in which the non-ruling group consciously uses political resources, organizational expertise, propaganda and demonstration, and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics."<sup>22</sup>

Although insurgency is a political and not a military struggle, it utilizes tools of struggle that are relevant to the tools used by the conventional forces. The tools used by insurgents

<sup>18</sup> In the 1960s, the American marketeer, E. Jerome McCarthy, provided a framework by means of the marketing mix: the 4P's. The 4P's include price, promotion, product and place, which is known as the basic marketing mix. The publication of McCarthy's 'Basic Marketing' (1960) is widely cited as a fundamental approach.

<sup>19</sup> Perreault, W. D. and McCarthy, E. J. *Basic Marketing: A Global-Managerial Approach*. 14<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Trent, S. and Doty, J. L. "Marketing: An overlooked aspect of information operations". *Military Review* 85/4. 2005. 70-74.

<sup>21</sup> Kott, A. and Skarin, B. "Insurgency and Security". In Kott, A. and Citrenbaum, G. (eds.), *Estimating Impact: A Handbook of Computational Methods and Models for Anticipating Economic, Social, Political and Security Effects in International Interventions*. Boston: Springer, 2010. 239-262.

<sup>22</sup> O'Neill, B. E. *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Washington D. C.: Potomac Book Inc., 2005. 13.

expand beyond political and organizational to reach propaganda and deception. They compete with those used by the national forces and sometimes they even win against them. “Insurgency since 2001 has proven that even a non-state actor can pursue the modest goal of area denial against vastly superior conventional armed forces, via asymmetric warfare.”<sup>23</sup>

The nature of insurgency has evolved due to the ever-changing environment. Currently, insurgencies are not the single-party organization, like that of Mao or Ho Chi Minh. Insurgent organizations are composed of “loose coalitions” of local and global networks.<sup>24</sup> These organizations reflect the social organizations they come from. They operate locally and globally, they also operate through local and transnational organizations like the Afghans who fought in Bosnia.<sup>25</sup> Taliban is another example that changed from being a purely local movement into a global jihadist community.<sup>26</sup> Although many insurgent coalitions share a common battle, they need not have the same goals, each party can fight for its own cause. In Syria insurgency coalitions have different objectives ranging from forming a secular government to those which aim at forming a strict Islamic one; however, they form coalitions of insurgents.

Insurgencies are now adapting to the changing environment; many are “transdimensional and transnational.”<sup>27</sup> They are using electronic warfare, computer network operations, psychological operations, and military deception. They have moved from simple communications and propaganda to online recruitment, vetting of recruits, training, and e-marketing. They are using the social media widely and intensively.

Insurgencies have been able to create and sustain funds for their activities. Colin Clarke categorizes the insurgents’ financial activities into “grey activities”<sup>28</sup> which include diaspora support, charities, fraudulent businesses, front companies, and money laundering; the other type is the “dark activities” which include kidnapping for ransom, robbery, smuggling or trafficking.

Psychological operations are critical, powerful tools used by the insurgents and counter-insurgents. They are usually seeking to expand their control of the grass-roots levels. In fact, in many cases psychological operations become factors that determine the results. Propaganda and marketing of insurgents’ cause were able to influence public opinion towards their cause or at least reach to a point of neutrality towards this cause. The psychological activities used by insurgents focus on the marketing objective discussed earlier: “exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market.”<sup>29</sup>

A battlefield is a multidimensional one, it encompasses the physical space, but it also includes cyberspace. The expansion of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development made it possible for insurgents to start cyber-insurgency. Leader of Al-Qaeda Ayman Zawahri stated “we are in a battle and more than half of this battle is in the media. In this media battle, we are in the race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.”<sup>30</sup> The internet

<sup>23</sup> Mahadevan, P. “The ‘Talibanization’ of Insurgency”. Center for Security Studies. 2 April 2014. <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/178192/pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Hammes, T. X. “Countering Evolved Insurgent Networks”. *Military Review* 86/4. 2006. 18-26.

<sup>25</sup> Hammes. “Countering Evolved Insurgent Networks”.

<sup>26</sup> Mahadevan. “The ‘Talibanization’ of Insurgency”.

