Media Strategy of ISIS: An Analysis

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Abstract

ISIS is one of the most sophisticated, brutal and technology savvy armed militia that is using media to project its self-image[1] of a legitimate political and religious institution in order to multiply war victories, propagate its ideology, recruiting international youth, threatening opponents, and nevertheless to brand itself as a mighty power. Increased influence of media in contemporary strategic affairs was motivational for ISIS to formulate a media policy in order to reach out maximum number of audience with minimum cost and time. As a result, ISIS successfully attracted international media and influenced their agenda. As a result, present penetration of ISIS in international media is providing it considerable attention to influence public opinion and making it centre of attraction. Despite the willingness to limit ISIS supported media, international community is unable to achieve its objective due to ISIS's strategy of decentralization of media. Despite military capabilities and control and command, it is its media strategy which is constructing images and building public perceptions in its favour through different means and methods.

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[1] Dana Hadra, (Thesis, 2015, Submitted to Bostan College University), 88, https://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:104188/datastream/PDF/view

Introduction

Clausewitz said, "War is an instrument of policy."[2] However, in contemporary politics media has become the instrument of policy.[3] Media is considered as the most important tool in warfare and diplomacy since it has become a bridge between the government and public. Former UN Secretary General[4] mentioned *CNN* as "the sixteenth member of the Security Council."[5] Media has the power to influence the thinking process of a society.[6] Since the very inception of media, it had played a vital role in shaping public opinion throughout the history, for instance[7] Adolf Hitler used media to create hatred against Jews.[8] The broadcasters, in the Balkans polarized local communities to the point where violence became an acceptable tool for addressing socio-political grievances.[9]Consequently, media plays a significant role in forcing governments to take and enforce decisions while reducing their options, time and space for decision-making.[10] Moreover contemporary media extends beyond a geographic battlefield, bridging traditional war tactics to disseminate brutality online.[11]

Theories of "agenda setting" and "*CNN* effect" provide guidelines for subject research study. The theory of agenda setting[12] claims that

[2]*Carl von Clausewitz, On War, eds./trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 606.*

[3]Simon J. Hulme, "The Modern Media: The Impact on Foreign Policy," (Master Thesis, British Army Command and Staff College England, 1996), http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army/media-hulme.pdf

[4]Boutros Boutros-Ghali was an Egyptian politician and diplomat who was the sixth Secretary-General of the United Nations from January 1992 to December 1996.

[5] Larry Minear et al., *The New Media, Civil War and Humanitarian Action* (Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 1996), 4.

[6] B. Cohen, *The Press And Foreign Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 232-233.

[7]Ouma Lydia Radoli, "Press Freedom and Media's Role in Conflict and Peace-building Case of the Post-2007 Election Crisis in Kenya" (Masters Dissertation, University of Gothenburg,Spring 2011), 16.

[8] Mark Thompson, *Forging War: Media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina* (University of Luton Press, Luton: 1999).

[9]Thompson, *Forging War: Media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina,* 7.

[10] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (NY: Macmillan, 1922), 12.

[11] Natalie Johnson, How ISIS Is Waging a 'War of Ideas' Through Social Media, Daily Signal, June 8, 2015. , http://dailysignal.com/2015/06/08/how-isis-is-waging-a-war-of-ideas-through-social-media/

[12]"Agenda Setting and the Mass Media," http://www.unc.edu/~jwladyb/Agenda.pdf

media agenda transforms public agenda with the passage of time; because media is a principal source of pictures in public's minds, the pictures of themselves, of others, of their needs, purposes, and relationship and formulate public opinions and perceptions of a world that for most citizens is "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind."[13] . Theory of *CNN* Effect[14] discusses the media discourses influencing governments to take and enforce decisions while reducing their options, time and space for rational decision-making.

"ISIS, once known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI, October 2006–April 2013), the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, April 2013–June 2014)," and al-Dawla al-Islamiyya i.e. the Islamic State (IS, June 2014-present) ─ seizure of Iraq's second largest city "Mosul on June 10, 2014 shocked the world and left many wondering existence and evolution." It is considered as a movement led by a new generation of armed revolutionaries. Its ideology "combines religious discourse with political aspirations, creating in the process powerful emotional and moral commitments as well as legal responsibilities."[15] ISIS is modern and capable of using technology to advance their military and political objectives. It provide its own media as a source of information to track occurrences in Syria and Iraq. Through presenting themselves as a source of information for conflict-ridden areas of the Middle East, it has increased reliance of international media and common man upon them. As a result, its viewership has increased, making it successful in drawing around "1,000 foreign recruits a month to Iraq and Syria from nearly 100 different countries."[16] "Each entry gained through social

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[13] *Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (NY: Macmillan, 1922), 12.*

[14] Margaret H. Belknap, "The CNN Effect: Strategic Enabler or Operational Risk?," USAWC Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, Pennsylvania, 16June 16, 2015,<www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army-usawc/cnn-belknap.pdf>

[15] Al-Rasheed and Marat Shterin, "Introduction" in *Demistifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), 2.

