ISIS Online: Analyzing ISIS's Use of the Internet as a Method of Legitimation

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Introduction:

Perhaps the most discussed movements in the 21st century have been terrorist movements originating in the Middle East. From Al-Qaeda to the Taliban to ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), these groups have been a main focus point for national media organizations, as well as military groups in most western nations. These groups intend to strike fear into the hearts of their victims, and many are able to do so. Most people consider these groups to be Islamic terrorist groups following the jihad. Jihad, which actually means "exerted effort" in Arabic but is often translated to mean "holy war," has been how people have identified the groups as terrorists.[1] This is problematic because by referring to these terrorist groups as Islamic following an Islamic mission, we portray Islam to be radical, violent, and anti-west. Thus, it is necessary to examine ISIS as a new religious movement (NRM).

Further, by examining ISIS as a NRM, we can understand how their strategies work in terms of legitimation, recruitment, and in their operational strategies. Perhaps their most influential strategies are used in their campaigns online, through social media, emails, and websites. By examining these often public campaigns, we can further understand how ISIS works to legitimize itself as a movement to be taken seriously. ISIS specifically and deliberately utilizes social media as a legitimation, recruitment, and operational tool for their new religious movement. By examining these uses of social media, we are better able to understand the phenomenon of ISIS and other terror groups around the world, which is then important in reacting to their operations.

One important point to consider is that religions do not take over territories by force, groups of people do. ISIS is composed of a group of people who identify themselves as part of a larger religious goal. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish ISIS as an independent organization composed of its own religious motivations and actions.. It is probable that there are people in ISIS who do not believe that they are a part of a sacred religious organization. For the most part however, this is a group of people who believe in, follow, and enact a religious ideology that informs and supports the secular actions they do. Therefore, ISIS is considered both a terrorist movement and a religious ideology. However, when discussing ISIS further in this paper, ISIS will refer to the group of people who have a religious motivation for what they are doing in the world.

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[1] Brian Handwerk, "What Does 'Jihad' Really Mean to Muslims?," *National Geographic News.* October 24, 2003, online, https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/ 2003/10/1023_031023_jihad.html.

Section 1: How Does the Media Understand ISIS in Relation to Islam?

Most people have a very limited understanding of ISIS, as they understand that the group's mission is to create "a global caliphate secured through a global war."[2] In 2015, CNN published an article written by Tim Lister who was trying to answer the question, "What does ISIS really want?"[3] This was an important piece because it attempted to understand the motivations behind ISIS, its terrorist attacks around the world, and the ideology behind the people who make up the terrorist group. Many people were, and still are, confused about the motivation behind the terrorist group. The CNN article was written for people to further understand why attacks were happening. Lister presented five different "end goals" for ISIS: creating the global caliphate, expanding their physical presence throughout the world, smashing down borders and toppling governments, purifying Islam of those who disagree with their methods or end goals, and "enslaving the disbelievers" and adversaries.[4] To end his article, Lister quoted the official spokesperson and senior leader of ISIS, Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani, who said that "We [ISIS] will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women. If we do not reach that time, then our children and grandchildren will reach it."[5]

Lister does not paint a very positive light on ISIS, but he does make sure to differentiate ISIS from Islam. Differentiating ISIS from Islam is an important distinction because it separates Islam, the second most popular religion of 1.3 billion people, from the fringe group of ISIS, a group made up of tens of thousands of people. Lister says "that the majority of Muslims -- even many jihadists - see ISIS's interpretations of the Quran and the hadith as manipulations or distortions."[6] The majority of Muslims do not believe in or support ISIS's mission. This is made clear to readers of Lister's article, but there are still many misconceptions about the relationship between Islam and ISIS that are perpetuated by other news outlets, media organizations, and political leaders.

One of the most relevant and infamous instances of how people have reacted and responded to ISIS can be seen in an interview with Anderson Cooper and Donald Trump in March of 2016.[7] In this interview, Cooper asked the then presidential nominee if he thought "Islam is at war with the west" and Trump responded by saying "I think Islam hates us. There's something, there's something there that, there's a tremendous hatred there. We have to get to the bottom of it."[8] In a follow up question, Cooper asked if Trump believed that there is a war between the west and "radical Islam" or if the war is with Islam. Trump responded by saying that "It's hard to define, it's very hard to separate" the two movements because "You don't know who's who."[9] This statement and mindset is problematic because it confuses and blurs the line

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[2] Time Lister, "What Does ISIS Really Want?," *CNN,* December 11, 2015, online, http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/11/middleeast/isis-syria-iraq-caliphate/index.html.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] CNN, "Donald Trump: 'I think Islam hates us,'" last modified March 9, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-Zj0tfZY6o.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

between Islam and radicalized Islamic groups like ISIS. Whether meaning to or not, Trump further blurred the lines between Islam and ISIS in the minds of many people in the United States. Thus, his supporters have further connected these two groups and have made it harder to differentiate between the fundamentalist motivations of ISIS and the various motivations within Islam as a religion.