<sup>27</sup> Hammes, “Countering Evolved Insurgent Networks”.

<sup>28</sup> Clarke, C. P. *Terrorism, Inc.: The Financing of Terrorism, Insurgency, and Irregular Warfare*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Kotler and Keller. *Marketing Management*.

<sup>30</sup> Zelin, A. Y. “The State of al-Qaeda”. The Washington Institute. 13 April 2015. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-state-of-al-qaeda>



has been used to maximize their effect and to have a greater influence. It is used for recruitment, training, advertisement, marketing and propaganda, for posting videos, photos, training materials, online magazines, building networks, among other tasks. The Islamic State publishes an online magazine named “Dabiq”<sup>31</sup>. Until July 31, 2017 15 issues were published. The magazine followed the development of IS and markets its propaganda globally.

The expansion of social media made it also possible to reach to the status of “global village”, where information spreads fast. It helps with the marketing process especially the case of Facebook, where you can use tools such as “recommended for” or “people you may know”. These tools reach not only local audience, but also global one; they help drive interests and link people with similar interests.

## MARKET EXPANSION VS. GUERRILLA RECRUITMENT

The recruitment strategy of insurgents is indeed a market growth strategy. This section will illustrate some marketing strategies while comparing them to the insurgency strategies and operations and more specifically to the insurgents’ recruitment. As mentioned earlier, IO and marketing share similar objectives, similar elements of the environment, and similar operational themes. An analysis of the market growth will help point out the recruitment strategies of insurgents.

Linking the marketing strategy to the general strategic direction is core when doing business or starting an IO. The Ansoff Matrix is, in fact, a strategic planning tool that links an organization’s marketing strategy with its general direction. It provides a framework enabling growth opportunities. The Ansoff Matrix was created by Igor Ansoff<sup>32</sup>. The model presents four alternative growth strategies. The matrix is a 2x2 table; the first dimension in this matrix is the ‘products’ that could be existing or new; while the second dimension is the ‘markets’ that could be existing or new. According to this model, four strategies are presented. Market penetration uses existing products and existing markets; with this strategy a company seeks to increase market share, increase product usage, increase frequency of use, or increase quantity used. Product development strategy uses new products and existing markets; this strategy includes product improvement, product line extensions, or new products for the same market. Market development uses existing products and new markets through expanding markets for existing products, geographic expansion or target segments. Diversification strategy uses new products and new markets.

The Ansoff Matrix simply suggests growth strategies that helps set the direction of an organization, while providing marketing strategies that helps achieve them. Each strategy is achieved differently, and each one faces different levels of risk. The market penetration strategy involves selling existing products to existing markets to gain higher market share. Though, in some cases the market is already mature and there are no new demographic sectors to target; in this case the strategy is to obtain market share from the competitors. This strategy carries the lowest risk compared to the other strategies. This can be achieved by competitive pricing strategies, advertising, and/or sales promotion.

<sup>31</sup> “Dabiq Magazine”. Jihadology.net. <https://jihadology.net/category/dabiq-magazine/>, Accessed on 20 January 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Igor Ansoff was a Russian American applied mathematician and business manager, he is known as the father of strategic manager and famous for his development of the Ansoff matrix, which he developed as a tool to plot generic strategies for the establishment of a company via existing or new products in existing or new markets.

The market development strategy is about selling existing products in new markets. This can be achieved by opening new geographic markets or new segments of population (e.g. approaching women or children who haven't been targeted before), which is associated with a high level of risk depending on the financial capacity and the new markets. This strategy is also possible through new distribution channels, such as changing street retailers to internet retailers to attract new customers throughout the globe or through providing services and products in new types of markets, which would require training of staff and developing of methods of distribution.

Table 1: *Ansoff Matrix for Market Growth Strategies*<sup>33</sup>

		Products	
		Existing	New
Markets	Existing	Penetration	Product Development
	New	Market Development	Diversification

Product development strategy is about introducing new products to existing markets. This growth strategy needs clear knowledge of the needs of the customers to be able to satisfy those needs. This might require new materials or new technologies. As this requires new product offerings (products, services, or ideas), research and development are much needed; however, the risk of losing existing customers with the new product is possible. This could be approached by presenting a new product that is closely associated with the existing one.