[16] Matthew Pezzulo, "Tweeting Terror: An Examination of ISIL's Online Operations Through Rational Choice Theory," (Undergraduate Final Year Research, The Institute For Middle East Studies, The Elliott School Of International Affairs, The George Washington University, May 2015), thttps://imes.elliott.gwu.edu/sites/imes.elliott.gwu.edu/files/downloads/documents/Capstone-Papers-2015/05%20May%202015%20Capstone-Tweeting%20Terror%20(Matthew%20Pezzulo).pdf;Natalie, Johnson, "How ISIS Is Waging a 'War of Ideas' Through Social Media," *The Daily Signal,* June 8,

media becomes an additional asset in its propaganda campaign," with a multiplying effect.[17]

This study has reviewed media strategy of ISIS by exploring its salient features followed by their projection in international media. Analysis of its media tactics explains how and why ISIS has been able to adopt a unique, effective and consistent media strategy. This study deliberates upon tactics of ISIS to use media (radio, TV, Newspaper, magazine) and social media to glorify and glamorize life with and under ISIS. This discussion leads to another research question regarding the role and contribution of independent media in effective implementation of ISSI media strategy. It is pertinent to understand that, knowingly or unknowingly, ISIS successfully attracted independent media. Such projection terrorized general public and indirectly helped ISIS to achieve one of its war objectives.

a) **Objectives of ISIS Media Strategy**

    i.   ISIS strives for both political and religious legitimacy [18]
    ii.   To be public, to be heard and discussed[19]
    iii.   State building
    iv.   To create a perception of "the world as immoral and divided"[20]
    v.   To label those Muslims who are against or indifferent to ISIS as traitors[21]
    vi.   To legitimize its authority in the controlled areas[22]

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[17] 2015.Available at http://dailysignal.com/2015/06/08/how-isis-is-waging-a-war-of-ideas-through-social-media/

[17]Kyle J. Greene, "ISIS: Trends in Terrorist Media and Propaganda," *International Studies Capstone Research Papers, Cedarville University*, Paper 3 (2015), 13http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/international_studies_capstones/3

[18]Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?*, 42-44.

[19]For details, see: Lina Khatib, " The Islamic State Strategy: Lasting and Expanding," *Carnegie Empowerment for International Peace,* June 29, 2015, http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/06/29/islamic-state-s-strategy-lasting-and-expanding/ibmd

[20]Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?,* 45.

[21]Ibid.,45-46.

[22] M. Ahsan Jamal, "Introduction" in *ISIS and Media*, *International Relations Insight & Analysis*, Report No. 8, May 2015, http://www.academia.edu/17777844/ISIS_and_Media

vii.   To threaten its enemies while directly communicating with the people all over the world.[23]

viii. To instill fear in the hearts and minds of their opponents and rivals.[24]

ix.   To indoctrinate its ideas into the minds of youth (especially among Muslims)[25]

x.   To recruit new militants, strengthen its force and area of influence.[26]

xi.   To establish liaison with other militants, supporters or sympathizers and to persuade them to execute ISIS-style attacks in foreign lands.[27]

xii.   To persuade all Muslims that battling to restore a caliphate is a religious duty.[28]

xiii. To portray ISIS as an agent of change, the true follower of the sovereign faith, a champion of its own notions of social justice, and a collection of avengers bent on settling accounts for the perceived sufferings of the others.[29]

xiv.   To build narratives to support ISIS such as ISIS is gaining strength and amassing power and that victory is inevitable.[30]

xv.   To convince its sympathizers that it not only has a post-war vision, but also a means of converting that vision into reality.

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[23]Ibid.

[24]Ibid.

[25] Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President in Closing of the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism," *The White House*, February 18, 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/remarks-president-closing-summit-countering-violent-extremism ; Williams, Sara Elizabeth, "The bullied Finnish teenager who became an Isis social media kingpin – and then got out," *Newsweek*, May 6, 2015, http://europe.newsweek.com/bullied-finnish-teenager-who-became-isis-social-media-kingpin-then-got-out-328290.

[26]M. Ahsan Jamal, "Introduction" in *ISIS and Media*, *International Relations Insight & Analysis*. .

[27]Ibid.

