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THESIS

**THE STRATEGIC USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
BY THE ISLAMIC STATE: EXPLORING
THE CONTENT AND TECHNOLOGY OF EXTREMISM**

by

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EXPLORING THE CONTENT AND TECHNOLOGY OF EXTREMISM**

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ABSTRACT

In 2014, the Islamic State (IS) captured the world's attention with the declaration of the Caliphate. IS showed significant success in exploiting the social media landscape to deliver costly signals that advanced its outbidding, intimidation, and polarization strategies. This thesis explored the nature of the content produced by IS from 2013 to 2018 and explained its primary purposes. Specifically, IS exploited social media platforms to intimidate internal opposition to its ascendancy and dissuade Western countries from intervening against its self-declared state. IS also has portrayed itself through social media as both an uncompromising militant movement and an effective rebel government in order to outbid rival rebel groups, especially those affiliated with al Qaeda. Its extremist violence has a dual purpose. Inside its territories, it seeks to polarize Muslims into clear categories of Sunni in-groups and Shiite out-groups; outside of its territories, it seeks to polarize the world into Muslim in-groups against non-Muslim out-groups. Therefore, despite its fanatical aura, IS deploys violence strategically to achieve recruitment and deterrence goals. Apart from these strategies, this thesis describes the nature of the social media technology used by IS media operators and the ways they sought to circumvent restrictions on social media. There are clear patterns of exploiting social media based on tested models of social media campaigns that advance its objectives.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AQ	al Qaeda
AQAP	al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQI	al Qaeda in Iraq
CCIF	Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en France
dWeb	decentralized Web
EU	European Union
GIMF	Global Islamic Media Front
ICSR	International Centre for the Study of Radicalization
IS	Islamic State
ISD	Institute of Strategic Dialogue
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and Levant
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
ISN	Islamic State News
ISR	Islamic State Report
NGOs	Non-government organizations
OPSEC	Operational Security
P2P	Peer-to-Peer
TAILS	The Amnesic Incognito Live System
TOR	Third Party Onion Routing
UN	United Nations
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
VPN	Virtual Private Networks

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. TERRORISM AND COSTLY SIGNALING THEORY

Strategic use of violence by terrorist groups to achieve some of their goals is not new.¹ While most scholars acknowledge violence is often used to achieve goals, the scholarly literature considers these actions to be primarily symbolic and not strategic.² In the case of terrorists, violence is a form of signal to advance some of the strategies they adopt.³ With this signal, the terrorists want to send the message that they do not limit themselves to words but are willing and able to do anything to achieve their goals. The theory of costly signaling began with the observation of animal behavior and was later adapted to explain some of the behaviors of individuals within human society. According to this theory, “animals (including humans) may send honest signals about desirable personal characteristics and access to resources through costly biological displays, altruism, or other behaviors that would be hard to fake.”⁴

The adoption of costly signaling by terrorists is not a modern phenomenon. During the Roman occupation of Palestine, Jewish zealots, known as Sicarii, used to kill their compatriots who were supporters of the Romans in public. In order to make their message as clear as possible, the Sicarii carried out the killings in public places, such as squares, so that there were enough eyewitnesses to spread the message.⁵ As Andrew H.

¹ Mia M. Bloom, “Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 119, no. 1 (2004): 64, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20202305>; Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” *The MIT Press, International Security*, 31, no. 1 (2006): 49–50, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4137539?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

² Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 4th ed. (California: UC Press, 2017), 154.

³ Kydd and Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” 50.

⁴ Francis T. McAndrew, “Costly Signaling Theory,” in *Encyclopedia of Evolutionary Psychological Science*, ed. Todd K. Shackelford and Viviana A. Weekes-Shackelford (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 1, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-16999-6_3483-1.

⁵ Emerson T. Brooking and P.W. Singer, “War Goes Viral,” *The Atlantic*, October 11, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/11/war-goes-viral/501125/>.

Kydd and Barbara F. Walter argue, “terrorist violence is a form of costly signaling.”⁶ The publicity of extremist acts, such as the beheading of prisoners, is a form of “costly signaling” or “strategic provocation.”⁷ The commission of such acts is intended to influence the beliefs of people across the spectrum that the extremists are confronting. That is, those who commit the acts try to influence the beliefs of their enemies, their allies, their supporters, and the neutral people of their territory in ways that help their own purpose. Terrorists groups emit costly signals for several reasons. Some of these acts are intended to attract new fighters, either local or foreign,⁸ to show the group’s hierarchy the commitment of the actors,⁹ and to cover up any foreign agents who have infiltrated the group;¹⁰ and to pressure its followers to prove their allegiance to the terrorist group and its purpose.¹¹

For the application of the aforementioned theory to achieve successful results, it must meet the following conditions concerning the signal and the signaler. The relationship between these two terms is that the signaler emits a signal in order to influence the receiver.¹² So, first, the signal must be clear and understandable to others. Moreover, it must be able to attract larger audiences. Second, it must be costly for the signaler in energy, power, or some other relevant area. Third, the signal must reliably reveal some of the characteristics of the signaler, such as dedication, strength, ability,

⁶ Kydd and Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” 50.

⁷ Simone Molin Friis, “‘Beyond Anything We Have Ever Seen’: Beheading Videos and the Visibility of Violence in the War against ISIS,” *The Royal Institute of International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015): 729, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12341>.

⁸ Barbara F. Walter, “The Extremist’s Advantage in Civil Wars,” *The MIT Press, International Security* 42, no. 2 (2017): 9, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00292.

⁹ Walter, 11.

¹⁰ Scott Gates and Sukanya Podder, “Social Media, Recruitment, Allegiance and the Islamic State,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015): 110–11, <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/446>.

¹¹ Thomas Hegghammer, “The Recruiter’s Dilemma: Signaling and Rebel Recruitment Tactics,” *SAGE, Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 1 (2012): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343312452287>.

¹² Diego Gambetta and Michael Bacharach, “Trust in Signs,” in *Trust in Society*, vol. II, The Russell Sage Foundation Series on Trust (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 159, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/209409853>.

risk-taking, and leadership. The last condition is that the application of such behavior should bring some significant benefits to the signaler.¹³ Finally, as Diego Gambetta mentions, signals are not just “cues, marks and symbolic signs.”¹⁴ Signals are thus different from “cheap talk” that is less credible to the audience. For example, for jihadists, a battle wound from Afghanistan or Iraq would be a more reliable sign than would be a verbal statement praising the Islamic State (IS).¹⁵

Terrorist groups have made extensive use of media and sophisticated propaganda to achieve these conditions detailed by costly signaling theory. Media, in all its forms, plays a decisive role in modern society. The information and images projected by the media on citizens, as well as the interaction between the media and the public, are what shape society’s perception of social reality.¹⁶ The terrorist groups have long realized this power of the media, and they tried in every way to strengthen their impact on various types of media. As Osama Bin Laden mentioned “[i]t is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact its ratio may reach 90% of the total preparation for the battle.”¹⁷ Similarly, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher argued that the publicity is the oxygen of terrorism, and terrorists at all times have understood this and acted accordingly.¹⁸

¹³ Eric Alden Smith and Rebecca L. Bliege Bird, “Turtle Hunting and Tombstone Opening: Public Generosity as Costly Signaling,” *Evolution and Human Behaviour* 21 (2000): 245–47.

¹⁴ Diego Gambetta, “Deceptive Mimicry in Humans,” in *Perspectives on Imitation: From Neuroscience to Social Science*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 231–32, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=3338568>.

¹⁵ The Islamic State (IS - also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, ISIS/ ISIL or Daesh) in Craig Whiteside, “Lying to Win: The Islamic State Media Department’s Role in Deception Efforts,” *The RUSI Journal*, 165, no. 1 (March 9, 2020): 130–141 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2020.1734318>.

¹⁶ Brian A. Monahan, *The Shock of the News: Media Coverage and the Making of 9/11* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 30.

¹⁷ Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 356.

¹⁸ Nacos, 357.

B. MEDIA DYNAMICS AND THE ADVENT OF THE INTERNET

Media dynamics have skyrocketed with the advent of the Internet, and every new technological breakthrough on the Internet has further enhanced this dynamic. Modern terrorists quickly moved to the Internet and began to explore it to their advantage. In 2005, the leader of al Qaeda (AQ), Ayman al Zawahiri, stated that “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.”¹⁹ Al-Shabaab and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al Qaeda affiliates, quickly followed in the footsteps of their parent organization. In fact, the leader of al-Shabab Omar Hammami once stated emphatically that “[t]he war of narratives has become even more important than the war of navies, napalm, and knives.”²⁰ Terrorists have been using the Internet for a long time, and it has become their favorite tool. Raphael Cohen-Almagor mentions that, according to the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism in 2014, the number of online sites operated by terrorist groups had increased from 12 in 1998 to more than 4,800 in 2010.²¹

The Internet is decentralized, allowing access to anyone who wants it, and at the same time, it offers the user anonymity, protecting him or her from possible controls or restrictions.²² For this reason, all terrorist groups now have their own pages on the Internet, and through them, the groups promote their propaganda, recruit new members, and gain funding.²³ In planning, organizing, and coordinating terrorist attacks, terrorists

¹⁹ Christina Schori Liang, *Cyber Jihad: Understanding and Countering Islamic State Propaganda*, GCSP Policy Paper (Geneva, Switzerland: Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 2015), 2, https://www.jugendundmedien.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/3_Medienkompetenz/Gegennarrative/Cyber_Jihad_-_Understanding_and_Countering_Islamic_State_Propaganda.pdf.

²⁰ Simon Cottee, “Why It’s So Hard to Stop ISIS Propaganda,” *The Atlantic*, March 2, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/03/why-its-so-hard-to-stop-isis-propaganda/386216/>.

²¹ Raphael Cohen - Almagor, *Confronting the Internet’s Dark Site: Moral and Social Responsibility on the Free Highway*, 1st ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 179.

²² Leevia Dillon, “Cyberterrorism: Using the Internet as a Weapon of Destruction,” in *Combating Violent Extremism and Radicalization in the Digital Era*, Advances in Religious and Cultural Studies (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2016), 429–30.

²³ Gabriel Weimann, *Terrorism in Cyberspace: The Next Generation*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C., New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Columbia University Press, 2015), 18.

have leveraged these features of the Internet, which has boosted the whole process by making everything more straightforward, and at a lower cost to the group, without compromising the level of security and secrecy of the older methods used by terrorists.²⁴ As Gabriel Weimann argues “the Internet is in many ways an ideal arena for terrorist and other extremist group activities. The great virtues of the Internet—its ease of access, lack of regulation, vast potential audiences, fast flow of information and so forth—have converted into the advantages of groups committed to terrorizing societies to achieve their goals. [Moreover], the anonymity offered by Internet is very attractive for modern terrorists.”²⁵

The evolution of the World Wide Web to Web 2.0 has led to the creation of social media and the interaction of users with each other. Along with the web upgrade came smartphones that gave the user a choice to use the Internet and its applications from his or her mobile phone. For example, P. W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking cite the existence of smartphones as one of the factors that made IS more effective than previous terrorist groups.²⁶ These two developments have boosted the use of mobile phones and social media to new heights, even in the poorest parts of the world. In 2018, the Pew Research Center surveyed 19 emerging and developing countries on the access their citizens have to the Internet, whether they own smartphones, and whether they use social media. For the period between 2013 to 2018, the percentage of citizens who had smartphones increased from 24% to 42% and the use of social media from 34% to 53%, respectively.²⁷ Social networks, in particular, dominated all aspects of users’ social life, gaining enormous momentum. The term social media refers to the means of interacting

²⁴ Weimann, 19.

²⁵ Weimann, 21.

²⁶ P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking, *Like War: The Weaponization of Social Media*, 1st ed. (New York: First Mariner Books, 2019), 150.

²⁷ Jacob Poushter, Caldwell Bishop, and Hanyu Chwe, “Social Media Use Continues To Rise in Developing Countries, but Plateaus Across Developed Ones,” Pew Research Center, June 19, 2018, 4, https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/06/15135408/Pew-Research-Center_Global-Tech-Social-Media-Use_2018.06.19.pdf#:~:text=Social%20Media%20Use%20Continues%20to%20Rise%20in%20Developing,benefits%20of%20internet%20access%20and%20social%20media%20use.

and communicating with groups of people through online communities. Social media appears in many forms and is the social interaction between people who create, share, or exchange information and ideas across virtual communities and networks. Nowadays, “[e]very minute, Facebook users post 500,000 new comments, 239,000 new statuses, and 45,000 new photos; YouTube users, more than 500 hours of video; and Twitter users, more than 350,000 tweets.”²⁸

The impact of social media on users is multifaceted. First, according to Dr. Jim Taylor in *Psychology Today*, “the goal for many now in their use of social media becomes how they can curry acceptance, popularity, status, and, by extension, self-esteem through their profiles and postings.”²⁹ Second, social media shapes the user’s perception of social events. Through the algorithms that the platforms have created to keep their users loyal to them, and have trapped users in a circle of information and other users who share similar characteristics. Also, this technology pushes the user to interact only with likeminded people.³⁰ This process creates the “echo-chamber” phenomenon, which, “in this context, is taken to be an environment where people experience only similar opinions to their own, and where contradictory or alternative opinions are not considered.”³¹ Hence, the “echo-chamber” creates a personal online universe for the user, making him more vulnerable to extreme propaganda.³² For instance, the user comes in contact with a specific group of people who have the same

²⁸ Singer and Brooking, *Like War: The Weaponization of Social Media*, 248.

²⁹ Jim Taylor, “Technology: Is Technology Stealing Our (Self) Identities?,” *Psychology Today*, July 27, 2011, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-power-prime/201107/technology-is-technology-stealing-our-self-identities>.

³⁰ Frederic I. Solop, “‘RT@BarackObama We Just Made History’: Twitter and the 2008 Presidential Election,” in *Communicator-in-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 47, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docId>.

³¹ Reed D. Phill, “Are Echo Chambers a Threat to Intellectual Freedom?,” *Psychology Today*, March 30, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/digital-world-real-world/201903/are-echo-chambers-threat-intellectual-freedom>.

³² Darrell M. West and Jack Karsten, “Inside the Social Media Echo Chamber,” *Brookings* (blog), December 9, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2016/12/09/inside-the-social-media-echo-chamber/>.

views as him, and gradually he becomes marginalized from his peers. And if this online social circle develops more extreme ideas, then the user will become more extreme as well.³³

Furthermore, in such an isolated environment, all the trends that have shaped public opinion for years have also found application in social media, but to a much greater degree and intensity. The “CNN effect” is magnified in fractions of a second, with each serious event receiving colossal publicity in a minimum of time.³⁴ Furthermore, many times the information about these events is distorted through manipulations with the help of amplified mechanisms, such as bots and trolls.³⁵ Finally, the protagonists of events that gained much publicity have often emerged as public personas who influence social life in various ways.³⁶ Social media has given great power to these people who can more easily influence their followers, making para-social interaction contact on a more personal level.³⁷

The new possibilities of the Internet, which have enabled the increased interaction between users, have changed the tactics of terrorists. In the recruitment of new members, the groups no longer need to wait for the candidate to approach them, but instead can employ an aggressive tactic and approach the future terrorists themselves.³⁸ As Ella Minty highlights, “this “echo-chamber” was to put best use by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its extremists to attract more and more supporters and incite

³³ Christina Pazzanese, “Danger in the Internet Echo Chamber,” Harvard Law Today, March 21, 2017, <https://today.law.harvard.edu/danger-internet-echo-chamber/>.

³⁴ Bloom, “Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding,” 85–86.

³⁵ J.-B. Jeangène Vilmer et al., *Information Manipulation: A Challenge for Our Democracies* (Paris, France: Policy Planning Staff (CAPS) of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM), 2018), 83–84, <https://www.rcmediafreedom.eu/Publications/Reports/Information-Manipulation-A-Challenge-for-Our-Democracies>.

³⁶ Monahan, *The Shock of the News: Media Coverage and the Making of 9/11*, 35.

³⁷ Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance,” *Psychiatry* 19, no. 3 (August 1956): 215, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1956.11023049>.

³⁸ Weimann, *Terrorism in Cyberspace: The Next Generation*, 19.

disenfranchised youth to acts of terrorism across Europe, Middle East, and U.S.”³⁹ This can be seen in the numbers of foreign fighters who traveled to join the IS army. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) estimated that by 2015 20,000 foreign fighters had gone to Syria, of which about 4,000 were European Union (EU) residents or nationals.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ella Minty, *Social Media and the Islamic State*, 1st ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2020), 24.

⁴⁰ Peter R. Neumann, “Foreign Fighter Total in Syria/Iraq Now Exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s,” *ICSR* (blog), January 26, 2015, <https://icsr.info/2015/01/26/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/>.

II. TERRORISM IN MEDIA

A. A SHORT HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TERRORISTS AND MEDIA

The use of the media by Islamists to preach their message dates back several years. Jihadists use audiovisual media for their strategic communications, and have been changing these practices over the past few decades to reflect the changes in the conflict mode and technology. Khomeini was the first in Iran to use videotape to spread his message against the Shah.⁴¹ Originally from Iraq, and then from Paris, Khomeini recorded cassettes non-stop and then distributed them to the world. In 1979, for example, about 110,000 cassettes of Khomeini speeches were released.⁴² Through the example of Khomeini, it is possible to observe some principles that have prevailed in the use of media for the dissemination of messages. First, with these videotapes, Khomeini was able to avoid the Shah's censorship. Second, fans could easily copy the cassettes' contents to as many copies as they wanted, and they, in turn, could share them with others. So, since Khomeini could not speak on Iranian radio or television, he could reach any Iranian through the tapes. Finally, with 60% of Iranians illiterate in 1977, the audio version of Khomeini's speeches bypassed this difficulty.⁴³ The prevailing conditions in Iran at that time made video and audio tapes the right tool for the right job.

Similarly, in the 1980s, the Mujahideen of Afghanistan used audio cassettes, printed journals, and videotapes to secure donations and attract foreign fighters. Over the next decade, as jihadist fighters from the Bosnian war spread to the Kashmir hills, their propaganda grew and acquired additional forms such as battlefield films, audio wills, and

⁴¹ Peter Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York & London: Routledge, 2014), 252.

⁴² Haroon K. Ullah, *Digital World War: Islamists, Extremists, and the Fight for Cyber Supremacy*, 1st ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 110.

⁴³ Ullah, 110.

pamphlets.⁴⁴ With the advent of the Internet as a means of propagating propaganda, the jihadists began to reach a growing audience. It is also the period when the jihadists set up the first forums as a reference point for terrorist circles and broadcast the first videos depicting extreme violence.⁴⁵

Al Qaeda and its affiliates were the first terrorist organizations to systematically use the media in all its forms to spread their propaganda. AQAP began by publishing the first radical Islamist online magazine in 2003. The magazine was in Arabic and edited by Sawt al-Jihad (Voice of Jihad). The magazine was published until 2005 when the security authorities of Saudi Arabia shut it down.⁴⁶ In the same year, al Qaeda published the bimonthly magazine al-Fursan, which continued until 2007. In the meantime, the AQ Islamic media front, Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), published the weekly magazine of *Sada al-Rafidayn* (“The echo of the two rivers”).⁴⁷ Jabhat al-Nuṣra, the al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, also published the English-language magazine *al Risalah*, a magazine that attempted to build the legitimacy and religious authority of al-Nuṣra against the IS.⁴⁸ These magazines are some of the many jihadist magazines that have been published ever since. At first, most of them were in Arabic, but then magazines were published in many other languages, including Urdu, German, Russian, French, English, and Turkish.⁴⁹ AQ’s most famous magazine, and to be precise its AQAP subsidiary, was the English-language

⁴⁴ Charlie Winter, *Media Jihad: The Islamic State’s Doctrine for Information Warfare* (London, UK: ICSR, 2017), 6–7, www.icsr.info; Mark Bourrie, *The Killing Game*, Kindle (Toronto, Canada: Patrick Crean Editions, 2016), 107.

⁴⁵ Malcolm Nance and Chris Sampson, *Hacking ISIS: How to Destroy the Cyber Jihad*, 1st ed. (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2018), 45–49.

⁴⁶ Robert J. Bunker and Pamela Bunker Ligouri, *Radical Islamist English-Language Online Magazines*, Kindle (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2018), sec. 187.

⁴⁷ Marco Arnaboldi and Lorenzo Vidino, “The Caliphate, Social Media and Swarms in Europe: The Appeal of the IS Propaganda to ‘Would Be’ European Jihadists,” in *Twitter and Jihad: The Communication Strategy of ISIS*, 1st ed. (Milan, Italy: ISPI, 2015), 60.

⁴⁸ UiO, “Al Risalah,” UiO -University of Oslo, 2017, <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/jihadi-document-repository/journals/english/al-risalah/index.html>.

⁴⁹ Bunker and Bunker Ligouri, *Radical Islamist English-Language Online Magazines*, sec. 187.

online magazine *Inspire* in 2010. One of the reasons it gained fame was that it was used by the Tsarnaev brothers to assemble the pressure-cooker bombs with which they executed the terrorist attack on the Boston Marathon in 2013. According to the leadership of the AQAP, the purpose of the magazine was to be a call to the Muslims of the West and to inspire them to jihad against the Western world.⁵⁰

B. THE ISLAMIC STATE AND THE MEDIA

The Islamic State was following in the footsteps of its parent organization al Qaeda and, with careful planning, advanced the media's strategic use to a higher level.⁵¹ The IS staff's plan was based on four pillars: human resources, structure, propaganda, and the media. Starting with human resources, the IS leadership recognized the importance of selecting specialized staff so that they could adequately operate the group's media campaign. The group tried to recruit staff with special skills such as videographers, producers, and editors because it knew that their specialized knowledge would help develop the media campaign, which for IS was a critical mission.⁵² The IS gave those who belonged to this group of "media people" many privileges, such as a much higher salary than the fighters, a car, and a house.⁵³ In addition to the role of reward for the knowledge "media people" provided, these privileges also served as a call for recruiting new qualified personnel.⁵⁴ The leadership of IS has benefited significantly from this

⁵⁰ Celine Marie I. Novenario, "Differentiating Al Qaeda and the Islamic State through Strategies Publicized in Jihadist Magazines," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 11 (2016): 955, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1151679>.

⁵¹ Judith Tinnes, "Counting Lives Lost – Monitoring Camera-Recorded Extrajudicial Executions by the 'Islamic State,'" *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 1 (February 20, 2016): 78, <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/483>.

⁵² Brendan I. Koerner, "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War—And How to Fight Back," *Wired*, March 2016, <https://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat/>.

⁵³ Greg Miller and Souad Mekhennet, "Inside the Surreal World of the Islamic State's Propaganda Machine," *Washington Post*, November 20, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-the-islamic-states-propaganda-machine/2015/11/20/051e997a-8ce6-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b_story.html.

⁵⁴ Shahira S. Fahmy, "The Age of Terrorism Media: The Visual Narratives of the Islamic State Group's Dabiq Magazine," *SAGE, International Communication Gazette* 82, no. 3 (2020): 263, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048519843412>.

practice. They have found “photojournalists” willing to cover all the fronts that the group was fighting and to transfer images and videos showing its greatness.⁵⁵ From a technical perspective, the videos broadcast by IS reached a level that many scholars have characterized as Hollywood-produced, contributing significantly to the jihadist media campaign’s success.⁵⁶ Finally, the group’s media activity on all kinds of Internet platforms, aimed at “advertising” the Caliphate, could only be compared in size to large Western companies, far surpassing rival jihadist groups in the social media war.⁵⁷

The second pillar concerns the structure and functions of the Islamic State media wing. Following Western business models, the group split the media wing into sections. The media administrative structure undergirded sections dedicated to the collection, evaluation, production, and distribution of the media products. Its core elements comprised the Media Council, the Media Agencies and Offices, the Media Judiciary Committee, the Information Bank, and the Media Security Office.⁵⁸ The group also set up a sophisticated decentralized network of media centers such as al-Furqan, al-Hayat, al-I’tisam, al-Battar, Ajnad, and al-A’maq. These centers functioned from different places, although most of these centers existed only virtually, and were responsible for the publication, release, and distribution of group propaganda materials.⁵⁹ Furthermore, as stated in the business strategy, the group has recognized “the need to digitize the real world so as to retain a competitive advantage in an increasingly commoditized environment [and that] remains a strategic imperative. Al-Hayat Media, the official

⁵⁵ Colin Clarke and Charlie Winter, “The Islamic State May Be Failing, but Its Strategic Communications Legacy Is Here to Stay,” War on the Rocks, August 17, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/the-islamic-state-may-be-failing-but-its-strategic-communications-legacy-is-here-to-stay/>.

⁵⁶ Christoph Reuter, Raniah Salloum, and Samiha Shafy, “Digital Jihad - Inside Islamic State’s Savvy PR War,” Der Spiegel International, October 8, 2014, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-professional-pr-strategies-of-isis-in-syria-and-iraq-a-995611.html>.

⁵⁷ Koerner, “Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War—And How to Fight Back.”

⁵⁸ Asaad Almohammad and Charlie Winter, *From Battlefield to Cyberspace: Demystifying the Islamic State’s Propaganda Machine* (New York: CTC - West Point, 2019), 7, www.ctc.usma.edu.

⁵⁹ Harith Hasan Al-Qarawee, “The Media, Methods and Messages of the Islamic State’s Communication Strategy,” in *Daesh and the Terrorist Threat: From the Middle East to Europe* (Italy: FEPS – Foundation for European Progressive Studies, 2015), 98.

media channel of ISIS, operates in an organic manner overseeing several other media divisions such as Wilayat Ninawa, Al-Anbar, Baghdad, Fallujah, Al-Furat, Ad-Dijlah, Kirkuk and Ar-Raqqah and empowering each province to provide unique updates pertaining to its own developments.”⁶⁰

The third pillar was the propaganda shared by the Islamic State. The IS spread its propaganda aiming to reach potential recruits,⁶¹ invite foreign fighters to join its ranks,⁶² deliver messages to its adversaries,⁶³ and instigate attacks in Western countries.⁶⁴ The full spectrum of IS propaganda messaging included brutality, mercy, victimhood, belonging, militarism, and apocalyptic utopianism.⁶⁵ All these narratives used as central messages in the creation of the IS propaganda campaign were not new; they are one of the basic concepts that dominate the jihadist movement. But there were essential details in how IS implemented the propaganda that made it so effective.⁶⁶ The Internet-savvy terrorists, having a “target marketing” policy, targeted specific groups of the population

⁶⁰ Remy Mahzam, “The Electronic Digitisation of ISIS: Building a Multi-Media Legacy,” *RSIS, RSIS Commentary*, 228 (October 27, 2015), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CO15228.pdf>.