An important aspect to understand is how the public perceives ISIS since the public's understanding of the movement is often reflected in the scholarly research done on it. Secondly, it is important because often times movements respond to and either refute or expand upon their public perception. They can utilize the public's understanding of their movement as a tool in furthering their campaign. However, it is also important to understand ISIS and movements like it in a more nuanced way. By doing so, it allows us to examine the movements holistically and see what works in their favor and what does not.

Section 2: How Do Scholars Understand ISIS in Relation to Islam?

In order to understand ISIS in a more nuanced way, it is important first to understand the meaning of "jihad," the Islamic State, and the global caliphate. First, it is necessary to understand the concept of "jihad" in Islam and in ISIS. Jihad is a term that carries many misconceptions for westerners, as "The usual western interpretation of jihad" is of a "just war."[10] Most westerners understand jihad to mean a war between Islam and the rest of the world. However, the traditional Muslim interpretation is quite different. The traditional understanding of jihad refers to the inner struggle between oneself and sin, and jihad literally means "to exert one's self."[11]

For most Muslims who understand jihad this way, ISIS's interpretation is a perverted interpretation of the religious term. And because ISIS and other "jihadi" groups are fundamentally focused on jihad, their primary belief is "to struggle in the form of jihad in defense of and for the restoration of authentic Islam."[12] The "authenticity" of this Islam is up to the discretion of the leadership of ISIS, and they can therefore claim that forceful violence is authentic Islam. When militant jihadist groups alter the meaning of the word "jihad," they separate themselves further from traditional Islam and their understanding of the term.

Understanding the idea behind the Islamic State is another key component. ISIS calls itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (they also call themselves ISIL — the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). Understanding what "Islamic State" means helps to understand ISIS and its relation to the world. ISIS, and other groups wanting to create an Islamic State, "place an overriding emphasis on the construction of an Islamic state as a prerequisite for any successful realization of an Islamic society."[13] Interestingly, these groups believe that Islam is not just a religion, but that it presents a system of law which allows for the establishment of a truly pure and holy Islamic

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[10] Bassam Tibi, "War and Peace in Islam," in *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict* edited by Sohail H. Hashmi, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 178.
[11] Ibid, 179.
[12] Peter B. Clarke, *New Religions in Global Perspective: Religious Change in the Modern World* London and New York: Routledge, 2006, 169.
[13] Ibid.

State. The Islamic State is integral in realizing the total Islamic society of people worldwide.

Finally, it is necessary to understand what ISIS means when they use the term "caliphate." In Islam, a caliph is the leader of all Muslims around the world.[14] A caliph is the most holy person on earth and was likely chosen by Allah (God) to lead the Muslim people. People's understanding of the caliph varies, but "some have argued that the caliph is the shadow of God on earth, a man whose authority is semi-divine and whose conduct is without blame; many more would accept that the caliph was, so to speak, the chief executive of the umma, the Muslim community, an ordinary human with worldly powers."[15] Historically, there have been many caliphs throughout time. ISIS believes that whatever these caliphs have done, no matter how brutal it was, is a legitimate and holy thing for them to do. For example, ISIS altered the meaning of jihad to fit their agenda, so too did they choose which caliphs to follow and revere. The argument can be made that "If you want a caliphate which is aggressive and fiercely controlling of the Muslim population, you can find precedents in the vast historical records."[16] On June 29, 2014, "the apparent leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared that he stood at the head of a Caliphate."[17] Al-Baghdadi anointed himself as the caliph, and claimed that ISIS was working as a caliphate that would unite true "Muslims" throughout the world in their holy campaign.