[28] James P. Farewell, "How ISIS uses social media," *International Institute of Strategic Studies, Politics and Strategy Blog Archive*, October 2, 2014, https://www.iiss.org/en/politics%20and%20strategy/blogsections/2014-d2de/october-931b/isis-media-9d28

[29] Khatib, *The Islamic State's Strategy..*

[30]Farewell, *How ISIS uses social media*.

Perhaps more threatening than ISIS' military capabilities is its ability to posture itself as a legitimate and sustainable state.[31]

xvi. Portrays itself as methodically and effectively establishing a system of governance.[32]

xvii. To display itself as daring, more extreme, than anyone else through posting videos and photos of executions.[33]

Media Strategy of ISIS

ISIS' media strategy differs from other terrorist organizations. It is louder, consistent and modern.[34] It ranges from framing news to writing training manuals resulting in high quality propaganda. Its multi-dimensional media strategy highlights "the gap between the past and present status of the Muslims."[35] This gap ultimately stands at the centre of "the anger and humiliation that drive political violence in the Middle East."[36] Taking advantage of the feelings of disenfranchisement, ISIS emphasizes the tranquil notion of an Islamic state that has the potential to understand and resolve the grievances of Muslims.

In addition, ISIS considers all attention as good attention[37] because it facilitates it in expanding its outreach and provides the opportunity to communicate with the larger audience. This strategy fetches new recruits, widens sphere of influence besides providing an opportunity to glorify and glamorize its extreme violence.[38]

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[31]Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?*, 149.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Said Ghafar Hussain in an interview to *NBC News*. Pepitone, J. (2014). Why ISIS' social media campaign is 'even more brutal' than most. http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/iraq-turmoil/why-isis-social-media-campaigneven-more-brutal-most-n132321

[34]Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?*, 75.

[35] Shadi Hamid, " The Roots of the Islamic State's Appeal," *The Atlantic,* October 31, 2014, /382175/laeppa-setatscimalsi -eht-fo-stoor-eht/10/2014/evihcra/lanoitanretni/moc.citnaltaeht.www//:ptth

[36]Ibid.

[37]Kyle J. Greene, "ISIS: Trends in Terrorist Media and Propaganda," *International Studies Capstone Research Papers, Cedarville University*, Paper 3 (2015), http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/international_studies_capstones/3

[38]Tim Parks, " Pretty Violence," *NYR Daily, The New York Review of Books,* 2015,http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2015/12/21/pretty-violence-david-shields-war-is-beautiful/

Recruitment of youth from across the globe is among the most important objectives of ISIS. Therefore, ISIS media wing targets to indoctrinate its ideas into the minds of youth, especially among Muslims to ensure the recruitment of new militants to strengthen force and area of influence.[39] According to Horgan, ISIS is quite proficient at reaching out to youth. He describes youth's inclination towards ISIS as its desire to be part of 'something bigger than one's self'.[40] The ISIS media propagates the "benefits" of living in the Islamic State.[41] For example, in its online magazine *Dabiq*, ISIS portrayed areas under its control as peaceful and hospitable and assured the provision of homes for all ISIS fighters.[42]As an acknowledgment of significance of graphics, ISIS substantiate its claim through photographs of fighters relaxing with tea and singing in tranquillity to glamorize Muslim brotherhood in their areas.[43] Interestingly, pictures and singing are prohibited in radical interpretation of Islam.

The media strategy of ISIS claims to accommodate local and international recipients/audience in minimum period of time.[44] Such swift sharing brings psychological and political gains for them.[45] For

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[39] Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President in Closing of the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism," *The White House*, February 18, 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/remarks-president-closing-summit-countering-violent-extremism ; Williams, Sara Elizabeth, "The bullied Finnish teenager who became an Isis social media kingpin – and then got out," *Newsweek*, May 6, 2015, http://europe.newsweek.com/bullied-finnish-teenager-who-became-isis-social-media-kingpin-then-got-out-328290.

[40]William, *The bullied Finnish teenager.*

[41] Khatib, *The Islamic Stats's Strategy: Lasting and Expanding.*

[42] Issue 3 of Dabiq was titled 'A Call to Hijra' (migration) and much of its content was aimed at persuading new recruits to join the State, http://www.jacksmithprophecy.org/2014/08/31/islamic-state-releases-dabiq-3-a-call-to-hijrah/

[43]"Photographic report of the break-time of the mujahidin on the Euphrates River," *Raqqa Province Media Office,* December 29, 2014.