⁶¹ EUROPOL, *Changes in Modus Operandi of Islamic State Terrorist Attacks - Revisited*, Europol Public Information (The Hague, Netherlands: EUROPOL, 2016), 8, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/changes-in-modus-operandi-of-islamic-state-revisited>.

⁶² AFP, “More than 6,000 European Jihadists in Syria, EU Official Says,” *Telegraph*, April 13, 2015, sec. World,

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/11531884/More-than-6000-European-jihadists-in-Syria-EU-official-says.html>.

⁶³ R. Gary Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*, 1st ed. (North Carolina: UNC Press, 2018), 128.

⁶⁴ Bridget Moreng, “ISIS’ Virtual Puppeteers,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 26, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-09-21/isis-virtual-puppeteers>; “Bloody Ramadan: How the Islamic State Coordinated a Global Terrorist Campaign,” *War on the Rocks*, July 20, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/07/bloody-ramadan-how-the-islamic-state-coordinated-a-global-terrorist-campaign/>.

⁶⁵ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Nathaniel Barr, and Bridget Moreng, *The Islamic State’s Global Propaganda Strategy*, ICCT Research Paper (The Hague, Netherlands: ICCT, 2016), 5–6, <https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Gartenstein-Ross-IS-Global-Propaganda-Strategy-March2016.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Charlie Winter, “The Virtual ‘Caliphate’: Understanding Islamic State’s Propaganda Strategy,” *Quilliam*, October 2015, 18, <http://www.quilliaminternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL-documenting-the-virtual-caliphate.pdf>.

with material depending on the purpose pursued.⁶⁷ For example, IS propaganda spread a message that the group provided protection and status to the women of the Caliphate.⁶⁸ The group also adopted a hip-hop style in some of its videos to make them familiar to young Western Muslims.⁶⁹ Yet, in addition to the hip hop style aimed at foreigners, the IS, giving great importance to the quality of its propaganda products, also incorporated “anashid” into its propaganda for the locals to inspire them and make them unite for the common purpose of the IS.⁷⁰ This differentiation in the choice of music investment for the group’s propaganda products was part of IS’s careful design. The IS media operators chose the content of the propaganda message according to the target audience.⁷¹ In sum, for IS, propaganda was perhaps the greatest weapon. When Mosul finally fell, Iraqis there, who had been influenced by the terror propaganda launched by the IS against them, surrendered the city, and many likened it to the fall of the French front in 1940. The Germans then used the radio to sow terror among French soldiers, which contributed to the German blitzkrieg’s success and the fall of France.⁷²

The last pillar was the means used by the Islamic State. The sophisticated planning of the IS propaganda campaign included every possible means that could advance the group’s message.⁷³ The jihadists knew that they would achieve legitimization with locals and with global jihadism through the systematic and continuous

⁶⁷ Weimann, *Terrorism in Cyberspace: The Next Generation*, 53.

⁶⁸ Minty, *Social Media and the Islamic State*, 51.

⁶⁹ Anthony N. Celso, “The Islamic State Threat to Western Homeland Security,” *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs* 5, no. 2 (2017): 2, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.4172/2332-0761.1000259>.

⁷⁰ Jonathan Pieslak and Nelly Lahoud, “The Anashid of the Islamic State: Influence, History, Text, and Sound,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 4 (2020): 295–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1457420>.

⁷¹ Scott Shane and Ben Hubbard, “ISIS Displaying a Deft Command of Varied Media,” *The New York Times*, August 31, 2014, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/31/world/middleeast/isis-displaying-a-deft-command-of-varied-media.html>.

⁷² Brooking and Singer, “War Goes Viral.”

⁷³ Anne Aly et al., “Introduction to the Special Issue: Terrorist Online Propaganda and Radicalization,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157402>.

dissemination of information.⁷⁴ Through the analysis of this campaign, it comes to light that the group used propaganda videos, radio, magazines, social media, forums, blogs, and chat rooms. According to Logan Macnair and Richard Frank, “these audiovisual media have been recognized for their technical complexity, high production value, consistent traffic, and multilingual character—all of which contribute to building a stable and legitimate brand image.”⁷⁵ IS, from the first moment of its existence back in 2014 when Al-Baghdadi declared the establishment of the Caliphate,⁷⁶ made widespread use of social media, exploiting its potential in the absence of security measures by Western authorities in the Internet space.⁷⁷

Briefly, as they are analyzed in more depth in Chapter IV, IS media operatives usually do not post the group’s material on specific servers but use several free and open platforms, including Google drive, Yandesk, Cloud.mail.ru, Sendvid.com, YouTube, Dailymotion.com, Archive.org, Justpaste.it, Bitly.com, Drive.ms, and others.⁷⁸ Moreover, since hosted content must actually reach the target audience and wider public, IS media operatives use global web platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, Tumblr, Google+, Pinterest, Viber, and WeChat.⁷⁹

The IS also used its magazines to spread its propaganda, as did other terrorist groups. Before its proclamation as a Caliphate, the group published the *Şawt al-Shām*

⁷⁴ Arnaboldi and Vidino, “The Caliphate, Social Media and Swarms in Europe: The Appeal of the IS Propaganda to ‘Would Be’ European Jihadists,” 60.

⁷⁵ Logan Macnair and Richard Frank, “The Mediums and the Messages: Exploring the Language of Islamic State Media through Sentiment Analysis,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 3 (2018): 439, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2018.1447226>.

⁷⁶ European Parliament, “Terrorism in the EU since 2015,” European Parliament, January 8, 2018, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/security/20180703STO07127/terrorism-in-the-eu-since-2015>.

⁷⁷ Rukmini Callimachi, “How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe’s Gaze,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 2016, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/29/world/europe/isis-attacks-paris-brussels.html>.

⁷⁸ Ahmet S. Yayla and Anne Speckhard, “Telegram: The Mighty Application That ISIS Loves - Part I,” *VOX - Pol* (blog), June 7, 2017, <https://www.voxpol.eu/telegram-mighty-application-isis-loves/>.

⁷⁹ Yayla and Speckhard.

magazine in Arabic.⁸⁰ The group also published military and political reports during the same period, such as through the *Islamic State News* (ISN) and the *Islamic State Report* (ISR), respectively.⁸¹ After 2014, when the Caliphate was declared, the group published several magazines, online and offline, which were of different types, content, and language. The group published newsletters, such as the weekly *Sanā al-Shām*,⁸² and the official IS newspaper, *al-Naba*.⁸³ The magazine that was the flagship of the IS propaganda campaign was *Dabiq*, and its later form named *Rumiyah*. *Dabiq* was published in parallel with the proclamation of the establishment of the Caliphate and, according to al-Ḥayāt Media Center, the publisher of *Dabiq*, its “mission [...] is to convey a message of the Islamic State in different languages with the aim of unifying the Muslims under one flag.”⁸⁴ *Dabiq* was renamed *Rumiyah* when IS lost the city of the same name to its rivals in 2016, also published by al-Ḥayāt Media Center.⁸⁵ The magazine in both its forms appeared online and in several different languages, including English, French, German, Russian, Indonesian, and Uyghur.⁸⁶ Also, the magazine’s two titles were symbolic and all the issues’ content supported the strategic goals of the

⁸⁰ UiO, “Sawt Al-Shām,” UiO -University of Oslo, 2016, <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/jihadi-document-repository/journals/arabic/iraq/sawt-al-sham/index.html>.

⁸¹ Jan Christoffer Andersen and Sveinung Sandberg, “Islamic State Propaganda: Between Social Movement Framing and Subcultural Provocation,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32, no7 (July 27, 2018), 2–3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1484356>.

⁸² UiO, “Sanā Al-Shām,” UiO -University of Oslo, 2016, <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/jihadi-document-repository/journals/arabic/iraq/sana-al-sham/index.html>.

⁸³ UiO, “Al-Naba’,” UiO -University of Oslo, 2017, <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/jihadi-document-repository/journals/arabic/iraq/al-naba/index.html>.

⁸⁴ UiO, “Dabiq,” UiO -University of Oslo, 2017, <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/jihadi-document-repository/journals/english/dabiq/index.html>.

⁸⁵ UiO, “Rumiyah,” UiO -University of Oslo, 2017, <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/jihadi-document-repository/journals/english/rumiyah/index.html>.

⁸⁶ Independent, “ISIS' new magazine Rumiyah shows the terror group is 'struggling to adjust to losses,’” *The Independent*, September 6, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-propaganda-terror-group-losses-syria-iraq-a7228286.html>.

Islamic State propaganda. Finally, following the “target marketing” policy, the group published some magazines in a specific language and content according to the Muslims living in these areas. The IS media wing put in place a Russian-language magazine named *Istok* (The Source) targeted future supporters from the Caucasus. Moreover, it launched the magazine *Konstantiniyye* (Constantinople) in Turkish, which offered essential points to the group’s strategy about Turkey. Furthermore, targeting French Muslims, the group issued the French magazine *Dar al-Salam* (the House of Peace).⁸⁷

Besides the modern means of spreading propaganda, the Islamic State also used traditional means to spread its message, especially within its territory. The group founded the Al-Bayan radio station, one of the most effective IS propaganda machine tools.⁸⁸ This radio informed the locals about the situation on the war fronts and the news, under the supervision of Idhā’at al-Bayān. The broadcasts were initially broadcast in English, Arabic, Russian, and Kurdish, and a little later, French was added.⁸⁹ The Al-Bayan radio network had been framed as “highly professional” and compared to the BBC and NPR for its quality and tone.⁹⁰ Moreover, in order to achieve the spread of its propaganda in its territory, the IS organized a network of “media points.” These points were cyber information booths in towns across the IS territory that provide religious and IS-related materials to the locals. According to IS leadership, the “media points” generated much interest among the people and were very well received. In fact, this network of points was a tool in the hands of the IS to indoctrinate local communities, of all ages, in the areas the

⁸⁷ Fahmy, “The Age of Terrorism Media: The Visual Narratives of the Islamic State Group’s Dabiq Magazine,” 265.

⁸⁸ NBC, “ISIS’ Al-Bayan Radio Station in Mosul Is Bombed Into Silence by Iraqi Jets,” NBC News, October 3, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/isis-al-bayan-radio-station-mosul-bombed-silence-iraqi-jets-n658521>.

⁸⁹ Winter, “The Virtual ‘Caliphate’: Understanding Islamic State’s Propaganda Strategy,” 12.

⁹⁰ Rudaw.Net, “ISIS Radio Station Attacked inside Mosul,” rudaw.net, August 30, 2015, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/30082015>.

group controlled by providing access to its pamphlets, videos, and other promotional and educational materials, and especially in areas where the population did not have Internet access or had an unstable Internet network.⁹¹

⁹¹ Steven Stalinsky and R. Sosnow, “The Islamic State (ISIS) Establishes ‘Media Points’ in Syria, Iraq, Libya to Indoctrinate Caliphate Citizens and Enhance Its Cyber Activities on The Ground: A One-Year Review,” MEMRI, 2015, <https://www.memri.org/reports/islamic-state-isis-establishes-media-points-syria-iraq-libya-indoctrinate-caliphate-citizens>.

III. ISLAMIC STATE MEDIA STRATEGIES

This chapter explores the aspects of the Islamic State's media strategy, which existing research has not sufficiently examined. These aspects concern in what ways the IS exploited the social media landscape to deliver costly signals that advanced the group's strategies of outbidding, intimidation, and polarization. This chapter reviews online magazines, videos, and images created and distributed by the Islamic State through various social media channels. In this material, the main issues that support the three strategies adopted by the Islamic State will be sought. The research focuses on the two versions of IS's online magazine, *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*. Additionally, this chapter compares the existing research on this magazine with the results gleaned from this analysis.

The chapter begins by describing the IS intimidation strategy and argues that the IS exploited the social media landscape to intimidate the resistant internal forces and Western countries to keep them out of the Islamic State's area of action. The chapter then demonstrates that the Islamic State portrayed itself through social media as either violent or caring to outbid rival terrorist groups. Following its examination of the outbidding strategy, this chapter also examines the ways in which IS sought to win over locals or recruit foreign fighters, given the competition from Al Qaeda. The last strategy covered by this analysis is polarization, in which the Islamic State, by spreading extremist acts against certain groups of people, polarized populations either inside (Sunnis vs. Shiites) or outside its territory (Muslims vs. non-Muslims). Finally, the chapter closes with the presentation of data extracted from analysis of the magazine's covers and the conclusions.

A. INTIMIDATION STRATEGY

Intimidation is a strategy that, according to Kydd and Walter, is similar to the "strategy of deterrence, preventing some undesired behavior by means of threats and

costly signals.”⁹² The Islamic State adopted this strategy mainly for three reasons. First, IS used intimidation to try to assure the community that the group is strong enough to punish disobedience or treason and that the coalition of the Syrian and Iraqi governments and Western countries is too weak to stop the IS. This effort also aimed to convince people to behave as the group wished. The punishment dynamics needed to be strong enough to scare and deter the opponent so as not to take any action undesirable for the group. Punishment plays the same important role as the strategy of deterrence.⁹³ Second, through this strategy, IS sought to intimidate and dominate rival terrorist groups. And finally, it wanted to send a clear message to the West to stay out.⁹⁴ To achieve the objectives just mentioned, IS used social media and the Internet to portray its horrors to as large an audience as possible.⁹⁵ IS carefully managed the messages that accompanied these actions in order to have the desired result.⁹⁶ Its aim was to intimidate, sending targeted messages to its victims, and to present itself as the toughest and most invincible jihadist group in the world.⁹⁷

Zarqawi, the spiritual father of IS, also adopted the strategy of intimidation. He implemented this strategy not only in the Iraqi security forces but also with external factors. The targeting of the Iraqi security forces began during the al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) period, with the well-known slogan “for every ten bullets, nine should be directed toward

⁹² Kydd and Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” 66.

⁹³ Christopher H. Achen and Duncan Snidal, “Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies,” *World Politics* 41, no. 2 (1989): 11.

⁹⁴ Andersen and Sandberg, “Islamic State Propaganda: Between Social Movement Framing and Subcultural Provocation,” 8.

⁹⁵ Koerner, “Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War—And How to Fight Back.”

⁹⁶ Matthew M. Sweeney and Meghan Kubit, “Blood and Scripture: How the Islamic State Frames Religion in Violent Video Propaganda,” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 13, no. 2 (October 2019): 172–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2019.1680853>.

⁹⁷ Jad Melki and May Jabado, “Mediated Public Diplomacy of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria: The Synergistic Use of Terrorism, Social Media and Branding,” *Media and Communication* 4, no. 2 (2016): 93, <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v4i2.432>; Matteo Colombo, “IS and the Others. A Topic Analysis of Pro- and Anti-IS Discourse on Arabic-Speaking Twitter,” in *Digital Jihad: Online Communication and Violent Extremism*, 1st ed. (Milan, Italy: ISPI, 2019), 75; Charlie Winter, “Redefining ‘Propaganda’: The Media Strategy of the Islamic State,” *The RUSI Journal*, 2020, 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2020.1734321>.

the apostates and one toward the crusaders.”⁹⁸ This tactic was intended to instill as much fear as possible in the Iraqis who served in these units, so that they would not cooperate with the Crusaders, and at the same time, it would weaken these units so they did not pose a measurable opponent to the jihadists.⁹⁹ Moreover, Zarqawi successfully adopted a strategy of intimidation to put off foreign intervention in Iraq. First, he wanted to stop the U.S. project to rebuild Iraq with other Muslim states’ participation. After the bombing of the Arab embassy by the AQI, no Muslim state wanted to participate in the U.S. project. To keep non-government organizations (NGO) out of Iraq and dampen their influence over the Iraqi population, Zarqawi attacked a hotel where United Nations (UN) officials stayed.¹⁰⁰

Additionally, the Islamic State used violent scenes to intimidate police and soldiers in Iraq and Syria to lower their morale. This situation favored the group, which could move forward without finding strong resistance.¹⁰¹ Videos were released showing IS death squads killing Iraqi security personnel, with some of the videos showing the victims begging for their lives before being killed. When the IS arrived in Mosul, it attacked the Camp Speicher military base near Tikrit, the hometown of Saddam Hussein.¹⁰² The group killed 1,700 Shia Iraqi soldiers serving there after occupying the base. The IS immediately broadcast a video of the killing of the soldiers.¹⁰³ According to Iraq’s former national security adviser Mowaffak al-Rubaie, the images of violence and terrorism spread by IS through Facebook and Twitter, were the reason that Mosul fell into the terrorist group’s hands, after 30,000 Iraqi Security Forces soldiers retreated for

⁹⁸ Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside, and Charlie Winter, *The ISIS Reader*, Kindle (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 125–26.

⁹⁹ Ingram, Whiteside, and Winter, 126–27.

¹⁰⁰ Joby Warrick, *Black Flags*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2015), 113.

¹⁰¹ Koerner, “Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War—And How to Fight Back.”

¹⁰² Al-Qarawee, “The Media, Methods and Messages of the Islamic State’s Communication Strategy,” 104.

¹⁰³ “ISIS Releases Another Video of Beheading,” February 1, 2015, CBS Sunday Morning, video, 0:54, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ym4DCem4-o>.

fear that they would also fall into the hands of the group.¹⁰⁴ And during the takeover of the Syrian 17th division outside Raqqa, the IS applied a similar intimidation tactic.¹⁰⁵ The group beheaded 50 Syrian soldiers and then photographed the heads of the soldiers in Raqqa, sending a message about how the IS manages to control the areas under its rule.¹⁰⁶ The fall of Ramadi was another example of the IS's tactics. In the first two days of the city's occupation the group executed 500 police members.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, the IS applied a model of extreme violence to the areas it occupied to achieve the absolute obedience of the inhabitants of those areas.¹⁰⁸ Testimonies of refugees fleeing IS-occupied areas confirmed the fact that the group knew how to use the killings to intimidate locals and force them to obey.¹⁰⁹ IS crucified two men in Raqqa and they left their bloody corpses displayed in the center of a town. Another ancient form of torture was also used by the IS as a sign of how life is under the rule of the group.¹¹⁰ After the conquest of the city of Mosul, the group released videos showing Iraqi men being hanged, crucified, or burned to death.¹¹¹ In addition, the group used chainsaws to slaughter nine young people in public view at a Mosul square because they belonged to a

¹⁰⁴ Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 2nd ed. (New York: Regan Arts., 2016), 174.

¹⁰⁵ Steven Zech and Zane Kelly, "Off With Their Heads: The Islamic State and Civilian Beheadings," *Contemporary Voices: St Andrews Journal of International Relations* 6, no. 2 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.1157>.

¹⁰⁶ Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 201–2.

¹⁰⁷ Weiss and Hassan, 251–52.

¹⁰⁸ Warrick, *Black Flags*, 287–89.

¹⁰⁹ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 69–71.

¹¹⁰ Jacob Siegel, "Islamic Extremists Now Crucifying People in Syria—and Tweeting Out the Pictures," *The Daily Beast*, April 30, 2014, sec. world, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/04/30/islamic-extremists-now-crucifying-people-in-syria-and-tweeting-out-the-pictures>.

¹¹¹ David L. Knoll, "How ISIS Endures By Innovating," *Foreign Affairs*, September 30, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-09-30/how-isis-endures-innovating>.

group that was opposed to IS.¹¹² Moreover, IS launched a campaign of assassinations against Sunni “traitors”¹¹³ as a warning to the Iraqi population not to ally themselves with the Iraqi authorities, the Americans, or others who opposed the IS, such as the Sunni Sahwa militias who allied with Maliki.¹¹⁴ Taylor Berman reports that “ISIS released a gruesome new video showing the execution of 16 prisoners. Five of the prisoners were filmed as they slowly drowned inside a metal cage while four others were blown up by an RPG as they were handcuffed inside a car. Another seven were killed by explosives that an ISIS member had strapped around their necks.”¹¹⁵

Implementing the group’s version of Sharia law was central to IS’s governance in the areas it controlled. The group imposed a set of stringent rules and prohibitions, with offenders being punished as an example, so that locals would show obedience to the IS.¹¹⁶ In Iraq’s Nineveh province, for example, IS members threw two men out of a building in front of an audience because they thought they were gay.¹¹⁷ There are photos of two crucified men who were accused of theft in the same province and a woman being

¹¹² Cristina Silva, “ISIS Kills Children with Chainsaws: Islamic State Brutal Killings on The Rise Amid Airstrike Campaign,” *International Business Times*, September 1, 2016, <https://www.ibtimes.com/isis-kills-children-chainsaws-islamic-state-brutal-killings-rise-amid-airstrike-2410236>; Amir Abdallah, “ISIS Slices Nine Youths with Chainsaw in Mosul,” *Iraqi News*, August 31, 2016, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/isis-slices-nine-youth-with-chinsaw-mosul/>.

¹¹³ Craig Whiteside, *Nine Bullets for the Traitors, One for the Enemy: The Slogans and Strategy behind the Islamic State’s Campaign to Defeat the Sunni Awakening (2006- 2017)*, ICCT Research Paper (The Hague, The Netherlands: ICCT, 2018), 2, <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ICCT-Whiteside-Nine-Bullets-For-The-Traitors-September-2018.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ Craig Whiteside, *Lighting the Path: The Evolution of the Islamic State Media Enterprise (2003-2016)* (The Hague, The Netherlands: ICCT, 2016), 16–17, 10.19165/2016.1.14.

¹¹⁵ Taylor Berman, “Graphic Execution Video Shows ISIS Drowning, Immolating Prisoners,” *Gawker*, June 23, 2015, <http://gawker.com/graphic-execution-video-shows-isis-drowning-immolating-1713379881>.

¹¹⁶ Jacob Siegel, “In Graphic Photos and On Twitter, ISIS Members Record and Tout Executions of Gays,” *The Daily Beast*, January 16, 2015, sec. us-news, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/01/16/in-graphic-videos-and-on-twitter-isis-members-record-and-tout-executions-of-gay-men>.

¹¹⁷ “ISIS Throws Gay Men off Buildings,” March 5, 2015, CNN, Video, 3:33, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gr7d1sTDNts>.

stoned to death for adultery.¹¹⁸ Finally, another aspect of IS's use of instilling fear in the locals is to maintain the faith of the local fighters who join the terrorist group. According to Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Nathaniel Barr, and Bridget Moreng, the group had problems recruiting Syrians and then keeping them loyal to the group.¹¹⁹ The pattern of exemplary punishment was also applied to foreign fighters when some tried to escape.¹²⁰

In addition to the Iraqi authorities, the Islamic State also used violence against tribes in the regions under its control, and especially against those tribes who might dare to resist. Thus, one video, depicting the massacre of about 700 men of the al-Sheitaat tribe, resulted in the tribe's sheikh begging the IS to show pardon and mercy. Another tribe that suffered from IS atrocities was the Albu Alwan tribe. When its siege by the IS ended, there were 500 members of the tribe dead, and 25,000 tribal members left the area.¹²¹ In this respect, IS did not act like the AQI; many times the IS preferred to use intimidation as a tactic against tribes that opposed it, rather than negotiating. For example, the IS slaughtered 150 men of the Albu Nimr tribe in the Anbar province, a tribe that has been opposed to the jihadist movement since the Awakening period.¹²² An issue related to the intimidation of the tribes was slavery and the way in which the captured people were treated as slaves. The IS used the issue of slavery mainly to intimidate the youth of the enemy, and especially girls, as was the case with the enslavement of Yazidi girls.¹²³ The IS refers to the Yazidi sect as 'devil worshipers,' claiming the Yazidi were polytheists, and so the Yazidis were deserving of death or

¹¹⁸ Siegel, "In Graphic Photos and On Twitter, ISIS Members Record and Tout Executions of Gays."

¹¹⁹ Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, and Moreng, "The Islamic State's Global Propaganda Strategy," 13.

¹²⁰ Gates and Podder, "Social Media, Recruitment, Allegiance and the Islamic State," 113.

¹²¹ Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 252–53.

¹²² Martin Chulov, "Isis Kills Hundreds of Iraqi Sunnis from Albu Nimr Tribe in Anbar Province," *The Guardian*, October 30, 2014, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/30/mass-graves-hundreds-iraqi-sunnis-killed-isis-albu-nimr>.

¹²³ Agathe Christien, "The Representation of Youth in the Islamic State's Propaganda Magazine Dabiq," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 7, no. 3 (2016): 5, https://www.academia.edu/28517095/The_Representation_of_Youth_in_the_Islamic_States_Propaganda_Magazine_Dabiq.

slavery.¹²⁴ When captured by the IS, Yazidi women, in particular, had two choices. Either they embraced Islam and became slaves, or they would be raped to death.¹²⁵

The message that anyone who opposes IS will have the same outcome spread everywhere. The Kurdish Peshmerga fighters at the same time abandoned their positions in front of the IS forces, which were advancing unscathed towards their positions.¹²⁶ The Peshmergas had an additional reason to fear the IS after allying themselves with the United States against the jihadists.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the IS carried out violent attacks not only against the tribes but also other jihadist groups, prompting Ayman al-Zawahiri to expel the group from al Qaeda.¹²⁸

To advance its intimidation strategy against the West, the IS used two approaches. First, the group distributed extremist material on its media platforms, mainly showing the beheading of prisoners, to send the message to stay out of the Caliphate. Second, as the Western coalition became involved in Syria, and the Caliphate lost ground, the group launched terrorist attacks in various Western countries.

The IS, following an older tactic of intimidation, that of beheading, proceeded to spread through its media the videos with such content where its victims were mainly Westerners. As Lisa J. Campbell states “the use of beheadings has a longstanding history. Beheadings have been used in a state and non-state capacity, for punishment or intimidation, against leaders, civilians and warring combatants, during times of peace and

¹²⁴ Ingram, Whiteside, and Winter, *The ISIS Reader*, 146.

¹²⁵ Chris Pleasance, “Hundreds of Yazidi Women Held in Islamic State Prison,” *Daily Mail Online*, August 28, 2014, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2737096/Hundreds-Yazidi-women-held-Islamic-State-prison-raped-sold-jihadi-brides-little-25.html>.

¹²⁶ Reuter, Salloum, and Shafy, “Digital Jihad - Inside Islamic State’s Savvy PR War”; Jillian Kay Melchior, “ISIS Tactics Illustrate Social Media’s New Place In Modern War,” *TechCrunch* (blog), accessed April 25, 2020, <https://social.techcrunch.com/2014/10/15/isis-tactics-illustrate-social-medias-new-place-in-modern-war/>.

¹²⁷ SITE, “IS Beheads Peshmerga Captive in Video, Threatens Barzani to End Alliance with U.S.,” SITE Intelligence Group, August 28, 2014, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-beheads-peshmerga-captive-in-video-threatens-barzani-to-end-alliance-with-u-s.html>.

