**Master Thesis Abstract**

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**Nation Branding in the Aftermath of a Military Conflict: the Case of Chechnya**

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**Keywords:** Chechen Republic, nation branding, national identity, nation brand image, nation brand identity, military conflict, stereotypes.

**Research Premises.** Around the turn of the 20th century, Chechnya was the

theater of two devastating military campaigns, carried out by Russian federal forces against the Chechen separatist army. After peaceful life was reestablished in Chechnya, the local administration had still to face a deep image crisis: the reputation of the Republic and its inhabitants was severely damaged in the course of the conflict, during which Chechnya came to be associated with crime, separatism and Islamic terrorism. Most of these stereotypes are deeply rooted in Russian culture, due to centuries of conflictive relations between Chechens and Russians. In the last few years, the local administration has been promoting a new image of Chechnya through what can be defined as a process of nation branding. Theorized by policy advisor Simon Anholt, the concept of nation branding refers to all communication practices aimed at promoting the image of a nation among a specific audience. The purpose of our study is to analyze the current Chechen nation brand, in order to identify the nation branding techniques that have been adopted to improve the reputation of Chechnya within Russian society.

**Novelty.** Our case study explores how nation branding can take place within a multinational State like the Russian Federation. Moreover, our study seeks to provide useful insights on how nation branding techniques can be useful to counter negative perceptions engendered during separatist conflicts.

**Research Object.** The primary objects of our study is the current Chechnya’s nation brand and the nation branding practices adopted by the Chechen administration to influence the Russian public. As a preliminary object of study, we carried out a diachronic reconstruction of the portrayal of Chechnya and Chechens in Russian literature and media, on the basis of which the contemporary brand of Chechnya can be interpreted.

**Research Questions.** What are the main features of Chechnya’s current nation brand? How is this brand related to the previous negative image of Chechnya?

**Goal.** The purpose of our research is to identify the contemporary brand of Chechnya and point out the nation branding techniques adopted by the Chechen administration to improve the image of the Republic in the eyes of the Russian public.

**Tasks.** In order to accomplish our goal, we carried out the following tasks:

* Researched the literature of nation branding and present the theoretical elements which we believe the most relevant for our case study.
* Reconstructed the diachronic evolution of the portrayal of the Chechen Nation in Russian culture
* Carried out a content analysis of the selected sources in order to deconstruct Chechnya’s nation brand and point out its main constitutive elements.

**Chronological framework.** Our historical reconstruction encompasses the

history of Russian-Chechen relations from the Caucasian War until the end of the second Chechen War, excluding the Soviet period. For our empirical analysis of the contemporary Chechen brand we considered a period of time comprised between October 2016 and April 2017.

**Theoretical foundation.** The theoretical foundations of our study lies in the

theory of nation branding, a relatively new field of study embracing elements of Marketing, Branding, Public Diplomacy, and National Identity Studies.In our overview of nation branding theory we relied upon the literature authored by experts in the field such as Simon Anholt and Keith Dinnie. To reconstruct the image of Chechnya in Russian literature and media, we mainly relied upon secondary sources. Academic articles by H. Ram were rather significant for our analysis of the representation of Chechnya in Russian 19th literature. Works by J. Russel and V. Tishkov provided us with extensive information on the media representation of Chechnya and Chechens during the last military conflict and their impact on the Russian public opinion.

**Methods.** Our research is founded on a mix of qualitative interviews and quantitative content analysis. Two interviews with Chechen civil servants, content analysis of Ramzan Kadyrov’s Vkontakte and the TV show ‘Komanda’ allowed us to extrapolate the brand identity of Chechnya.

**Sample.** To carry out our content analysis we selected 200 posts from Kadyrov’s Vkontakte page and the eight episodes making up the TV series ‘Komanda’.

**Structure.** Our study consists in three chapters. In the first one we provide an overview of the nation branding theory. The second is an historical reconstruction of the representation of Chechens in Russian culture. The third one contains an analysis of the contemporary Chechen national brand.

**Research Outcomes.**

* The head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, plays a significant role in the creation of the Chechen nation brand, focusing mainly on the promotion of Chechen culture and government.
* The interpretation of the Chechen-Russian conflict is a major component of Chechnya’s nation branding strategy.
* The Chechen nation brand identity is largely tailored to counter the preexisting negative brand image rooted in Russian society.