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HOW ISIS USES SOCIAL MEDIA FOR RECRUITMENT

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SOLO FLIGHT

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By Maj Ata. AlSarayreh

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INTRODUCTION

The combination of affordability, strategic reach, and ability to micro-target your

audience by demographics, has made social media platforms the medium of choice for

extremist organization, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). At their fingertips, they

have access to strategic communication and global recruitment. They merely have to

extend their hands and touch their screens. They use Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter

with all the ease of those born to it, and are not struggling like traditional militaries full of

digital immigrants. In most cases, if not all, terrorists and extremist groups have primarily

used this avenue to fuel, intensify, and make their fight international. In today's world,

terrorist organizations not only use social media to spread propaganda and recruit, but

also to carry out the actual attacks by using their followers to do that in their name.

Antonia Ward from the U.S. think tank *RAND* stated in a comprehensive security study

that: "ISIS's strategic use of social media demonstrates the resourcefulness of the

terrorist-cum-insurgent organization, which mobilized an estimated 40,000 foreign

nationals from 110 countries to join the group."[1]

Increasing access to the internet, coupled with its open standards structure is

posing significant challenges to international governance, and increasing social strife for

domestic security, particularly in vulnerable countries. This medium gives the ISIS

militia the opportunity to target a vastly increased recruiting pool, concurrently

identifying the extremists, while avoiding detection by respective domestic security

authorities. The evidence shows an increased number of people who have been attracted

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[1] Antonia Ward, "ISIS's Social Media Use Poses a Threat to Stability in the Middle East and Africa," RAND Corporation Provides Objective Research Services and Public Policy Analysis | RAND, Last modified December 11, 2018, https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/12/isiss-use-of-social-media-still-poses-a-threat-to-stability.html.

both from the Middle East and Africa to join the team.[2] Consequently, strategic

recruitment has made it possible for ISIS to regain some of its lost territories, and protract

the conflict.[3] The importance of social medial as a recruiting instrument for ISIS is

inseparable from sustaining their tactical successes. The reach that social media grants,

coupled with ISIS's strong narrative, which focuses primarily on religious, social, and

material grounds, has made their organization successful and a harbinger of future

conflicts.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions that will be used in this essay, how effective is ISIS' use of various

social media platforms? In particular, what themes does ISIS use through social media to

attract followers?

This paper will argue that social media was ISIS' most effective strategic tool to

increase their ranks and spread their propaganda. It was also a highly effective tactical

level tool, used prior to attacks to coerce their enemies and encourage them to flee.

However, it was the use of social media within the cognitive domain that provided them

with a competitive advantage against both their adversaries and close ideological

competitors. Their level of informational dominance and volume of messaging is

unexplainable by any other means. Exploring this 'thread' will consist of two defined

steps. First will be the analysis of the various platforms that ISIS utilizes to shape, recruit,

and brainwash recruits. Second, the argument will shift to a detailed evaluation of the

common themes that ISIS utilizes to recruit its targeted individual include branding,

recruiting the youths, and its version of love versus hate, in order to illustrate how social

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[2] *Ibid.*,1.
[3] *Ibid.*,2.

media, coupled with the right message was able to create a digital community, providing the manpower and financial support that underwrote ISIS' tactical successes.

PLATFORMS

Social Media Theories

ISIS main focus of social media is international recruitment not proselytizing, though these shouldn't be considered completely divisible within the ISIS information campaign framework. It must ensure that it maintains, and increases, a high number of followers to replace those lost as a result of death and desertion. In this context, ISIS has been using different tools to carry out its recruitment process, in which social media use must be considered the most prevalent and ties together more recognizable methods. ISIS' broad approach of recruiting followers enabled by social media, however, is more dangerous and has helped to attain their recruitment targets and objectives.[4] ISIS has developed a brutal but effective approach to inspiring susceptible groups and attracting people to join or finance their cause. This translates into sustaining their militia activities in the field, and their population intimidation campaign, exemplified by their infamous murder cycles. The war in Syria and Iraq has established new social media networks, allowing ISIS to consolidate targeted virtual groups from various Twitter accounts, creating an exploitable and operationalized echo chamber. In doing so, ISIS can obtain not only the names of potential recruits but was also capable of mapping potential ISIS supporter profiles to further refine their messaging, increasing their social engineering efficacy.[5]

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[4] Sarah Ponder and Jonathan Matusit, "Examining ISIS Online Recruitment through Relational Development Theory," Connections: The Quarterly Journal 16, no. 4 (2017), 35-50. doi:10.11610/connections.16.4.02.