¹²⁸ Anthony N. Celso, “Dabiq: IS’s Apocalyptic 21st Century Jihadist Manifesto,” *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs* 2, no. 4 (2014): 3, <https://doi.org/10.4172/2332-0761.1000e111>.

that of upheaval.”¹²⁹ The peculiarity of beheading, combined with the over-promotion that the mass media can give, was something that Zarkawi had understood, since he was the pioneer in such executions. He also understood the enormous impact that beheadings had on the West.¹³⁰ In 2004, the American contractor Nicholas Berg’s beheading by Zarkawi was the first video with a beheading released by the AQI. Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan observe that “[t]he staging and pageantry of this grotesquerie was also transformational for the future of international terrorism.”¹³¹ After all, it was Zarqawi who argued that AQI should fill the hearts of every enemy of Islam with fear.¹³²

The series of videos of prisoners’ beheadings, which are almost identical to each other with the victims wearing the orange Guantanamo prison uniform, began with the video named ‘A message to America.’¹³³ The first victim was American journalist James Wright Foley.¹³⁴ It was in this video that the protagonist of the beheadings, known as Jihadi-John, first appeared, during which he blamed America for its actions in Iraq and presented Foley’s beheading as retribution for the air strikes commanded by President Obama in August 2014.¹³⁵ Moreover, according to the landmark book detailing a strategy for radical Islamists *Management of Savagery*, if the enemy acts aggressively, he should be repaid with extreme violence. Foley “paid the price” for the U.S. airstrikes.¹³⁶ In the same Foley video, the executioner showed another IS prisoner, the American

¹²⁹ Lisa J. Campbell, “The Use of Beheadings by Fundamentalist Islam,” *Global Crime* 7, no. 3–4 (2006): 583, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17440570601073384>.

¹³⁰ Ariel Koch, “Jihadi Beheading Videos and Their Non-Jihadi Echoes,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 12, no. 3 (2018): 24.

¹³¹ Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 32.

¹³² Warrick, *Black Flags*, 174–75.

¹³³ Bourrie, *The Killing Game*, 111.

¹³⁴ SITE, “IS Beheads Captured American James Wright Foley, Threatens to Execute Steven Joel Sotloff,” SITE Intelligence Group, August 19, 2014, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-beheads-captured-american-james-foley-threatens-to-execute-another.html>.

¹³⁵ Simone Molin Friis, “‘Beyond Anything We Have Ever Seen’: Beheading Videos and the Visibility of Violence in the War against ISIS,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015): 725, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12341>.

¹³⁶ Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger, *ISIS*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 48.

photojournalist Steven Joel Sotloff, and he threatened the United States that if the military operations approved against the group were not stopped, the IS would execute him.¹³⁷ The second video that the Islamic State finally released was the beheading of Sotloff.¹³⁸ In the same video, terrorists threatened the life of another captive, a Briton, David Cawthorne Haines, with the following words: “[w]e take this opportunity to warn those governments that enter this evil alliance of America against the Islamic State to back off and leave our people alone.”¹³⁹ Another clear message to the West and those who allied with them was the immolation of the Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh.¹⁴⁰

The video with the beheading of British aid worker Alan Henning was also a response to the UK decision to allow airstrikes in Iraq.¹⁴¹ The continuing wave of beheadings by the IS caused panic around the world. After Henning, a Japanese journalist,¹⁴² Kurdish and Syrian soldiers, and Egyptian and Ethiopian Christians were also killed with this horrifying method of execution.¹⁴³ Finally, the Islamic State, in addition to videos of its own actions, presented videos in the West where the content depicted the violence and destruction caused by Western coalition forces.¹⁴⁴ The casualties and casualties of people in Iraq and Syria from Western coalition airstrikes were the reason why, instead of following the IS-registered practice to execute the

¹³⁷ Friis, “‘Beyond Anything We Have Ever Seen’: Beheading Videos and the Visibility of Violence in the War against ISIS,” 725.

¹³⁸ “Islamic State Posts Video Showing Beheading of Second American Journalist IS,” September 3, 2014, Arirang News, video, 2:08, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUUucXHp7_4..

¹³⁹ SITE, “IS Behead Steven Joel Sotloff, Threatens to Execute Briton David Cawthorne Haines,” SITE Intelligence Group, 2014, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-behead-steven-joel-sotloff-threatens-to-execute-briton-david-cawthorne-haines.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Melki and Jabado, “Mediated Public Diplomacy of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria: The Synergistic Use of Terrorism, Social Media and Branding,” 93.

¹⁴¹ Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 264–65.

¹⁴² CBS Sunday Morning, “ISIS Releases Another Video of Beheading.”

¹⁴³ Tim Hume, “ISIS Beheadings: Is Terror Propaganda Brutalizing Us?,” CNN, April 20, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/04/20/middleeast/isis-beheadings-psychological-impact/index.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Logan Macnair and Richard Frank, “‘To My Brothers in the West...’: A Thematic Analysis of Videos Produced by the Islamic State’s al-Hayat Media Center,” *SAGE, Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 33, no. 3 (2017): 249, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986217699313>.

Jordanian pilot (beheading), they preferred to burn him.¹⁴⁵ It was a clear message to the West that ‘*If you burn us, we burn you.*’¹⁴⁶

As the Caliphate began to shrink, the IS launched terrorist attacks outside IS territories. By carrying out these attacks, the Islamic State wanted to send the message that even under the pressure it was receiving from the opposing forces, it was able to spread its attacks to the territory of these states as well. In doing so, the IS wanted to terrorize the citizens of the states that formed a coalition against the IS, as well as to prevent these states from continuing to fight the Islamic State or to offer assistance to Iraqis and Kurds who were fighting the IS.¹⁴⁷

In addition to the disgusting images circulating on the Internet, as well as the threatening messages, the terrorist attacks inside the territory of Western countries, carried out by the supporters of the group, were an additional factor of intimidation.¹⁴⁸ The group’s spokesman, Al-Adnani, urged the group’s supporters to terrorize the residents of these countries so much that “the neighbor fears his neighbor.”¹⁴⁹ By organizing/inspiring/conducting terrorist attacks in Europe, the IS demonstrated the group’s ability to hit back at the EU states.¹⁵⁰ The group terrorized European citizens with its attacks to warn their governments not to get involved in the war in Syria. In Germany, for example, after a series of terrorist attacks in that country, the prime minister of Bavaria, Horst Seehofer, came out and said that the citizens of the country

¹⁴⁵ “Why Did ISIS Burn Pilot Instead of Beheading Him?,” February 5, 2015, CNN, video, 2:03, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjclX0a7Ohk..>

¹⁴⁶ Simone Molin Friis, “‘Behead, Burn, Crucify, Crush’: Theorizing the Islamic State’s Public Displays of Violence;,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066117714416>.

¹⁴⁷ Ahmed S. Hashim, *The Caliphate at War*, Kindle (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), secs. 5204–5220.

¹⁴⁸ Loo Seng Neo et al., “Why Is ISIS so Psychologically Attractive?,” in *Combating Violent Extremism and Radicalization in the Digital Era*, Advances in Religious and Cultural Studies (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2016), 160.

¹⁴⁹ Paul Cruickshank, “Orlando Shooting Follows ISIS Call for Ramadan Attacks,” CNN, June 13, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/06/13/us/orlando-shooting-isis-ramadan-attacks/index.html>.

¹⁵⁰ Rohan Gunaratna, “Global Threat Forecast,” *RSIS, Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 10, no. 1 (2018); “Bloody Ramadan.”

were “riled up” and “full of fear.”¹⁵¹ And despite the recent territorial losses of the IS, which led to its downturn, there has been great concern that the remaining supporters of the group through the now virtual caliphate will remain a significant threat to the West.¹⁵²

B. OUTBIDDING STRATEGY

The outbidding strategy is adopted by a group when it wants to dominate an area and gain the support of the residents of that area, while the group must compete with other groups that already exist there. Demonstrating strength and extreme violence are ways a group can convince the public to take the side of the group.¹⁵³ The IS adopted its outbidding strategy to achieve two strategic goals. The first strategic goal was the establishment and consolidation of the Caliphate. The second one was the domination of the jihadist movement, an open conflict with al Qaeda. To achieve these goals, the IS disseminated through the media material from acts of atrocities, as well as a series of narratives, to persuade its audience to follow the IS.

The IS narratives moved mainly on two axes. The first axis concerned the creation of the state by the IS and how life was in this state. The IS propaganda worked to prove that the IS had succeeded in creating a state, and the group was capable of governing and providing security and prosperity in the areas it conquered. The display of the black flag of the IS and the black uniform of the group members was the attempt of the jihadist media to create the image of an organized state.¹⁵⁴ Ahmed S. Hashim states that “IS’s media also had another mission: to portray how wonderful life was in the Islamic utopia. As a result of IS’s venture into governance following the capture of large swathes of

¹⁵¹ “Germans ‘Full of Fear’ over Attacks,” *BBC News*, July 26, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36897694>.

¹⁵² Michael P. Dempsey, “The Caliphate Is Destroyed, But the Islamic State Lives On,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), November 22, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/22/the-caliphate-is-destroyed-but-the-islamic-state-lives-on/>.

¹⁵³ Kydd and Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” 51, 76.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Qarawee, “The Media, Methods and Messages of the Islamic State’s Communication Strategy,” 100–102.

territory in Syria and Iraq after 2013, it deployed its media to portray itself as a group capable of leadership of a state.”¹⁵⁵ The Wilayat state system’s implementation and the creation of the currency were two of the main themes of IS propaganda, seeking to highlight the structural changes the group made to build the Caliphate.

Also, IS showed that it cares for needy and orphaned children.¹⁵⁶ Jad Melki and May Jabado analyzed a series of videos produced by Al-Hayat Media Center in 2015. Through images of children playing carefree, markets full of people and goods, water and electricity, the group wanted to show that the Caliphate had come to stay. IS had managed to build a harmonious Caliphate so that its citizens could live in peace.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, IS propaganda, with the aim of gaining the support of locals and foreign fighters from other terrorist groups, shared on social media images of terrorists with kittens or Nutella containers. The intention was to show that it was cool for someone to belong to the Islamic State.¹⁵⁸ Eventually, the IS, to prove that it could govern effectively in the areas it occupied, imposed order on Iraq’s and Syria’s turbulent environment and provided the locals with basic services, such as offering cheap medical care, distributing petrol or aid to locals, offering classes to teach the Quran.¹⁵⁹ All IS’s actions led some locals to consider the group better at governing the territory than al-Assad, the Iraqi government, or other militias.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Hashim, *The Caliphate at War*, secs. 5779–5786.

¹⁵⁶ Andersen and Sandberg, “Islamic State Propaganda: Between Social Movement Framing and Subcultural Provocation,” 8.

¹⁵⁷ Melki and Jabado, “Mediated Public Diplomacy of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria: The Synergistic Use of Terrorism, Social Media and Branding,” 100–101; Steve Rose, “The Isis Propaganda War: A Hi-Tech Media Jihad,” *The Guardian*, October 7, 2014, sec. World News, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/07/isis-media-machine-propaganda-war>.

¹⁵⁸ Melchior, “ISIS Tactics Illustrate Social Media’s New Place In Modern War”; James Vincent, “‘I Can Haz Islamic State Plz’: Isis Propaganda on Twitter Turns To,” *The Independent*, August 21, 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/isis-propaganda-on-twitter-turns-to-kittens-and-lolspeak-i-can-haz-islamic-state-plz-9683736.html>; Meg Wagner, “Apparent ISIS Terrorists Take Photos with Nutella to Seem Softer, Friendlier to West,” *New York Daily News*, August 23, 2014, <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/isis-fighters-photos-nutella-friendly-article-1.1914450>.

¹⁵⁹ Al-Qarawee, “The Media, Methods and Messages of the Islamic State’s Communication Strategy,” 100–102.

¹⁶⁰ Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 169–70.

The second axis that promoted the IS narratives was its Islamic correctness.¹⁶¹ The group boasted that it had enforced Sharia law and that was what made the group stand out.¹⁶² According to the group, the state they founded provided protection to the Ummah from the injustice and inferiority the community experienced currently.¹⁶³ Sharia provides a place for Muslims to practice the texts and traditions of early Islam.¹⁶⁴ For this reason, this state could rightly be described as a Caliphate. As Jan Christoffer Andersen and Sveinung Sandberg argue, “the caliphate also has a more prophetic role in the rhetoric, and IS believes that the creation of a de facto state (the caliphate) serves as evidence of IS’s religious sincerity and God’s acceptance.”¹⁶⁵ The promotion of the Caliphate and the advantages of living under Sharia was in the effort of IS to win the hearts and minds of Muslims and to obtain further funding from donors.¹⁶⁶ The media platforms belonging to the IS presented the Caliphate’s narrative in two anti-diametric ways. On the one hand, they featured images from Muslim holiday celebrations, such as Ramadan, with worshipers participating in the celebrations as well as sermons and prayers.¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, the circulation of images of stoning, crucifixion, and beheading of Sharia law violators was intended to act as a signal that the IS, being rightly a Caliphate, is practicing Islamic Law.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶¹ Al-Qarawee, “The Media, Methods and Messages of the Islamic State’s Communication Strategy,” 100–102.

¹⁶² Koerner, “Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War—And How to Fight Back.”

¹⁶³ Winter, “Media Jihad: The Islamic State’s Doctrine for Information Warfare,” 15.

¹⁶⁴ Loo Seng Neo et al., “Why Is ISIS so Psychologically Attractive?” in *Combating Violent Extremism and Radicalization in the Digital Era*, Advances in Religious and Cultural Studies (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2016), 157–58.

¹⁶⁵ Andersen and Sandberg, “Islamic State Propaganda: Between Social Movement Framing and Subcultural Provocation,” 8.

¹⁶⁶ Hashim, *The Caliphate at War*, secs. 5779–5786.

¹⁶⁷ Andersen and Sandberg, “Islamic State Propaganda: Between Social Movement Framing and Subcultural Provocation,” 8.

¹⁶⁸ Celso, “Dabiq: IS’s Apocalyptic 21st Century Jihadist Manifesto,” 3.

To establish the Caliphate, the IS also had to displace its rivals from Syria and Iraq. As soon as the IS announced the establishment of the Caliphate, the group called on all jihadist groups to unite under its banner.¹⁶⁹ This call provoked the reaction of some groups to oppose the IS.¹⁷⁰ The group in Syria and Iraq had to deal with such rival groups as the Free Syrian Army, Ahlu Sunna Waljamaa, or Jaysh Rijaa al-Tariqa al-Naqshbandia, and Jabhat al-Nusra.¹⁷¹ The IS engaged in a variety of actions, fraught with tension, which they performed occasionally to dominate their opponents. Starting with the mildest action, where the Islamic State, through social media, launched very negative characterizations of its opponents in order to humiliate them in the eyes of the locals. The central idea was to use anything that could underestimate, offend, or ridicule IS's opponents. Thus, all the opponents of the group were *kuffars* (roughly translated as "disbelievers"), cowards, incompetents, and hypocrites.¹⁷² For example, the IS considers the Nusra Front as apostates "because they fight alongside foreign-backed groups."¹⁷³ Moreover, IS launched a Twitter campaign aimed to highlight al-Nusra's weaknesses.¹⁷⁴ Along with the transmission of negative messages about its opponents, the group also broadcasted messages presenting themselves as true believers and defenders of the Sunnis.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Gunnar J. Weimann, "Competition and Innovation in a Hostile Environment: How Jabhat Al-Nusra and Islamic State Moved to Twitter in 2013–2014," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42, no. 1–2 (2019): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1513692>.

¹⁷⁰ Zech and Kelly, "Off With Their Heads."

¹⁷¹ Walter, "The Extremist's Advantage in Civil Wars," 7.

¹⁷² Macnair and Frank, "The Mediums and the Messages: Exploring the Language of Islamic State Media through Sentiment Analysis," 450.

¹⁷³ Hassan Hassan, "The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 13, 2016, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/13/sectarianism-of-islamic-state-ideological-roots-and-political-context-pub-63746>.

¹⁷⁴ Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 68–69.

¹⁷⁵ Aaron Y. Zelin, "Picture Or It Didn't Happen: A Snapshot of the Islamic State's Official Media Output," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015): 6–7, www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/445/html.

The Islamic State broadcast images of its victorious outcome against its opponents, to show that the IS is superior to them.¹⁷⁶ Of course, these images also contained the necessary violence, which acted as a deterrent for the group's opponents. Thus, in the video "Flames of War" the group mentions about 800 prisoners, who seem to be digging their own graves and in the end are executed by the men of the Islamic State standing in front of them. It was the perfect combination of superiority and intimidation.¹⁷⁷ In addition, the constant broadcasting of IS victories, the bombardment of enemy forces, and the portrayal of the group's fighters as extremely brave were intended to convey a clear message. Whoever was with IS experienced the ultimate victory and glory; otherwise, he had to be prepared to face the inevitable defeat.¹⁷⁸

At the same time, through the dominance of these groups, and in particular Al-Nusra, and the demonstration of its strength on the battlefield, IS was trying to dethrone al Qaeda from the position of world leader of the jihadist groups and take its place.¹⁷⁹ Al Qaeda has been the dominant jihadist movement for several years, but its network has become increasingly threatened by the IS. The extreme violence used indiscriminately by the Islamic State, as well as the proclamation of the Caliphate, were what brought the two groups together in the final conflict. For its part, the IS was trying to bring to the fore all the shortcomings of AQ, with the ultimate goal of undermining the strength and legitimacy of al Qaeda. For the IS, AQ was a segregated, declining organization. This controversy is also evident in the social media posts by fans of both groups. There was a strong controversy between al Qaeda and ISIS on Twitter, with IS supporters calling al Qaeda members and leadership "Jihadi Jews," implying that al Qaeda's purpose was no

¹⁷⁶ Colombo, "IS and the Others. A Topic Analysis of Pro- and Anti-IS Discourse on Arabic-Speaking Twitter," 75–76.

¹⁷⁷ Macnair and Frank, "'To My Brothers in the West...': A Thematic Analysis of Videos Produced by the Islamic State's al-Hayat Media Center," 243.

¹⁷⁸ Macnair and Frank, 237.

¹⁷⁹ Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 68–69.

longer truly Islamic or that al Qaeda is linked to Israel.¹⁸⁰ Finally, from this confrontation with al Qaeda, the IS aimed mainly at the new generation of jihadists and foreign fighters,¹⁸¹ because they knew it would be difficult to attract al Qaeda's "old guard."¹⁸²

The terrorist attacks in the West, the images of extreme violence, and the flight of many foreign fighters were the factors that turned authorities and academics to study IS propaganda in terms of its influence in the West. Although the West was a target of the group's media, it was not its main target. For the IS and for creating the Caliphate that the group wanted, the immediate priority was the locals in Iraq and Syria. The second priority was the group of Muslims from the Middle East and North Africa and, in the end, the attraction of foreign fighters. Ali Fisher and Nico Prucha point out that "the native Sunni Arabs are their prime target audience. As a result, the jihadist movement is almost entirely directed in Arabic and its content is intimately tied to the socio-political context of the Arab world."¹⁸³

J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan conducted an extensive survey of more than 20,000 Twitter accounts between October 4 and November 27, 2014. The sample of 20,000 accounts is estimated by researchers to represent at least 93% of IS supporters. The analysis showed some critical elements that reinforce the view that the IS had as its primary target, the locals. First, the largest cluster of accounts (28%) was found in Syria and Iraq. The next largest cluster (27%) was in Saudi Arabia, and after these two clusters in no other country was there a cluster larger than 6%. While the languages used by the users of these accounts were Arabic (73%), English (18%), and French (6%), these

¹⁸⁰ Ahmed Al-Rawi and Jacob Groshek, "Jihadist Propaganda on Social Media: An Examination of ISIS Related Content on Twitter," *International Journal of Cyber Warfare and Terrorism (IJCWT)*, October 1, 2018, 9, <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJCWT.2018100101>.

¹⁸¹ Thomas Hegghammer, "The Calculated Caliphate," in *Iraq Between Maliki and the Islamic State*, POMEPS Briefings 24 (Project on Middle East Political Science, 2014), 31–32, <http://www.pomeps.org>.

¹⁸² Hegghammer, 31–32.

¹⁸³ Ali Fisher and Nico Prucha, "Follow the White Rabbit - Tracking IS Online and Insights into What Jihadists Share," in *Digital Jihad: Online Communication and Violent Extremism*, 1st ed. (Milan, Italy: ISPI, 2019), 45.

percentages reflect to which audience the IS propaganda was addressed and with what importance.¹⁸⁴ In addition, the IS used direct personal contact and traditional means such as murals and billboards, with the same messages of its propaganda, in order to win over the local population.¹⁸⁵

In implementing its outreach strategy, the IS has developed a new approach to attracting foreign fighters. Although the group's main target was the locals, as we said before, there should be no misunderstanding that the IS was not interested in foreign fighters. Foreign fighters have played an important role in the history of the jihadist movement since the 1980s.¹⁸⁶ Foreign fighters offer war experience, ideology, and devotion to the struggle and the IS wanted these characteristics to establish the Caliphate.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, the fact that the vast majority of foreign fighters who went to war in Syria fought for the IS was a blow to al Qaeda's leadership.

In addition to images of happy foreign fighters claiming that all they needed was a place like the Caliphate,¹⁸⁸ the IS developed another kind of approach, mainly to Western Muslims. The Islamic State, with the help of social media and the Internet, had brought new aspects to the concept of ideology, beyond the common themes that had been used in earlier terrorist plots.¹⁸⁹ To begin with, the Islamic State legitimized

¹⁸⁴ J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, *The ISIS Twitter Census Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Project, 2015), 7–14, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/isis_twitter_census_berger_morgan.pdf.

¹⁸⁵ Al-Qarawee, "The Media, Methods and Messages of the Islamic State's Communication Strategy," 100–102.

¹⁸⁶ Daniel Byman, *Road Warriors: Foreign Fighters in the Armies of Jihad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1–12.

¹⁸⁷ Gates and Podder, "Social Media, Recruitment, Allegiance and the Islamic State," 4.

¹⁸⁸ Rose, "The Isis Propaganda War."

¹⁸⁹ "Common ideological themes are the belief that Western societies are morally bankrupt; the West is engaged in a war against Muslims; Muslims must show loyalty to their coreligionists by fighting non-Muslims, even those living in their host societies; and that jihad and martyrdom are indeed legitimate means by which Muslims defend their faith and their coreligionists" (in Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism," 968).

transgression and violence through the creation of a subculture.¹⁹⁰ After all, violence in quantities has always served as an incentive for foreign fighters.¹⁹¹ This subculture promoted violence, fraternity among members, jihadi-cool trends, and similar elements that make up street gang subcultures.¹⁹² In this way, IS opened the door for Europeans attracted to lawlessness and violence to find a space in which they could act freely.¹⁹³ They joined up with the Islamic State as part of a sort of “super-gang.”¹⁹⁴ For example, the gesture of the raised right hand with a closed fist while the index finger is pointing upward, referring to *tawhid* (the oneness of God), used by IS members is also a gang symbol.¹⁹⁵

Finally, the IS tactics’ strategic side applied during the attacks it organized or supported in countries outside Syria-Iraq should be analyzed. The IS used “broad suicide mission” tactics during these attacks. The term “broad” includes attacks with suicide bombers as well as “lone wolves.” Most scholars have dealt more with the motives or how the “lone wolf” was radicalized rather than with the tactics of such an attack. Taking on a “lone wolf” mission by an attacker is similar to that of a suicide bomber, as in both cases, the terrorist is almost certain to die. This conclusion comes from many factors. First, the “take what you find and go out and kill as many as you can” mission violates any principle of successfully planning a strike mission, nor can such a mission be

¹⁹⁰ Andersen and Sandberg, “Islamic State Propaganda: Between Social Movement Framing and Subcultural Provocation,” 10.

¹⁹¹ Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Bram Peeters, “Fickle Foreign Fighters? A Cross-Case Analysis of Seven Muslim Foreign Fighter Mobilisations (1980-2015),” *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies* 6, no. 8 (2015): 20–21, <https://doi.org/10.19165/2015.1.07>.

¹⁹² Andersen and Sandberg, “Islamic State Propaganda: Between Social Movement Framing and Subcultural Provocation,” 10.

¹⁹³ Suraj Lakhani, “Extreme Criminals: Reconstructing Ideas of Criminality through Extremist Narratives,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 3 (2018): 208, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1450613>.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Cruickshank, “A View from the CT Foxhole: An Interview with Alain Grignard, Brussels Federal Police,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2015, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/a-view-from-the-ct-foxhole-an-interview-with-alain-grignard-brussels-federal-police/>.

¹⁹⁵ Nathaniel Zelinsky, “ISIS Sends a Message,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 3, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-09-03/isis-sends-message>.

described as a special operation mission.¹⁹⁶ That is, before carrying out the attack, the perpetrator has neither planned a way to escape, nor a safe extraction from the target, nor information about the existence of police forces on the target. In general, the action plan of the “lone wolf” has many gaps, which in essence makes such a mission a “high risk” mission, or otherwise a suicide mission.¹⁹⁷ Second, the IS called on all Muslims to attack the West in any way they can, which resulted in most of the attackers lacking the training or experience to carry out such a mission. So, the terrorists could hardly react to the resistance of the security forces. That is why most of them have been killed by police fire. In a study of terrorist attacks in Europe in 2015 and 2016, 65% of terrorists were killed on target by either suicide bombing or police fire. The remaining 35% were arrested by police.¹⁹⁸ From these results it becomes clear that no terrorists managed to escape after their attacks. So, all missions have been doomed to either death or capture by the enemy (police). For example, two “IS soldiers,”¹⁹⁹ as the IS-linked Amaq news agency called them, killed an 84-year-old priest and took four other people hostage in a church in northern France, before being found dead by fire from the French Police.²⁰⁰

Yet, the IS strengthened the undertaking of “broad suicide missions” to advance the outbidding strategy. First, as Mohammed M. Hafez argues, “[g]roups that deploy suicide attacks appear the most daring, heroic, and sacrificing. These qualities naturally raise their legitimacy among the public in the context of conflict with outside groups.”²⁰¹ Second, taking, for example, the rivalry between Hamas and Islamic Jihad, suicide

¹⁹⁶ Craig Whiteside, Ian Rice, and Daniele Raineri, “Black Ops: Islamic State and Innovation in Irregular Warfare,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, June 25, 2019, 19–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1628623>.

¹⁹⁷ Global Security, “FM 7-85 Chapter 5 Strike Operations,” 2020, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/7-85/ch5.htm>.

