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MAKING THE IMAGE OF THE MILITARY ACCORDING TO NATO STANDARDS: THE LEGAL DIMENSION

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Abstract. The image of the military is an important component of the image of an individual unit, which influences the public's perception of the security and defence sector and the Alliance as a whole. Understanding NATO in terms of shaping the image of the military means studying the audiences influenced by military public relations professionals whose main activities are regulated by law. NATO standards in the area of military image building are based on the understanding of the leading role of the individual military in shaping the image through the direct influence of military public relations professionals on external and internal audiences. Public perceptions of the individual service member and the Alliance as a whole are an important element in supporting missions and activities. The main means of influence is segmented content, which is disseminated in an appropriate form through information and communication channels on relevant platforms. Understanding audiences, studying and researching them is important in planning information campaigns, implementing them and receiving feedback to be taken into account for approaching to Ukraine interoperability to NATO standards in public affairs sphere.

Key words: NATO standards, external and internal audiences, strategic communications, public relations, brand.

Introduction. NATO is a brand that provides an important service to its citizens: defending peace, freedom and security. The brand of NATO and its military commanders is how the public, partners and potential adversaries perceive the Alliance, and how they think and feel about its decisions and actions. NATO's brand is based on reputation and needs to be monitored. Media monitoring and analysis can provide insight into how audiences at the local (tactical) and international (strategic) level view NATO and its actions.

According to NATO's governing documents, public support for NATO's missions and tasks is based on public understanding of the Alliance's contribution to international peace and security. Public confidence is strengthened by NATO's ability to carry out its tasks in an open, transparent manner, in line with the values and expectations of its member states.

Main part. As stated in NATO's Strategic Concept, the NATO Alliance is united by shared values: individual liberty, human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Alliance is an alliance of democracies with political control over their armed forces, which are accountable to their governments and to the public for the implementation of their missions.

According to the Alliance's governing documents, strategic communications is the function of the command group responsible for informing all audiences. StratCom uses all means of communication, consisting of actions, images and words, to properly inform and influence the attitudes and behaviour of audiences. StratCom in the NATO military context is the integration of communications capabilities and information staffs operating with other military activities to understand and shape information policy in support of NATO's strategic goals and objectives.

NATO's military public affairs policy is based on the highest principles of democracy, including freedom of expression in the media. NATO Commanders and Public Affairs Officers

are required to comply with NATO's public information policy and to promote media and freedom of expression.

Military public relations have the following key characteristics:

1. A single internal communications capability across all NATO headquarters, capable of creating effects in the cognitive, virtual and physical dimensions.
2. A capability that is publicly recognised as the official voice of the organisation (in both internal and external communication functions).
3. A provider of direct and indirect advice to the commander, senior staff, and designated personnel on the implications of public diplomacy operations, activities, and issues.
4. The primary means of public communication for the transmission of truthful, accurate, timely, and relevant information (NATO, 2024 : 76).

Military public relations, according to the main normative legal documents, is described as a key function in ensuring internal and external communications (NATO, 2024 : 12).

Military public affairs plays a leading role in external and internal communications and is directly responsible for the training of the commander.

To be successful, commanders must understand the following principles of public relations:

1. Informing internal audiences – creating and disseminating information to internal audiences increases morale, confidence, discipline, and unit effectiveness.
2. Informing external audiences builds the trust of the Alliance and other stakeholders and deterring enemies and potential adversaries by communicating capability, readiness and resolve.
3. Every member of the armed forces is a spokesperson. Any person working in or on behalf of NATO forces, speaking in an organised setting to an external audience, or intending to publish their work on a NATO-related topic in the public domain, should seek advice from the organisation's public affairs staff, who will advise whether prior approval is required from the NATO Command. Actively engaged spokespersons can generate significant credibility with external audiences and enhance the Alliance's reputation and relevance. Internal communications has evolved from being about disseminating news and information to an activity that creates an information-rich environment where people get the information they need, when they need it, to perform at their best.
4. Journalists as media representatives are active participants in information and communication campaigns.
5. The principle of maximum disclosure of information with minimum delay, based on the Alliance's commitment to promptly inform the public in full.

NATO standards on the image of the military comprehensively consider the preparation and dissemination of content that shapes the perception of the military in society.

The NATO standards envisage communication with audiences directly, through third parties or through the media, which are considered as a factor of influence on the public. They also include a focus on audience behaviour, audience and media analysis, which are adjusted at the planning stage of public relations activities. Audience research involves, in particular, taking into account demographic indicators, behaviour, attitudes, and geographical location.

Military public affairs communication activities are focused on providing truthful, accurate and timely information aimed at a specific segment of the audience to promote their understanding of NATO and its military objectives and other Alliance capabilities. The synergistic effect of the capabilities simultaneously contributes to maintaining or changing audience behaviour (NATO, 2022 : 134).