Diversification is the growth strategy that is achieved by developing new products for completely new markets. Hence, it is associated with a very high risk because of the lack of experience in the new market and the new product. There are three types of diversification: full diversification, backward diversification and forward diversification. Full diversification is a totally new product to a new, unknown market, which is a strategy with the highest risk. Backward diversification is when the organization decides to complement its existing product with one that is used in the preceding step of the production cycle. Forward diversification is about developing a product that is used in the following steps of the production cycle.

The recruitment strategy of insurgents is in fact an Ansoff matrix; it is a growth strategy model of operations to maintain existing members and recruit new members. It provides a framework enabling growth opportunities. As is the case in the market growth strategy, the model presents *four alternative growth strategies*. The first dimension in this matrix is the 'services' that could be either existing or new; while the second dimension is the 'region' that

<sup>33</sup> Ansoff, I. *Corporate Strategy*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1965.



could be existing or new. According to the model, four strategies are presented: insurgency penetration (existing services and existing regions), insurgency development (new services and existing regions), insurgency expansion (using existing services and new regions), and insurgency diversification (using new services and new regions). Figure (2) below illustrates the recruitment strategy of insurgents.

The Ansoff Matrix for insurgency, named here *the insurgents' recruitment matrix*, is a growth strategy of insurgency. Each strategy is achieved differently, and each one faces different levels of risk. The *insurgency penetration* involves promoting existing services and propaganda to existing regions to gain higher acceptance and loyalty amongst local community. This targets the adversary, but most importantly targets the neutral communities in the region they operate. This strategy carries the lowest risk compared to the other strategies, as insurgents are aware of the community and the needs and interests of this community. This can be achieved by promoting their ideology through local media and local recruiters. Direct contact (face to face word of mouth or personal selling) of potential members is the most common method in this strategy as those members are possible to be identified by some surveys and intelligence.

Table 2: *Insurgents Matrix for Insurgency Growth Strategies*

		Services	
		Existing	New
Region	Existing	Insurgency Penetration	Insurgency Development
	New	Insurgency Expansion	Insurgency Diversification

The *insurgency expansion strategy* is about promoting existing services and propaganda in new regions. This can be achieved by expanding the ideology to new regions or new population segments, which is associated with a high level of risk depending on the financial capacity, the new regions, and the knowledge about those regions. This strategy is also possible through new distribution channels such as the cyber-insurgency; where insurgents are able to recruit new members through the internet. This would require high levels of trainings and developed skills in the use of ICT. ISIS is a good example of this since they use the internet to expand their operation and recruit new members from the globe.

*Insurgency development strategy* is about introducing new services to existing markets. This growth strategy needs clear knowledge of the needs and interests of the local community, to be able to satisfy those needs, and provide the desired and possible new services. ISIS provided different services to develop their organization and expand their operations through recruiting new members. The organisation was able to provide medical and educational services in a manner that fits their strategy and their ideology.

*Insurgency diversification* is the growth strategy that is achieved by developing new services for completely new regions. Hence, it is associated with a very high risk because of the lack of experience in the new region and the new service. Main examples of insurgency diversifications are the mergers of two different insurgencies in two different countries, for example Al-Shabab insurgent group in Somalia united with ISIS to expand and diversify their operations.<sup>34</sup> Diversification is also present in insurgency through backward diversification<sup>35</sup>, this is apparent through ISIS associated places of worship that supported their operations in those regions.

Insurgents usually develop highly sophisticated strategic communications campaigns, “this has been the pattern since Ho Chi Minh.”<sup>36</sup> Insurgency have developed recruitment strategies that helped them recruit new members locally and globally through services related directly or indirectly to their operations.