¹⁹⁸ Lorenzo Vidino, Francesco Marone, and Eva Entenmann, *Fear Thy Neighbor. Radicalization and Jihadist Attacks in the West* (Milan, Italy: ISPI, 2017), 47, www.ledizioni.it.

¹⁹⁹ Vidino, Marone, and Entenmann, 31.

²⁰⁰ “France church attack: Priest killed by two ‘IS militants’,” *BBC News*, July 26, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36892785>.

²⁰¹ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2007), XXXI.

missions play an essential role for a terrorist group in its quest to gain leadership of a movement.²⁰² Correspondingly, the IS promoted suicide missions to take the lead from al Qaeda.²⁰³ In this way, the IS wanted to highlight the inability of al Qaeda to strike at the infidels, making it rightfully the group that should be at the top of the jihadist movement.²⁰⁴ In this context, it becomes more apparent why the IS carried out attacks in the West; it was mainly a matter of prestige and not to provoke Western leaders. The IS also had to make its own “9/11” to win the competition with al Qaeda. Finally, with these suicide attacks, the IS wanted to gain more supporters and donors, taking the share from AQ.²⁰⁵

Simultaneously, suicide missions also advanced the other strategies adopted by the IS, which are studied in this paper. Beginning with the intimidation strategy, as Robert A. Pape explains, suicide attacks in whatever form have “in common a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland.”²⁰⁶ So the IS wanted to pressure the Western democracies not to send troops to its territory. In addition, the suicide missions cause terror because they show a side of the group that emphasizes that it is ready for anything and is not afraid of death either. While the group leaves open the fact that another attack can be made with maybe more victims at any time.²⁰⁷

Finally, the attacks that have already taken place in Western societies, in combination with what the IS has projected and proclaimed, have created a phobia that at any time, a Muslim can pick up a vehicle and rush at a crowd or pick up a knife to attack unsuspecting citizens. This phobia resulted in the suspicion and marginalization of

²⁰² Bloom, “Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding,” 73.

²⁰³ Mia M. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 1st ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 26–27.

²⁰⁴ Bloom, 26–29.

²⁰⁵ Bloom, 77.

²⁰⁶ Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2005), 4.

²⁰⁷ Pape, 28.

Muslims by their fellow citizens and the oppression of Muslims by the police's strict and unjust security measures. Both of these cases reinforce the IS' polarization strategy.

C. POLARIZATION STRATEGY

The third strategy adopted by the IS was polarization. This strategy has its roots in Zarqawi and the landmark book *Management of Savagery*. Brian H. Fishman argues that “[t]he ‘Management of Savagery’ book’s core message is that polarizing society through brutal violence is valuable to mobilize a reticent population.”²⁰⁸ The Islamic State began the polarization strategy in a sectarian context, mainly against the Shiites in Iraq.²⁰⁹ They then pursued this strategy in Western societies, and especially in Europe, to polarize Muslims and non-Muslims.²¹⁰ In both cases, the group tried to push an “us vs. them” doctrine.²¹¹ The enemies of the IS did not wage war on the group but against Islam, according to this strategy. Through the study of relevant literature, Tyler Welch emphasizes the importance of the doctrine of “us against them” and states “[t]his us-versus-them mentality can be an effective tool in unifying and motivating a terror group[.] Furthermore, articles in ISIS online magazines also securitize its enemies. With the perception of danger and constant contestation from ‘the other, securitization of the common enemy encourages urgent action outside the realm of calm policy debate, legitimizing violent action.’”²¹²

For the analysis of the IS polarization strategy, as mentioned, the research should begin with the AQI. The ground in Iraq was conducive for the AQI to implement a

²⁰⁸ Brian H. Fishman, *The Master Plan*, 1st ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 38.

²⁰⁹ Mohammed M. Hafez, “The Origins of Sectarian Terrorism in Iraq,” in *The Evolution of the Global Terrorist Threat : From 9/11 to Osama Bin Laden’s Death*, 1st ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 436–60; Celso, “Dabiq: IS’s Apocalyptic 21st Century Jihadist Manifesto,” 1.

²¹⁰ John Turner, “Manufacturing the Jihad in Europe: The Islamic State’s Strategy,” *The International Spectator* 55, no. 1 (2020): 113, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1712136>.

²¹¹ Colombo, “IS and the Others. A Topic Analysis of Pro- and Anti-IS Discourse on Arabic-Speaking Twitter,” 80.

²¹² Tyler Welch, “Theology, Heroism, Justice, and Fear: An Analysis of ISIS Propaganda Magazines Dabiq and Rumiyah,” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 11, no. 3 (2018): 191–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2018.1517943>.

sectarian strategy, as for years, Saddam had presided over a sectarian protection system that largely favored the minority at the expense of an impoverished and upset majority.²¹³ William McCants has emphasized that “Zarqawi hated the Shiites not only because they were traitors and collaborators of the Americans, but also because they served the Antichrist, just as the Americans did. At the end of time, the Antichrist will come to fight the Muslims. For this reason, Zarqawi wanted to start a civil sectarian war between Sunnis and Shiites, with the aim of eradicating the latter.”²¹⁴ Zarqawi used extreme violence against Shiites in Iraq,²¹⁵ and he explained in a letter that the “fighting against the Shi’a is the way to drag the [Islamic] nation into the battle.”²¹⁶ For Zarqawi the worst enemy for the Sunnis was the Shiites, and also they were the key to change. By targeting and hitting Shia “in their religious, political, and military depth will provoke them to show the Sunnis their rabies and bare the teeth of the hidden rancor working in their breasts.”²¹⁷

To make his strategy a success, Zarqawi launched a campaign of terror against prominent Shiite clerics, civilians, and important Shia symbols. The hallmark of this campaign was suicide bombers. Between 2003 and 2006, AQI carried out 514 suicide attacks in Iraq.²¹⁸ Attacks could range from a suicide bomber to large-scale complex attacks against multiple targets. In 2003, AQI launched attacks on markets, Shiite mosques, and cities, including Kadhimiya, Samarra, Najaf, Baquba, Howaidar, and Shiite areas of Baghdad. The main target of these attacks was Iraqi civilians. In the same year, the Zarqawi group attacked at the Imam Ali Mosque, one of Shia’s holiest mosques, and killed the leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution of Iraq, Ayatollah

²¹³ Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 27.

²¹⁴ William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 1st ed. (New York: St.Martin’s Press, 2015), 10–11.

²¹⁵ Hassan, “The Sectarianism of the Islamic State.”

²¹⁶ Ingram, Whiteside, and Winter, *The ISIS Reader*, 46.

²¹⁷ Ingram, Whiteside, and Winter, 44–45.

²¹⁸ Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 57.

Mohammad Baqr al-Hakim.²¹⁹ In 2005, AQI using a suicide bombing killed 125 people in the Shia city of Hilla, many of whom were recruits for Iraqi security forces. The following year, AQI launched a series of suicide bombings in Karbala's holy city, spreading death. The most valuable attack on Zarqawi's campaign was the bombing of the al-Askariya Mosque in Samarra.²²⁰ The mosque is an important Shiite shrine that houses the tombs of the tenth and eleventh imams of the Shia faith, Ali al-Askari and his son Hasan al-Askari. This attack contributed igniting an unofficial civil war between Sunnis and Shiites.²²¹

The ISI, the successor to the AQI, pursued the same strategy, targeting either Shiites or security forces. So, the ground for the IS to exercise its polarization strategy was already prepared. The IS propaganda aimed to create a common enemy to achieve the unification of its group members into a united front. Furthermore, to strengthen this front, the group was trying to emphasize the righteousness of the IS operations, and on the other hand, to show in detail how wrong the IS enemies are. The group classifies its enemies into three groups: anti-Muslims, Muslims—apostates, and Muslims—supporters. The first group concerns all infidels, and especially America, Europe, and Israel, who aim to destroy the Arab world and Islam. The second group consists of Shiites and Muslims who deny the imposition of Islamic law. Finally, the third group is all Muslims who cooperate or support the two previous groups.

The IS, as Zarqawi did, believed that the enemies within Islam were the worst. The group organized an offensive campaign against the internal enemy, making extensive use of extreme force. The group supported this campaign extensively through its media. The targets of these attacks were mainly people of different sects and their important symbols. The number one target of IS, like its predecessors, was the Shiites. According to IS' beliefs, the Shia is a "heretical *apostate* group with Jewish origins that are driven by a

²¹⁹ Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 30.

²²⁰ Mohammed Hafez, "The Origins of Sectarian Terrorism in Iraq," in *The Evolution of the Global Terrorist Threat: From 9/11 to Osama Bin Laden's Death*, 1st ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 436.

²²¹ Hashim, *The Caliphate at War*, secs. 4281–4289.

pathological need to corrupt and destroy Islam.”²²² The main goal of the IS was to attack and provoke the Iraqi Shiites so that they would retaliate against their Sunni compatriots. The retaliation against the Sunnis by the Shiites would result in the former turning to the IS for protection. Thus, when the IS invaded and occupied Camp Speicher in Tikrit, it executed, according to Human Rights Watch, 770 Shiite soldiers who had surrendered. Moreover, when the group captured Mosul, it rushed to Badoush Prison and killed all the Shiite prisoners.²²³ But also the acts of revenge by the Shiites had a direct effect on Sunni groups such as the Islamic Army of Iraq, Ansar al-Sunnah and the Mujahideen Army, which while in 2007 united to fight AQI, in 2014 these groups helped ISIS to capture Fallujah. Eventually Zarqawi’s polarization strategy brought results.²²⁴

In addition to its core areas in Iraq, IS used the same strategy in Syria when it occupied its territories. Syria had many similarities with Iraq, making it easy for the IS to implement its polarization strategy. Sectarianism in Syria has existed for many years. In particular, the ruling sect in Syria was the Alawites, who were the minority, exercising power over the Sunnis, who made up 75% of the population.²²⁵ The IS wanted to take advantage of this situation to recruit the Sunnis, trying to convince them that they were the victims and that they had been humiliated for years.²²⁶ Moreover, the Islamic State expanded its sectarian war beyond the Iraq-Syria front. With aggressive rhetoric and selective attacks, mainly on mosques, the Islamic State targeted Shiites in countries with large Shiite populations, including Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Yemen. In 2015, they bombed a mosque in Asir in Saudi Arabia, killing 13 Saudi security officers. That same year, IS carried out suicide bombings in Beirut’s Shiite neighborhood, killing 43 people. Both attacks were intended to undermine these states’ social cohesion by polarizing

²²² Anthony N. Celso, “Sectarianism, State Failure and the Radicalization of Sunni Jihadist Groups,” *International Journal of Political Science (IJPS)* 4, no. 3 (2018): 29–30, <http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2454-9452.0403004>.

²²³ Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 30–31.

²²⁴ Fishman, *The Master Plan*, 183–84.

²²⁵ Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 129.

²²⁶ Al-Qarawee, “The Media, Methods and Messages of the Islamic State’s Communication Strategy,” 103–4.

relations between Shiite and Sunni communities in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon.²²⁷ By inciting sectarian strife in the Muslim community, the group aimed to present itself as the protector of Sunnis around the world.²²⁸ The IS stands beside and defends the community against “crusaders,” “the armies of the cross,” and “apostate rulers.”²²⁹

Finally, the IS launched a campaign against religious monuments that were not in line with the group’s beliefs. The campaign involved Shiite, Sufi, and pagan monuments. In 2014, the IS looted and destroyed the tombs of Prophet Shayth (Biblical Seth) and Prophet Yunus (Biblical Jonah), and after declaring that “the mosque of Prophet Yunus had become a place of apostasy and not of prayer,” they placed explosives and demolished it.²³⁰ The same year the IS dominated the village of Bashir of Taza, in the province of Kirkuk, where the group looted and blew up religious shrines and Shiite mosques.²³¹

In 2015, the IS destroyed the tomb of Mohammed bin Ali, who is worshiped as a saint by the Shiites. The group also blew up the Shrine of Abu Behaeddine, a 500-year-old Sufi monument. Finally, the cultural monuments of Palmyra did not escape from the IS either. The group blew up and destroyed the Temples of Baalshamin and Bel monuments, while also distributing videos showing children killing 25 regime soldiers at the Roman Theater in Palmyra.²³²

In Europe, as John Turner states, the IS “seeks to capitalize on existing inter-communal tensions in Europe characterized by alienation, marginalization, and fear of

²²⁷ Hashim, *The Caliphate at War*, secs. 5204–5220.

²²⁸ Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, and Moreng, “The Islamic State’s Global Propaganda Strategy,” 21.

²²⁹ Zech and Kelly, “Off With Their Heads.”

²³⁰ Abdelhak Mamoun, “ISIL Destroys Mosque of Biblical Jonah, Prophet Yunus,” Iraqi News, July 25, 2014, <https://www.iraqinews.com/features/urgent-isil-destroys-mosque-biblical-jonah-prophet-yunus/>.

²³¹ Abdelhak Mamoun, “ISIL Loots and Destroys Shia Mosques near Kirkuk,” Iraqi News, July 17, 2014, <https://www.iraqinews.com/features/urgent-isil-loots-destroys-shia-mosques-near-kirkuk/>.

²³² Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 273.

the other.”²³³ With this strategy, the Islamic State expects to persuade Muslims in a “gray” zone to move to the jihadist side, adopting a Dar al Harb / Dar al Islam.²³⁴ By this narrative, the group was trying to gain additional supporters, and especially those who did not have a clear stance, that is, whether they were for or against the IS.²³⁵ Finally, the Islamic State, through videos sent to social media, opened up to Muslims in the West. These Muslims might feel persecuted or oppressed in the countries they live in and the videos called on them to become members of a global Muslim population.²³⁶

The key to achieving this IS strategy was to turn non-Muslims against Muslims. With its attacks and acts of extreme violence, the IS, exaggerating these two through its media, aimed to increase anti-Muslim hatred, Islamophobia,²³⁷ and the oppression of Muslims by the policies pursued by the Western authorities. The unjust and aggressive behavior of non-Muslims was what would fill the hearts of Western Muslims with grievances.²³⁸ Grievances are one of the main factors that produce extremism. Moreover, grievances create conditions for possible radicals. The IS wants to take full advantage of

²³³ Turner, “Manufacturing the Jihad in Europe: The Islamic State’s Strategy,” 122.

²³⁴ Sarah Lyons-Padilla et al., “Belonging Nowhere: Marginalization & Radicalization Risk among Muslim Immigrants,” *Behavioral Science & Policy* 1, no. 2 (2015): 1; Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, and Moreng, “The Islamic State’s Global Propaganda Strategy,” 23.

²³⁵ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Toward a Profile of Lone Wolf Terrorists: What Moves an Individual from Radical Opinion to Radical Action,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 1 (2014): 72–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.849916>.

²³⁶ Macnair and Frank, “‘To My Brothers in the West...’: A Thematic Analysis of Videos Produced by the Islamic State’s al-Hayat Media Center,” 246.

²³⁷ “Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilizing and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed ‘we’. Islamophobia operates by constructing a static ‘Muslim’ identity, which is attributed in negative terms and generalized for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts as Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam.” Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report - 2015* (Ankara, Turkey: SETA, 2016), 7.

²³⁸ “Grievances include economic marginalization and cultural alienation, deeply held sense of victimization, or strong disagreements regarding the foreign policies of states. Grievances could also entail personal disaffection, loss, or crisis that leads one to seek a new path in life.” Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38 (2015): 961, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1051375>.

grievances to broaden their prospective pool of recruits, attackers, sympathizers, and donors.

First, the Islamic State's terrorist attacks raised Europeans' anxiety, filling them with fear, and as a result, the terrorists achieved their goal.²³⁹ Between 2014 and 2017, there were 51 jihadist attacks in North America and Europe. Of the 65 terrorists who carried out the attacks, 73% were citizens of the country in which they carried out the attack. This extensive percentage results in the citizens of these societies suspecting and marginalizing Muslims.²⁴⁰ As al Adnani did in his speech entitled "Indeed Your Lord Is Ever Watchful," IS's calls to the Muslims to attack the infidels in the West strengthened the climate against Muslims.²⁴¹ When these calls became a reality through the terrorist attacks, the anti-Muslim climate intensified.

Observing the reactions of citizens in France, Germany, Spain, and the UK, it is possible to draw certain conclusions related to their concerns about Islamic extremism. In 2005, the year after the terrorist attack in London and one year after Madrid, 43% of the citizens in Spain, 35% in Germany, 34% in the UK, and 32% in France were concerned about the potential for Islamic extremism.²⁴² In 2011 the rates were 32% in Spain, 26% in Germany, 31% in the UK, and 29% in France. In 2015, following the emergence of the Islamic State and its subsequent attacks, these rates almost doubled, reflecting the

²³⁹ European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, *Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA) 2019* (The Hague, The Netherlands: EUROPOL, 2019), 9, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/iocta-report>.

²⁴⁰ Vidino, Marone, and Entenmann, *Fear Thy Neighbor. Radicalization and Jihadist Attacks in the West*, 101.

²⁴¹ Abu-Muhammad al-Adnani ash-Shami, "Indeed Your Lord Is Ever Watchful," pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com, September 22, 2014, <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmaur.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16495/ADN20140922.pdf?sequence=1>.

²⁴² Andrew Kohut et al., *Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics*, 17-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2005), 3, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2005/07/14/islamic-extremism-common-concern-for-muslim-and-western-publics/>.

concern of European citizens and the terror that the Islamic State gave birth to.²⁴³ Moreover, the videos of beheadings and other extremes promoted by IS on the Internet had the effect of negatively impacting Western societies' views of Muslims and linking Islam to violence. Simone Friis cites a PEW Research study that states "the number of Americans associating Islam with violence has risen dramatically to an all-time high of 50% following the distribution of videotaped beheadings."²⁴⁴

At the same time, Islamophobia has been on the rise in Europe due to the combination of terrorist attacks and immigration.²⁴⁵ The climate against Muslims has been worsened by far-right parties or organizations that are flourishing in Europe.²⁴⁶ The negative behavior that Muslims experience from their European compatriots is a form of anti-Muslim racism, also known as Islamophobia.²⁴⁷ Islamophobia has to do with the phenomenon of unequal treatment of Muslim citizens in Western societies. This inequality is often combined with the dehumanization of Muslims in the perception of their Western compatriots. Thus, while Muslims are the victims of physical attacks and political restrictions, they are often confronted with a climate of distrust and hostility from the authorities and society when they turn to them to defend themselves. As Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez state that "Islamophobia is by no means confined to the working poor or the middle class, who have been misinformed about Islam and Muslims. It is especially true for the so-called educated elite. Discriminating policies like the ban of the hijab for certain professions, the ban of the niqab in public, bans of minarets and other laws restricting Muslim's freedom of religion speak

²⁴³ Jacob Poushter, "Extremism Concerns Growing in West and Predominantly Muslim Countries," *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project* (blog), July 16, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/07/16/extremism-concerns-growing-in-west-and-predominantly-muslim-countries/>.

²⁴⁴ Friis, "'Beyond Anything We Have Ever Seen': Beheading Videos and the Visibility of Violence in the War against ISIS," 738–39.

²⁴⁵ David Laitin, "Rational Islamophobia in Europe," *Archives Européennes De Sociologie* 51, no. 3 (2010): 429, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975610000202>.

²⁴⁶ "Anti-Muslim Racism in Europe on Rise in 2018: Report," SETA, 2019, <https://www.setav.org/en/anti-muslim-racism-in-europe-on-rise-in-2018-report/>.

²⁴⁷ Bayrakli and Hafez, "European Islamophobia Report - 2015," 7.

volumes.”²⁴⁸ The rise of IS in Syria and Iraq as well as the images of extreme violence it promoted through its media, the flight of many European Muslims to join IS as foreign fighters, and finally the terrorist attacks carried out by IS supporters in Europe during 2015–2018, are the key factors that have increased Islamophobia within European societies. Three states that combine all of the preceding factors are France, Belgium, and the UK.

Starting with the Belgian case, Islam and the issue of Belgian Muslims issue has been at the forefront of public debate since 2015. At the beginning of that year, the Belgian authorities launched a campaign of raid to find individuals suspected of Islamic extremism. This practice of the Belgian police developed a climate of dread and insecurity among Belgian Muslims. The terrorist attacks in France in November 2015 acted as a trigger for Islamophobia to erupt in Belgium. And this is explained by the sharp rise in Islamophobic attacks on Belgian Muslims after November 13 and the Paris attack. Between November 13 and December 16, 2015, a total of 47 episodes were reported against Muslims in Belgium, and mainly Muslim women who had a prominent Muslim appearance.²⁴⁹ As in the previous year, Islamophobia continued to increase throughout Belgium in 2016. On March 22, 2016, the attacks at Maalbeek metro station and Zaventem airport sparked a climate of hatred and anti-Muslim prejudice. The involvement of Belgian media and politicians, who turned against the Muslims, also shaped this climate.²⁵⁰ Finally, Islamophobic incidents were recorded in both in 2017 and 2018.²⁵¹

Implementing the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, which was a continuation of the previous PREVENT policy of 2005, made the situation even worse for British

²⁴⁸ Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report - 2016* (Ankara, Turkey: SETA, 2017), 7.

²⁴⁹ Amina Easat-Daas, *Islamophobia in Belgium: National Report 2015, European Islamophobia Report 2015* (Istanbul, Turkey: SETA, 2016), 53.

²⁵⁰ Amina Easat-Daas, *Islamophobia in Belgium: National Report 2016, European Islamophobia Report 2016* (Istanbul, Turkey: SETA, 2017), 64.

²⁵¹ Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report - 2018* (Ankara, Turkey: SETA, 2019), 30–33.

Muslims. Under this law, it was possible to report to the police a person who was a suspected extremist. This parameter resulted in complaints against Muslims without evidence but based on prejudices and misconceptions.²⁵² Muslims' situation was fully reflected in a BBC poll in 2015; the results showed that because of prejudice against Islam, about half of British Muslims (46%) said it was challenging to live in the UK.²⁵³ This prejudice against Muslims also prevails in finding work in the UK, where Muslims are less likely to be hired than whites even if they have the same qualifications and age. This phenomenon is described as the "Muslim penalty," and 76% of Muslim men experience this phenomenon, while 65% of Muslim women do.²⁵⁴ 2016 was a challenging year for the UK after the referendum on leaving the EU. The political campaign in support of Brexit was based mainly on issues against minorities and Islam. The following year, terrorist attacks sparked increased anti-Muslim sentiment,²⁵⁵ and attacks against Muslims rose sharply, from 47% in the previous year to 110%.²⁵⁶

In 2015, the terrorist attacks on Charlie Hebdo headquarters and Paris marked France. These attacks also increased the already existing Islamophobia within French society, a country with the largest Muslim population in Europe. Furthermore, a 2016 survey revealed that 25% of teens in France were Muslim. This percentage reveals that there is a large audience for jihadist propaganda in France, and since as teenagers, they are "hot-blooded."²⁵⁷ Especially after the Paris attack, both the French authorities and the citizens turned against the Muslims, leading to the marginalization of the latter. French authorities have raised the issue of Islam in public debates as part of a series of raids on mosques and Muslim institutions to arrest extremists. However, also within French

²⁵² Arzu Merali, *Islamophobia in UK: National Report 2015, European Islamophobia Report 2015* (Istanbul, Turkey: SETA, 2016), 552.

²⁵³ Merali, 556.

²⁵⁴ Merali, 559.

²⁵⁵ Aristotle Kallis, *Islamophobia in UK: National Report 2017, European Islamophobia Report 2017* (Istanbul, Turkey: SETA, 2018), 677–78.

²⁵⁶ Kallis, 674.

²⁵⁷ Michel Gurfinkiel, "Islamization and Demographic Denialism in France," Middle East Forum, 2016, <https://www.meforum.org/5909/quarter-of-french-teenagers-are-muslim>.

society, Muslims have become victims of violence by their fellow citizens.²⁵⁸ According to Oliver Esteves' review of research conducted by *Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France* (CCIF), in the first half of 2015, attacks on Muslims increased rapidly by 500%, with 75% of the victims being Muslim women due to their appearance.²⁵⁹ In the wake of the terrorist attacks in Paris, the French government declared a state of emergency. This regime strengthened the forces of the executive branch of the French authorities, which immediately targeted the Muslims. In 2016, the French authorities carried out more than 4,000 raids against Muslim targets, of which only six were based on terror-related elements.²⁶⁰ In 2017, there was a decrease in physical attacks against Muslims compared to 2016; despite the decrease, there were 121 anti-Muslim attacks. Besides, the French authorities continued to oppress Muslims as they continued to target Muslim individuals and their institutions.²⁶¹

Finally, the policies pursued by the Western authorities towards the Muslims, in addition to the oppression, also resulted in their humiliation and making them feel out of place in the society in which they lived. A 2012 report by Human Rights Watch detailed the behavior of the French police towards Arabs in France. According to the report, the police used an ethnic profile when selecting the people to be subjected to security checks. In these checks, the police treated the citizens of Arab descent in a derogatory manner, using offensive language and racial defamation, while the police's excessive use of force is not uncommon.²⁶² This situation is confirmed by another study in 2009, which found that in France, Arabs were almost eight times more likely than whites to be stopped by

²⁵⁸ Oliver Esteves, *Islamophobia in France: National Report 2015, European Islamophobia Report 2015* (Istanbul, Turkey: SETA, 2016), 158.

²⁵⁹ Esteves, 161–62.

²⁶⁰ Yasser Louati, *Islamophobia in France: National Report 2016, European Islamophobia Report 2016* (Istanbul, Turkey: SETA, 2017), 197.

²⁶¹ Yasser Louati, *Islamophobia in France: National Report 2017, European Islamophobia Report 2017* (Istanbul, Turkey: SETA, 2018), 218.

²⁶² "France: Abusive Identity Checks of Minority Youth," Human Rights Watch, January 26, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/01/26/france-abusive-identity-checks-minority-youth>.

policemen for security checks.²⁶³ The aforementioned practices applied by the French police resulted in the Arabs living in France feeling humiliated and excluded from society.²⁶⁴ In 2016, the Defender of Rights institution conducted a survey in France, which showed that it was now 20 times more likely for the police to stop an Arab than a white person for a security check.²⁶⁵ This increase in French police checks on Arabs, which was about 2.5 times higher than in 2009, may have contributed to the terrorist attacks at Charlie Hebdo in January 2015, followed by the mass shootings and suicide bombings in Paris of November 2015, as well as the Nice attack on Bastille Day in July 2016. Current anti-terrorism legislation in France allows the police to carry out security checks on people, bags, and vehicles, without having to show any apparent serious or imminent threat.²⁶⁶

In addition to checks, police in France also intervene in matters of Islamic tradition, such as what a Muslim woman may or may not wear.²⁶⁷ For example, Lisa I. Carroll states that “[t]he French Administrative Court [...] ruled that Muslim girls could remain in school and wear their headscarves, changed its rulings, and banned all ‘ostentatious’ displays of religion. The ban was not limited to schools. Police in Nice, just one short month after the terrorist attacks on Bastille Day, ordered a woman to remove

²⁶³ Steven Erlanger, “Study Says Blacks and Arabs Face Bias From Paris Police,” *The New York Times*, June 29, 2009, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/30/world/europe/30france.html>.