[44]Alexis O' Connor, " Defeating the ISIS Recruitment Strategy," *Chicago Monitor*, July 2, 2015,http://chicagomonitor.com/2015/07/defeating-the-isis-recruitment-strategy/ . U.S. based Carter Center is working for its encounter, http://www.cartercenter.org/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-ISIS.html

[45]Christiana Spens, "Shock and Awe: Performitivity, Machismo and ISIS," *E-International Relations,* Nov 2, 2014,http://www.e-ir.info/2014/11/02/shock-and-awe-performativity-machismo-and-isis/

example, in the virtual world through appreciating or sharing pro-ISIS material, its followers feel as if they are contributing in the development of the Islamic State.[46] This makes them vulnerable to ISIS propaganda that demands their physical migration. At the same time, the organization induced fear within its enemies that they could be its future target and would face the rage of ISIS if they criticize and oppose them.[47]

In addition, ISIS promotes its interest in promotion of literacy rate by encouraging children and developing an "Islamic State Curriculum."[48] Overwhelmingly, it sought to portray itself as an institution effectively establishing a system of governance, which is not just talking about the 'caliphate' but enacting it as well.[49] Its media campaign creates an impression of being capable of dealing with convulsions of post conflict society[50] and runing a state[51] under its popular slogan "baqiyya wa tatamaddad" (remaining and expanding).[52] Hence to ensure this, its media office demonstrates that its militant organization is capable of governing these areas with excellence by

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[46]Foremost among the unofficial propagandists are the likes of al-Asawirti, al-Nasra al-Muqaddisiyya (Palesitnian Supprt), Mu'assasat al-Khilafa (Calliphate Foundation) and al-Jabha al-I'lmiyya l-Nusrat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya (Media Front for the support of the Islamic State). See also: Robin Creswell and Bernard Haykel, "Battle lines: want to understand the jihadis? Read their poetry,"*New Yorker,* June 8, 2015.

[47]See: Ahsan, ISIS and Media

[48] "Honouring the cubs that have memorized two parts of the Quran," *Raqqa Province Media Office*, March 29, 2015.

[49] For example They have established different state institutons such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of "Health Services" (al-Khidmaat al-Saahia), a Ministry of "Treasury" (Bayt al-Mal) and an "Office for Security" (Maktab al-Amin).

[50] Interview with Free Syrian Army leaders in Jordan, May 2015. Also see: Amir Abdhallah, "ISIS Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi Grants $1,200, House and Furnishings to Members Who Wish to Marry," *Iraqi News*, August 31, 2014,http://www.iraqinews.com/features/isis-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-grants-1200-house-furnishings-members-wish-marry/

[51] Azmat Khan, " What ISIL's English-language propaganda tells us about its goals," *Al-Jazeera America,* June 20, 2014,http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/articles/2014/6/how-isil-is-remakingitsbrandontheinternet.html

[52] Aymenn al Tamimi, "The Islamic State's Regional Strategy,"*Europena Council on foreign relations,* October 2, 2014,http://www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/commentary_the_islamic_states_regional_strategy326

providing information regarding local and religious security services, and their legal system.[53] Salient features of ISIS media strategy are as under:

Social Media

Social media networks such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, mobile applications, chatting and social networking sites etc., provide a wide range of forums to ISIS to reach out to the young, more gullible age groups, which is more susceptible to choose violence because of violent socio-political structures and the lack of peace education.

ISIS is using social media outlets as an essential tool to promote its "brand awareness." It displays itself as daring by posting videos and photos of executions[54] to impress the audiences. Its fascinating version of militancy is similar to popular Hollywood movies,[55] full of violence and war between good and evil, for example, movies like *The Flames of War*[56] or *Lend Me Your Ears*. Similarly, the posters depicting the atrocities of the West are displayed on social networks to create a perception of "the world as immoral and divided,"[57] and present ISIS as the only moral force fighting against immoralities and atrocities valiantly. Through its media strategy, the organisation has portrayed itself as an agent of change, true follower of the faith, supporter of social justice, and avengers for the perceived sufferings of the others.[58]

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[53] For details, see: Charles C. Caris & Samuel Reynolds, "ISIS Governance In Syria," *Middle East Security Report 22* (US: Institute for the Study of War, July 2014), http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISIS_Governance.pdf

[54] Said Ghafar Hussain in an interview to NBC News. Pepitone, J. (2014). Why ISIS' social media campaign is 'even more brutal' than most,http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/iraq-turmoil/why-isis-social-media-campaigneven-more-brutal-most-n132321

[55] *Natalie Johnson, "How ISIS Is Waging a 'War of Ideas' Through Social Media," Daily Signal, June 08, 2015,*http://dailysignal.com/2015/06/08/how-isis-is-waging-a-war-of-ideas-through-social-media/

[56] The video is available at http://leaksource.info/2014/09/21/flames-of-war-islamic-state-feature-length-propaganda-recruitment-film/

[57] Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?,* 45.