NATO's understanding of audience adaptation refers to tailoring messages to a specific audience, which is viewed through the prism of background, history, and the way they receive information. This approach requires coordination of public relations specialists with J2 (intelligence), psychological operations, information operations, and the cultural component.

– Interaction with the audience and the formation of influence on it is considered in the focus of three approaches: very active, active and reactive.

– According to the very active approach to public relations, public interest is the desired outcome of information and communication activities, for which efforts to create a context for the narrative are made with the involvement of targeted and extensive efforts.

– An active approach to public relations involves raising awareness of a wide audience, which is used to satisfy the interests of a certain audience with a small expenditure of time and resources and obtaining an equally proportional benefit.

– A reactive approach is appropriate for military public relations in cases where there are no major efforts to attract and retain the attention of the audience, as well as in situations where information is delivered in the focus of operational security, confidentiality, and regulation (NATO, 2020 : 44).

Audience in NATO's understanding is a person, group or organisation whose interpretation of events and subsequent behaviour can influence the achievement of an end state.

Military Public Affairs considers the audiences with which it interacts as internal, consisting of NATO military and civilian personnel and their families, and external, consisting of other audiences. Military public affairs identifies audiences, segments them, and determines those that are most relevant to the respective functions in a given case study. Effective communication involves adapting content to a particular type of audience.

They include:

– External audiences: all non-NATO organisations, including the media, and the general public.

This group can be further subdivided into national/regional audiences, including adversaries.

– Internal audiences: chain of command, family members.

– External actors/key influencers: think tanks, academic institutions, non-governmental organisations.

– Key stakeholders: organisations, corporations with vested interests.

The audience ranges from the global to the direct participants and is segmented into three general categories – the public, stakeholders and actors – depending on their ability to influence the end state, as shown in Picture 1.

The NATO Public Affairs Officer can communicate with these audiences directly, through third-party representatives or through the media. It is important to understand that the media is both an audience and a means by which commanders, through their spokespersons, provide information about the activities of the unit.

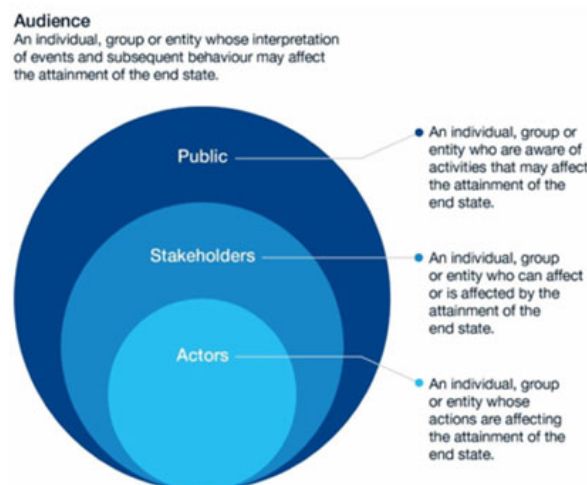


Fig. 1. The three categories of audiences: public, stakeholdes and actors

External communications include media relations, outreach, direct audience engagement through social media and public relations.

The internal audience receives information about events through media such as mainstream newspapers, newsletters, leaflets and posters.

External audiences are informed through the local media, using press releases, public service announcements and radio and television appearances. In preparation for an event, NATO Public Affairs Officers are advised to invite local media representatives to a preview of the event 24 hours before the event or, in the case of a parade, to a dress rehearsal. Identifying spokespersons, speakers and media contacts is an integral part of planning public events.

Digital media activities provide information directly to the audience and stakeholders through online channels and social media.

Effective programmes keep internal audiences informed of important developments that affect their work; raise awareness of the organisation's goals and activities; and make the team more effective spokespersons for the organisation.

In addition, in support of national public relations objectives, proactive content sharing with NATO's higher headquarters can help to increase the overall impact on regional and international audiences – an effect that may be difficult for any single country to achieve.

Digital engagement is an important part of NATO's ability to communicate directly and effectively with audiences in both verbal and visual forms. Digital media management is the process of using and combining capabilities to achieve communication objectives in accordance with the commander's intent.

Communication strategies are developed on the basis of predefined concepts, cultural or political biases, or general perceptions of a particular medium.

Public relations professionals conduct human factors analysis and media audience analysis, including surveys of both internal and external audiences.

Media monitoring and analysis can help plan information and communication campaigns by identifying the information needs of the audience. In particular, media monitoring and analysis research should focus on:

1. Information channels for receiving information:

- internal newspaper or newsletter for internal audience, social media (special Facebook group for internal audience, other platform), frequency of communications, audience reach. Research the attention of the community, local media to the topic that needs to be covered, opinion leaders who can deliver the message;

- for external audiences – trusted and read media; influencer journalists; to what extent does the audience consume news content from traditional media rather than using social media as the main source of information? whether the media should be viewed as an audience for changing public opinion rather than as a carrier of the message. The extent to which media should be involved is an important aspect of the analysis.