²⁶⁴ “‘The Root of Humiliation,’” Human Rights Watch, January 26, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/01/26/root-humiliation/abusive-identity-checks-france>; *French Police Target Black and Arab Children as Young as 10*, Human Rights Watch (Paris, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VszwKotQw_s&feature=emb_title.

²⁶⁵ Aline Robert, “France Has a Discrimination Problem, Says National Human Rights Defender,” *Euractiv*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/non-discrimination/news/france-has-a-discrimination-problem-says-national-human-rights-defender/>.

²⁶⁶ The current counterterrorism legislation in France is the French Code on Internal Security, art. 226–1, as modified by the Law on Internal Security and Terrorism (2017-1510 of October 30, 2017) (“‘They Talk to Us Like We’re Dogs,’” Human Rights Watch, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/06/18/they-talk-us-were-dogs/abusive-police-stops-france>).

²⁶⁷ Robert Zaretsky, “How French Secularism Became Fundamentalist,” *Foreign Policy*, April 7, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/07/the-battle-for-the-french-secular-soul-laicite-charlie-hebdo/>.

her ‘burkini,’ as the press labeled modest minded beachwear mainly for observant Muslim women.”²⁶⁸

D. SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

In order for propaganda to succeed, its purpose must be comprehensive and include all modern media.²⁶⁹ So in addition to the Internet, radio, banners, leaflets, and posters, the IS also uses magazines as a means of spreading its propaganda. The IS placed great emphasis on its magazines, designing them in great detail and sophistication, and this is because “magazines are instruments of power.”²⁷⁰ The IS published an online English-language magazine, as the official magazine of the group, but they changed its name after the fall of Dabiq. The IS published 15 issues of what was first called *Dabiq* between July 2014 and July 2016, and then 13 issues of the magazine under its second title *Rumiyah*, between September 2016 and September 2017.²⁷¹ The analysis of the messages promoted by IS’ online magazine is vital to understanding the strategies implemented by the IS, and consequently, what its strategic goals were. Simultaneously, the comparison between the two versions of the magazine offers insight into the modus operandi of the IS over time, from the establishment of the Caliphate to the loss of territory.

The analysis was carried out by coding the cover of each magazine. The magazine cover is the most valuable piece for any magazine.²⁷² First, in today’s

²⁶⁸ Lisa I. Carroll, “The Nexus of Law Enforcement and Intelligence,” in *The Conduct of Intelligence in Democracies : Processes, Practices, Cultures*, 1st ed. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2019), 111–12.

²⁶⁹ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda, The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 9.

²⁷⁰ Carolyn Kitch, “Theory and Methods of Analysis,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Magazine Research, The Future of the Magazine Form*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 10.

²⁷¹ Welch, “Theology, Heroism, Justice, and Fear: An Analysis of ISIS Propaganda Magazines Dabiq and Rumiyah,” 188.

²⁷² Ted Spiker, “The Magazine Cover,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Magazine Research, The Future of the Magazine Form*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 377; Lindsey Kressin, “Racial Cover-up 1996–2000: Who Is the Face on Today’s Fashion Magazine?,” in *Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 5–6.

digital environment where information passes quickly in front of the reader's eyes,²⁷³ a magazine cover must be eye-catching to can gain his or her attention.²⁷⁴ Thus, most designers no longer put much information on covers, and instead highlight two or three crucial things about the magazine and its representation. As Sara Jerde explains "covers are a brand statement. They are to promote who you are and what you stand for." ²⁷⁵ Secondly, the IS used its magazines to promote and maintain its branding,²⁷⁶ and the magazine cover and its design reinforced the brand.²⁷⁷ How cleverly a cover is designed not only promotes the message the group wants to convey its audience through the Internet, but can help that message go viral. The Internet allows magazine covers to reach audiences farther away than ever before. Magazine covers now have their own URLs, enabling them to be continuously distributed on the Internet via sharing on Facebook, tweets, and retweets, and this process makes the cover viral.²⁷⁸ Nowadays, the cover is a statement on multiple levels, and it becomes what people associate with the cover's message.²⁷⁹ For example, in an NBD survey, the phenomenon of an event becoming viral was observed mainly from its exposure on a magazine cover, since 80% of the

²⁷³ Rajesh Sharma, "Impact and Relevance of Design Principles in Magazine Covers: A Content Analysis," *ASCO, Amity Journal of Media & Communication Studies* 6, no. 1 (2016): 15.

²⁷⁴ Deana B. Davalos, Ruth A. Davalos, and Heidi S. Layton, "Content Analysis of Magazine Headlines: Changes over Three Decades?," *SAGE, Feminism & Psychology* 17, no. 2 (2007): 252, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353507076559>.

²⁷⁵ Sara Jerde, "Why Magazine Covers Are Making A Comeback," *AdWeek*, accessed August 12, 2020, <https://www.adweek.com/digital/why-magazine-covers-are-making-a-comeback/>.

²⁷⁶ Amarnath Amarasingam, "A View from the CT Foxhole: An Interview with an Official at Europol's EU Internet Referral Unit," *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 2 (February 2020): 15–19, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/view-ct-foxhole-interview-official-europols-eu-internet-referral-unit/>.

²⁷⁷ Sammye Johnson, "The Art and Science of Magazine Cover Research," *Journal of Magazine & New Media Research* 5, no. 1 (2002): 1.

²⁷⁸ Bunker and Bunker Ligouri, *Radical Islamist English-Language Online Magazines*, secs. 1539–1545.

²⁷⁹ Carol Holstead, "Magazine Design," in *The Routledge Handbook of Magazine Research, The Future of the Magazine Form*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 392.

respondents had not read the article and were affected only by the cover.²⁸⁰ This is the trend that happens today with all the popular magazines in the Western world and IS followed this trend with its own magazine, designing its covers accordingly.

According to the prevailing trends prevailing in modern cover design, to be effective, the cover does not have to contain a lot of information. So firstly, there are no more slogans, buzzwords, or graphics on their covers.²⁸¹ And secondly, the design elements most critical for success are a) the masthead or title of the magazine, b) the main image on the cover, and c) the main cover line or anchorage text.²⁸²

The covers of IS magazines, following the design patterns of popular Western magazines, did not have slogans, buzzwords, or graphics on their covers. This thesis chapter analyzes the covers by coding the strategies promoted by the main image and the main cover line of each cover of both versions of the magazine (*Dabiq*, *Rumiyah*). Afterward, the covers were categorized into three broad strategy types. Each cover image and main cover line were read and coded according to the strategy they advanced. For instance, a cover image depicting the IS capture of a new territory would be get the code as cover advanced the outbidding strategy. Cover images or cover lines that clearly advanced two strategies were granted with two codes. For the sake of parsimony and simplicity, each cover image or cover line got only one or two codes. For covers that included many elements, a judgment was made as to which codes represented the cover's dominant strategy. This judgment was done by comparing the cover image and the cover line to find out the common concept of these two, and in case of doubt, the final ranking was made after reading the article in the magazine that had the same topic as the cover. Finally, the magazine title, which is the third crucial element in the design of a periodical,

²⁸⁰ Catherine Taibi, "How the Magazine Cover Is Surviving—And Thriving—In the Digital Revolution," HuffPost, December 6, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/magazine-covers-digital-revolution_n_7590566.

²⁸¹ BBC, "Analysing a Magazine," GCSE Media Studies Revision, accessed August 11, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zcpqdmn/revision/2>.

²⁸² BBC.

is analyzed in the context of IS strategies and compared with the results of the analysis of the other two elements of the cover.

E. NUMERICAL OVERVIEW

As already mentioned, IS chose two titles for its online magazine. For *Dabiq*'s 15 cover images, three were coded as advancing the intimidation strategy, 11 as advancing the outbidding strategy, and eight as advancing the polarization strategy. Similarly, of *Dabiq*'s 15 main cover lines, three were coded as advancing the intimidation strategy, 12 as advancing the outbidding strategy, and eight as advancing the polarization strategy. For *Rumiyah*'s 13 cover images, ten were coded as advancing the intimidation strategy, four as advancing the outbidding strategy, and two as advancing the polarization strategy. In a similar way, of *Rumiyah*'s seven main cover lines, five were coded as advancing the intimidation strategy, four as advancing the outbidding strategy, and two as advancing the polarization strategy. The covers of each of these magazines and their elements that were used in this analysis are provided in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.

F. INITIAL OBSERVATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The comparison between *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* covers reveals changes in the IS strategies and offers valuable insights about the group during the period in which these magazines were published. Remarkable initial findings include:

1. Masthead or Title of the Magazine

The choice of the magazine titles reflects the core of the IS strategies at the time of the magazine's publication. Besides, these two titles had a significant interpretation. A few days after announcing that it had re-established the Caliphate, the group chose the title *Dabiq* for the magazine it published. *Dabiq*, according to radical Islamist eschatology, is the area where the End of Days battle will be fought.²⁸³ The approach to the title was an apocalyptic promise of the IS leadership for Ummah and its life in the

²⁸³ Bunker and Bunker Ligouri, *Radical Islamist English-Language Online Magazines*, sec. 454.

Caliphate.²⁸⁴ As stated by al-Ḥayāt Media Center, the publisher of *Dabiq*: “The mission [...] is to convey a message of the Islamic State in different languages with the aim of unifying the Muslims under one flag.”²⁸⁵ Hence, the strategy supported by this title is outbidding. The next title given to the magazine was *Rumiyah*, which means Rome in Arabic, and is inspired by a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad ordered the Muslims to first conquer Constantinople, then Rome.²⁸⁶ The title reflects the change in the group’s strategy, which after the loss of territory and according to the tactical situation in Syria and Iraq, adopted an aggressive approach, thus changing its strategy to intimidate opponents.

2. Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis of the cover image and the main cover line has the same effect on supporting a particular strategy, except in one case where the main cover line adds a new strategy (*Dabiq* Issue #6). So from this point on, in this paper, the cover analysis includes both cover elements. The elements of this comparative analysis are illustrated in Appendix C.

3. Analysis of the Design of the Covers

The analysis of the design of the covers of the magazine also reflects the situation of IS in the period 2014–2017. *Dabiq*, with a sophisticated Western cover design showed the acme of the group. Important events such as the loss of the town of Dabiq, the deaths of the two of its most senior media strategists—Abu Muhammad al-’Adnani and al-Furqan—resulted in a drop in the quality of the magazine’s covers, which had changed its

²⁸⁴ Dounia Mahlouly and Charlie Winter, “A Tale of Two Caliphates: Comparing the Islamic State’s Internal and External Messaging Priorities,” VOX-Pol, 2018, 13–14, www.voxpol.eu; Marco Lombardi, “IS 2.0 and Beyond: The Caliphate’s Communication Project,” in *Twitter and Jihad: The Communication Strategy of ISIS*, 1st ed. (Milan, Italy: ISPI, 2015), 105.

²⁸⁵ *Dabiq*.

²⁸⁶ *Rumiyah*.

name at that period.²⁸⁷ That is why in the analysis of the covers, those for *Rumiyah*, after the sixth issue, had a similar quality to the *Dabiq* covers.

4. Analysis of the Covers

The analysis of the covers of the magazine reveals that the IS used the group's official magazine to promote the strategies analyzed in this chapter. Depending on the IS's tactical situation at the time the magazine was published, the group focused on a specific strategy that best served the group.

a. *Dabiq*

The analysis of *Dabiq* covers shows that the IS when it was at the peak of its power, pursued as primary goal the legitimization of the Caliphate. As Miron Lakomy points out, the “magazine attempted to present the IS as the ‘wonderland’ for Ummah.”²⁸⁸ That is why the outbidding strategy was the one that dominated the largest percentage of the covers. The IS employed soft power through the outbidding strategy, promoting its ability to provide social services and govern the Caliphate. Moreover, the group's propaganda aimed to secure a position of dominance in the jihadist movement. The same conclusions were reached by Celine Marie Novenario after her analysis of the magazine, where she states that “[f]indings reveal that Al Qaeda consistently employs attrition to compel changes in the West's policy and behavior, while the Islamic State has shifted from intimidating populations to outbidding competing groups to solidify its claim to the Caliphate.”²⁸⁹ Shahira Fahmy, in her research on the visual narratives of the

²⁸⁷ Mahloully and Winter, “A Tale of Two Caliphates: Comparing the Islamic State's Internal and External Messaging Priorities,” 19.

²⁸⁸ Miron Lakomy, “Recruitment and Incitement to Violence in the Islamic State's Online Propaganda: Comparative Analysis of *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2019, 13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1568008>.

²⁸⁹ Novenario, “Differentiating Al Qaeda and the Islamic State Through Strategies Publicized in Jihadist Magazines,” 953.

Dabiq magazine, also emphasizes that the group “focused primarily on visuals emphasizing its attractiveness and legitimacy.”²⁹⁰

Polarization was the strategy identified by the second largest percentage of magazine covers. The *Dabiq* period is characterized by a more sophisticated design on the covers to support multiple strategies.²⁹¹ Polarization is a long-term strategy, whereby IS wanted to invest in future generations of followers. For this reason, IS propaganda presented messages that demonstrate the oppression of Muslims within the Arab world by corrupt regimes or in the rest of the world by the authorities and societies in which they live. Finally, the IS advanced intimidation as its third priority to subdue populations within its territories. In an analysis made by Lakomy of the magazine’s gruesome materials and their role in the IS propaganda aimed at intimidation, he concludes that they had a secondary importance.²⁹²

b. *Rumiyah*

Rumiyah effectively abandoned its predecessor’s sophisticated narration, and it “chose to attach greater importance to inciting them to get involved in jihad against the infidels.”²⁹³ This shift was understandable as al-Baghdadi’s strategic situation deteriorated significantly in 2016 and 2017. In addition, IS supporters’ opportunities to move to the remaining areas controlled by the group in Iraq and Syria were minimized. Thus, instead, the group decided on the promotion of its agenda through intimidation. The consequence of the factors just described is that in this form of the magazine, the IS gave much less importance to its outbidding and polarization strategies.

²⁹⁰ Fahmy, “The Age of Terrorism Media: The Visual Narratives of the Islamic State Group’s *Dabiq* Magazine,” 280.

²⁹¹ Winter, “The Virtual ‘Caliphate’: Understanding Islamic State’s Propaganda Strategy,” 12–13.

²⁹² Miron Lakomy, “Danse Macabre : Gore Images in the Islamic State’s ‘*Dabiq*’ Magazine as a Propaganda Device,” *International Journal of Intelligence, Security, and Public Affairs*, 21, no. 2 (2019): 158, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23800992.2019.1649138>.

²⁹³ Lakomy, “Recruitment and Incitement to Violence in the Islamic State’s Online Propaganda: Comparative Analysis of *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*,” 13.

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IV. THE ISLAMIC STATE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The leaders of the Islamic State had understood from the beginning that the most essential part of the dynamics of their propaganda was its dissemination through the Internet. The full exploitation of the Internet spectrum and its possibilities would ensure the desired results for the group. For this reason, the IS took advantage of every latest Western technology as well as recruiting specialized personnel to use it accordingly. For example, Bari Atwan, in an interview with David Patrikarakos, explained that the group “made use of the latest Western invention—the Internet—and managing to recruit everyone from experts in IT [...] to graduates from highly reputed Western universities to put themselves on the media, political, and military map.”²⁹⁴

A. THE WEB AND SECURE BROWSERS

Web 2.0, or simply Web, is the interactive web on which Internet users can now interact with each other, exchange information, and shape the content of a web page. The web is divided into three areas, “Surface Web,” “Deep Web,” and “Dark Web.” The first domain concerns the average user, accounts for 4% of the web, and has the most information circulating on the Internet. The deep web is where data is not retrieved from standard web search engines. The data is stored in other layers where they are not accessible by the majority of users. The last area, the dark web, consists of encrypted sites, which can be accessed only by those who know where to find these sites and how to log in to them. Most of these sites are involved in criminal activities, and it is an area that also favors the development of jihadist networks.²⁹⁵

Another component is the Decentralized Web (DWeb), which has almost the same properties as the ordinary web, except for the existence of “middle man.”²⁹⁶ This

²⁹⁴ David Patrikarakos, *War in 140 Characters: How Social Media Is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*, 1st ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 208.

²⁹⁵ Nance and Sampson, *Hacking ISIS: How to Destroy the Cyber Jihad*, 14.

²⁹⁶ Loránd Bodó, “Decentralised Terrorism: The Next Big Step for the so-Called Islamic State (IS)?,” *VOX - Pol*, December 12, 2018, <https://www.voxpol.eu/decentralised-terrorism-the-next-big-step-for-the-so-called-islamic-state-is/>.

term refers to the condition that allows users to communicate with each other in the DWeb, with no large intermediaries or services that control and own the users' personal data. Loránd Bodó highlights that "the decentrali[z]ed web reverses the current data-ownership model, in which users will take back full control over their data. Decentrali[z]ed models include peer-to-peer (P2P) and various other distributed systems."²⁹⁷ Meanwhile, Peter King points out that "[t]he decentrali[z]ed web gives users more say about where their data is stored, avoiding reliance on the big Internet gatekeepers like Google and Facebook. It is built on network infrastructure that is more resilient against censorship and surveillance and poses additional challenges to law enforcement agencies, restricting their ability to remove content."²⁹⁸

Navigation on all forms of the web is done through browsers. Using browsers for IS was vital to carrying out activities on the Internet. For Web, the group used all the well-known browsers such as Firefox, Google Chrome, and Safari, among others. These browsers made it very easy for the group and its supporters to use, but also made them vulnerable to security authorities' detection. In order to protect and maintain its anonymity from surveillance by the authorities through common browsers, the IS moved in two directions. Initially, the group used these browsers simultaneously with virtual private networks (VPN), which have the ability to hide the real location of the user and, at the same time, present a random wrong location. The tech-savvy jihadists then proceeded to use the anonymous browsers as an alternative, most of which contained or were compatible with VPN programs. The Opera Browser, which contains an ad-blocker and free VPN service, was a jihadist-approved browser.²⁹⁹ Ghost VPN is a program that, combined with the anonymous browser Third Party Onion Routing (TOR), makes it

²⁹⁷ Bodó.

²⁹⁸ Peter King, "Islamic State Group's Experiments with the Decentralised Web," Europol Public Information in *Proceedings of Third Conference of the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) Advisory Network*, The Hague, The Netherlands: EUROPOL, 2019), 4, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/islamic-state-group%E2%80%99s-experiments-decentralised-web>.

²⁹⁹ Laith Alkhouri and Alex Kassirer, "Tech for Jihad: Dissecting Jihadists' Digital Toolbox," Andy Black Associates, July 2016, 2, <https://andyblackassociates.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/TechForJihad.pdf>.

extremely difficult to detect the user's IP address. Anonymous browsers such as TOR are required to gain access to the dark web.³⁰⁰ Other web browsers that function like TOR are I2P, Subgraphs OS, Freepto, and Freenet.³⁰¹ Finally, an additional measure for the jihadist network's cyber-security was to start their computers from an external source (a CD or flash drive) so that no traces were left on the hard disk. The program proposed by IS for this process was The Amnesic Incognito Live System (TAILS), which has TOR preinstalled and also provides encryption tools for files, folders, messages, and emails.³⁰²

B. SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND APPLICATIONS

The Islamic State's online campaign was implemented through several social media platforms and applications. Social media refers to how groups of people interact and communicate through online communities. Social media appear in various forms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Social media allows interactions between users who create virtual communities and networks to exchange and share information and ideas within those networks seamlessly. Applications are small computer programs, mainly for the smartphone or tablet that can perform a specific task or a small number of related tasks. As Marco Arnaboldi and Lorenzo Vidino highlight that social media platforms and applications are "easy to use and cheap, [and] they offer unlimited opportunities to share content and, as a consequence, are difficult to control: these are the strengths that social networks offer to jihadists."³⁰³

1. YouTube

YouTube is a site that allows its users to share, store, search, and play digital videos and digital movies. It was founded in 2005 and today operates as a subsidiary platform of Google. Although used by other terrorist organizations in the past, the

³⁰⁰ Abdel Bari Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, 1st ed. (London, UK: SAQI, 2015), 24.

³⁰¹ Nance and Sampson, *Hacking ISIS: How to Destroy the Cyber Jihad*, 14.

³⁰² Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, 24.

³⁰³ Arnaboldi and Vidino, "The Caliphate, Social Media and Swarms in Europe: The Appeal of the IS Propaganda to 'Would Be' European Jihadists," 129.

platform was massively exploited by Islamist fighters in the early days of the war in Syria, so much so that the war took the nickname “YouTube War.”³⁰⁴ While the campaign with the videos of the beheadings that the IS had launched was characterized by Hanna Kozłowska of the *New York Times* as “a modern guillotine execution spectacle, with YouTube as the town square.”³⁰⁵

The platform had a function that strengthened radicalization; without the IS having to intervene in this process, all the group had to do was upload as much propaganda material as possible. YouTube had developed a powerful artificial intelligence system that learns what the user likes to watch on the platform and continuously feeds him or her similar video content. This system with the process of matching the content of the videos and suggesting appropriate videos creates for the user his or her own “ecosystem.”³⁰⁶ If the user’s ecosystem consists of IS videos, he will likely become radicalized and become an ardent supporter of the group. Something similar happened in Brazil, where the unrealistic rise of the far-right on the platform was due to the “ecosystem of hate,” which had been created by YouTube’s recommendation engine.³⁰⁷

2. Twitter

Twitter is a social networking site that allows its users to send and read text messages (up to 280 characters) called tweets. Offline users can also read messages, but only those logged-in can post. The Islamic State used Twitter more than any other social media platform in its early days as a Caliphate,³⁰⁸ until the platform opposed the violent

³⁰⁴ Kylie Morris, “Online Is the New Frontline for Syrian Fighters,” Channel 4 News, 2013, <https://www.channel4.com/news/syria-youtube-jihad-weapons-videos-rebels-war-assad>.

³⁰⁵ Friis, “‘Beyond Anything We Have Ever Seen’: Beheading Videos and the Visibility of Violence in the War against ISIS,” 726.

³⁰⁶ Max Fisher and Amanda Taub, “How YouTube Radicalized Brazil,” *The New York Times*, August 11, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/11/world/americas/youtube-brazil.html?auth=login-email&login=email>.

³⁰⁷ Fisher and Taub.

³⁰⁸ Arnaboldi and Vidino, “The Caliphate, Social Media and Swarms in Europe: The Appeal of the IS Propaganda to ‘Would Be’ European Jihadists,” 129.

posts of the group and gradually closed a large number of accounts that belonged to the IS or its supporters.³⁰⁹ Until then, the group took full advantage of the platform to spread its propaganda and message about the establishment of the Caliphate to Muslims everywhere. The group and its supporters even used the platform to fight rival jihadist groups.³¹⁰ The extent of the IS's exploitation of the platform was reflected in the numbers that emerged from various studies concerning the use of Twitter by the group. For example, from September through December 2014, Berger and Morgan, in their study, estimated that at least 46,000 Twitter accounts were used by IS supporters.³¹¹ Also, Singer and Brooking highlight that "in 2014, at its peak, the ISIS propaganda machine would span at least 70000 Twitter accounts, a chaotic mix of professional media operatives, fanboys, sockpuppets, and bots."³¹²

The media staff of IS had adopted a series of tactics to be able to use the platform effectively. All the specialized staff on media and online marketing recruited by the group contributed to the design of these tactics, and their basic idea was to take full advantage of all the features provided by the platform itself.³¹³ The first tactic they applied was the multifaceted use of the hashtag and its functions. The hashtag has become a channel of online communication in critical situations in order to share important information. The hashtag is built using the "#" symbol at the beginning and then the keyword is added. As explained by Tim Highfield, that hashtag is "a common marker that allows social media users to find relevant details among the wider coverage of the unfolding events, the hashtag acting as an unstructured and automated aggregator

³⁰⁹ Adam Chandler, "Should Twitter Have Suspended the Violent ISIS Twitter Account?," *The Atlantic*, June 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/should-twitter-have-suspended-the-violent-isis-twitter-account/372805/>.

³¹⁰ Weimann, "Competition and Innovation in a Hostile Environment: How Jabhat Al-Nusra and Islamic State Moved to Twitter in 2013–2014," 30; Ahmed Al-Rawi and Jacob Groshek, "Jihadist Propaganda on Social Media: An Examination of ISIS Related Content on Twitter.," *International Journal of Cyber Warfare and Terrorism* 8, no. 4 (2018): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJCWT.2018100101>.

³¹¹ Berger and Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter," 2.

³¹² Singer and Brooking, *Like War: The Weaponization of Social Media*, 235.

³¹³ Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, 18.

of information.”³¹⁴ The hashtag on Twitter started as a reference point for the transmission of information about the fires in California in 2007, and since then, in each crisis, there have been similar hashtags that Twitter users enter to search for information related to the events of the crisis. The earthquake in Haiti in 2010 and the terrorist attack in Norway in the same year are, for example, events that generated hashtags for the transmission of information about these events.³¹⁵

The group launched a hashtag campaign in which the IS users uploaded thousands of specific hashtags in order for these hashtags to appear in the most popular hashtags of the account @ActiveHashtags. The acquisition of this Twitter account by IS was aimed at the Arab world, who came to this account to check the current events and the current top trending hashtags.³¹⁶ The other side of the hashtag exploitation was based on the “brand sharing” strategy to distribute the jihadist propaganda material. In this case, when the group’s material was published, the IS media operators added hashtags from a well-known event or person in order to distribute the material to those who follow these hashtags and who were not supporters of the group. So the group promoted its propaganda to as many as it could. For example, the jihadists used the hashtag #Louis in a video they uploaded in 2014, inadvertently forcing Grand Prix fans to expose themselves to IS to the IS propaganda content.³¹⁷ Similarly, the jihadists used pop superstar Justin Bieber’s hashtag to exploit his 74 million followers, and inadvertently or voluntarily, make them contribute to the spread of the Caliphate’s name and message.³¹⁸

The second tactic applied by IS was its creation of an Arabic-language Twitter app called The Dawn of Glad Tidings, or just Dawn. The application, an official IS

³¹⁴ Tim Highfield, *Social Media and Everyday Politics*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 91.

³¹⁵ Highfield, 90–91.