## ISIS MARKET EXPANSION STRATEGY

The Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) was announced in October 2006 with the leadership of Hamid al Zawi (Abu Umar al-Baghdadi)<sup>37</sup>. Al-Zawi was killed in April 2010 and replaced by the current leader Ibrahim al-Badri (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was announced as the *Amir Al-Mu'mineen* (commander of faith)).<sup>38</sup>

The first media product was issued by the ISI in 2012, it was a video titled “The Expedition of the Prisoners”. The video targeted Iraqi Sunni audience, and the main message was identifying the enemies of the ummah, including the Shiites and Americans.<sup>39</sup> This was followed by a series of publications titled *Salil al-Sawarem* (The Clanging of the Swords).<sup>40</sup> The videos ranged from violent scenes to peaceful and religious messages.<sup>41</sup>

PSYOP includes the SCAME technique to help analyse the opponent propaganda. SCAME is about Source, Content, Audience, Media, and Effects. The following is an analysis of the *Salil al-Sawarem* using the SCAME technique:

*Source*: Actors in the videos were mainly ISIS people showing their activities, their training, their achievements, their messages and everything they do. Many of them are real

<sup>34</sup> Azman, N. A. and Alkaff, S. H. B. O. “ISIS in Horn of Africa: An Imminent Alliance with Al-Shabaab?” *RSIS Commentary* 282. 30 December 2015. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CO15282.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Backward Diversification is when a company decides to diversify its products or services by offering a product or service that relates to the preceding stage of the current product or service. For example, a dairy products company’s backward diversification is to buy cows so that they control the raw material (that is milk).

<sup>36</sup> Jones, C. W. “Exploiting Structural Weaknesses in Terrorist Networks: Information Blitzkrieg and Related Strategies”. In David, G. J. and McKeldin, T. R. (eds.), *Ideas as weapons: influence and perception in modern warfare*. Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2009. 7-12.

<sup>37</sup> Tønnessen, T. “Heirs of Zarqawi or Saddam? The relationship between al-Qaida in Iraq and the Islamic State”. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9/4. 2015. 48-60.

<sup>38</sup> Barret, R. “The Islamic State”. The Soufan Group. November 2014. <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Hartmann, C. “Who does (not) belong to the jihadist umma? A comparison of IS’s and al Qaida’s use of takfir to exclude people from the Muslim community”. *Journal for Deradicalization* 13. 2017. 213-242.

<sup>40</sup> Zelin, A. Y. “al-Furqan Media presents a new video message from the Islamic State of Iraq: ‘Clanging of the Swords, part 1’”. *jihadology.net*. 3 June 2012. <http://jihadology.net/2012/06/30/al-furqan-media-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-clanging-of-the-swords-part-1/>

<sup>41</sup> Shamieh, L. and Szenes, Z. “The Propaganda of ISIS/DAESH Through the Virtual Space”. *Defence Against Terrorism Review* 7/1. 2015. 7-31.

footage, however, some are cheap visual effects. These videos are funded and produced mainly by individuals associated to the group.

*Content:* All the videos produced included a background song and music called “Salil al-Sawarem”. Strikingly, if you listen to the music without watching the shocking visuals, you will be amazed with the melody and beautiful Arabic hymn. Studying these videos makes the listener even start humming along. A technique that helps recruit new people especially the youth. The impact of those videos is enormous given the thousands of viewers of those videos. Those videos were organized in such a fashion that they follow similar structure that is able to present the objective of the video, intentions. Videos also show witnesses of men who have bled and died for their beliefs, they show why “true Sunni Muslims” (as they call it) should follow the same path. Recruitment is based on two aspects; the right religion, and the strive to attack theological enemies.

*Audience:* The propaganda was aware of the different targets, hence they addressed each differently using different means, different types of videos, and even different languages, which enabled the global dissemination of the means.

*Media:* ISIS had several media strategies<sup>42</sup>; Salil al-Sawarem, was mainly videos used to widely disseminate the message.

*Effects:* The effect of the videos and the music was a cutthroat; the melody was interesting even for those who tried to mock the videos and used the same music to mock the content. The number of viewers ranged from hundreds of thousands to millions. Although measuring the effectiveness of the video is difficult, however, the number of followers, likers and commenters gives an indication about the impact.

When Abu Baker al-Baghdadi announced Nusra Front a branch of the Islamic State 2013, ISIS propaganda transformed to the new brand and expanded to non-Arabic speaking audience. During this period, they were seeking market development by attracting new segments of the population. The quality of the publications advanced in this phase. 2014 witnessed the transformation of the ISIS propaganda. They started the publication of the “Islamic State News” in English. Within two years the messages changed from Arabic speaking media production to English and German speaking with main messages of “conquering the world” with its main message “*baqeya wa tatamadad*” (here to stay and expand).