[5] Steve Rose, "The ISIS propaganda war: a hi-tech media jihad," The Guardian 7 (2014).

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is an approach that is extensively used by many people who seek specific media outfits with the aim of satisfying specified needs.[6] Historically, the UGT was applied during the Nazi Germany era; however, things have changed since that time as the only viable approach by then.[7] Seeing how it was applied in the past, ISIS grabbed on UGT and is utilizing it. On multiple occasions, ISIS has successfully manipulated and lured many young adults to join their team through social media.[8] ISIS targets younger people due to their communication and technological skills and, thus, serves its needs appropriately.

ISIS has effectively employed the UGT to propagate and recruit followers.[9] It is explainable by the UGT's distinct differences with other media effect theories approaches, which mostly focus on what the media generally does to people in return following their use. On the other hand, the UGT approach focuses on what the audience does with the media in fulfilling their wants and needs. Still, the media choices are not only limited to television, twitter, radio, snap chat, Facebook, and Instagram.[10] This model, to an extent, appears to be working in favour of ISIS in recruiting from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East countries. They are motivated by the fact that it clearly shows what kind of social media is being adopted, the necessary uses, and motivates its users to shy away from other sites available. In essence, a large number of previous works on media that targets the audiences anticipates a one-sided relationship. For instance, Magic

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[6] Gina M. Chen, "Tweet this: A uses and gratifications perspective on how active Twitter use gratifies a need to connect with others," Computers in Human Behavior 27, no. 2 (2011): 755-762. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2010.10.023.

[7] *Ibid.,*755.

[8] *Ibid*.,760.

[9] Anabel Quan-Haase and Alyson L. Young, "The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Approach as a Lens for Studying Social Media Practice," The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory, 2014, 269-286. doi:10.1002/9781118591178.ch15.

[10] Alex Schmid, "Challenging the Narrative of the "Islamic State"," Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies, 2015. doi:10.19165/2015.1.05.

Bullet theory that terms the audience as passive viewers with minimal response.[11] But in the case of UGT, it tries to justify the importance of comprehending the complicated relationship that exists between audience and media targeted by the ISIS group to spread their message.

Following the rise in innovation, the UGT approach seems more reliable for terrorist organizations, as it focuses on social-psychological relations with the mass media. This collaboration provides the audience with the freedom to choose the media sample that satisfies a specified need, while still giving them chances to attain affection, cognitive needs, social and personal integrative needs.[12] To expand, cognitive needs entail the desire to acquire knowledge, by the use of media. That this might just be a confirmation bias is irrelevant: it is that the audience is fed interactions in a manner that they perceive they are in charge of what they are learning. In contrast, affection needs are considerably emotional, not cognitive, and lastly, personal integrative needs are self-esteemed needs intending to attain credibility and stability.[13]

ISIS uses the UGT to its advantage by encoding messaging that would appeal to its target audience, which is mostly young elites with access to modern media platforms.[14] This indirect replication makes the audience believe it is actively participating in the ISIS project. These messages are utilized to modify how the targeted population views their actions, as they are made to believe their actions are justifiable in line with the Imam's teachings. Much like flat earthers, ISIS leads vulnerable people to

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[11] Steve Rose, "The ISIS propaganda war: a hi-tech media jihad," The Guardian 7 (2014).

[12] *Ibid.*,4.

[13] Sarah Ponder and Jonathan Matusit, "Examining ISIS Online Recruitment through Relational Development Theory," Connections: The Quarterly Journal 16, no. 4 (2017), 35-50. doi:10.11610/connections.16.4.02.

[14] Nelly Lahoud, "The 'Islamic State' and al-Qaeda," Oxford Scholarship Online, 2017, doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190650292.003.0002.

other vulnerable people, which amplifies their core message and gives it the look of legitimacy vis-à-vis an online community. Furthermore, this is tied into the development stages of UGT, progressing hierarchically First satisfying people's critical needs are highly recommended appearing at the base of the pyramid with essential needs, followed by more existential social needs.[15] This creates depth in the relationship and trust. Specifically, with respect to Twitter, the platform gives the audience the illusion of choosing threads and feeds friendships, but they are circular, coming back to an ISIS-controlled microcosm within the Internet. Contrary to older social media platforms like Facebook, the audience currently can hold onto the two accounts and effectively use them, so the online network needs to integrate across devices. ISIS does not just push out propaganda as an extension of analogy methods, they are interactive. It is like the difference between a movie and a video game.