³¹⁶ Mustapha Ajbaili, “How ISIS Conquered Social Media,” Al Arabiya English, June 24, 2014, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/digital/2014/06/24/How-has-ISIS-conquered-social-media-.html>.

³¹⁷ Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, 18.

³¹⁸ James Billington, “Isis Using Justin Bieber to Trick Twitter Users into Watching Execution Videos,” International Business Times UK, January 26, 2016, <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-using-justin-bieber-trick-twitter-users-into-watching-execution-videos-1540166>.

product promoted by its top users, was advertised as working to keep Islamic State followers informed on the latest news about the group and its operations.³¹⁹ The Dawn application enabled IS media operators to post whatever tweet they wanted in the accounts of all those who had signed up for the application. The tweets shared by the IS headquarters operated as disseminators and contained mainly real-time news from the battlefield, sermons by the group leadership, photographs of battles, and equipment.³²⁰

Finally, the IS innovated a reliable tactic by opting “for decentralized crowdsourcing, in-house designed apps and bots, and hashtag hacking.”³²¹ With this tactic, IS had created a multi-tiered network among its supporters, whose mission was to strengthen the group’s presence on Twitter. The crowdsourcing tactic followed a well-designed pattern: “After being posted and authenticated by official ISIS members, a second-tier group of several dozen online activists would retweet the link with a hashtag, then retweet each other’s tweets and write new tweets, all using the same hashtag. Other activists would upload the release to multiple platforms, so that it could be found even when Internet providers pulled the content down. [A] third tier...would repeat the process on a larger scale.”³²² This continuous posting and re-posting process created what is called a Twitter storm, “where hundreds of tweets with consistent hashtags at coordinated times cross the threshold that would trigger trending alerts, thereby exposing such tweet to a wider audience and generating more activity.”³²³

³¹⁹ J. M. Berger, “How ISIS Games Twitter,” *The Atlantic*, June 16, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-iraq-twitter-social-media-strategy/372856/>.

³²⁰ Joseph A. Carter, Shiraz Maher, and Peter R. Neumann, “#Greenbirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks” (London, UK: ICSR, 2014), 15, <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ICSR-Report-Greenbirds-Measuring-Importance-and-Influence-in-Syrian-Foreign-Fighter-Networks.pdf>.

³²¹ Melki and Jabado, “Mediated Public Diplomacy of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria: The Synergistic Use of Terrorism, Social Media and Branding,” 97.

³²² Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 155.

³²³ Melki and Jabado, “Mediated Public Diplomacy of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria: The Synergistic Use of Terrorism, Social Media and Branding,” 97.

3. Telegram

The Telegram social media application became the most reliable medium for the IS to upload any relevant videos, journals, memes, and pictures.³²⁴ Telegram is an online messaging application that works similarly to popular messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Viber, and Facebook Messenger.³²⁵ According to the app's creators, Nikolai and Pavel Durov, Telegram is the fastest and safest app, and it is almost impossible to penetrate or eavesdrop on private conversations. Initially, the Telegram platform was designed to provide a secure and private messaging platform to protect users in authoritarian regimes from being monitored by the authorities. But eventually, Telegram ended up becoming the jihadists' favorite platform.³²⁶ The security protocols that followed and the advantages provided by the platform led the web team of IS to take full advantage of Telegram and use it according to the group's intended goal.

First of all, the application administrators do not follow strict security protocols regarding their users' content and show a relative tolerance. Unlike other applications that directly block such accounts, they do not quickly stop accounts that circulate material of the IS. Second, the other advantage of the app is that it provides users four different communication options. Telegram users can use direct one-to-one communications with secret chats and voice calls, which are secret and protected with a secure algorithm. Also, they can create groups and supergroups that can have up to 200,000 members and channels that broadcast to an unlimited number of users.³²⁷ The IS used these encrypted modes of communication to succeed in recruiting new members, communicating with the group's supporters, and coordinating and guiding jihadists to carry out terrorist attacks in

³²⁴ Bennett Clifford and Helen Powell, *Encrypted Extremism: Inside the English-Speaking Islamic State Ecosystem on Telegram*, Program on Extremism (Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, 2019), 7, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/EncryptedExtremism.pdf>.

³²⁵ Gunaratna, "Global Threat Forecast," 4.

³²⁶ Clifford and Powell, *Encrypted Extremism: Inside the English-Speaking Islamic State Ecosystem on Telegram*, 9–10.

³²⁷ Clifford and Powell, 7.

Europe.³²⁸ For example, the French jihadist Rachid Kassim used his Telegram channel “Sabre de la Lumière” in order to recruit other youth to carry out terrorist attacks in his country.³²⁹ Using Telegram, the IS also took responsibility for Europe’s attacks and celebrated the attacks with its followers.³³⁰

A third advantage is that the application is effortless to use since it has easy registration, it can work either on a mobile phone or PC, and its mode of operation is in many respects the same as that of other known applications (e.g., WhatsApp, Twitter).³³¹ Telegram also enables its users to use the “self-destruct option” when sending a message, by which the message self-destructs when read by the recipient.³³² Finally, as Ahmet Yayla and Anne Speckhard point out, “another important feature of Telegram is being able to search the channels posts, group messages, individual messages or any kind of communications or posts in one’s account. This feature is available for both cell phone applications and the Web-based Telegram interface making it possible to reach any content by simply searching. This basically makes Telegram one of the largest free ISIS databases available.”³³³ Thus, it constitutes a genuine IS library of both old (archived) and new material. The contents of this material can be ideological, operational (tutorials, anonymity awareness, fundraising), and declaratory (claims of terrorist attacks in particular).³³⁴

³²⁸ Ahmad Shehabat, Teodor Mitew, and Yahia Alzoubi, “Encrypted Jihad: Investigating the Role of Telegram App in Lone Wolf Attacks in the West,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 10, no. 3 (October 2017): 3, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.10.3.1604>.

³²⁹ Mia Bloom, Hicham Tiflati, and John Horgan, “Navigating ISIS’s Preferred Platform: Telegram,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 6 (2019): 1243, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1339695>.

³³⁰ Shehabat, Mitew, and Alzoubi, “Encrypted Jihad,” 45.

³³¹ Yayla and Speckhard, “Telegram,” 2017.

³³² Shehabat, Mitew, and Alzoubi, “Encrypted Jihad,” 45.

³³³ Ahmet S. Yayla and Anne Speckhard, “Telegram: The Mighty Application That ISIS Loves – PART II,” *VOX - Pol*, 2017, <https://www.voxpol.eu/telegram-mighty-application-isis-loves-part-ii/>.

³³⁴ Raphael Gluck and Laurence Bindner, “Trends in Islamic State’s Online Propaganda: Shorter Longevity, Wider Dissemination of Content,” CT Strategic Communications, 2018, <https://icct.nl/publication/trends-in-islamic-states-online-propaganda-shorter-longevity-wider-dissemination-of-content/>.

4. DWeb Platforms

IS started investigating DWeb for use in 2014, following the massive shutdown of its Twitter accounts. In the beginning, the group experimented with three low-profile decentralized platforms—Friendica, Quitter, and Diaspora.³³⁵ On the first two platforms, the group's accounts were deleted within the first few days, while in Diaspora, the accounts survived the longest, until the group used the platform to spread a video of the beheading of a Western prisoner. Immediately after the video release, the IS accounts were shut down on this platform as well.³³⁶ The return of IS media operators to decentralized platforms came when the group saw 3,000 of their accounts deactivated overnight on Telegram in December 2018.³³⁷ This time the group tried DWeb services Riot, ZeroNet, RocketChat, and, most recently, Minds.³³⁸ Although DWeb platforms feature resilience and provide the group with the advantage of being able to network through it to communicate with its supporters and then share its material, at the same time, these platforms have a significant drawback. These platforms have limited capabilities to expand the number of users, as they cannot support a network with multiple users; for example, the RocketChat server run by IS is currently only capable of reaching about 1,000 users.³³⁹ For this reason, and once the IS media operatives and supporters have found a way to survive in the Telegram app,³⁴⁰ experts agree that the group does not currently appear willing to leave the platform, and the experiments on

³³⁵ J. M. Berger, "ISIS and the Big Three," Hate Speech International, 2016, <https://www.hate-speech.org/isis-and-the-big-three/>.

³³⁶ King, "Islamic State Group's Experiments with the Decentralised Web," 5.

³³⁷ Mina Al-Lami, "Analysis: Wave of Telegram Suspensions Hits Jihadist Accounts," BBC Monitoring, 2018, <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c200h0s4>; Max Bernhard, "Telegram App Tackles Islamic State Online Propaganda," *Wall Street Journal*, 2019, sec. WSJ Pro, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/telegram-app-tackles-islamic-state-online-propaganda-11574789617>.

³³⁸ "Analysis: ISIS Use of Smaller Platforms and the DWeb to Share Terrorist Content," Tech Against Terrorism, April 29, 2019, <https://www.techagainstterrorism.org/2019/04/29/analysis-isis-use-of-smaller-platforms-and-the-dweb-to-share-terrorist-content-april-2019/>.

³³⁹ King, "Islamic State Group's Experiments with the Decentralised Web," 8.

³⁴⁰ Driss El Bay, "Analysis: IS Steps up Use of Telegram 'groups' Feature," BBC Monitoring, 2018, <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c200gneu>.

DWeb were mainly to have ready back-up solutions in case Telegram manages to banish them completely in the future.

5. Smaller Web Platforms

According to experts, the IS chooses to use smaller web platforms that meet most of the following criteria, so that the exploitation of these platforms will benefit the group. These criteria are security, stability, usability, and audience reach.³⁴¹ Security as a selection criterion means the platform must have end-to-end encryption to meet high-security standards and provide the maximum possible operational security (OPSEC) for IS media operators and users of the platform. Stability as a selection criterion refers to whether the platform will harass the group on the pages and posts that it will upload to the platform following some security protocols for extremist content. Usability as a criterion refers to how easy it is to install the application, the registration process on the platform, and how easy it is to use it daily. The last criterion considered is the platform's ability to reach a new audience and what size audience it can support.³⁴²

Tech Against Terrorism has researched the activity of terrorist groups, especially that of the IS, on the Internet. To conduct the research, Tech Against Terrorism collected more than 45,000 URLs, which were links to more than 330 platforms that contained terrorist material for the period between 2015 and 2018. Although this number is only part of all URLs related to terrorism, it is safe to draw conclusions from the results of their research. The first conclusion is that terrorist groups make extensive use of small- and micro-platforms, especially after being excluded from the larger platforms. For example, out of the top 50 most used platforms identified in the research data, half of them are small- or micro-platforms.³⁴³ A second conclusion is that terrorists make extensive use of file-sharing sites and other cloud storage services to be able first to preserve and then share the material they have collected or created up to that time, while avoiding law enforcement. Research has shown that 44% of the top 50 most used

³⁴¹ "Analysis: ISIS Use of Smaller Platforms and the DWeb to Share Terrorist Content."

³⁴² "Analysis: ISIS Use of Smaller Platforms and the DWeb to Share Terrorist Content."

³⁴³ "Analysis: ISIS Use of Smaller Platforms and the DWeb to Share Terrorist Content."

platforms are platforms with the aforementioned features, and mainly the eight discussed in the following paragraph: dump.to, addpost.it, t.co, archive.is, archive.org, bit.ly, Justpaste.it, and shortwiki.org.³⁴⁴

The Justpaste.it platform, which is also considered an anonymous sharing portal, acts as an online “bulletin board” but offers anonymity since it does not require registration and provides the ability to use passwords and encryption. The platform also works with low-speed Internet, which favors using it in the Middle East, where the Internet is unstable and low speed. Also, due to the lack of ads on its page, it favors right-to-left Arabic writing. These qualities of the platform made it sought after in jihadist circles and the world of crime since anyone can “pin” anything he or she wants on this board, from a note, video, photo, or text with any content. The IS used this “digital board” to upload battlefield reports, photos of violent deaths, beheadings, and links to the group’s fans to videos or pages removed from known applications. As Haroon K. Ullah points out about Justpaste.it, it is “a fast run-and-gun system, completely anonymous, easier to use than most blogs, and nowhere near as heavily patrolled by content monitors as the big names.”³⁴⁵ Moreover, the anonymous sharing portals, such as Justpaste.it, Sendvid.com, Dump, and the popular in the Middle East Top4top.net,³⁴⁶ acted as black boxes for IS propaganda content, helping the group “to sustain high-intensity information flows and maintain global communication channels. The emergence of these portals has fundamentally changed the way ISIS distributes its propaganda globally.”³⁴⁷

6. Shortlinks and URLs

Shortlinks convert a long and unwieldy weblink into a convenient short Uniform Resource Locator (URL). Some of the most used shortlinks are Twitter’s t.co, Google’s

³⁴⁴ “Analysis: ISIS Use of Smaller Platforms and the DWeb to Share Terrorist Content.”

³⁴⁵ Ullah, *Digital World War: Islamists, Extremists, and the Fight for Cyber Supremacy*, 25–26.

³⁴⁶ Clifford and Powell, *Encrypted Extremism: Inside the English-Speaking Islamic State Ecosystem on Telegram*, 25.

³⁴⁷ Ahmad Shehabat and Teodor Mitew, “Black-Boxing the Black Flag: Anonymous Sharing Platforms and ISIS Content Distribution Tactics,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 1 (2018): 97–98.

goo.gl, bit.ly, and WordPress's wp.me. Most of the time, the new small URL retains the original link's address; so, if the user clicks on it, it goes to the page of the original link. For example, a user may click on a shortlink on Twitter and be redirected to a YouTube page.³⁴⁸ The virtual community of IS sympathizers disseminates URLs widely to preserve and expand its networks and online propaganda.³⁴⁹ It was an action to foster resilience against the various platforms' measures to remove jihadist material from their pages.³⁵⁰

7. Encrypted Applications

End-to-end encrypted messaging applications have played a key role in recruiting, planning, and coordinating IS attacks.³⁵¹ The group and its followers used a wide range of these applications, which provided relative security during communication, and most had a free installation on their mobile phones or PCs.³⁵² Some of these applications are Signal, Wickr, Surespot, Threema, Silent Circle, Viber, and Skype.³⁵³ Although WhatsApp had the same end-to-end encryption protocol as Signal, IS supporters did not

³⁴⁸ Ali Fisher, Nico Prucha, and Emily Winterbotham, *Mapping the Jihadist Information Ecosystem: Towards the Next Generation of Disruption Capability*, Global Research Network on Terrorism and Technology (London, UK: RUSI, 2019), 7, <https://www.rusi.org/publication/other-publications/mapping-jihadist-information-ecosystem-towards-next-generation>.

³⁴⁹ Gluck and Bindner, "Trends in Islamic State's Online Propaganda."

³⁵⁰ Samantha Weirman and Audrey Alexander, "Hyperlinked Sympathizers: URLs and the Islamic State," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 3 (2020): 251, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1457204>.

³⁵¹ Homeland Security Committee, *Final Report of the Task Force on Combating Terrorist and Foreign Fighter Travel* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. House of Representatives, Homeland Security Committee, 2015), https://hurd.house.gov/sites/hurd.house.gov/files/wysiwyg_uploaded/FinalReport_HomelandSecurityCommitteeTaskForce.pdf.17-18.

³⁵² European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, *Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA) 2018* (The Hague, The Netherlands: EUROPOL, 2018), 10, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/internet-organised-crime-threat-assessment-iocta-2018>.

³⁵³ Bruno Halopeau, "Terrorist Use of the Internet," in *Cyber Crime and Cyber Terrorism Investigator's Handbook* (Elsevier Science & Technology Books, 2014), 125, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=1744499>; Nance and Sampson, *Hacking ISIS: How to Destroy the Cyber Jihad*, 62–71.

trust it because Facebook purchased it in 2013.³⁵⁴ Another favorable message platform was Kik messenger, which appears to be used for illegal activities.³⁵⁵ The IS also used applications such as TrueCrypt for encrypting and tracking files.³⁵⁶ Additionally, for encryption, the group used the Zello application that allows users to establish channels to share encrypted audio messages.³⁵⁷

8. Cryptocurrencies

The IS entered the world of cryptocurrencies to avoid the obstacles posed by the Western authorities. Cryptocurrencies have allowed jihadists to move funds across borders while avoiding regular banking scrutiny.³⁵⁸ At the end of 2017, IS sympathizers launched campaigns to fund the Islamic State through cryptocurrency donations (Bitcoin and the more anonymous Zcash). These campaigns were conducted on IS affiliate sites as well as on chat platforms (e.g., Telegram) to finance the group.³⁵⁹

C. ADOPTED PATTERNS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE

At the beginning of the IS activity on the Internet, the IS tech group operated mainly within the limits of each application separately, trying to exploit each application's features fully. So, through the analysis that was done in the applications used by the group, some micro-patterns adopted by the IS for each application emerged. After the gradual removal of propaganda material and the shutdown of IS accounts by the administrators of the most popular platforms and applications, the group changed course,

³⁵⁴ Shehabat, Mitew, and Alzoubi, "Encrypted Jihad," 33.

³⁵⁵ Rita Katz, "As the Caliphate Crumbles, a Female American ISIS Member Makes a Pitch for Redemption," SITE Intelligence Group, 2019, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/categories/jihad/entry/439-as-the-caliphate-crumbles,-an-american-isis-member-makes-a-pitch-for-redemption>; Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, 18.

³⁵⁶ Nance and Sampson, *Hacking ISIS: How to Destroy the Cyber Jihad*, 71.

³⁵⁷ Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 176–77.

³⁵⁸ Nathaniel Popper, "Terrorists Turn to Bitcoin for Funding, and They're Learning Fast," *The New York Times*, August 18, 2019, sec. Technology, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/18/technology/terrorists-bitcoin.html>.

³⁵⁹ European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, "Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA) 2018," 53.

adopting two different patterns that connect a vast range of platforms across the surface and the dark web. As a result, the IS created a large and complex information network.³⁶⁰

The first pattern concerns the existence and preservation of IS propaganda material on the web so that it is available to its supporters and is not in danger of being destroyed by the authorities. The group media operators adopted the following practice to design this pattern. They uploaded the group material on several platforms, either file-sharing or archive types. For example, in 2019, the Institute of Strategic Dialogue (ISD) discovered one of the largest online jihadist material collections belonging to the IS. This digital library, which ISD called the Caliphate Cache, contains more than 90,000 unique items and has about 10,000 visits per month.³⁶¹ The group then used encryption message apps, mainly Telegram, to distribute its material to the group's followers, sending them links to these platforms in URL format.³⁶² This pattern has a significant advantage, but also a drawback. It makes the authorities' task even more challenging to eradicate terrorist propaganda from the Internet, but it is not easy to apply by the public, so it is more limited and more personalized. So, the group's abandonment of widespread social media use has removed the IS's ability to make a viral issue.

The second pattern aims to mitigate the disadvantage of the first one, helping the group make some specific events go viral and dominate the media worldwide. The terrorist attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, where 50 people were killed, is a representative case study of the pattern that terrorists now use to make their actions go viral and at the same time to share their propaganda and ideology.³⁶³ Although the perpetrator subscribed to far-right terrorism, the pattern he used was similar to that of the IS, and can safely help us draw conclusions about the exploitation of social media by

³⁶⁰ Fisher, Prucha, and Winterbotham, *Mapping the Jihadist Information Ecosystem: Towards the Next Generation of Disruption Capability*, 2.

³⁶¹ Shiroma Silva, "Islamic State: Giant Library of Group's Online Propaganda Discovered," *BBC News*, 2020, sec. Technology, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-54011034>.

³⁶² Gluck and Bindner, "Trends in Islamic State's Online Propaganda."

³⁶³ Bianca Britton, "How the New Zealand Terror Attack Unfolded," *CNN*, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/15/asia/new-zealand-christchurch-attack-what-we-know-intl/index.html>.

terrorists.³⁶⁴ This pattern uses well-known large platforms to act as “beacons” to first upload the material to them and then, in collaboration with smaller file-sharing platforms, directs users to scatter the URL of the propaganda material on as many platforms as possible.³⁶⁵ The second stage of the pattern essentially acts as an amplifier of the propaganda material to reach as broad an audience as possible by bypassing the safety measures implemented by the social media platforms against extremist material of any kind (image, video, text). The network of supporters of the terrorist group amplified terrorist propaganda material by re-sharing the link and re-uploading the material every time it was shut down from the platforms. Both of these processes take place on as many platforms as possible and as quickly as possible so that terrorists can prevent countermeasures from the authorities and the platform administrators.³⁶⁶

Analyzing the attack on the mosques, in Christchurch, in contrast to the stages of the pattern analyzed previously, the following actions can be distinguished by the perpetrator per stage:

1. Before the Attack

a) The perpetrator uploaded his manifesto, titled “The Great Replacement,” on several smaller file-sharing platforms such as ZippyShare, MediaFire, Mega.nz., and Solidfiles. ISIS has previously used these platforms.³⁶⁷

b) About ten minutes before attacking the first mosque (Linwood Mosque), the terrorist, following the “beacon” tactic, uploaded to large social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and 8chan) links from his manifesto from the aforementioned file-

³⁶⁴ Amar Toor, “French Terror Suspect Reportedly Streamed Attack on Facebook Live,” The Verge, June 14, 2016, <https://www.theverge.com/2016/6/14/11930916/france-terrorist-larossi-abballa-facebook-live-video>; Peter Allen, Julian Robinson, and Imogen Calderwood, “ISIS Knifemen Film Themselves Murdering French Priest in Normandy Attack,” Daily Mail Online, July 26, 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3708394/Two-men-armed-knives-people-hostage-French-church.html>.

³⁶⁵ Mahzam, “The Electronic Digitisation of ISIS: Building a Multi-Media Legacy.”

³⁶⁶ “Analysis: New Zealand Attack and the Terrorist Use of the Internet,” Tech Against Terrorism, March 26, 2019, <https://www.techagainstterrorism.org/2019/03/26/analysis-new-zealand-attack-and-the-terrorist-use-of-the-internet/>.

³⁶⁷ “Analysis: New Zealand Attack and the Terrorist Use of the Internet.”

sharing content storage sites, along with a message about his motivation for the attacks.³⁶⁸

2. During the Attack

The perpetrator live-streamed the attack through his Facebook profile, while at the same time, he had uploaded a link to his profile on 8chan so that those interested could watch the attack live.³⁶⁹ The live video of the attacks was viewed 4,000 times before it was removed.³⁷⁰

3. Following the Attack

a) The terrorist uploaded the video of the attack on LiveLeak, YouTube, Kiwifarms, BitChute, and also as a downloadable file on Torrentz. Moreover, users of these media platforms re-shared links to the video on 8chan, Reddit, and Facebook. Additionally, the terrorist's manifesto appeared on 8chan, Reddit, and Scribd.³⁷¹

b) British news media sites (The Daily Mail, The Mirror, and The Sun) uploaded the terrorist's manifesto or the video of the attack on their webpages, contributing to these materials going viral.³⁷²

³⁶⁸ Ian Bogost, "Social Media Are a Mass Shooter's Best Friend," *The Atlantic*, March 15, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/03/how-terrorism-new-zealand-spread-social-media/585040/>; Patrick Bishop and Stuart Macdonald, "Terrorist Content and the Social Media Ecosystem: The Role of Regulation," in *Digital Jihad: Online Communication and Violent Extremism*, 1st ed. (Milan, Italy: ISPI, 2019), 139.

³⁶⁹ Kate Conger, "It's Back: 8chan Returns Online," *The New York Times*, November 4, 2019, sec. Technology, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/04/technology/8chan-returns-8kun.html>; Lia Eustachewich, "Social Media Companies Struggle to Scrub New Zealand Mosque Attack Video," *New York Post*, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2019/03/15/social-media-companies-struggle-to-scrub-new-zealand-mosque-attack-video/>.

³⁷⁰ Rory Cellan-Jones, "Facebook: NZ Attack Video Viewed 4,000 Times," *BBC News*, 2019, sec. Technology, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-47620519>.

³⁷¹ Joan Donovan, "How Hate Groups' Secret Sound System Works," *The Atlantic*, March 17, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/03/extremists-understand-what-tech-platforms-have-built/585136/>; "Analysis: New Zealand Attack and the Terrorist Use of the Internet."

³⁷² "Analysis: New Zealand Attack and the Terrorist Use of the Internet."

c) Versions of his social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter) and his manifesto surfaced on archive content sites (Archive Today, and Internet Archive's Wayback Machine).³⁷³

The “beacon” pattern in the attack in New Zealand is shown in numbers through the data provided by the major social media platforms in their attempt to eliminate any file, video, or account related to the attack. For example, YouTube said it “removed tens of thousands of videos and terminated hundreds of accounts created to promote or glorify the shooter.”³⁷⁴ While at the same time Facebook stated that “in the first 24 hours [it] removed 1.5 million videos of the attack globally, of which over 1.2 million were blocked at upload.”³⁷⁵ Similarly, Facebook VP and Deputy General Counsel Chris Sonderby stated that the security staff of popular social media worked tirelessly to eliminate any trace of the attack on Facebook pages.³⁷⁶ Finally, this pattern was also adopted by the perpetrator of the terrorist attack in Halle, Germany.³⁷⁷ And in this case, as the terrorist broadcast the attack live, it became less widespread on the Internet due to the measures taken by the social media platforms.³⁷⁸

D. NEXT BIG THING

The study of the IS's patterns and the platforms that IS uses shows that the group has found a way to store and share its propaganda. The group's problem is that it is

³⁷³ “Analysis: New Zealand Attack and the Terrorist Use of the Internet.”

³⁷⁴ YouTubeInsider, “Wanted to give you an update on our actions since Friday's horrific tragedy.” Twitter, March 18, 2019, <https://twitter.com/YouTubeInsider/status/1107645353673871360>.

³⁷⁵ Twitter, “Facebook Newsroom on Twitter,” Twitter, 2019, <https://twitter.com/fbnewsroom/status/1107117981358682112>.

³⁷⁶ Chris Sonderby, “About Facebook: Update on New Zealand,” Facebook, March 19, 2019, <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/03/update-on-new-zealand/>.

³⁷⁷ Amie Liebowitz, “Halle Synagogue Attack: Survivors Relive Terror in German Trial,” *BBC News*, 2020, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54433397>.

³⁷⁸ Tech Against Terrorism, “Analysis: What Can We Learn from the Online Response to the Halle Terrorist Attack?,” Tech Against Terrorism, October 15, 2019, <https://www.techagainstterrorism.org/2019/10/15/analysis-what-can-we-learn-from-the-online-response-to-the-halle-terrorist-attack/>.

looking for the next platform, which will help the Islamic State's actions to go viral. The platforms that seem to be the jihadists' next targets are Instagram and TikTok.