Section 3: Examining ISIS as a New Religious Movement

As equally important to understanding ISIS, jihad, and the Islamic State, it is integral to examine whether or not ISIS is actually a movement involved with, equal to, or supporting Islam. While ISIS claims that it is the only true and valid expression of Islam, most Muslims disagree. Some argue that "99% of Muslims disagree with ISIS's version of the Caliphate," meaning that they do not approve of or even recognize ISIS's caliphate as a legitimate one.[18] Regardless of beliefs on how truly Islamic ISIS is, one thing is for certain: ISIS is a vastly different entity than the majority of Muslim communities around the world. The primary example of this is how they enact and enforce their understanding of jihad. They also have taken action to create an Islamic State and established themselves as Allah's chosen caliphate meant to bring about the apocalypse.

Clearly, ISIS differentiates themselves from Islam, and have shown themselves to be an alternative fringe movement that should be classified as a new religious movement. By understanding ISIS to be a new religious movement, scholars, the media, and individuals around the world can better understand how ISIS is fundamentally at odds with Islam and is an entirely different entity. Many characteristics of ISIS fit into the scholarly understanding of new religious movements. The most obvious example being: ISIS is an "end of times" movement. In fact, one of ISIS's tenants is that they await "the army of "Rome," whose defeat at Dabiq, Syria, will

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[14] Hugh Kennedy, "How ISIS Twisted the Meaning of 'Caliphate'," *Time*, October 11, 2016, http://time.com/4471463/caliphate-history/.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Rebecca Collard, "What We Have Learned Since ISIS Declared a Caliphate One Year Ago," *Time,* June 25, 2015, http://time.com/3933568/isis-caliphate-one-year/.

initiate the countdown to the apocalypse."[19] They believe that their mission of re-establishing the Medieval caliphate and defeating the army of "Rome" (the army of the "west") will bring about the apocalypse. Their firm belief in this helps to make their mission that much holier, because it becomes their sacred duty to be the best members of the caliphate that they can be. Bringing about the end of times is a familiar belief in new religious movements; scholars suggest that apocalyptic groups are one of the few archetypes of new religious movements. Their belief that the end of days is here, and that they are the ones to bring about the apocalypse, is perhaps the most pertinent example of their division from mainstream Islam to a new religious movement.

Clearly the ideology of ISIS is very different than of Islam, but they have adopted the traditions, culture, and scripture from Islam into their religion, which is a common trend for new religious movements. As mentioned previously, ISIS has taken aspects of Islam and altered them to fit their own religious mission, as a deliberate strategy to establish itself as a valid option for Muslims to join. For example, appealing to the history and tradition of the caliphs is representative of ISIS appealing to "the authority of traditional religious figures" by "attributing new teachings to them that differ from traditional doctrines."[20] ISIS has used the prior history of the caliphs as a way to allow themselves to torture and kill enemies of their organization. However, because they are traditional figures in Islam as well, they are able to attract Muslim sympathizers by claiming the same heritage and history. By adopting and changing the meaning of the Islamic tradition, ISIS has made itself a new religious movement that would potentially be appealing to people looking for a particularly violent caliph or caliphate.

Many new religious movements are appealing to people who have already been exposed to an alternative, fringe, or different NRMs. These people are "seekers," and they are looking for an answer to a specific need that they have.[21] One of the common types of members of NRMs is the individual in a state of crisis.[22] This person is often looking for an answer to their problems, and many times they turn towards religion. So, when people are seeking a religious movement to address and fix their feeling of hopelessness, they will often turn towards a new religious movement because of its ability to answer a direct need. If this movement ends, then the members will often drift to another similar movement. ISIS is no different. Many of the supporters of Saddam Hussein, another radical militant jihadist, have joined ISIS and have taken up leadership in the movement.[23] In fact, "as many as 25 of the ISIS leadership previously took orders from the late Iraqi leader."[24] It is important to note that these two movements are still differents; ISIS is not the evolution of Al-Qaeda. ISIS is a new movement which has attracted members of other like-minded movements and has grown due to the fact that they are like-minded in mission, but different in operation.

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[19] Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic,* March 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/.

[20] James R. Lewis, *Legitimating New Religions,* New Brunswich, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003, 14.

[21] Ibid, 107.

[22] Ibid, 88.

[23] Rebecca Collard, "What We Have Learned Since ISIS Declared a Caliphate One Year Ago," *Time,* June 25, 2015, http://time.com/3933568/isis-caliphate-one-year/.

[24] Ibid.