ISIS applies the UGT to shape the message that it broadcasts. Many ISIS operatives have successfully lured others by displaying clips and Imams that would incite a positive reaction and feed into people's sense of justice. There are instances where ISIS showed people propaganda messages such as: "Look at the Muslims they are being killed. Look at the child, they killed his father."[16] These strategies are used to target an emotional response from their followers. By doing so, members have been brainwashed with the sentiments such as "even though we don't have guns like the enemy, we can still

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[15] *Ibid.,*23.

[16] Ronald Tiersky, "ISIS's Deadliest Weapon Is the Idea of Heaven," RealClearWorld, Last modified September 19, 2016, https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2016/09/19/isiss_deadliest_weapon_is_the_idea_of_heaven_1120 51.html.

defeat them and win."[17] This manipulation has successfully attracted candidates to join ISIS. ISIS often misquotes the Imam, which then fools a susceptible audience in believing that the war is justifiable. This clever manipulation, which does not represent any consensus within the faith, appeals to emotions of the targeted demographic to maximize recruitment. Indeed, the circulation of such clips on social media has charmed many youths (an inherently vulnerable group) who have opted to join ISIS and thus, populating the militia with not just fighters, but a generation of non-digital immigrants who can feed back into their technologically sophisticated propaganda arm. ISIS also initiated a training program through social media, broadcasting videos that demonstrate how to create improvised explosive devices. Although not directly linked to recruiting, these bomb-making videos are a necessary evolution in indoctrinating the online community. Let us take the bombing of the Boston Marathon as an example. ISIS turned their bomb-making investment into a recruiting campaign by glorifying killing and suicide. These acts introduced a susceptible population to the idolization of killing and martyring, which resulted in bolstering ISIS ranks.[18] However, because this happened through the virtual domain, it was a dissociative gateway that would then lead someone to immigrate to the Islam State. This is not to say that this was their original strategic plan that they had thought outthought sophisticated analysis. It is only to say the violence begets violence, sometimes in a very mindless way. ISIS has demonstrated its ability to take advantage of how violence can make messaging much simpler with fewer requirements to be logical or coherent; and, when combined with modern social media platforms, is an effective recruitment technique.

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[17] Nelly Lahoud, "The 'Islamic State' and al-Qaeda." Oxford Scholarship Online, 2017, doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190650292.003.0002
[18] *Ibid.,*21

ISIS and Twitter

Amid the numerous social media platforms used by ISIS to promote terror

attacks, Twitter has proven to be an excellent platform when it comes to recruitment.[19]

Similar to other social media platforms, Twitter has a vast audience and universal

outreach with more than 1 billion subscribers. Research has shown that Twitter has an

average of almost 350,000 twitter messages sent per minute and practically 500,000

tweets posted daily.[20] ISIS uses Twitter to not only disseminate their ideology but also to

recruit new members, which ultimately results in a global increase in intimidation and

fear. Even though Twitter cap a message at 140 characters, ISIS uses the platform

effectively by depicting messages of fear and false religious doctrines. By accompanying

the tweet with some well-worded comments, ISIS is capable of effectively broadcasting

and appealing to a massive Twitter audience.[21] ISIS' main goal is the mass propaganda of

an extremist message to the broadest receptive audience possible. ISIS Twitter reaches

far exceed its published handles as their message is also supported, and retweeted by

approximately thirty other online media groups. The sheer volume privileges simplicity

shock over reason. For example, the al-Battar Media Group, with 32,000 followers,

continually works to mobilize Twitter members to support ISIS by translating ISIS

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[19] *Ibid.,*20.
[20] Jytte Klausen, "Tweeting theJihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 38, no. 1 (2014): 1-22. doi:10.1080/1057610x.2014.974948.
[21] *Ibid*.,20.

releases and by independently producing media.[22] In 2014, Katz quickly demonstrated

the far reach that ISIS has on twitter:

> The Billion Muslim campaign has generated over 22,000 posts within four
> days since its launch on June 13, 2014. On June 20, 2014, Twitter users
> began distributing images displaying words of encouragement or the
> phrases "All Eyes on ISIS" and "We are all ISIS" in Twitter posts that
> feature the hashtag "#AllEyesOnISIS." The hashtag now totals over
> 30,000 tweets." Whilst Twitter has been actively suspending many of the
> Isis accounts, Isis continues to have an online presence, and as this study
> will show, are using this to intimidate and radicalize people.[23]