1. Instagram

Instagram is a popular mobile social application and at the same time a social networking service, which allows users to download and share photos and videos, while it also has a variety of other user-friendly tools. Although it is not a recent application, in recent years its use as a means of spreading misinformation has come to the fore. According to experts, Instagram is the next platform that will be used to spread extremist ideologies.³⁷⁹ Jonathan Albright, as he quoted in *The Atlantic* article, points out that "Instagram [is] perhaps the most effective platform to spread misinformation, [because it] has the power of Twitter to broadcast out, but the infrastructure of Facebook supporting it."³⁸⁰ The application is already being exploited by far-right extremists to share material and express their anti-Jewish hatred.³⁸¹ Also, unlike other popular social media applications that have blocked far-right users' posts and accounts, the extremists on Instagram have found a way to bypass security protocols and continue to operate undisturbed.³⁸² Similar to far-right terrorists, IS jihadists seem to be turning their attention to Instagram.³⁸³ Besides, Instagram has a feature that makes it particularly

³⁷⁹ Paul M. Barrett, *Disinformation and the 2020 Election: How the Social Media Industry Should Prepare* (New York: NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights, 2019), 7, https://issuu.com/nyusterncenterforbusinessandhumanri/docs/nyu_election_2020_report.

³⁸⁰ Taylor Lorenz, "Instagram Is Full of Conspiracy Theories and Extremism," *The Atlantic*, March 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/03/instagram-is-the-internets-new-home-for-hate/585382/>.

³⁸¹ David Ingram, "Attacks on Jewish People Rising on Instagram and Twitter, Researchers Say," NBC News, October 27, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/attacks-jewish-people-rising-instagram-twitter-researchers-say-n925086>.

³⁸² Will Sommer, "Instagram Is the Alt-Right's New Favorite Haven," *The Daily Beast*, October 30, 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/instagram-is-the-alt-rights-new-favorite-haven>.

³⁸³ Emily Zanotti, "Kicked off Facebook and Twitter, ISIS Turns to Instagram," *The Daily Wire*, May 13, 2019, <https://www.dailywire.com/news/kicked-facebook-and-twitter-isis-turns-instagram-emily-zanotti>.

attractive to the IS. The majority of the application's users are young people, who are more vulnerable to IS propaganda and possible recruitment.³⁸⁴

2. TikTok

The TikTok app is currently the fastest growing social media platform, especially in the quarantine imposed across many states due to the pandemic. Although TikTok was introduced to the world in 2017, the application already has more than two billion downloads, ranking it in seventh place for the most downloaded application of the decade. The application is very easy to use and provides users with the ability to upload and watch short lip-synced videos.³⁸⁵ The massive creation of profiles on TikTok by its users also attracted extremist circles, where they found their new place to distribute their propaganda material. This particular platform has some features that make it particularly appealing to extremists. First, it is based in China, sparing the company immediate pressure from Western authorities on the policies it should implement regarding the content of the users' posts. Second, the way the app works, as well as the way posts are shared among users, makes it impossible to report an extreme video and download it directly from the base of the app. As Sophie Lewis explains,

TikTok's unique algorithm and content recommendation system allow content to spread more easily than other apps. Contrary to other platforms like Facebook and Instagram, which mainly focus on people you follow, TikTok's main feed, the 'For You Page,' gives users viral content regardless of whether or not they follow the account positing it — making it very difficult to avoid unwanted footage.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg, "ISIS and the Militant Jihad on Instagram," *Homeland Security Today*, July 21, 2020, <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/cybersecurity/isis-and-the-militant-jihad-on-instagram/>.

³⁸⁵ Aaron Reich, "TikTok Rife with Racist, Antisemitic Content Aimed at Children – Study," *The Jerusalem Post*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/tiktok-rife-with-racist-antisemitic-content-aimed-at-children-study-631808>.

³⁸⁶ Sophie Lewis, "TikTok Struggles to Stop the Spread of Viral Suicide Video," CBS News, September 9, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tiktok-video-suicide-man-shooting-self-struggles-remove/>.

For example, the administrators of the application took several days to delete a post uploaded to the platform and showed the suicide of a man live.³⁸⁷

In addition, extremists have found a way to bypass the automated method of detecting extremist material, which TikTok has as a security measure to detect inappropriate material posted on its pages. As Weimann, an expert in the online terrorist activities, has observed, detecting extremist material on TikTok is extremely difficult, as users do not use common keywords but a combination of codes, symbols, and hashtags. Finally, this application targets young people; for example, 41% of its users are aged 16 to 24.³⁸⁸ For extremists, this age group is not only especially vulnerable to in the appeal of extreme ideologies, but also represents the fighters of the future. The IS has already begun to make its appearance in the application, uploading propaganda material and targeting young audiences who are the primary users of TikTok, according to what Weimann has emphasized.³⁸⁹

E. INNOVATOR OR ADOPTER

The Islamic State's rapid spread on the web, combined with its land conquests in Syria and Iraq, has brought to the fore the debate over how innovative the group was in its use of social media and how sophisticated its media campaign was. But a closer look at the IS's tactics in exploiting the Internet makes clear that the group seems to have followed other models, tailored to its own requirements, rather than the group discovering new ways to exploit the Internet. In addition, technological developments on the Internet and in applications have helped the IS to impose its plan for the dissemination of its propaganda. Brooking and Singer emphasize this by saying that "[w]hile the Islamic State has shown savvy in its use of social media, it is the technology itself—not any unique genius on the part of the jihadists—that lies at the heart of the group's

³⁸⁷ Sian Elvin, "TikTok Can't Stop People Uploading Video of Man Shooting Himself Dead," *Metro* (blog), September 8, 2020, <https://metro.co.uk/2020/09/08/tiktok-cant-stop-people-uploading-video-of-man-shooting-himself-dead-13237704/>.

³⁸⁸ Reich, "TikTok Rife with Racist, Antisemitic Content Aimed at Children – Study."

³⁸⁹ Sam Shead, "TikTok Used by Islamic State to Spread Propaganda Videos," *BBC News*, October 22, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50138740>.

disruptive power and outsize success. Other groups will follow.”³⁹⁰ Following are some of the models that the group used as a guide to design their own media campaign.

The IS initially looked for models that had already been successfully implemented by its parent organization, al Qaeda, and that group’s other affiliated terrorist organizations. First, al Qaeda created a Windows encryption program that helped jihadists encrypt their emails. The program, known as “Mujahideen Secrets,” was upgraded in 2008 while al Qaeda, through *Inspire* magazine, gave its fighters instructions on how to use the program.³⁹¹ Edward Snowden’s revelations that the U.S. National Security Administration collaborated with several software companies to gather information on application users³⁹² made jihadists particularly distrusting of mainstream applications and prompted them to create their own. Al Qaeda firstly created the Tashfeer al-Jawwal, Asrar al-Dardashah, and Amn al-Mujahid programs for Android and Windows mobile phones, which provided encryption based on the Twofish cryptography application. Likewise, the IS later created its own applications.³⁹³ Moreover, the Somalia-based cell of the al Qaeda, al-Shabaab, even before the IS declared the Caliphate, had used al Qaeda online platforms to disperse its propaganda and gain new supporters and financial support.³⁹⁴ In 2013, al-Shabaab was also the first jihadist group to broadcast live the attack on Westgate Mall in Nairobi. The group used Twitter to produce a live feed through a social media platform of an ongoing terrorist attack.³⁹⁵ Finally, the use of YouTube by IS was inspired by al Qaeda’s practices in using the platform. The YouTube-based jihadist channels broadcasted threats and texts from the

³⁹⁰ Brooking and Singer, “War Goes Viral.”

³⁹¹ Yaakov Lappin, *Virtual Caliphate: Exposing the Islamist on the Internet*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2011), 32.

³⁹² Jamie Bartlett, *The Dark Net*, 1st ed. (New York: Melville House, 2015), 101.

³⁹³ Nance and Sampson, *Hacking ISIS: How to Destroy the Cyber Jihad*, 73–77.

³⁹⁴ Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*, 105.

³⁹⁵ Aly et al., “Introduction to the Special Issue,” 8.

Quran, promoted violent acts, and stressed Muslims' suffering from the Western military forces.³⁹⁶

Al Qaeda's successful use of the Internet and social media, however, was not the only model examined by jihadists. The widespread and well-designed use of the Internet by U.S. President Barack Obama and his staff was the determining factor that led him to the presidency. Just as then-Senator John F. Kennedy took advantage of television as the emerging medium for his campaign, so did Obama with the Internet, forever changing the way election campaigns are conducted.³⁹⁷ Claire Cain Miller points out that "by using interactive Web 2.0 tools, Mr. Obama's campaign changed the way politicians organize supporters, advertise to voters, defend against attacks, and communicate with constituents."³⁹⁸ In fact, Obama's 2008 presidential campaign was exemplary in being used by terrorist organizations to design their own online campaigns.

First, social media played a crucial role in helping Obama distribute his message to a broad audience, organize his party's supporters throughout the nation, and raise unprecedented donations.³⁹⁹ The successful online campaign for Obama achieved the same goals that a terrorist group wants to achieve through its propaganda: to mobilize its supporters, recruit new members, and find funding. The Obama campaign managed to "mobilize supporters and organized communities, registering 1.5 million volunteers through myBarackObama.com and raising \$600m from 3 million people. In addition, Obama's campaign also built a consensual database of 3m mobile numbers."⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ Jytte Klausen et al., "The YouTube Jihadists: A Social Network Analysis of Al-Muhajiroun's Propaganda Campaign," *TRI, Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, no. 1 (2012): 39, <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/klausen-et-al-youtube-jihadists/html>.

³⁹⁷ Françoise Papa and Jean-Marc Francony, "The 2012 French Presidential Campaign: First Steps into the Political Twittersphere," in *The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 364.

³⁹⁸ Claire Cain Miller, "How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics," *The New York Times, Bits Blog* (blog), November 7, 2008, <https://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/how-obamas-internet-campaign-changed-politics/>.

³⁹⁹ Solop, "'RT @BarackObama We Just Made History': Twitter and the 2008 Presidential Election," 37.

⁴⁰⁰ Jemina Kiss, "How Obama's Online Campaign Helped Win Him the Presidency," *The Guardian*, November 10, 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2008/nov/10/obama-online-strategy>.

Second, the Obama campaign illustrated that all sites and platforms that are up-to-date and popular should be used. Thus, it is observed that Obama's campaign staff used YouTube, MySpace, Flickr, Twitter, and Facebook to promote the candidate. Obama's staff also quickly realized that through sophisticated videos, YouTube could become the barometer of public opinion.⁴⁰¹ For this reason, they uploaded videos to the platform at a frantic pace.⁴⁰² For instance, during the 2008 U.S. elections over 3,500 political videos were published on YouTube.⁴⁰³ While on Election Day, the barakobama.com site belonging to the winner of the election, Obama, had uploaded 1,821 videos on YouTube, while the opponent's site, JohnMcCain.com, had posted only 330 videos.⁴⁰⁴ A comparison of these two numbers indicates YouTube played a significant role in Obama's dominance.

On Twitter, the 2008 election campaign was based on two patterns. First, Obama's staff wanted to direct voters to targeted pages via a link posted on Twitter, especially on the Democratic party's official website, where party representatives were waiting to persuade them to become volunteers, vote, or donate money. Through this pattern, the staff wanted to mobilize the voters and make them part of the party.⁴⁰⁵ The second pattern was the existence of a Twitter link that led voters to other official party platforms, such as YouTube or Facebook, trapping them in the party's digital ecosystem

⁴⁰¹ Larry Powell, "Obama and Obama Girl: YouTube, Viral Videos, and the 2008 Presidential Campaign," in *Communicator-in-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 95, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docId>.

⁴⁰² Sarah Lai Stirland, "Obama Campaign Floods the Zone on YouTube Too," *Wired*, November 2008, <https://www.wired.com/2008/11/obama-campaign-2/>.

⁴⁰³ Travis N. Ridout, Erika Franklin Fowler, and John Branstetter, "Political Advertising in the 21st Century: The Rise of the YouTube Ad," in *APSA 2010 Annual Meeting Paper* (Washington, D.C., 2010), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1642853#.

⁴⁰⁴ Charles Musser, "Political Documentary, YouTube and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election: Focus on Robert Greenwald and David N. Bossie," *Studies in Documentary Film* 3, no. 3 (2009): 215, <https://doi.org/10.1386/sdf.3.3.199/1>.

⁴⁰⁵ Gunn Enli and Anja Aaheim Naper, "Social Media Incumbent Advantage," in *The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 370–71.

and thus making them its supporters.⁴⁰⁶ Both of these patterns were used by IS for its own spread in the media. In addition, the Democratic presidential campaign staff, in order to strengthen these two patterns, knew that they had to increase the number of party posts considerably. With this in mind, they created the Thunderclap application, which acted as an amplifier of Obama's side posts, after tweeting and retweeting them.⁴⁰⁷ Inspired by this application, IS also created its own Twitter application, Dawn of Glad Tidings.⁴⁰⁸ The effectiveness of these two patterns in the 2012 re-election campaign that Obama won is reflected in the number of followers that each of the candidates had. Obama had 22 million followers, while the losing candidate, Mitt Romney, had 1.8 million followers.⁴⁰⁹ Respectively, if the IS presence on Twitter is compared to that of Al-Nusra, in February 2017, despite the mass downloading and blocking of IS and its followers' accounts, the IS hashtag was reported 12,000 times a day, while the hashtag of al-Nusra ranged between 2,500 and 5,000 per day.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁶ Enli and Naper, 370–71.

⁴⁰⁷ Bourrie, *The Killing Game*, 127–28.

⁴⁰⁸ Bourrie, 127–28.

⁴⁰⁹ Enli and Naper, "Social Media Incumbent Advantage," 368.

⁴¹⁰ Bourrie, *The Killing Game*, 127–28.

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V. EPILOGUE

A. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has explored aspects of the Islamic State's media strategy not sufficiently covered by existing research. Specifically, this analysis found that the IS exploited the social media landscape to deliver costly signals that advanced its strategies of outbidding, intimidation, and polarization. The IS exploited available social media platforms to intimidate resistant forces within Iraq and Syria as well as Western countries it wanted to stay out of the area of action of the Islamic State. The IS also portrayed itself through social media as either violent or caring to outbid rival terrorist groups. Finally, by publicizing its extremist acts against certain groups of people, the IS sought to polarize Sunnis and Shiites within its territory or Muslims and non-Muslims outside its territory.

The IS did not use extreme messages in propaganda for no reason; on the contrary, its use of Internet-based messaging was purposeful and strategic. And it is important for scholars and authorities to understand that there is a strategic logic behind its publicity campaign. First, such an understanding can enable the security authorities to design and implement effective counterstrategies. When *Dabiq* was first promoting IS's outbidding strategy, Western nations should have immediately launched an anti-propaganda campaign to deconstruct all the IS-promoted narratives to dominate the other terrorist groups and al Qaeda.⁴¹¹ Moreover, if the anti-IS coalition had realized in time the change in the group's strategy from outbidding to intimidation, as evidenced by the move from *Dabiq* to *Rumiyah*, they might have better planned how to deal with the group beyond the web. A strategy of intimidation would be better dealt with by ground forces, for example, than by aerial bombardment.⁴¹² A more immediate and effective response to the group's stated goals and plans might have meant the final defeat of the IS rather

⁴¹¹ Novenario, "Differentiating Al Qaeda and the Islamic State Through Strategies Publicized in Jihadist Magazines," 962–63.

⁴¹² Novenario, 962–63.

than merely the loss of some areas and a return to its roots, enabling continued insurgency operations that gave it an advantage and a new breath of life.⁴¹³

Second, recognizing that the IS uses its propaganda as a signal, the authorities should study jihadist activities in an attempt to find out what strategy the propaganda wants to advance, and consequently, what the group's ultimate goals are. Authorities can devise countermeasures if they know what a terrorist group is seeking, and it is also easier for them to anticipate future actions by terrorists and be better prepared to prevent or mitigate them. The IS and its predecessors show consistency in the goals they have stated and in the strategies they follow. The IS leadership took the group from where Zarqawi and later AQI and ISI leaders had brought it and made it the most successful jihadi terrorist group in modern history.⁴¹⁴

On the other hand, there are two caveats related to the assessment of the IS media campaign in this thesis. First, the study of how effective the signaling campaign was in supporting IS strategies highlights that there are no clear boundaries between strategies. A atrocity that will act as a signal, precisely because of its extreme nature, can generate multiple messages that advance more than one strategy. The media, which act as multipliers, have a profound effect on this phenomenon. So the message from an extreme act can be made to appeal both for various target audiences and for longer periods. In particular, a terrorist attack in a city in the West can act directly as a strategy of intimidation in the near term while simultaneously as a foundation on which to stoke the polarization among the population over time.

The second caveat concerns the limitations of scholars in analyzing jihadist propaganda in order to draw various conclusions. Initially, most studies, like this one, deal with IS material written in English. This is a major drawback in trying to pinpoint IS propaganda's exact message and what strategy it ultimately supports. Moreover, because many experts on this topic agree that the group's main goal was to establish a Caliphate,

⁴¹³ Haroro J. Ingram and Craig Whiteside, "In Search of the Virtual Caliphate: Convenient Fallacy, Dangerous Distraction," War on the Rocks, September 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/09/in-search-of-the-virtual-caliphate-convenient-fallacy-dangerous-distraction/>.

⁴¹⁴ Ingram, Whiteside, and Winter, *The ISIS Reader*, 177.

it is understood that the local propaganda texts written in Arabic have many vital elements to study and analyze. In tandem with the limitations posed by language in the analysis of IS propaganda is the process of collecting and editing texts. Due to the plethora of texts available on the Internet and all the posts that have been uploaded by the IS and its followers on social media platforms, scholars and authorities have made a corpus of online jihadist texts through the use of keywords. This practice results in a large amount of propaganda material escaping analysis, either because of the different language in which it is written or because it has a different format such as image, video, or audio material that does not support keyword search engines.⁴¹⁵

Apart from the IS strategies, this thesis demonstrates the ways IS took advantage of the dynamics and technological possibilities of the Internet, and especially social media platforms and applications. First, the IS developed some patterns to exploit the social media landscape. The IS used these patterns depending on the desired result and to circumvent restrictions imposed by social media platforms. Second, the IS used tried and tested models to design its social media campaign to advance its strategies. For example, the group's exploitation of Twitter was like that of major U.S. political parties during the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Ultimately, this analysis of how the IS exploited the Internet concludes that the elimination of the group's presence from the Internet is impossible.⁴¹⁶ The group has so far shown that it finds ways to bypass security protocols, even on the most powerful platforms like Facebook.⁴¹⁷ According to the author of this thesis, the authorities should find ways to restrict the group as much as possible. To aid authorities in that endeavor,

⁴¹⁵ Tom De Smedt, Guy De Pauw, and Pieter Van Ostaeyen, *Automatic Detection of Online Jihadist Hate Speech*, CLiPS Technical Report (Belgium: University of Antwerp, 2018), www.uantwerpen.be/clips.

⁴¹⁶ European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, "Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA) 2018," 53.

⁴¹⁷ Gordon Corera, "ISIS 'Still Evading Detection on Facebook', Report Says," *BBC News*, July 13, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53389657>.

following are some recommendations based on the data that emerged during the research to write this thesis.

The “beacon” pattern used by the IS, and which it seems to continue to follow,⁴¹⁸ can be likened to a “whack-a-mole” game.⁴¹⁹ That is, after the group displays its inflammatory propaganda material on a social media platform, the authorities must discover and delete it. Consequently, the authorities’ main effort is to strike as fast as possible before the material gains traction, becomes more robust, and functions as a “beacon,” or in more popular terms, “before it goes viral,” attracting the attention of its ubiquitous supporters and social media users. This thesis suggests several preventative measures:

(1) There must be a common framework of operation between the platforms and the authorities to exclude terrorist material immediately before it goes viral. To take a case in point, the EU enacted legislation pushing social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to remove terrorism content from their sites within one hour of posting.⁴²⁰ Failure to comply with this legislation will result in the platforms facing fines of many millions of euros.⁴²¹ Furthermore, by preventing material released by terrorist organizations from going viral, the authorities are also preventing some terrorists, like

⁴¹⁸ Syed Huzaifah and Remy Mahzam, “Islamic State after the Fall of Mosul and Raqqa: Impact on Organisation and Propaganda,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 10, no. 1 (2018): 57, www.rsis.edu.sg.

⁴¹⁹ Rita Katz, “Jihadists Vent Frustrations as Telegram Deletion Campaign Continues, Search for Haven,” SITE Intelligence Group, 2019, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/categories/jihad/entry/441-jihadists-vent-frustrations-as-telegram-deletion-campaign-continues,-search-for-haven>.

⁴²⁰ Daniel Boffey, “Remove Terror Content or Be Fined Millions, EU Tells Social Media Firms,” *The Guardian*, September 13, 2018, sec. Media, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/sep/13/social-media-firms-could-face-huge-fines-over-terrorist-content>; Charlie Osborne, “EU Considers 60-Minute Deadline for Social Networks to Remove Terrorist Content,” ZDNet, 2018, <https://www.zdnet.com/article/eu-considers-60-minute-deadline-for-social-networks-to-remove-terrorist-content/>.

⁴²¹ “Terrorist Content Online Should Be Removed within One Hour, Says EP,” News European Parliament, 2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190410IPR37571/terrorist-content-online-should-be-removed-within-one-hour-says-ep>; Leo Kelion, “IS Propaganda ‘Hidden on Internet Archive,’” *BBC News*, May 15, 2018, sec. Technology, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-44112431>; “Social Media Faces EU Fine If Terror Lingers for an Hour,” *BBC News*, 2018, sec. Technology, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-45247169>.

“Jihadi John,” from becoming role models⁴²² and inspiring new terrorists.⁴²³ Additionally, cooperation among social media platforms is vital to the development of a crisis response protocol to handle potential terrorist content online following a terrorist attack.

(2) Governments should press the larger social media platforms and organizations to deal with terrorists via established mechanisms, such as the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT),⁴²⁴ to support smaller tech companies that may not have the resources to tackle the spread of terrorist material on their platforms.⁴²⁵

(3) To make the most of new policies and emerging technologies, the Western authorities must staff all its services with the most qualified personnel: professionals who can understand the new and emerging technologies as well as the function, content, and nature of social media. To assist the cyber domain, authorities should use religious authorities, scholars, and Muslims within communities to create effective anti-propaganda against the Islamic State.⁴²⁶ For example, the British military is “recruiting philosophers, psychologists, and theologians to research new methods of psychological warfare and behavioral manipulation.”⁴²⁷

(4) Governments must work with social media platforms to apply international legal frameworks, such as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime,⁴²⁸ for cross-border access to electronic evidence. Since legislation varies from country to

⁴²² Monahan, *The Shock of the News: Media Coverage and the Making of 9/11*, 35.

⁴²³ Weimann, *Terrorism in Cyberspace: The Next Generation*, 204–10.

⁴²⁴ GifCT, accessed March 13, 2020, <http://www.gifct.org>.

⁴²⁵ Dave Lee, “Tech Firms Hail ‘Progress’ on Blocking Terror,” *BBC News*, June 8, 2018, sec. Technology, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-44408463>.

⁴²⁶ Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*, 139.

⁴²⁷ Damien Gayle, “UK Military Turns to Universities to Research Psychological Warfare,” *The Guardian*, March 13, 2019, sec. UK news, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/mar/13/uk-military-mod-universities-research-psychological-warfare-documents>.

⁴²⁸ Council of Europe, “Convention on Cybercrime,” 2001, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/185>.

country and different international legal instruments may be applicable, this policy will slow the spread of terrorist material online.⁴²⁹

(5) Cooperative efforts are needed to silence or curb the jihadists' means for spreading propaganda electronically. The law enforcement agencies of the EU Member States, Canada, and the United States have formed an alliance designed to curb IS action. The policy they adopted, in addition to ground operations, also had pro-active cyber operations against the group's online capabilities. On April 25, 2018, they launched a joint action against the Amaq News Agency, al-Bayan radio, Halumu, and Nashir News, which are the main components of IS' propaganda machine, with the aim of disrupting their online infrastructure.⁴³⁰ Another Western operation, known as # Op-ice-ISIS, succeeded in paralyzing several IS-related information dissemination channels.⁴³¹

(6) Finally, a feature of the IS members is that they were 'early adopters,' meaning they had the urge to use every innovation on the Internet immediately.⁴³² The design of new policies and laws should take into account the features of new and emerging technologies in order to devise an effective strategy to prevent further abuse.⁴³³

(7) One of the most drastic steps to fight terrorism is cutting the financing of terrorism.⁴³⁴ Western states should support new projects, such as BeCaNet, whose primary objective is to combat the online financing of terrorist organizations. To make

⁴²⁹ EUROPOL, *SIRIUS - Cross-Border Access to Electronic Evidence*, Europol Public Information (The Hague, The Netherlands: EUROPOL, 2019), 9, www.europol.europa.eu/sirius.

⁴³⁰ European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, "Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA) 2018," 52.

⁴³¹ Shehabat and Mitew, "Black-Boxing the Black Flag: Anonymous Sharing Platforms and ISIS Content Distribution Tactics," 12; Shehabat, Mitew, and Alzoubi, "Encrypted Jihad," 35.

⁴³² Manuel R. Torres Soriano, "Seven Premises of Jihadist Activism on the Internet," in *Digital Jihad: Online Communication and Violent Extremism*, 1st ed. (Milan, Italy: ISPI, 2019), 32–33.

⁴³³ European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, "Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA) 2019," 49.

⁴³⁴ European Parliament, "How to Stop Terrorism: EU Measures Explained (Infographic) | News | European Parliament," March 22, 2018, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/security/20180316STO99922/how-to-stop-terrorism-eu-measures-explained-infographic>.

these projects more effective, it is necessary to strengthen public-private partnerships and improve the analysis of big data.⁴³⁵

The last recommendation relates to Special Operations and concerns the decapitation of the Islamic State as a counterterrorism policy. This policy has many advantages. First, the loss of leadership can bring a terrorist group to its end.⁴³⁶ Second, the elimination of the leaders of terrorist organizations is a moment of retribution for the states that suffer from them.⁴³⁷ Third, publicizing successful operations against terrorist groups strengthens citizens' sense of security.⁴³⁸ Finally, in the long run, the removal of the leaders or key members of a terrorist organization or network also has other significant benefits for the state that effects their removal from power. The killing of skilled terrorists such as trainers, bomb makers, trainers, recruiters, and leaders, who are both scarce in number and require a long time to perfect their skills, is a severe blow to the organization. The substitute for the losses will require time to train new terrorists, so the organization will be inactive for that time.⁴³⁹

The U.S. and the anti-IS coalition chose the decapitation counterterrorism policy, that relied mainly on drone attacks or airstrikes. In this way they killed Abu Muhammad al Adnani al-Shami,⁴⁴⁰ ISIS deputy Abu Alaa al-Afri,⁴⁴¹ and top Daesh commander

⁴³⁵ EUROPOL, "No Money for Terror," 2019, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/no-money-for-terror>.