[58] For details, see: Lina Khatib, "The Islamic State Strategy: Lasting and Expanding," *Carnegie Empowerment for International Peace,* June 29, 2015. Available at http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/06/29/islamic-state-s-strategy-lasting-and-expanding/ibmd

Through its *Twitter* accounts, ISIS attempts to penetrate the isolated social movements and activist groups. It uses same hashtags and similar rhetoric.[59] ISIS' social media triumph can be credited to active users, promptly tweeting in ISIS's favour in great numbers.[60] No less than "46,000 *Twitter* accounts"[61] are operated by sympathizers of ISIS. For example, '*The Ghuraba*'[62] is responsible for publishing essays, books, and poems via *Twitter* to endorse the Islamic State.[63] Moreover, through "hashtag hijacking,"[64] ISIS is practically aligning itself with other violent forces. This *Twitter* strategy is also known as *Twitter* Bombs. Its omnipresence, scope and reach make it difficult to contest ISIS messages and prevent online recruitment.[65]

In April 2014, ISIS launched an Arabic-Language *Twitter* app "*Fajr al-Bashaer*" for Android and PC.[66] From April till June 2014, around 5,000 to 10,000 people downloaded the app to follow ISIS' progress and to obtain latest news about its activities. According to various estimations, around 40,000 messages were tweeted through the app on the day when ISIS captured Mosul. This app has transmitted ISIS propaganda to a larger group of people. Although *Twitter* flags this application as "potentially harmful", it is difficult for *Twitter* to recognize such accounts.[67]

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[59] Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?,*79.

[60]*M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census, Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter," The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis Paper (20), March 2015, 3.*

[61] Et. al., *Social and news media.*

[62] A Media Foundation, a pro-Islamic State group

[63] Its twitter handle as of this writing is @alghuraba_ar11. For an archive of Ghuraba's writings see: http://justpaste.it/archivealghuraba

[64] Hijacking happens when a Hashtag is used for a different purpose than the one originally intended. For details, http://www.memrijttm.org/isis-hashtag-campaign-hijacked-by-twitter-trolls-a-case-study.html

[65] Matt Kwong, " Iraq Crisis: ISIS social media blitz could be its downfall,"*CBCNews World,* July 2, 2014,http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/iraq-crisis-isis-social-media-blitz-could-be-its-downfall-1.2687301

[66]Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?,* 16.

[67]Mustapha Ajbaili, "How Has ISIS Conquered Social Media," *Al Arabiya News*, June 24, 2014, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/digital/2014/06/24/How-has-ISIS-conquered-social-media-.html

As evident in its campaign on *Twitter*, ISIS is also reactive towards non-Muslim powers, for example it launched a campaign on *Twitter* following the US air campaign in August 2014 with the hashtag #AmessagefromISIStoUS[68]. They established liaison with other such organisations and persuaded them to execute ISIS-style attacks in foreign lands to instill fear among its opponents.[69] For example, on September 21, 2014, ISIS leadership called on its supporters to kill Westerners.[70]

For broader media campaigns of militant communications, ISIS affiliates with traditional media, radio, web forums, and non-traditional media, such as *Twitter*, *Youtube*, and *Kik*.[71] Additionally, its members have also been increasingly using business and marketing websites such as eBay and Reddit to send coded messages to their members and supporters around the world.[72]

An e-book published by ISIS, titled *Hijrah* (migration, in Arabic) to the Islamic State, details how to approach the caliphate territories and what the prospective traveler should pack.[73] In order to provide mesmerizing and aspiring information to its viewership, it has launched a website of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Minbar al-Tawhidwa'l-Jihad ("The Pulpit of God's Unity and Jihad").[74] Furthermore, it is effectively using *YouTube* to disseminate their messages, information, videos and photographs to transform public agendas as per their objectives. It would be pertinent to mention that when other social media forums are unsuccessful in dealing with ISIS media campaign, as per their policy *Facebook* deletes any profile, page or group related to a terrorist

[68] Ali Hashem, "The Islamic State's Social Media Strategy," *AL-Monitor,* August 18, 2014,http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/08/is-clinton-atrocities-social-media-baghdadi-mccain.html
[69] Ahsan, *ISIS and Media*.
[70] Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, "Inna Rabbaka la-bi'l-mirsad," Mu'assasat al-Furqan, September 21, 2014, transcript available at http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Inna-Rabbaka-la-bil-mirsad.pdf
[71] For further details, see: Brock Walsh, "Online Jihad: ISIS and Social Media," June 14, 2015, BrockWalsh WordPress,https://brockwalsh.wordpress.com/2015/06/14/isis-and-social-media/
[72] Ahsan, *ISIS and Media*.
[73] Islamic State, " Hijra (2015) to Islamic State," https://archive.org/stream/GuideBookHijrah2015-ToTheIslamicState/7-Hijrah2015-ToTheIslamicState_djvu.txt
[74] For example the website: http://www.tawhed.ws/

organization and strictly monitor any content celebrating terrorism or hate speech. Consequently, it has deleted posts and blocked accounts, which were projecting ISIS related newsletters, videos, and photos.