ISIS effectively uses Twitter as a publicity tool to convey their messages and pass

out false information to thousands of users. ISIS media broadcast uses Twitter to send out

bulk messages at a higher rate with retweets to their followers.[24] Twitter acts as an

amplifier that ISIS uses superbly to manipulate users in believing how good and normal it

is to participate in terror activities. It is aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the

younger, and highly influenceable, generation. Twitter also allows ISIS to achieve a more

sustained global presence, thus extending its reach to places like Europe. In a twisted

irony, this has further validated their status as a proto-state as legitimate states are forced

to deal with their social media attacks, and acknowledge they are at war with them. For

example, reports show that the ISIS fighters use Twitter to post beheaded photos with

captions like #Wolrdcup showing that they find pleasure in their killing activities.[25] The

gruesome killings of citizens from other countries forces States to take steps to curtail

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[22] Rita Katz, "Follow ISIS on Twitter: A Special Report on the Use of Social Media by Jihadists,"
Latest Articles, Last modified June 26, 2014.
https://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/categories/jihad/entry/192-follow-isis-on-twitter-a-special-report-on-the-use-of-social-media-by-jihadists.
[23]*Ibid.*,5.
[24] *Ibid.*,7.
[25] WIRED, "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War," WIRED, Last modified April 2016.
https://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat/.

ISIS's social media activity, which in turn further ostracizes and solidifies the hate of ISIS' recruitment demographic.

Statics shows that ISIS has thirty media groups in addition to its overall local pages.[26] The Al-Battar media group, which has over 30,000 followers, utilizes Twitter to mobilize members in supporting ISIS. The group also goes as far as editorializing its messages, which, once again, increased the audience that could be influenced.[27] ISIS is also assisted by numerous Muslim sympathizers that are encouraging, on Twitter, young individuals to support them. Often used captions such as #AllEyesOnISIS garnered almost 30,000 retweets.[28] Despite several attempts by Twitter to suspend such terrorism accounts, ISIS has been able to grow unchecked over the internet where it can intimidate and radicalize people into joining its movement. Twitter has been undeniably a vital tool to disseminate and tailor information by ISIS.

ISIS members and supporters have been able to generate several accounts on Twitter like the famous Al-I'tisam page used to market ISIS propaganda. Moreover, many accounts such as @Nnewsi, @ShamiWitness @Minbar, @mghol1122, @alfurqan2013, and @hashtag_ISIS have transformed Twitter into an ISIS megaphone used to propagate terror and criminal offences.[29] These accounts help ISIS factions in updating its ISIS followers on their daily activities. These independent accounts are capable of continuing the spread of ISIS's message when Twitter shuts down ISIS'

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[26] *Ibid.,9.*

[27] *Ibid.,10.*

[28] Rita Katz, "Follow ISIS on Twitter: A Special Report on the Use of Social Media by Jihadists," Latest Articles, Last modified June 26, 2014. https://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/categories/jihad/entry/192-follow-isis-on-twitter-a-special-report-on-the-use-of-social-media-by-jihadists.

[29] *Ibid.,23.*

accounts. It is done after a close examination of the accounts used in propagating the ISIS agenda. Of all these Twitter accounts, the @ShamiWitness account has emerged as the most profitable Twitter account and has positively been able to attract over 17,000 new members. Channel four news research shows that the tweets from this account have had almost 2 million views monthly.[30]

When journalists reported that the main user of @shamiWitness, who was identified as Mehdi Masroor, had been arrested, it produced a massive online response.[31] It led to a Twitter strike with the hashtag #FreeShamiWitness circulating, making it the highest trend on twitter at that moment in time. Between #FreeShamiWitness and the lack of ability for Twitter to positively link Mehdi Masroor with the handle @shamiWitness, the account was reactivated. This was an important moment for ISIS since a lack of internet governance led to a backlash that was not effectively resolved, encouraging ISIS boldness. It was an accelerant to ISIS' recruitment campaign. Videos and pictures that play on stereotypical ideologies and show terrorism, were confusingly allowed to be transmitted through Twitter. The Twitter structure enables terrorist groups like ISIS, through an enormous user-based platform, the ability to target the influenceable population, especially the youth who tend to retweet such posts, regardless to what extent they support the organization.