⁴³⁶ Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, 5th ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011), 18–21.

⁴³⁷ Nacos, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, 255, 265–68.

⁴³⁸ Bruce Schneier, *Beyond Fear: Thinking Sensibly about Security in an Uncertain World* (New York: Copernicus Books, 2006), 9.

⁴³⁹ Daniel Byman, *A High Price: The Triumphs and Failures of Israeli Counterterrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 365.

⁴⁴⁰ Robin Wright, "Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani, the Voice of ISIS, Is Dead," *The New Yorker*, August 31, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/abu-muhammad-al-adnani-the-voice-of-isis-is-dead>.

⁴⁴¹ Nick Paton Walsh, Barbara Starr, and Hamdi Alkhshali, "ISIS' No. 2 Leader Abu Alaa al-Afri Killed, Iraq Says," CNN, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/05/13/middleeast/isis-al-afri/index.html>.

Omar Al-Shishani.⁴⁴² This tactic of the Western allies achieved some of the advantages mentioned previously, but for a group, such as the IS, in which decentralization is one of its key components this approach did not bring the desired results. First, the killing of some IS leaders was a severe blow to the group, but not enough to eliminate it. On the contrary, having a decentralized administration, the group quickly promoted other people to key positions in the group. Moreover, the group used these attacks to fuel their propaganda by making the victims “heroes” of the war against the infidel Westerners and the cowardly way in which they killed these “heroes.”⁴⁴³ Second, the killing of IS leaders by bombing destroyed evidence such as laptops, sticks, mobile phones. For a group that has set up a chaotic decentralized system both on the Internet and on the ground worldwide, evidence collection is vital to uncovering its structure and reach. Perhaps studying this evidence is the only way to dismantle IS networks, helping authorities to follow Ariadne’s Thread through the labyrinth of the “virtual” and real Islamic State. For example, Special Operations Group raids in Iraq against ISI leaders have resulted in the deaths of those leaders and the gathering of vital information about the group. Utilization of this collected information brought to the surface the network of the group and its gradual elimination.⁴⁴⁴

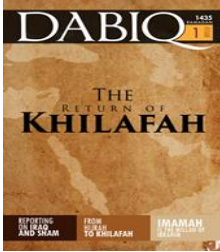
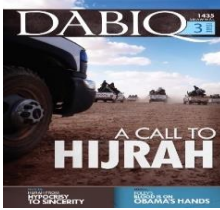
⁴⁴² Arab News, “Daesh Says Top Leader Omar Al-Shishani Killed in Battle,” Arab News, July 14, 2016, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/953236/middle-east>.

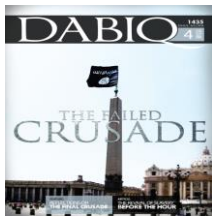
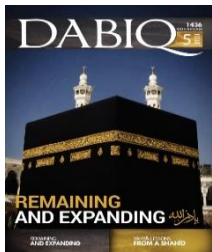
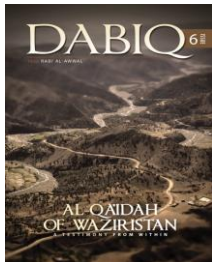
⁴⁴³ Charlie Winter and Haroro J. Ingram, “Why ISIS Is So Good at Branding Its Failures as Successes,” *The Atlantic*, September 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/isis-propaganda/540240/>.

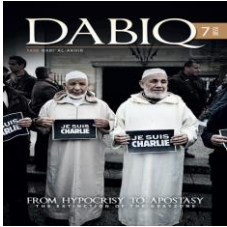
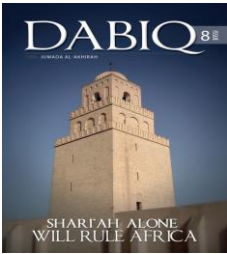
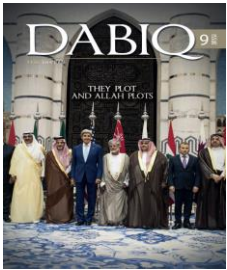
⁴⁴⁴ Fishman, *The Master Plan*, 147.

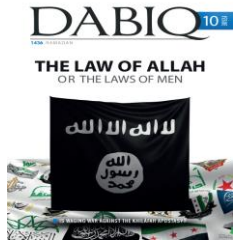
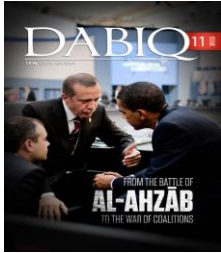
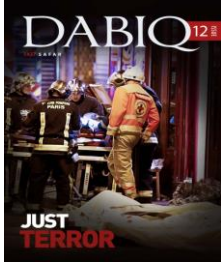
APPENDIX A. ANALYSIS OF DABIQ COVERS

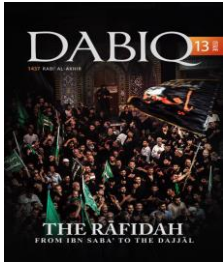
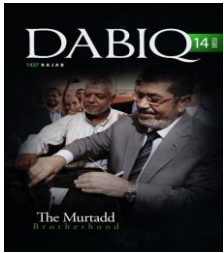
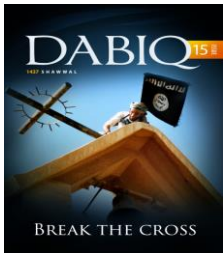
Table 1. Analysis of Dabiq Covers.

N/B	Magazines Details	Magazine Cover	The main image of the cover	Strategies	Main cover line or anchorage text	Strategies	Puffs to the information stand out	Strategies
1	Issue: 1 Date:7/5/14 Pages: 50		Khilafah	O	The Return of Khilafah	O	a. Reporting on Iraq and Sham b. From Hijrah to Khilafah c. Imamah is the Millah of Ibrahim	a. – b. O c. O
2	Issue: 2 Date:7/27/14 Pages: 44		Noah's Ark	O	The Flood	O	a. It's Either the Islamic State or the Flood b. Feature: The Flood of Mubalahah	a. O b. O
3	Issue: 3 Date:9/10/14 Pages: 42		Jihadists on Trucks	O	A Call to Hijrah	O	a. Hijrah from Hypocrisy to Sincerity b. Foley's Blood is on Obama's Hands	a. O b. I

N/B	Magazines Details	Magazine Cover	The main image of the cover	Strategies	Main cover line or anchorage text	Strategies	Puffs to the information stand out	Strategies
4	Issue:4 Date:10/11/14 Pages: 56		St. Peter's Square with IS Flag	O - I	The Failed Crusade	O - I	a. Reflection on the Final Crusade b. The Revival of Slavery – Before the Hour	a. O - I b. I
5	Issue: 5 Date:11/21/14 Pages: 40		Sanctuary of Mecca	O	Remaining and Expanding	O	a. Remaining and Expanding b. Yahya: Lessons from a Shahid	a. O b. -
6	Issue: 6 Date:12/29/14 Pages: 63		South Waziristan	-	Al-Qaidah of Waziristan – A Testimony from Within	O	-	-

N/B	Magazines Details	Magazine Cover	The main image of the cover	Strategies	Main cover line or anchorage text	Strategies	Puffs to the information stand out	Strategies
7	Issue:7 Date:2/12/15 Pages: 83		Two Muslims having banners with “Je Suis Charlie”	P	From Hypocrisy to Apostasy – The Extinction of the Greyzone	P	-	-
8	Issue: 8 Date:3/30/15 Pages: 68		The Great Mosque of Kairouan, also known as the Mosque of Uqba (Tunisia)	O	Shariah Alone will Rule Africa	O	-	-
9	Issue: 9 Date:5/21/15 Pages: 79		Arab Leaders Join U.S. Military Campaign Against ISIL	O - P	They Plot and Allah Plots	O - P	-	-

N/B	Magazines Details	Magazine Cover	The main image of the cover	Strategies	Main cover line or anchorage text	Strategies	Puffs to the information stand out	Strategies
10	Issue:10 Date:7/13/15 Pages: 79		IS's Flag over others Muslim countries' flags	O - P	The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men	O - P	Is Waging War Against the Khilafah Apostasy?	O
11	Issue: 11 Date:9/9/15 Pages: 66		Erdogan-Obama	O – P	From the Battle of Al-Ahzab to the War of Coalitions	O – P	-	-
12	Issue: 12 Date:11/18/15 Pages: 66		Rescue team with one injured	I - P	Just Terror	I-P	-	-

N/B	Magazines Details	Magazine Cover	The main image of the cover	Strategies	Main cover line or anchorage text	Strategies	Puffs to the information stand out	Strategies
13	Issue:13 Date:1/19/16 Pages: 56		Shia Prayer	O - P	The Rafidah From Ibn Saba to the Dajjal	O - P	-	-
14	Issue: 14 Date:4/13/16 Pages: 68		Muslim Brotherhood (Egypt)	O - P	The Murtadd Brotherhood	O - P	-	-
15	Issue: 15 Date:7/31/16 Pages: 82		A Jihadist broke the cross from a church	I - P	Break the Cross	I - P	-	-

REMARKS

I = Intimidation Strategy

O = Outbidding Strategy

P = Polarization Strategy

Puff= An incentive which is placed on the cover to make something stand out. Usually by putting text into a shape.

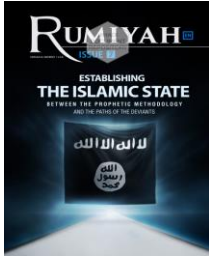
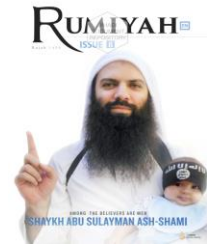
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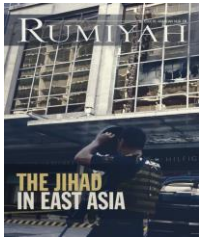
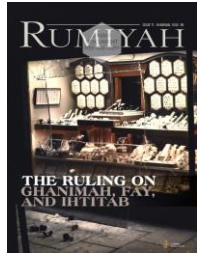
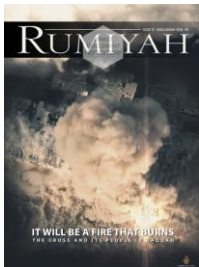
APPENDIX B. ANALYSIS OF RUMIYAH COVERS

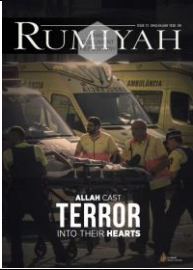
Table 2. Analysis of Rumiyah Covers.

N/B	Magazines Details	Magazine Cover	The main image of the cover	Strategies	Main cover line or anchorage text	Strategies	Puffs to the information stand out	Strategies
1	Issue: 1 Date: 9/5/16 Pages:38		Abu Mohammad al-Adnani with a suicide vest	I - O	-	-	-	-
2	Issue: 2 Date: 10/4/16 Pages: 38		Bloody knife	I	-	-	-	-
3	Issue: 3 Date: 11/11/16 Pages: 46		The aftermath of the attack in Diyarbakir	I	-	-	-	-

N/B	Magazines Details	Magazine Cover	The main image of the cover	Strategies	Main cover line or anchorage text	Strategies	Puffs to the information stand out	Strategies
4	Issue:4 Date:12/7/16 Pages:40		The aftermath of the attack at Ohio State University	I-P	-	-	-	-
5	Issue: 5 Date:1/6/17 Pages:44		The flames of justice devour the murtaddin	I	-	-	-	-
6	Issue: 6 Date:2/4/17 Pages:44		The IS Istanbul Reina Night Club Attack	I	-	-	-	-

N/B	Magazines Details	Magazine Cover	The main image of the cover	Strategies	Main cover line or anchorage text	Strategies	Puffs to the information stand out	Strategies
7	Issue:7 Date:3/7/17 Pages:38		The IS Flag	O	Establishing the Islamic State – Between the Prophetic Methodology and the Paths of the Deviants	O	-	-
8	Issue: 8 Date:4/4/17 Pages:48		Photo of Shaykh Abu Sulayman Ash-Shami with a baby	O	Among the Believers are Men - Shaykh Abu Sulayman Ash-Shami	O	-	-
9	Issue: 9 Date:5/4/17 Pages:58		Photo of a broken cross	I - P	The ruling on the belligerent Christians	I - P	-	-

N/B	Magazines Details	Magazine Cover	The main image of the cover	Strategies	Main cover line or anchorage text	Strategies	Puffs to the information stand out	Strategies
10	Issue:10 Date:6/17/17 Pages:46		Bombed building	I	The Jihad in East Asia	I - O	-	-
11	Issue: 11 Date:7/13/17 Pages:46		Vandalisms	I	The Ruling on Ghanimah, Fay, and Ihtitab	I	-	-
12	Issue: 12 Date:8/6/17 Pages:46		A bomb explosion	O	It will be a Fire that Burns – The Cross and its People in Raqqah	I - O	-	-

N/B	Magazines Details	Magazine Cover	The main image of the cover	Strategies	Main cover line or anchorage text	Strategies	Puffs to the information stand out	Strategies
13	Issue:13 Date: 9/9/17 Pages: 44		Rescuers with a stretcher at Barcelona's attack	I	Allah Cast Terror into their Hearts	I - P	-	-

REMARKS

I = Intimidation Strategy

O = Outbidding Strategy

P = Polarization Strategy

Puff= An incentive which is placed on the cover to make something stand out. Usually by putting text into a shape.

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APPENDIX C. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DABIQ AND RUMIYAH COVERS

Table 3. Numerical Overview of Dabiq Magazine.

Dabiq Magazine: 15 Issues					
IS Strategy	Main image of the cover		Main cover line or anchorage text		Remarks
	Total	%	Total	%	
Intimidation (I)	3	14%	3	13%	
Outbidding (O)	11	50%	12	52%	
Polarization (P)	8	36%	8	35%	

Notes: In eight covers both the main image and the main cover line were given a pair of codes.

Table 4. Numerical Overview of Rumiyah Magazine.

Rumiyah Magazine: 13 Issues					
IS Strategy	Main image of the cover		Main cover line or anchorage text		Remarks
	Total	%	Total	%	
Intimidation (I)	10	62%	5	46%	
Outbidding (O)	4	25%	4	36%	
Polarization (P)	2	13%	2	18%	

Notes: 1) The issues #1–#6 did not have a main cover line or anchorage text.

2) In three covers both the main image and the main cover line were given a pair of codes.

Figure 1. Strategies Reflected by the Main Image of the *Dabiq* Covers.

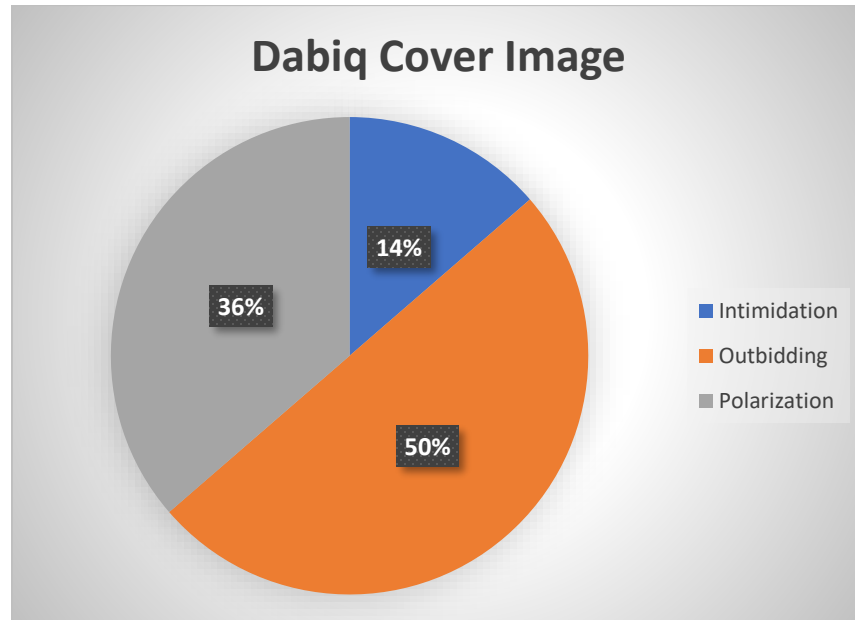


Figure 2. Strategies Reflected by the Main Image of the *Rumiyah* Covers.

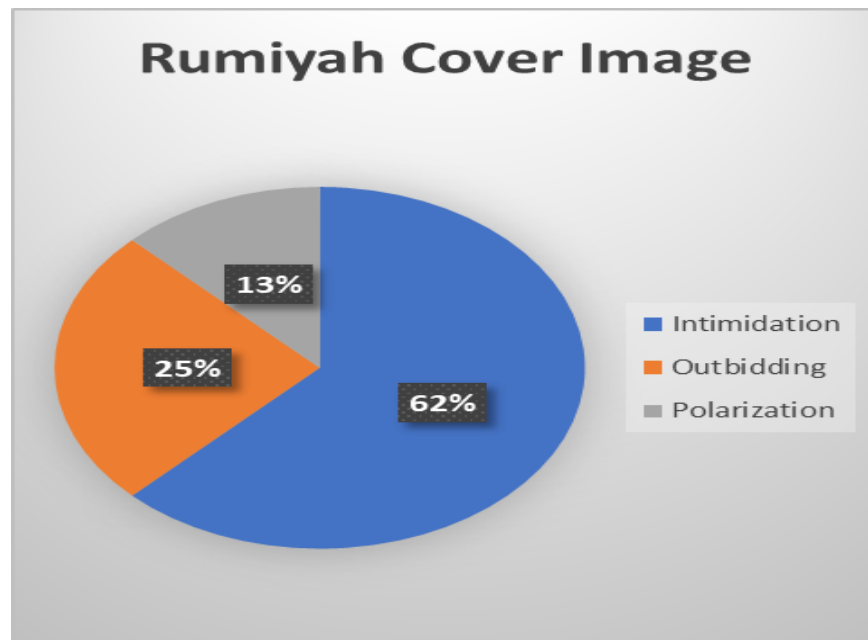


Figure 3. Comparative Analysis of the Strategies Reflected by the Main Image of the *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* Covers.

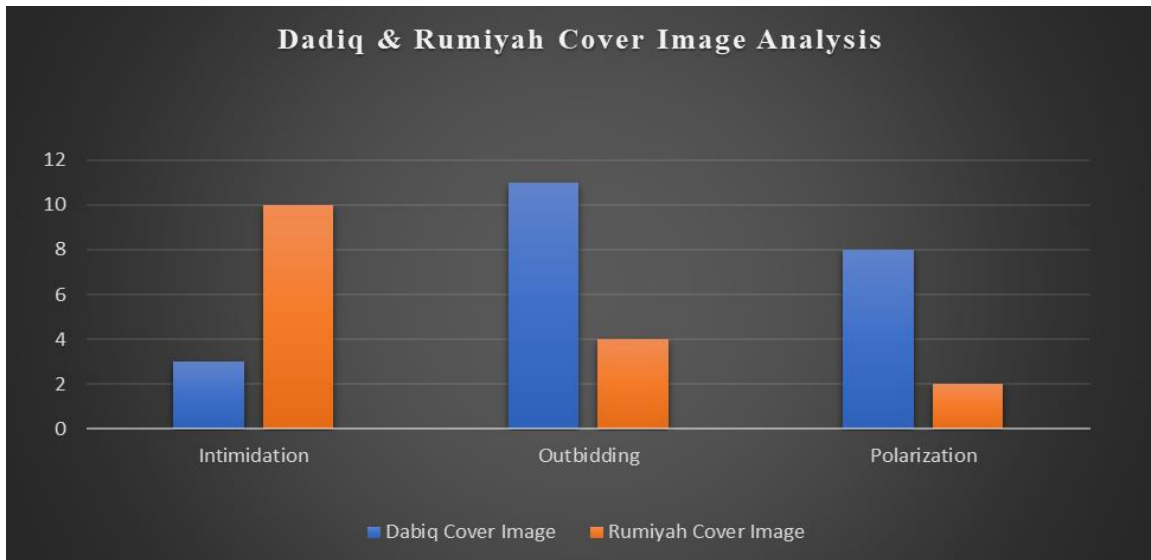


Figure 4. Strategies Reflected by the Main Cover Line or Anchorage Text of *Dabiq* Magazines.

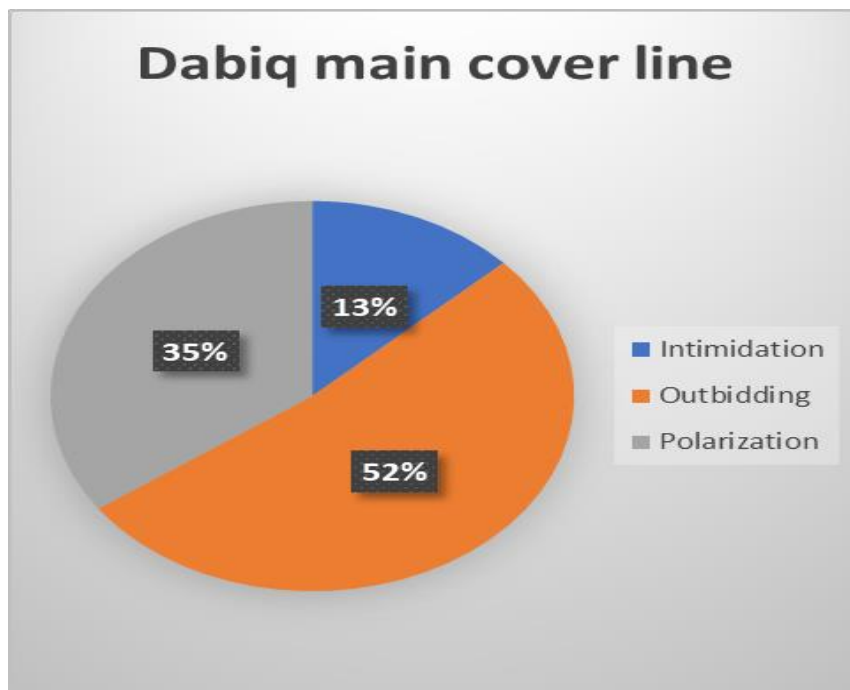
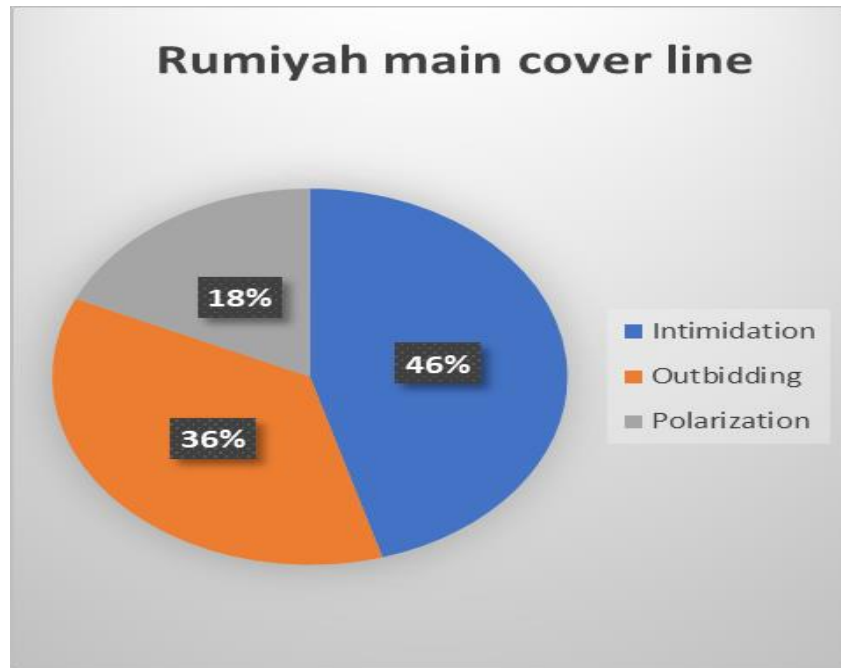
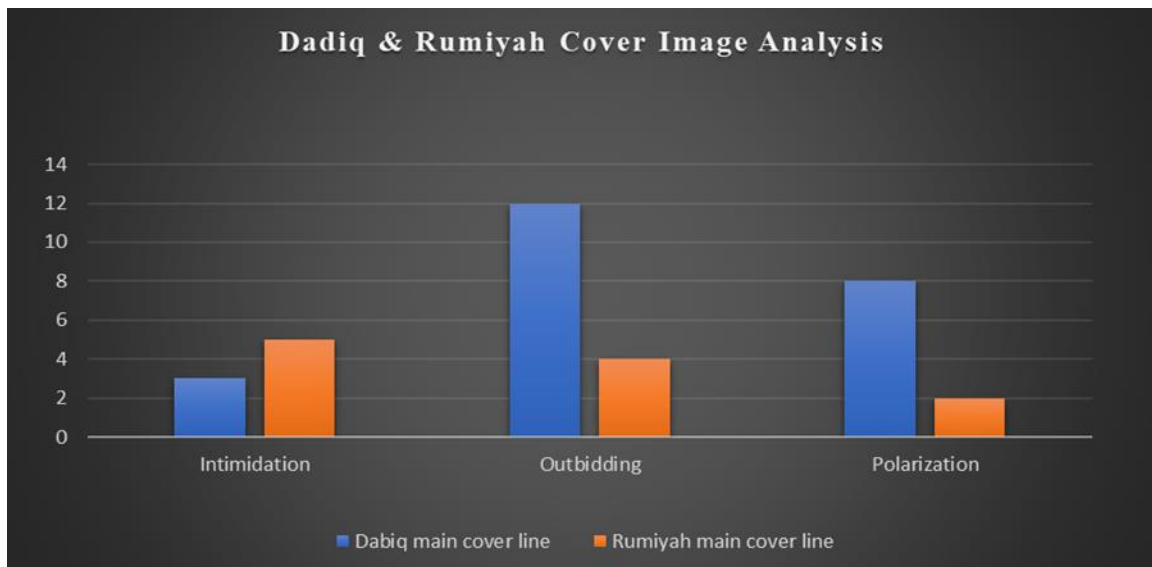


Figure 5. Strategies Reflected by the Main Cover Line or Anchorage Text of *Rumiyah* magazines.



Note: The issues #1–#6 were without a main cover line.

Figure 6. Comparative Analysis of the Strategies Reflected by the Main Cover Line or Anchorage Text of *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* Magazines.



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