Traditional Media

The radio channel of ISIS, *Al-Bayan*, broadcasts its news daily from Mosul, Iraq and airs propaganda in modern standard Arabic for those without mobile phone or access to internet. These programmes are uploaded on *Youtube* and circulated through *Twitter* to increase its outreach. Each programme starts with a pro-ISIS "*nasheed*", an Islamic song in Arabic language.[75] Moreover western media claims that ISIS is launching a TV channel,[76] to attract new recruits and to provide information regarding its success. This gives an impression that ISIS has the potential infrastructure and finances to operationalise such projects.[77]

ISIS has launched an online magazine *Islamic State Report* (ISR) known as "An Insight into the Islamic State" to project the life within the Islamic state and propagate the benefits of living under the caliphate.[78] ISIS often publishes photographs and interviews of fighters and citizens showing how they are enjoying prosperity under the shade of the Caliphate.[79] To reach the global audience, the group publishes a magazine, *Dabiq*. It is a detailed form of the ISR, as mentioned above. Similarly, the *Islamic State News* (ISN) is a pdf newspaper of six pages with pictorial English commentary.[80] ISN is the only primary and credible newspaper of ISIS. Its function is to present, project and amplify ISIS rhetoric victories and information.

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[75] Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future*?, 85.

[76] Gilad Shiloach, "The Islamic State is Starting a TV Channel," *Vocativ,* November 9, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/nov/09/nasheed-how-isis-got-its-anthem

[77] Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?,* 86.

[78] Ahsan, *ISIS and Media*.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Auhtor, -hcnerF dna namreG ,hsilgnE sesserddA ynapmoC aideM SISI weN srenretseW gnikaepS, date, Publisher, -aidem -sisi-wen/gro.mttjirmem.www//:ptth .lmth.srenretsew-gnikaeps-hcnerf-dna-namreg-hsilgne-stegrat-ynapmoc

Religious Legitimacy

In addition, ISIS uses media to portray and establish its political and religious legitimacy in the controlled areas.[81]The organisation uses text from Quran in a decontextualized way to present its news reports on military victories and snapshots of its philanthropic work. In its media campaign, the organisation has exploited pertinent dictums of Islamic sources of Islamic jurisprudence, especially, the notion of 'Jihad' and 'Khilafat.' Furthermore, they described its leader Baghdadi as Qurashi, Hashemi, a descendant of al-Hussein Ibn Ali, to gain the religious clout and announced him as Amir-al-Mu-mineen.[82] Its governance is based on a rigid interpretation and propagation of Islamic laws and its leaders to project themselves as warriors of 7th century, fighting to establish religious empire. The organisation terms the car bombs as "steeds" and drivers as the "death admirers, the knights of martyrdom."[83] A recent study found that this propagation has also helped them in recruitments and draw funds from about 81 countries.[84]

Legitimacy is also portrayed through an emphasis on re-establishment of Islamic caliphate as a religious obligation.[85] ISIS labels those Muslims who are against or indifferent to its ideology as traitors.[86] ISIS considers other Islamic organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah, as traitors and asserts that eliminating and destroying them is of more importance than

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[81] Ahsan, "Introduction" in "ISIS and Media,"*International Relations Insight & Analysis*, Report No. 8, May 2015,http://www.academia.edu/17777844/ISIS_and_Media; Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?*, 42-44.

[82] Alberto M. Fernandez, Here to stay and growing: Combating ISIS propaganda networks, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World U.S.-Islamic World Forum Papers 2015, October 2015, 9.

[83] Cam Simpson, How ISIS Corporatized Terror?,*Bloomberg Business*, November 20, 2014.

[84] Richard Barrett, "Foreign Fighters In Syria," *The Soufan Group*, June 2, 1014, http://soufangroup.com/foreign-fighters-in-syria/

[85] James P. Farewell, "How ISIS uses social media," *International Institute of Strategic Studies, Politics and Strategy Blog Archive*, October 2, 2014, https://www.iiss.org/en/politics%20and%20strategy/blogsections/2014-d2de/october-931b/isis-media-9d28

[86]Ibid.,45-46.

any other objective.[87] This ideology is evident in the crucifixion of the eight Muslim rebels for being too moderate.[88] It is pertinent to mention that they were fighting with jihadists against the Syrian government.