2. Search for media that specialise in the topic or have already focused on the issue, hashtags used to find the topic.

3. Frequency of information dissemination.

4. Mentions of the military unit in the context of a specific topic (thematic linkage).

5. The level of vulnerability of the target audience to disinformation and other hostile manifestations in the sphere of information confrontation, the spread of disinformation in the media and social networks, and trends in its spread.

An idea of the target audience can be formed based on the results of media monitoring and analysis conducted by public relations specialists, as well as on focus group surveys and research that form an idea of the target audience.

Based on the data, the public relations specialist creates a plan to achieve the goal, understanding the audience segments that are affected and the methods of communicating the message. Audience research provides a baseline against which to measure changes during and at the end of a campaign.

The formation of the image of the military is generated at the level of planning an information campaign, studying the intentions of actions in terms of studying the audience for interaction. The key questions when planning information campaigns are:

- What effect are you trying to achieve?
- Who is your audience?
- Planning visual information and images.
- Who is the target audience and how do they receive the information?
- Which medium(s) are the most relevant to reach these audiences?
- Are there any agreements, restrictions, cultural taboos, ground rules or ethical issues that should be considered when developing the shooting plan or that should be considered as guidelines for photographers?

– In what format will the audience view the images? Include this information to ensure that photographers and staff officers/noncommissioned officers understand the format requirements.

The least effective method of internal communication is to use communication channels that do not provide feedback. In this case, the recipient does not have the opportunity to ask questions, and the sender does not have the opportunity to make sure that the message was received correctly. One-way communication is acceptable for direct orders and other important information.

When planning your content, it is important to identify the following areas:

1. Who is your audience?
2. What is your message?
3. Channels of information delivery.
4. Time of delivery of information?
5. Security, confidentiality, or other limiting factors.

Prior to public communication in the information space or with a specific audience, public relations specialists conduct a detailed study of the target audience and the conditions of activity.

Official Internet resources of official pages contain content that forms the public's opinion on the image of the military (NATO, 2024 : 2).

The NATO Media Information Centre is the focal point for media during military operations [2]. Media activity, as defined by NATO guidelines, is designed to provide information through all media channels to a wide audience.

Conclusion. The image of the military is formed through the systematic dissemination of content for a specific audience segment. NATO's Annual Reports include reports by the Secretary General on Alliance activities and future plans. The report includes photo content that shows the training of the Alliance's military, personnel, and samples of equipment and weapons. The Alliance's primary purpose is to defend the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of its peoples, based on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. The 2023 report contains photo content – portraits of officers, NCOs, cadets of military educational institutions, photo content on exercises, training, international cooperation activities, infographics on warfare, military capabilities of Allies, readiness initiatives, deterrence of aggression (NATO, 2023 : 4).

The presence of military-related content in the media is an element of shaping the image of the military. Examples include publications on defence policy, international security, and innovations in weapons and equipment. Content on the Alliance's official platforms includes visual and textual content on exercises, international cooperation, and partnerships.

Press releases, which are a regular element of informing audiences about NATO operations and missions, are often accompanied by visual content of NATO training. Such visuals may include

content on troops, weapons, and joint operations. Examples include press releases on major exercises such as Defender-Europe or NATO air policing missions.

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly's reports publish content in the form of reports that provide visual content of NATO troops, training, and areas of engagement. These reports can be used to inform members of parliament about NATO's military commitments and operations. Examples include committee reports that examine NATO's response to emerging security threats and may include images of military deployments.

Reports on NATO's innovations and military exercises, which often include images of experimental military equipment and new operational tactics, are documents from NATO's Transformation Command.

Briefings and reports on specific NATO operations, such as those in Kosovo or Iraq, often include images of NATO soldiers, equipment and vehicles. These documents serve to inform member states and the public about the progress and results of NATO missions.

Peacekeeping is also an element of the military's image. Mission briefings that include photos of NATO troops in the field performing peacekeeping functions.

An important aspect is that the guiding documents are approved by NATO's senior staffs. In particular, the NATO Visual Identity Guidelines are defined, approved and disseminated by the Public Diplomacy Division at NATO Headquarters.

Workshops and recommendations on public relations guidelines are quite flexible, as it is up to the public relations officer in the Alliance countries to compile and develop them. The main thematic focus is on cases that are likely to occur in the unit. These are cases that are not covered in existing operational plans and strategies. The guidance materials summarise the issues, identify spokespersons, provide coordination instructions, and list messages.

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