Extremist groups are viewed to be very active advocates when it comes to the public Internet and online publicity. It is a standard method used by terrorist groups, like

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[30] Jytte Klausen, "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 38, no. 1 (2014): 1-22, doi:10.1080/1057610x.2014.974948.
[31] *Ibid.,22.*

ISIS, to entice and employ their new possible members.[32] Cyberspace, especially Twitter,

is a much more comfortable and convenient method to communicate with a larger group

of people. Terrorist groups like ISIS take advantage of this technological improvement to

motivate their followers and lure them into becoming one of them. Twitter has, therefore,

immensely helped ISIS in the radicalization and transformation of individuals. The

change in the radicalization of the newest recruits was created by forgetting the recruit's

prior beliefs on terrorism. It uses Twitter to feed members with massive visual and

textual info that portrays the act of terrorism as a fun activity to indulge. Some of the

popular hashtags are #IslamDevleti, #PKK, #Iraq. It is at heart a disturbing modern

version of Romanticism. Violent murders and execution recordings are posted on Twitter

account to incite ISIS adversaries in a race to the ethical bottom, as well as to recruit

followers from other parts of the world who only tangentially feel the realities of war at

its most horrific.

ISIS and Facebook

Facebook is a platform that has a wide range of uses when it comes to terrorism.

Facebook is not only used for donation solicitation but also to recruit sympathizers and

followers. Technology has been the cornerstone in enhancing message delivery, which

terrorist organizations have continued to use to obtain information regarding different

users.[33] After accessing the user's information, the terrorist organization, such as ISIS,

will contact individuals who have shown interest or passion on the pages to join terror

organizations. Generally, terrorist recruiters have preferred to seek recruits rather than

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[32] Gina M. Chen, "Tweet this: A uses and gratifications perspective on how active Twitter use gratifies a need to connect with others," Computers in Human Behavior 27, no. 2 (2011): 755-762, doi:10.1016/j.chb.2010.10.023.

[33] Natalia Macrynikola and Regina Miranda, "Active Facebook use and mood: When digital interaction turns maladaptive," Computers in Human Behavior 97 (2019), 271-279, doi:10.1016/j.chb.2019.02.012.

sitting back and wait for them to join.[34] Most of the recruitment tools used by terrorists

have integrated anti-state propaganda and twisted religious orders. In this case, terrorists

have led their sympathizers to secret chat rooms on the darknet where they are provided

training manuals. Facebook also enables communication with the recruits to instruct them

to travel and join the militia in Iraq and Syria.[35]

Facebook, like other social media platforms, is borderless and can attract a large

number of people from all parts of the world. To achieve this, an individual would create

a personal profile or a page and upload his pictures accompanied by his contact

information. Afterwards, they would try to create a connection with other Facebook users

with the same interest creating a group of people. It is not exempting individuals and

organization with ill motives like ISIS, who uses that platform to attract people into

Islamic extremist groups. ISIS has used Facebook to promote terrorism through

comments, writings, and propaganda videos that brainwashes people. It modifies the

target individual, which starts to develop an interest in extreme Islamic religious

teachings that radicalized its believers.[36]

The extremist ideology is tailored to the targeted audience so that it only portrays

the facets that the group would find attractive. For example, terrorist groups have

continuously posted videos titled learning self-defence. In reality, these videos are solely

meant to radicalize people by teaching them how to use or assemble explosive weapons.

Other clips orient people on how to hack as well as encrypt deadly viruses.[37] Upon

identification of the interested parties, ISIS tailors further their content, ensuring the use

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[34] *Ibid.*,274.
[35] *Ibid.*,275.
[36] *Ibid.*,277.
[37] *Ibid.*,279.

of modern marketing concepts of repetition and reinforcement through a mix of

propaganda, profiling terrorist acts, and persuasive talks presented by supposed Islamic

authorities.[38] It generally culminates with showing the future recruits videos of training

sessions conducted at its terrorist training camps and by promising some incentives upon

recruitment.[39] Here is an example of a recruiting message that targets a Canadian

audience:

> I am your brother in Islam here in Syria. I originally come from Canada,
> [and while panoramic shots of a snow-covered Canadian mountain range
> with children playing hockey in the foreground appear on-screen he
> continues], before Islam I was like any other regular Canadian, I watched
> hockey, I went to the cottage in the summertime, I loved to fish . . . I liked
> the outdoors; I liked sports. [He goes on to urge other Canadians Muslims
> not to continue living in a land where they are oppressed, implying that
> even normal people like him are capable of making the trip to Syria and
> are accepted once they arrive].[40]

Facebook radicalization has been used as a method by ISIS to transform followers

into more violent extremist individuals. It maximized the use of propaganda in encoded

video or writing to effectively perused susceptible people. Facebook internal algorithms,

in turn, reinforce the echo chamber effect, and synthesizing groups with historic

grievances whoever unrelated they are. In the U.S, ISIS has continuously targeted

African Americans because they see them as oppressed, vulnerable and influenceable,

and by following their situations, ISIS can capitalize on mixed messaging. ISIS also

employs propaganda that tends to radicalize black people against a white population and

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[38] Christina Schori Liang, "Cyber Jihad: understanding and countering Islamic State propaganda," GSCP Policy Paper 2, no. 4 (2015): 1-12.