Many new religious movements are supported and led by charismatic leaders who push their movement to be the most effective that it can be. The current leader of ISIS is a man named, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[25] Prior to this man gaining power, two of the primary leaders of ISIS were killed, and al-Badri donned the "nom de guerre Abu Bakr al-Baghadi," which is a name that refers to his leadership, the first caliph Abu Bakr, and the city of Baghdad.[26] Al-Badri thus adopted a pseudonym that would engender fear, respect, and/or praise from people around the world. While his leadership has been different than the charismatic leadership of other new religious movement leaders, his back story, pseudonym, and position allow him to act as the charismatic leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Because of his position as the Caliph, he has differentiated himself as the divinely chosen leader of Islam who is meant to bring about the apocalypse.

Section 4: How Does ISIS Legitimize Itself?

ISIS faces a dilemma though. Most new religious movements are not often considered a legitimate movement or religion. However, ISIS has gone to great lengths to prove not only that it is a viable option for Muslims to convert to, but that it is the only option for them to be a part of. ISIS has done this by using scripture and tradition, as mentioned before, to legitimize itself as the correct interpretation of Islam. The main purpose of this legitimation is to seek "legitimacy in the eyes of followers and potential converts."[27] By proving that they are a serious organization with important, relevant, and inherently sacred goals, ISIS is able to legitimate themselves religiously. Another aspect of legitimation is differentiation; the qualities that make ISIS unique and engaging to potential converts are also hugely important to their legitimation strategies. Some of these qualities are found in their usage of the internet.

ISIS is known to be a technologically active group, especially for a militant "Islamic" group who is following a premodern doctrine and is, in part, a reaction against globalism. Not only does this differentiate themselves from other groups with similar end goals, but it is also a way for them to tap in to new recruits and to further their mission as no militant group has ever done before. There are five teams in ISIS who control their internet operations: the media propagation teams, cyber communication team, administrators, recruiters, and hackers.[28] These groups work in collaboration and in unison to help bring about the global caliphate that ISIS is pursuing. These groups actually function as many businesses do: the media propagation teams act as public relations, advertising, and marketing, the cyber communication team functions as human resources and internal communication branch, the administrators function primarily to keep accurate records, an active registry of members, and make sure everything is running smoothly, the recruiters act as salespeople, and the hackers act as engineers or developers. These teams are representative of how ISIS has strategically and decidedly moved towards utilizing the internet for all it can be used for. Each team acts to show progress and upward mobility for ISIS.

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[25] Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror,* New York: Regan Arts, 2015, 116.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Lewis, *Legitimating New Religions,* 12.
[28] Malcolm Nance and Chris Sampson, *Hacking ISIS: How to Destroy the Cyber Jihad*, New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2017, 35.

They want to show off to members of ISIS and potential recruits that their mission is not only a success, but that it is succeeding only after careful and practical strategic movements via the internet.

One of the most important members of ISIS is the head of the ISIS Media Council. Since their early days, "there has been a leader of the media wing who helped call the shots and support the leadership with a controlled messaging campaign directed at unbelievers that projected strength and prophetic destiny."[29] This leader was responsible for their public image, propaganda, and intimidation campaigns. Through the years, this position has switched hands from one leader to another because many of the leaders have been killed during this time.[30] The leaders are often seen on camera in ISIS's propaganda and recruitment videos, which is often why they are so easily and readily targeted. One of the most important aspects about this position and this leader is that they are often instigators of discussion online in social media, newsletters, and websites, because their videos aim to incite discussion between members of ISIS, pride for these members, and disgust in those who are not a part of ISIS. Thus, the use of social media is extremely important to the development of ISIS's goals, movement, and mission.

Section 5: ISIS and Social Media:

Over the past couple of years, ISIS has truly made a name for itself as a leader in using the internet to push for their militant and terrorist mission. One of the ways ISIS has used social media is by using it as a process of legitimation, as discussed previously. Social media, in this context, is the way that groups utilize internet platforms as methods of communication. The social media platforms used include: Facebook, Twitter, and other websites which promote the sharing of content and open communication between websites' users. The only thing necessary for someone to access these methods of communication is a computer or phone with access to the internet. ISIS also uses social media as a method to control their operations and manage their complex system of members and sympathizers through the ease of communication that these platforms provide. ISIS has primarily used newsletters, online magazines with chat forums, Twitter, and videos uploaded to a variety of websites.[31] These platforms and methods are the core methods used by the group to further their mission online and throughout the world.