ISIS gained support locally and internationally, they were able to persuade audiences in the region along with overseas audiences, this is evident through a variety of members engaged from different nationalities, different regions and even different religions. They were able to attract audiences with little at stake in their mission to sacrifice for their cause.

ISIS markets itself as strong group supported by religious scripture. The slogan of “enduring and expanding” enforces the group’s message of strength. It aims at establishing a nation-state ruled by Sharia law with an intention to return to the earliest fundamental sources of Prophet Mohammed, to expand it to a wide geographical are in the Middle East and Europe.

ISIS used the market penetration/insurgency penetration strategy by providing financial and sexual incentives for its existing members. They used product development/insurgency development through providing educational programs, health and legal services under *Sharia* cover. They used market development/insurgency expansion through expanding presence in different countries. They also used backward diversification through controlling oil sources.

<sup>42</sup> Shamiéh and Szenes. “The Propaganda of ISIS/DAESH Through the Virtual Space”.

## ISIS RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

ISIS recruitment strategy will be identified through the Ansoff strategy defined earlier as the *insurgents' recruitment matrix*. ISIS recruitment strategy was based on two factors; the services they provide and the regions they are operating in or targeting potential members in.

The *insurgency penetration* involves promoting existing services and propaganda to existing regions to gain higher acceptance amongst the local communities. In Syria and Iraq ISIS targeted the adversaries and most importantly the neutral communities. ISIS is aware of the region and the needs of the people. Knowing the culture and the economic status, ISIS provided rewards through religious beliefs. They provided rewards and salaries for those in need along with sexual rewards. This was possible through promoting their ideology using local media and local recruiters and direct contact with potential members.

The *insurgency expansion* strategy is about promoting existing services and propaganda in new regions. ISIS achieved this by expanding their ideology to new regions. They were able to achieve this by new distribution channels including cyber-insurgency. ISIS was able to recruit new members through their chatrooms, Facebook and other social media.<sup>43</sup> They promoted their utopian and religious state to the internationals using multilingual messages, and they were able to recruit Arabic and non-Arabic speaking members.

*Insurgency development* strategy is about introducing new services to existing markets. ISIS provided medical and educational services to the people living in the areas they control. They provided military training along with religious education. They provided medical services through their medical members. They also provided dispute and conflict resolution through sharia law and courts they established.

*Insurgency diversification* is the growth strategy that is achieved by developing new services for completely new regions. Although this strategy is hard to accomplish as it entails high risk, ISIS was able to diversify its services. This was accomplished by the association of other insurgency groups to ISIS. ISIS also succeeded in accomplishing a backwards diversification, where ISIS controlled places of worship that was then able to feed the organization with new members. It was able to control financial sources as was accomplished with the oil in Iraq.

## ISIS COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS IN INFORMATION OPERATIONS

ISIS works at *three environmental levels*: physical, emotional and cognitive influence of the targeted audience to achieve the desired mission. It utilizes the ABC model of attitude including: Affective component that involves feelings and emotions, Behavioural or conative component, and Cognitive that involves a person's belief about an attitude object. However, the main factor motivating the different individuals and groups to participate and engage in ISIS is its cognitive dimension. ISIS is marketing its brand by being the '*right Sunni*'. Hence the war is between Sunni and the rest of the religions and sects. It is between Sunni and all non-Sunni, between Sunni and Shiite, between Sunni and non-Wahhabis Sunni, between Sunni and other Wahhabis Sunni.

Although ISIS might be driven or even started or fed by external forces and by motives that are not necessarily part of the whole cognitive dimension of ISIS, the Caliphate and the

<sup>43</sup> Liang, C. S. "Cyber Jihad: Understanding and Countering Islamic State Propaganda". *GCSP Policy Paper 2*. 2015. <https://www.gcsp.ch/publications/cyber-jihad>

Jihadism as a tool are the core of this cognitive dimension. The Caliphate is not a new term or concept for them; it was the basis for Islamic rule in the early phases of Islam, but it was also revived by the Ottoman Empire during their rule. Currently, Caliphate is a contested status amongst different Sunni Islamic parties. The caliphate and jihadism as a tool are the core of the cognitive dimension of ISIS.