[39] Dr.P., P.M. Vishnu Balasubramanian and Sushmitha Sidharth, "Social Media as a Recruitment Tool," Bonfring International Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management Science 6, no. 3 (2016), 108-110. doi:10.9756/bijiems.7468.

[40] Richard N. Landers and Gordon B. Schmidt. "Social Media in Employee Selection and Recruitment: An Overview," Social Media in Employee Selection and Recruitment, 2016, 3-11. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-29989-1-1.

especially a majority white authority.[41] It is executed through the dissemination of fake

mythical relationships that supposedly link African Americans' reality to that of the

Islamic religion. This in itself, is not a new tactic and goes back to Malcom X and the

Nation of Islam, but social media's ability to make global connections is. ISIS' goal is to

create a pool of Americans that could be used to conduct terror acts on American soil.

Africa being a developing continent, faces several challenges, not limited to

dictatorship, high unemployment, and technological latency. Terrorist groups have

primarily taken advantage of these existing obstacles to convert and recruit Africans into

ISIS. It has psychologically shaped terrorists to be fighters for justice by those of extreme

Islamic believes.[42] ISIS uses Facebook to attract many youths by falsely presenting the

benefits of joining such groups, which include financial stability, and a fight for justice.

These powerful messages, coupled with socio-economic pressures, are increasingly

viewed as the only option available. The recruits are trained and made to execute violent

and sometimes deadly actions in Africa and other parts of the world.[43] For example, the

1998 bombing of the United States embassy in Nairobi, Kenya by Africans ISIS believers

was executed to demonstrate their rebellion against the United States' operations in the

Muslim states of Iraq.[44] The operation was mostly planned and coordinated through

Facebook.

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[41] Vernon Silver, and Sarah Frier, "Bloomberg," Bloomberg - Are You a Robot?, Last modified May 10, 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-10/terrorists-creep-onto-facebook-as-fast-as-it-can-shut-them-down.

[42] Donald Holbrook, "A critical analysis of the role of the internet in the preparation and planning of acts of terrorism," Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict 8, no. 2 (2015): 121-133.

[43] *Ibid.*, 122.

[44] Jason Burke, "Africa Embassy Bombings: Attacks That Propelled Bin Laden Into the Limelight," The Guardian, Last modified November 29, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/20/africa-embassy-bombings-osama-bin-laden-kenya-tanzania-al-qaida.

THEMES

Branding

ISIS has succeeded in recruiting relevant capabilities to the organization from across the world using social media. It is believed that in 2017, ISIS has more than 30,000 members from at least 100 countries.[45] Social media has enabled the transfer of information from one country to another with little to no carrying cost. ISIS seized the opportunity to use social media to spread its propaganda, false religious information, recruit new soldiers, and incite the public against various forms of authority. ISIS employs a multitude of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and online magazines like Dabiq, supported by countless chat groups.[46] ISIS is waging war on the ground, online, and in cyberspace. Over the years, extremist groups have strengthened their communication strategies by recruiting highly trained individuals, focusing on recruits with computer knowledge and information technology skills.[47] The war in the cyber domain is centrally managed and executed by specialists within the organization under what could be termed as an information ministry.[48] This department has succeeded in producing high-quality videos, speeches, images, and radios shows which are typically distributed through a wide range of authorized news agencies like al-Hayat Media Center, al-Bayan, and Furqan.[49] ISIS is also using official news agencies to

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[45] Steve Rose, "The ISIS propaganda war: a hi-tech media jihad." The Guardian 7 (2014).

[46] Clara Pellerin, "Communicating terror: An Analysis of ISIS Communication Strategy," Science Po Kuwait Program, http://www.sciencespo.fr/psia/sites/sciencespo.fr.psia/files/PELLERIN_Clara_KSP_Paper_A ward.pdf.

[47] *Ibid.,*22.

[48] *Ibid.,*24.