Video:

One of the most infamous incidents regarding ISIS, their relationship with the west, and new media is the incident regarding James Foley and the British terrorist Mohammed Emwazi aka Jihadi John. ISIS released a propaganda video in 2014 that featured footage of James Foley, an American Journalist, being beheaded by Mohammed Emwazi. The video was shared on a file sharing site called YouSendIt which functioned in a way similar to Dropbox.[32] The video went viral for a number of reasons. The first reason, and most obvious, is because an American journalist who had been held captive for about two years was executed on camera. The second

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[29] Ibid, 37.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid, 134-175.
[32] Ibid, 135.

reason was because the person executing him was a British born man who grew up in London and received his degree at the University of Westminster.[33] The third reason being the video was filmed in High Definition.[34] While this seems like a very small and unimportant fact, the video was scrutinized and examined even further due to the "Hollywood style" production quality of the video.[35] The video showed that ISIS was able to create highly produced content with "better quality cameras, editing skills, and, most important, a clear narrative."[36] In fact, ISIS continually utilizes a large mix of gear including "GoPro cameras, hand held Sony and Canon cameras, and small project studios used to mix various segments of the spectacle together."[37] This is incredibly important for their mission, because it allows ISIS to tap into a legitimation, recruitment, and operations platform that other militant groups have not yet utilized.

The video posted by ISIS was just one of many different videos created by the group that have been used to further their missions. All videos that have been posted were meant to strike fear into the people who they wish to intimidate, many times succeeding in doing so. They also succeeded in instilling admiration in their followers who agree with these practices and their ideology. The videos are distinctly ISIS videos. They feature "specific logos and stylings that are very distinctive and bear the stylistic signature of the regional and central branches," which makes the content that much more relatable to ISIS's supporters and followers.[38] The videos are often targeted to specific local communities, and thus have graphics and imagery to make it relevant to regional communities. For example, they might have imagery that relates to specific geographic locations that instill appreciation for their supporters. However, every video features central ISIS imagery and attempts to function in the same ways as recruitment, legitimation, and operation.

Newsletters and Online Magazines:

Famously, ISIS has utilized newsletters and online magazines like few movements have done before. One of the most famous and relevant outlets is known as the Amaq News Agency. The organization is ISIS's "news" network: it is used to push out information about political or military advancements, to give out information regarding recent propaganda and recruitment campaigns, and to take claim over various terrorist acts around the world.[39] Amaq is a branch of ISIS, and they function by presenting their news in online publications and newsletters. Recently, Amaq was in the news after Muslim activists hacked the Amaq mailing list and presented proof that they had over 1,784 emails of members of ISIS.[40] After crackdowns on the internet with the goal to silence ISIS or at least to prevent the growth of the movement, Amaq retreated "from

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid, 134.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid, 141.

[38] Ibid, 135.

[39] Lizzie Dearden, "Muslim activists hack ISIS mailing list hours after terrorists claimed it was unhackable," *The Independent,* November 11, 2017, online, http:// www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-hacked-propaganda-amaq-mailing-list-emails-subscriberspublished-islamic-state-online-caliphate-a8049771.

[40] Ibid.

mainstream platforms to rapidly shifting websites and encrypted messaging services," but "its automated email service had been one of the last reliable channels."[41] By hacking this reliable and crucial strategic newsletter, one of ISIS's methods of communication was lost, thereby crippling their online mission.

The group that hacked Amaq was a Muslim activist hacker group by the name of "Di5s3nSi0N."[42] The group used the Twitter hashtag "#SilenceTheSwords" as their rallying cry against ISIS and Amaq.[43] Their goal was to stop the spread of the false global caliphate that Amaq was advertising, and they likely helped to dismantle the group's power and influence. Previously, other "hacktavist" groups like CtrlSec, Daeshgram, and End of Daesh were responsible for creating the hashtags #OpISIS and #OpIceISIS which were hoping to help cripple the campaign as well.[44] Another attack created previously by these groups was the "malicious software disguised as an update, able to activate cameras, steal files, read phone messages, detect GPS locations and collect contacts from unsuspecting jihadis."[45]

Each activist group used their computer science and hacking skills to dismantle ISIS's online presence, which upset their mission of being a legitimate option for potential recruits. They also effectively cut off part of their operational presence because they limited the amount of information spread by ISIS. These online newsletters and magazines were incredibly important to the functioning and legitimation strategies of ISIS because they assisted with "the propagation of the terrorists' message, the mobilization of recruits, and the planning of attacks."[46] After various hacker groups helped to cripple the platforms, ISIS has effectively had their hands tied behind their back in terms of utilizing these newsletters.