Role of Independent Media

Media and terrorism, directly and indirectly, feed on each other.[89] Knowingly or unknowingly, independent media supports the agenda of ISIS. Various theories claim that by reporting terrorism, media gives special attention to ISIS that, consequently, motivates other groups to carry out similar attacks to seek media attention. The "culpable media model,"[90] suggests that media is also responsible for terrorism as terrorists would be less motivated if they knew it would not be that significant for public and media.[91] Furthermore the "vulnerable media model"[92] recognizes the complicated situation for media after a terrorist attack. As a matter of fact, numerous decentralized and autonomous media networks are in competition with one another. Therefore, if a media house chooses not to cover an attack, it not only loose viewership but eventually has to bear financial strain. Under these circumstances, media has to establish preferences between being perceived as "covering up" a piece of important news by not reporting it or, at least, giving terrorists a voice.[93] This complex scenario creates a conducive

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[87]Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, "Qul inni 'ala bayyina min Rabbi,"*Mu'assasat al-Furqan,* March 13, 2007. Transcript in Transcript in al-Majmu' li-qadat Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya, 2010, 12-16.

[88] Kurt Eichenwald, ISIS's Enemy List: 10 Reasons the Islamic State is Doomed, Newsweek, August 9, 2014,http://www.newsweek.com/2014/09/19/isiss-enemy-list-10-reasons-islamic-state-doomed-268953.html

[89]K. J. Green "ISIS: Trends in Terrorist Media and Propaganda,"2015, http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=international_studies_capstones

[90] K. G. Barnhurst, "The literature of Terrorism: Implications for Visual Communications," in A. O. Alali and K. K. Eke,eds., *Media Covedrage of Terrorism: Methods of Diffusion* (London: Sage), 112-137.

[91]T. Milosevska & N. Taneski, "Terrorist Violence and the Role of the Media," *Ministry of Defence of the republic of Macedonia,* (2014): 59.

[92]Barnhurst, "The literature of Terrorism," 112-137.

[93] Greene, " ISIS: Trends in Terrorist Media and Propaganda," 6.

environment for ISIS to become a focus of attention for international media.[94]

International media has permitted ISIS to practice a decentralized and highly organized media campaign to multiply the impact of ISIS ideology.[95] ISIS receives extensive media coverage which insipred some teenagers to commit similar acts of violence. Each story of brutality by ISIS becomes a challenge for media to tell the truth without either propagating or censoring it. Several media channels often unintentionally fall into this trap of ISIS and propagate their radical ideas and induce fear.

Electronic and social media often publicize terrorists' propaganda campaign and cause fear among the general population.[96] For example, *Fox News* became the only US media to have broadcasted a video showing ISIS violence on its website. These moves spread fear among the citizens and discouraged the countries fighting against ISIS. The media unknowingly helped ISIS to achieve its goals[97] by giving excessive coverage to ISIS military gains, training camps, military parades (displaying artillery guns, tanks and armored vehicles) and suicidal missions.[98]

In reporting ISIS, most media organizations are reliant on internet, and ISIS is regularly trending on social media websites such as *Twitter* etc. Interestingly, according to Google trends ISIS was behind the Ebola virus and it was in top news searches in 2014.[99] Hence, the media is

[94]Ben Norton, " How the Media Helps ISIS Spread its Propaganda,"*Counter Punch,* May 8, 2015, http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/05/08/how-the-media-helps-isis-spread-its-propaganda/
[95] Ahsan, *ISIS and Media*.
[96]Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Primary-propaganda: "Blood of jihad I", *Nineveh Province Media Office*, October 10, 2014; "Parade of the army of the caliphate in Barqa Province," *Barqa Province Media Office*, November 16, 2014; "Correspondents' programme – the raid to liberate Baiji refinery," *Salahuddin Province Media Office*, May 13, 2015; "Battles in Ayn al-Islam," *Aleppo Province Media Office*, December 9, 2014 quoted in Charlie Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy*, July 2015, Quilliam Foundation, 26
[99] Ibid.

building the image of ISIS as an unstoppable force, capable of standing up to the international system.[100]

Conclusion and Analysis

Media strategy of ISIS is decentralized, efficient, and public.[101] These characteristics do not permit strict control by international community on ISIS media, rather it facilitates the organisation's media policy.[102] On one hand, it conveniently pursues its strategy of terrorizing and impressing the world and, on the other, brutality, displayed in their media campaigns, establishes firm conviction by international actors to counter ISIS strategy.[103] This makes its media strategy counterproductive. War strategists wrote, "know yourself, know your enemy,"[104] ISIS media strategy provides ample opportunity to intelligence agencies to predict its next moves. Particularly, social media helps agencies to find ISIS targets. [105]

ISIS' leadership appears to understand that "social media is a double-edged sword that serves its interest."[106] Social media can be used to infiltrate in their echelons to demoralize, neutralize and locate them. Therefore, ISIS imposes strict framework of media regulations through authoritarian censorship and organizational control. Their "Information Office" reviews all media content prior to distribution.[107] As an antidote, ISIS tries to protect the identity and location of its leadership by

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[100] Ibid.