[49] Nathan K Schneider, "ISIS and Social Media: The Combatant Commander's Guide to Countering ISIS's Social Media Campaign," 2015, Last modified June 16, 2014, doi:10.21236/ada621060.

achieve legitimacy and spread its influence beyond the Middle East borders. To strengthen its cause towards legitimacy, ISIS is imitating the logos of popular and reputable sources such as Al Jazeera. In October 2014, ISIS created the Al-Zora Foundation, which they use as a new wing of social media. Finally, ISIS develop a smartphone application that is widely used by its followers and is known as Dawn of Glad Tidings.[50]

Recruiting the Youth

There are numerous documented cases of teenagers being stopped as they are actively trying to leave their countries to join ISIS.[51] Most of these young people admitted to having been recruited through social media platforms. For instance, Shannon Conley, nineteen years old, was stopped at an airport in the United States by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. She was convinced that her nursing skills could help the organization. Shannon was lured by a Tunisian recruiter who promised to marry her.[52] Another teenager named Mohammed Hamzah Khan was stopped in Chicago with his younger sister and brother. According to Khan, the government of the United States was using their taxes to kill innocent Muslims across the borders. Therefore, Khan, with his young siblings, decided to join ISIS to avoid the killing of Muslims through the use of their taxes.[53] In October 2014, three young ladies from Germany ages 17, 16, and 15 were reportedly stopped on their way to join the ISIS group in Syria.[54] These are just a few cases that demonstrate the reach that ISIS has and its ability to influence the mind of

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[50] J.M. Berger, "How ISIS Games Twitter," The Atlantic, Last modified June 16, 2014. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-iraq-twitter-social-media-strategy/372856/.

[51] *Ibid.,6.*

[52] *Ibid.,6.*

[53] Ben Connable, Natasha Lander and Kimberly Jackson, "Beating the Islamic State: Selecting a New Strategy for Iraq and Syria," 2017. doi:10.7249/rr1562.

[54] *Ibid.,23.*

the younger generation. ISIS skillfully used social media to lure these people through

propaganda, incitement, and false religious messages. One of the messages that ISIS

utilize to propagate their false religious intentions is:

> For an Islamist fundamentalist, Heaven is a real place, a Garden full of
> sensual delights. For example, take the famous claim that in Heaven, a
> deserving Muslim will enjoy the company of 72 virgins. This is nowhere
> mentioned in the Qoran. It is found in a fanciful hadith by Ibn Kathir,
> writing in the 14th century, hundreds of years after prophet Mohammed's
> death: "Prophet Mohammed was heard saying, 'The smallest reward for
> the people of paradise (the meaning of course only men) is an abode
> where are 80,000 servants and 72 wives, over which stands a dome
> decorated with pearls, aquamarine, and ruby…'" Innumerable such tall
> tales appear throughout the history of Islamic commentary.[55]

In 2015, then-President Obama with Secretary of State John Kerry, publicly

admitted that ISIS group is using propaganda to target, lure and recruit young people

across the world.[56] In his speech, President Obama emphasizes the need and urgency to

shut down all the machinery, such as social media, as well as the propaganda, which is

being used by terrorists to recruit young adults into dangerous groups.[57] In a notable

address made in February 2015 at the Washington summit to counter violent extremist,

President Obama stated that:

> Terrorist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, deliberately target their
> propaganda in the hopes of reaching and brainwashing young Muslims,
> especially those who may be disillusioned or wrestling with their identity.
> The high-quality videos, the online magazines, the use of social media,

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[55] Ronald Tiersky, "ISIS's Deadliest Weapon Is the Idea of Heaven," RealClearWorld, Last modified September 19, 2016, https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2016/09/19/isiss_deadliest_weapon_is_the_idea_of_heaven_112051.html.

[56] Emma L. Briant, "Propaganda 'boundaries' and the extended apparatus," Propaganda and counter-terrorism, 2015, doi:10.7765/9781847799630.00007.

[57] FBI: ISIS message resonating with young people from U.S., West, CBS NEWS (Mar. 5, 2015, 8:15 PM), http://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-targeting-young-people-from-u-s-western-countries-as-recruits.

terrorists Twitter accounts, it's all designed to target today's young people online.[58]

Love Versus Hate

ISIS produces numerous videos that air propaganda messages, which are intended to portray their group as the most dangerous and competent group on the battlefield. These videos are of high-quality, and in most cases, incorporate slow-motion scenes, short dialogue, and montages.[59] The content of the video consists typically of mass shootings, beheadings, and/or torturing of the considered enemies within their self-proclaimed territories. These videos depict a dedicated group, a brotherhood, that shows inclusion and equality.[60] These videos also encourage the mass to support ISIS' cause, especially the fight against a common enemy. They also bear the message of radicalization of the international community so that victory in the Caliphate can be achieved.[61] ISIS has ingeniously manipulated its message to show two simultaneous vision, one of hate and one of love. The videos are used to provoke or frighten their adversaries and at the same time to recruit sympathizers from different parts of the world.