Twitter:

Perhaps the most unique thing about ISIS is the groups use and utilization of the social media platform Twitter. Even as early as 2008, just two years after the company was founded, the U.S. Army released a report on the "Potential of Terrorist Use of Twitter."[47] The Army was worried that Twitter would be used to help run the operations of terrorist groups around the world because of the ability for people to read and write things quickly without much oversight due to the size of the platform, as well as how it was difficult to monitor. The Army was mostly accurate in their fears: groups from around the world would utilize Twitter as not just as a method for operations, but for broadcasting their "accomplishments" to the world. For a new religious movement like ISIS, Twitter was an attractive, agile, and effective tool that could help score new

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[41] Ibid.

[42] "Di5s3nSi0N" means Dissension.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid; "CtrlSec" refers to Control Section. "Daeshgram" refers to Daesh (another name to ISIS). "End of Daesh" also refers to ISIS and is a play on "End of Days." "OpISIS" refers to Operation ISIS. "OpIceISIS" refers to Operation Ice ISIS, "ice" meaning to kill or stop.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Assaf Moghadem, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017, 76.

[47] Gabriel Weimann, "Terror on Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 16, no 2 (2010): 45-54, accessed November 9, 2017, 48.

recruits, garner support worldwide, and establish networks of communication across territorial lines.[48]

An interesting point is the comparison that many terrorists make between Twitter and Facebook. Many terrorists believe that using Facebook as a network for terrorist activities is incredibly dangerous. One man issued a warning in a chat room regarding this security risk, saying:

> Don't make a network in Facebook… Then Kuffar will know every friend you have or had in the past. They will know location, how you look, what you like, they will know everything. Join Facebook if you want and use it to keep in touch with friends and brothers far away but not as a network.[49]

Twitter, on the other hand, is different. People can create public Twitter accounts that can be searched for or collected through the use of hashtags that act as key words. Terrorists do not have to follow anyone on their accounts in order to use them as operational tools. As long as the method of communication is clear, Twitter can be used in many different ways to facilitate the growth and operations of terrorist groups like ISIS. Twitter is undoubtedly a useful platform for members of ISIS.

One of the reasons Twitter can be used so effectively by ISIS, and other movements like it, is because Twitter functions in the three most common ways that websites function: with one-to-one connections, one-to-many connections, and many-to-many connections.[50] Twitter can often be used as a one-to-one network, much like direct messages or emails, and can therefore foster communication between individuals as part of a collective. Twitter is also a "micro blogging" tool, and often functions as blogs or webpages for specific people. Twitter functions as a one-to-many network,[51] because users have their own profiles. People can use those profiles as individual websites that can share updates or Tweets from one centralized place. For example, other new religious movements like The Church of Scientology use their Twitter feed as a place to advertise their religion, post updates regarding their church's growth, and foster a community. Most new religious movements, and even established religions, use Twitter as a forum and a legitimate way for communication between members and to the rest of the world. However, ISIS is unable to have a centralized Twitter profile because it is a terrorist organization that fosters hate speech, which is against Twitter's Terms of Service policy.[52] They are unable to have this centralized presence on Twitter because they are deemed a terrorist group by most standards. This does not stop ISIS from using Twitter however. Perhaps the most effective way that ISIS utilizes Twitter is by the many-to-many connections that exist on the network. Individuals can collaborate with, interact with, respond to, and assist other individuals because of the many-to-many network. This also means that there is no centralized, and therefore easily hacked or deleted, Twitter profile, but instead there are many active profiles of many individuals. Thus,

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[48] Ibid, 49.
[49] Ibid, 50.
[50] Edward Kessler, "Social Media and the Movement of Ideas," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 46, no 1 (2013): 26-35, accessed November 10, 2017, 27.
[51] Ibid.
[52] "Terms of Service," *Twitter*, accessed December 4, 2017, https://twitter.com/en/tos.

Twitter is able to be used in a variety of ways for members of ISIS and other movements like it. Twitter is an incredibly useful tool for groups such as ISIS in their efforts to legitimize, recruit, and organize their operation.