[101] For details, see: Hadra, "ISIS: Past, Present, Future?

[102] Greene, "ISIS: Trends in Terrorist Media and Propaganda," 47.

[103] Pew Research Center, "Growing Support fo Campaign Against ISIS- and Possible Use of U.S. Ground Troops," *U.S. Politics & Policy,* February 24, 2015,http://www.people-press.org/2015/02/24/growing-support-for-campaign-against-isis-and-possible-use-of-u-s-ground-troops/

[104] Y.K. Wong, *The Art Of War Applied To Wall Street*, (CA: 2010), 41.

[105] For details see: Jay Akbar, "The sick ambitions of a caliphate bent on carnage," *Daily Mail,* June 39, 2015,http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3134534/The-sick-ambitions-caliphate-bent-carnage-Chilling-map-predicts-ISIS-seize-new-land-strike-West-lone-wolf-attacks-awaken-sleeper-cells-end-Ramadan.html

[106] Helle Dale, Social Media Proves Double-Edged Sword for ISIS, *CNS News,* Oct 24, 2014, http://www.cnsnews.com/commentary/helle-dale/social-media-prove-double-edged-sword-isis

[107] Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?,* 77.

minimizing electronic communications among top cadres and using couriers to deliver command-and-control messages by hand.[108]

Theoretically and practically, there are not many options for international community to develop a counter media policy. Strategy to suspend and control pro-ISIS media has been a futile effort and was unable to disengage them with its viewers.[109] ISIS media strategy can be hampered only if they realize that its media hungry attitude is counterproductive.[110] The use of Internet, *Twitter*, *Skype*, *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* applications has linked the ISIS cyber experts with not only sympathizers but also with adventure-seeking youths. Dozens of sympathizers began promoting ISIS ideas as un-appointed franchise machineries making it difficult for many governments to locate and control the electronic offensive including cyber-attacks, hackings and penetrations.[111]ISIS, has capitalized on the political vacuum created by weak states and the failure of national governments to address core socio-political grievances, disenfranchisement of youth and marginalization of particular segments of the population.[112]

International media houses are also providing out of proportion coverage to ISIS[113] and propagating the strategy objectives of ISIS. For example, ISIS aims at outreach; media has brought them to living rooms. ISIS is attention seeker: media is giving the organisation desired attention at the cost of the other important issues. ISIS needs recruitment; media is projecting it like best violent film of Hollywood. ISIS wants the

[108] Farewell, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*.
[109]Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?,* 142.
[110]Farwell, *How ISIS uses social media*. Also: Matthew Wallin, "Winning the Social Media War Against ISIS,"October 01, 2015, *American Security Project,* http://www.americansecurityproject.org/winning-the-social-media-war-against-isis/
[111]Ahsan, *ISIS and Media.*
[112] Houda Abadi, "ISIS Media Strategies: The Role of Our Community Leaders Contributor," Paper was presented in the conference titled *A Guide to Preventing Extremist Narratives: Paving The Path To Peace,* March 2016, https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/ISIS-media-strategies-role-of-muslim-religious-leaders-2015.pdf
[113]T. Becket Adams, " Obama: Media have blown the Islamic State Out of Proportion,"*Washington Examiner,* December 21, 2015, www//:ptth -fo-tuo-etats-cimalsi-eht-nwolb-evah-aidem-amabo/moc.renimaxenotgnihsaw. 2578880/elcitra/noitroporp

world to know what it does with their captives and media telecast those videos.

To conclude, ISIS seems successful in building narratives to its support,[114] by building perception that it is a devastating force and general public has submitted to the organization not only through the fear it instills but also through its propaganda of enchanting slogans of love, freedom, justice, equality and humanity.[115] However, despite being well planned and sophisticated, media strategy of ISIS is complex and chaotic. Its media strategy is unique,[116] despite the fact that its social media users[117]across the globe, and its media strategy is well-coordinated, decentralized.[118] focused and realistic.

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[114]Farewell, *How ISIS uses social media*.

[115] Hassan Hassan, "Isis has reached news depths of depravity, but there is a brutal logic behind it,"*Guardian*, February 8, 2015; Abu Bakr Naji, The Management of Savagery, translated by Will McCants (2006), *Harvard: John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies*, 17.

[116] Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?,*76.

[117]There were at least 45,000 Twitter accounts being used by ISIS supporters in the fall of 2014.

[118] Hadra, *ISIS: Past, Present, Future?,* 48-49.