## BRANDING OF ISIS

The American Marketing Association states that “a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from their competitors. In fact, ISIS is a name that is very well known globally. Their flag is extremely recognizable *Muhammad Rasoul Allah* (Muhammad is the prophet of God) with a black background. Their symbol is religion and military capability, which is used to identify their existence and to differentiate them from other insurgents. The name ISIS identifies itself as a state, and all their operations are executed as such; starting from the structure of the state to the currency they started and the military education and they are providing. “Brands distill the value of other intangible assets into one meaningful identity of the firm.”<sup>44</sup>

Aaker describes brand personality as metaphor which “can help brand strategist by enriching their understanding of people’s perceptions of and attitude toward the brand, contributing to a differentiating brand identity, getting the communication effort and creating brand equity.”<sup>45</sup> ISIS has in fact understood people’s perceptions and communicated with different segments according to the perceptions they hold. Aaker mentioned that a brand should not only define its functional purpose, but also to express the brand’s higher purpose. ISIS has defined its functional purpose which is Islamic Sharia, it also defined its higher purpose which denominating the rule in the region through the Islamic caliphate. This means that by defining the brand purpose, the brand positioning will be achieved, the brand differentiation and the brand identity.

ISIS has been able to develop a nation brand. A nation brand is “the unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences.”<sup>46</sup> This definition proposes that ISIS as a brand exists in the minds of the people; it is a perception of ISIS. ISIS was able to appeal diverse stakeholders through its nature of nation brand. It was successful to a certain point of time when it was able to deliver its promised values. Their laws, the religion, the social norms, the organizational structure all reflect and appreciate were able to attract certain groups to engage. The individuals recruited and the groups affiliated, all appreciated the values and the social and economic interactions. They are all aware of the values and all are interested in joining. ISIS member are all guided by the strict religious values leading to utopianism as they claim. Their main themes to identify their brand is brutality and belonging; ‘either you are with us or against us’. Their main objective to hone their nation brand is to gain more power and expand the regions of control, to recruit more members, and to generate more fear amongst the others to be able to achieve the first two objectives.

<sup>44</sup> Moore, L. “The Law and the Ultimate Intellectual Asset”. *Intellectual Asset Management* 10/6. 2012. 78-84.

<sup>45</sup> Aaker, D. A. *Building strong brands*. New York: Free Press, 1996. 126.

<sup>46</sup> Dinnie, K. *Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice*. Elsevier, UK. Amsterdam; Oxford: Elsevier, 2008.

ISIS was trying to hone the nation brand to be able to form a competitive identity. Having different nationalities, ISIS members have one thing in common; they have common affiliations. This affiliation forms their identity. Individuals who are recruited feel they don't belong to their original states or societies, they have a sense of lack of belonging. They reach to a point of dilemma about their identities and belonging. ISIS then works on leading them to a new direction; members feel ISIS the saviour. With this ISIS plays a role in making individuals feel they have new belonging and identities.

ISIS was able to work on the institutional and political image, image of the ISIS services and image of the contacts and partners. The identity-image gap was diminishing by time when people faced the immense violence enacted by ISIS. With this diminishing trend ISIS started its diminishing phase.

## ISIS: A MODERN MARKETING STRATEGY

ISIS operations were based on non-traditional marketing methods. They adopted guerrilla marketing using innovative and creative tools and methods to achieve their goals, by using multilingual messages to reach as many people as possible. Guerrilla marketing techniques seek to maximize the surprise effect, the diffusion effect and the low-cost effect. The surprise effect is aimed at surprising the consumers with unexpected activities, the diffusion effect is to increase the number of individuals exposed to the message, and the low-cost effect is to achieve the surprise and diffusion at little or no cost.<sup>47</sup> Mainly, ISIS was able to achieve the three effects and more, they focused on the following guerrilla marketing methods:

*Viral Marketing* is a marketing technique that utilizes websites or users to pass on messages to other sites or users, which enables the message to be delivered to a mass number of people.<sup>48</sup> ISIS is active in this field as it focuses on publishing many videos on YouTube. It is very active on twitter, to the extent that many twitter accounts were closed but users were able to start new accounts whenever their accounts were closed. With this marketing strategy, ISIS was able to use the 1/9/90 rule of social media network, which posits that on a social media network only 1 percent of users create content, 9 percent react by sharing and commenting, and 90 percent watch and read without commenting.<sup>49</sup> ISIS was able to expose its messages to the public; it took advantage of rapid multiplication to spread the messages to thousands then to millions.