The widespread distribution of such videos has succeeded in persuading young people, both men and women, that the Caliphate is the idealistic world, especially to those that are part of the cause. The ISIS love and hate messages have successfully motivated a large number of individuals to migrate from their respective countries to the

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[58] Kathy Gilsinan, "Why ISIS's Power on Twitter and Facebook Is Overrated," The Atlantic, Last modified February 23, 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/is-isiss-social-media-power-exaggerated/385726/.

[59] Steve Rose, "The ISIS propaganda war: a hi-tech media jihad." The Guardian 7 (2014).

[60] Richard N. Landers and Gordon B. Schmidt, "Social Media in Employee Selection and Recruitment: An Overview," 3-11.

[61] Kathy Gilsinan, "Why ISIS's Power on Twitter and Facebook Is Overrated." The Atlantic, Last modified February 23, 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/is-isiss-social-media-power-exaggerated/385726/

ISIS-controlled region for the sake of Allah.[62] In ISIS, Al-Hayat Media, as mentioned earlier, is responsible for the video production and its primary duty is to lure the non-Arabic speaking population.[63] Additionally, Al-Hayat Media produces its love and hate videos in numerous languages such as English and Turkish, to cover a wide range of people and increase its reach.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated ISIS's proficiency with social media and the extraordinary success that ISIS has had to attract new followers and recruits. ISIS's rise and successes in battle are inseparable from their strategic communications and recruitment. The casualties they have suffered and the enemies they have created through their abhorrent version of Islam would be unsustainable without social media providing a pool of new frantic fighters. Additionally, the point was made that ISIS has not only solely attracted recruits but has also used social media to grow terrorists through modern marketing and social media techniques. It demonstrated that the materials, religious messages, and social aspects were the most effective recruiting themes but were successful because they were carried upon a medium that allows the identification and isolation of vulnerable targets. The analysis was done through an evaluation of the various platforms that ISIS utilizes to shape, recruit, and brainwash recruits. It then shifted to a detailed evaluation of the common themes that ISIS utilizes to recruit its targeted individual include branding, recruiting the youths and love versus hate.

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[62] H. Gil de Zúñiga, T. Diehl, B. Huber and J. Liu, "Personality Traits and Social Media Use in 20 Countries: How Personality Relates to Frequency of Social Media Use, Social Media News Use, and Social Media Use for Social Interaction," Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking 20, no. 9 (2017), 540-552. doi:10.1089/cyber.2017.0295.

[63] Martin Rudner, "Electronic Jihad: The Internet as Al Qaeda's Catalyst for Global Terror," Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 40, no. 1 (2017): 10-23.

Social media has transformed terrorism forever. ISIS successfully exploited the vast data associated with social media and the interconnectivity of the internet to advance their political and military agenda. The essential organizational demands such as recruitment, publicity, and funding are achieved conveniently by the click of a button. With the use of technology, the traditional recruit pool has been vastly extended. ISIS recruiters can now reach, manipulate, recruit, and instruct candidates without leaving their houses. ISIS uses social media to launch its propaganda and can reach unimaginable potential recruits across the borders. It is important to note that the spread of such information on social media is broadcast without restrictions or regulatory oversight.

ISIS maximizes the use of online platforms through multiple users, which allows them to mass discriminate tailored messages to social media, chat applications, and other websites. This technique has extended the reach of ISIS significantly. Technology is continuously evolving and can be easily manipulated to advance good and evil causes. Social media is providing unprecedented open access to lure young, malleable individuals directly as well as influencing new supporters through hashtags, messaging, and much more. To date, efforts to impede the ISIS recruiting machine on social media have proven relatively ineffective. It is therefore imperative that governments and the private sector dedicate more efforts to counter the use of social media by such groups.

The analysis presented in this paper is explicit, ISIS favours the uses of social media to influence and lure more members to join their team. For instance, the use of twitter to discriminate false religious messages has been used extensively to lure different members to join the ISIS across the world. Facebook links and messages are also other crucial platforms that the group has used to lure many members to join the group

worldwide. In many instances, ISIS twists religious messages such as *the deadly heaven messages of the Promised Land* and *the 72 Virgins* to entice followers to join. They have even employed themes such as violence branding, youth recruitment, and love versus hate, through the use of selective chapters to foster their radicalization message.

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