Section 6: The Broader Picture:

By having more of an awareness and understanding of ISIS, it is clear that ISIS is a separate entity from Islam. In fact, it should be classified and understood as a new religious movement. ISIS functions much like many NRMs because they use different strategies for legitimation, recruitment, and operation. Their most relevant and effective strategy has been their use of social media and the internet to further their campaign. However, after ISIS's Amaq News Network was hacked, it became clear that the movement was losing ground online.[53] Perhaps the most interesting aspect regarding the hack was that the group responsible for it, Di5s3nSi0N, was a Muslim hacker activist group who were fighting back against ISIS's regime. This group, along with other Muslim hacktavist groups like CtrlSec and End of Daesh, are using their strengths to fight against ISIS's movements online, as well as refuting the claim that ISIS is the only correct and holy expression of Islam. Hacktavist groups function in two ways: the first being to cripple the reach that ISIS has online, and the second being to disassociate ISIS with Islam.

Social Media is also used by billions of people around the world, but it is a particularly interesting tool for members of religions who are spread out around the world. For Muslims, this is especially true. Far too often, people make claims that social media will be at either one of the bipolar extremes of total positive progression or total negative stagnation.[54] For example, some believe that the growth of the internet and social media for Muslims will lead people to be more aware of the possibilities of democracy, social and civil rights, and political reform. On the other hand, some believe that social media will be primarily used by ISIS and other militant movements as a way to convert people to their cause. However, it is far more likely that neither of these things will happen altogether. The Muslim community is so large and is comprised of many different smaller communities that there is no singular thing that will happen to the entire community.[55] It is also likely that the role the internet will play in these communities will be largely neutral, but "it is always useful and helpful to adopt the middle position of cautionary optimism, which allows for a fair, balanced, and realistic assessment of the role the internet can play in bringing about positive transformation, including democratization."[56] It is clear that the internet and social media will become an increasingly useful, and important tool for the future, and scholars must hold judgement on what will happen to these communities, at least for now.

Conclusion:

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[53] Dearden, "Muslim activists hack ISIS mailing list hours after terrorists claimed it was unhackable," *The Independent.*
[54] Sahar Khamis, "The Internet and New Communication Dynamics among Diasporic Muslims: Opportunities, Challenges, and Paradoxes," in *European Muslims in New Media,* edited by Merve Kayikci and Leen d'Haenens, 35-52, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017, 49.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a dominant militant force around the world that has been responsible for terrorist attacks in London, Europe, and throughout the Middle East. However, it is also important to remember that this group is fundamentally a new religious movement with a distinct ideology and understanding of Allah. ISIS claims to be the new caliphate of Islam that will unite the world under one Islamic identity that will bring about the apocalypse. They want to ensure that the entire world is a firm believer and follower of their religious doctrine, and therefore will use force to convert people to their cause. ISIS has utilized the traditions and history of Islam to add substantial background and precedent to their actions. They have also utilized the Qur'an to provide sacred scripture that supposedly endorses their movement as the true expression of Islam in the world. While this is of constant debate between many people in the media and around the world, it is clear that ISIS has completely broken away from Islam and has been functioning as a new religious movement.

Part of the way that ISIS has operated as a new religious movement is by its use of the internet and social media. ISIS has utilized social media platforms in order to legitimize itself to others, recruit potential new members, spread information regarding their successes, and to function effectively. While their primary method of communication has been email newsletters and the Amaq News Network (as well as other similar networks), ISIS has also been using Twitter as a main method of communication and collaboration. Twitter has been an extremely helpful tool for the organization because of the multitude of ways that it can function, and it has also spread their high production valued recruitment, intimidation, and legitimation videos. ISIS's emphasis on the internet and social media platforms has allowed it to perpetrate the world's most transformative and transforming space, and therefore has made it an easily adaptable, agile, and dangerous online movement.

When looking at ISIS, it is easy to view the movement as one of the many terrorist groups who claim to be following some perverted-yet-sacred orders from Allah. In reality, most of ISIS's followers truly believe that they are bringing about the end of days by enforcing the jihad. The rhetoric used by members of the movement is laced with theological and historic Islamic ideas that are both sermon and instruction. Members of ISIS respond to their sacred calling and purpose by questioning the status quo. The movement is not just a terrorist movement in response to globalization; for some, it is the indisputable, Allah-given answer to the question "Why am I here?" Understanding this is just one part of understanding ISIS completely and accurately.

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