*Grassroots Marketing* aims at winning customers on an individual basis, it focuses on building a lasting connection and relationship between the consumer and the brand.<sup>50</sup> ISIS was able to connect to individuals, to brain wash, to build a lasting relationship with those members who became part of the community. They were able to maintain this relationship by providing services of different kinds, both financial and non-financial.

<sup>47</sup> Hutter, K. and Hoffman, S. "Guerrilla Marketing: The Nature of the Concept and Propositions for Further Research". *Asian Journal of Marketing* 5/2. 2011. 39-54. DOI:[10.3923/ajm.2011.39.54](https://doi.org/10.3923/ajm.2011.39.54)

<sup>48</sup> Wilson R. "The six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing". *Web Marketing Today* 70/1. 2000. 232.

<sup>49</sup> Rainie L., Lenhart, A. and Smith, A. "The tone of life on social networking sites". Pew research Center. 9 February 2012. [http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2012/Pew\\_Social%20networking%20climate%202.9.12.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2012/Pew_Social%20networking%20climate%202.9.12.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> Baker, M. J. and Hart, S. J. (eds.) *The Marketing Book*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2008.



*Astroturfing* is the marketing strategy with the highest risk. It includes fake endorsements, testimonials and recommendations by individuals who are paid to convey a positive message.<sup>51</sup> ISIS published several videos of people giving testimonials about the utopian state and idealistic life they are living. Several videos of locals presented that; along with videos of internationals, like the testimonials of the British hostage John Cantlie who provided a series of videos that started from describing his case until the last video that showed how easy it was for him to live and travel within the Islamic State territory.

*Ambush Marketing* is a form of associative marketing; this is done by associating the organization with an event or property without necessarily having a direct connection.<sup>52</sup> In many cases ISIS claimed their responsibility for different events, explosions, or brutal activities throughout the globe, though there are no proofs that they are really responsible for these activities.

## CONCLUSION

The war of perceptions and deceptions is more effective than the war of weapons. Therefore, understanding the cognitive dimensions of the insurgents is important before applying new methods and techniques. In the changing security environment, it is even more important to understand the operational environment and the operations capacities of the adversaries.

In this study, the recruitment strategy of insurgents was compared to the Ansoff growth matrix. Four recruitment strategies were identified on the basis of the services the insurgents provide and the regions they operate in. The model shows that it is possible with the diversification of services that insurgents are able to recruit new members locally or globally, whether affiliated to the ideology or even not related to the ideology.

ISIS marketing strategy was analysed through understanding its brand. Its market expansion strategy was also analysed. It showed ISIS focus on the target group to achieve attitude change. It also showed that with the proper use of marketing campaigns, insurgents are able to recruit neutral members easily.

Insurgency can blend in easily with the surrounding environment through their marketing strategy; thus, an analysis of this strategy helps counter the actions and results. Understanding this strategy helps exploit communication and information rather than the utilization of traditional war and mass killing. Since insurgent strategies focus on political and psychological operations, the counterinsurgents should act similarly. Countering the insurgency should be through the Ansoff matrix; it should counter their penetration, expansion, development and diversification strategies by controlling the geographic expansion and limiting the insurgents' capability to provide services. It should counter the local and global messages using information and communication technology. It should be focused on the brand by diminishing the gap between its image and the real identity. Most importantly, it should focus on the message delivered to the neutral population.

<sup>51</sup> Jacobs, J. "Faking it: how to kill a business through astroturfing on social media". *Keeping Good Companies* 64/9. 2012. 567-570.

<sup>52</sup> Chadwick, S. and Burton, N. "Ambushed! Sponsors pay a lot to link their brands to sporting events. Then there are those who get those links for nothing". *Wall Street Journal*, 25 January 2010. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204731804574391102699362862>



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