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THE CREATION AND USE OF AN EFFICIENT SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY IN MODERN TERRORISM AND HOW TO TACKLE IT: AN ISIS CASE STUDY

Bachelor's Thesis

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I declare I have written the bachelor's thesis independently.

All works and major viewpoints of the other authors, data from other sources of literature and elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The Islamic State, ISIS, is a jihadi organization functioning in Iraq and Syria and classified as a terrorist organization by many. ISIS is an exception from other existing jihadi organizations as it founded its own caliphate in 2014, which bases on the Sharia law. The organization has utilized an efficient social media strategy running from approximately year 2013. This has been a major factor in increasing its threat all around the world. The research question in this paper is: how is the ISIS social media strategy structured, how it can be countered and does countering it matter. The paper only includes information gathered before 17.04.2016. The paper will first introduce the theoretical framework to social media strategy and management. This includes presenting McDonald's as an example of a successful social media strategy in a multinational corporation, following a comparison of how ISIS uses the same strategic guidelines. The paper then introduces all the platforms ISIS uses in its strategy and discusses their security levels. Furthermore, it analyses the main functions of the strategy in practice and discusses the use of the different platforms in it. The paper also introduces factors that can be used in the counter strategy. Two possible alternatives are proposed on how to take ISIS down: either going fully on board with online war and trying to expose that the organization is actually weak or allowing the information flow freely and use the informatics to defeat ISIS on the ground. The paper concludes that ISIS social media strategy is its strongest weapon and therefore countering it would make a significant impact on the war against terrorism.

Keywords: ISIS, social media, online jihad, counter strategy

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic State, ISIS, is a jihadi organization operating in Iraq and Syria that is characterized as a terrorist organization by many. It established its own caliphate in 2014, which is something a jihadi group has not managed to do before, even though al-Qaeda has had similar plans. What is also phenomenal about ISIS is that it is the first jihadi organization with an actual social media strategy. This is one of the reasons it has gained such a large popularity and caused a severe security threat for other countries around the world. Through the social media strategy, ISIS has taken the online jihad to a completely new level as it has used it for visibility, recruiting fighter domestically and internationally, communicating and threatening.

This paper aims to lay out the structure of the ISIS social media strategy and identify factors that could be used in the counter strategy. Moreover, it aims to find an answer to the discussion if countering the ISIS social media strategy matters. The hypothesis of this Bachelor's thesis is that the ISIS social media strategy is structured as well as a social media strategy of a multinational organization or corporation and follows the same guidelines. Therefore the impact of the ISIS social media strategy cannot be underestimated, and a solid counter strategy is evident to take down the jihadi group.

The research paper will first introduce the theoretical perspective. This includes the theory of social media strategy and management and the theoretical framework for it. Furthermore, the theoretical perspective introduces McDonald's as an example of a social media strategy in a multinational corporation. The following section will then present how the ISIS strategy compares to the McDonald's one as well as the traditional framework. A closer look is taken on the structure, the used narrative and how the ISIS social media strategy differs from the traditional framework and the McDonald's model presented. Different social media platforms are analyzed in terms of their security and how ISIS uses them in practice. This will include both commonly used as well as ISIS's self-developed apps.

The paper moves on examine the use of social media in terrorism before ISIS and then explains how ISIS uses its strategy in practice by introducing three main purposes and the

used platforms in each. The platform definitions include examples of accounts that have existed and material that has been shared. The section will also discuss briefly, why the strategy has been so successful.

The next section examines factors that can be used to counter the ISIS strategy: governments, hacker groups, social media movements and used social media platforms. The section discusses how these factors have already contributed and what more could be done in terms of tackling the terrorist group. Finally a possible counter strategy is presented. It is also argued if countering ISIS online is even relevant. Two possible options are taken into closer consideration.

The Bachelor's thesis is using a qualitative study method and is conducted by analyzing book material as well as materials published in online newspapers and news sites.

1. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 Defining social media

Social media, the Web 2.0, has significant changed the way people communicate. Social media is a collection of Internet and mobile-based tools, which makes sharing information and discussion possible. It refers to activities, which combine technology, communication and interaction between people by using words, pictures, video and sound. Social media is a web and Internet technology service with which one can stay in touch with others and contribute opinions as well as share personal information. It consists of user contribution, a community where the content is being used and technology, which provides the platform for contribution, communication and distribution. (Leino 2010) Various tools define the term social media. These tools include blogging platforms such as Tumblr, Twitter and BlogSpot, social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn and social content sites like YouTube and Flickr (Smith & Zook 2011). In addition, interactive online multi-user games such as World of Warcraft and Second Life have created a whole another tool group. Social media today is what word of mouth is in the offline world (Brown 2012). Social media contributes and fulfills a necessary human need, which is to communicate (Smith & Zook 2011).

One of the reasons why the Web 2.0 and social networks exists and succeeds is the generation Y. This generation is able to engage with multiple communications tools, control the information flood, and therefore inevitably define already the current patterns in working and communication. This generation puts effort on their online profiles, they share information and produce content, they do social media mashups in the profiles and express their identities. Generation Y has taught and showed the older generations how to interact in social media which has resulted the interaction turning to social, trusting and communal and that is what makes the whole digital interactivity powerful (Brown 2012).

1.2 Key principles of social media management and strategy

For organizations and businesses, social media offers an easy communication platform to engage with customers and target audience. Organizations, who have implemented an effective social media engagement strategy, can find their target audiences and connect with necessary key people efficiently (Brown 2012). These key people are used as advocates for the organization and they broadcast and amplify the message for it. Also using social software inside an organization is recommended as it results in productivity and reduction of costs and makes the external strategy stronger as people inside the organization are comfortable with social software tools. (Brown 2012)

There are three very basic rules for social media strategies in organizations, which offer a possibility for an organization's marketing to succeed. First, influence and go for positive responses. Second, strive for engaging the audience and participating in open discussions. Third, take advantage of the positive responses and engaged discussions to develop the relationship with the online audience even further. (Brown 2012) These rules define the base for an effective strategy.

For a social media strategy model, organizations' framework in theory consists of SOSTAC, which is a simple aide-memoire developed by P.R. SMITH in 1998 but later identified as an efficient social media framework. This strategy model, presented in Figure 1, offers an all-around guide for organizations how to plan and execute an efficient social media strategy. The plan starts with a situation analysis, which includes target group segmentation using different criteria such as demographics (age, socio-economic grouping), geo-demographics (geographical location, demographic data), psychographics, lifestyle, attitudes, beliefs, intentions and benefits sought. It is important to listen and monitor to these groups and see how they interact in the web so that the strategy is targeted from the beginning.

The next step is finding objectives for the strategy. For this, organizations use the SMART objectives: specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and time specific. Organizations should not do every single social media platforms but pick the most important ones that they have found their specific target audience uses. Clearly defined objectives help achieving the wanted outcome with social media: developed relationships, grown awareness

and/or brand credibility. It might take some time to reach the objectives as things rarely happen overnight. The key is to "develop credibility before raising visibility".

The third step in the model is the actual strategy on how to reach the set objectives. The strategy builds around target markets, objectives, positioning, stages, integration and tools. Next, tactics define the details of the strategy and lists what happens when and for how much. Tactics are often expressed as a Gantt chart. In the action stage, the strategy is implemented and put into work. Detailed action plans make the tactics real. In this stage, it is also important to do a "rescue plan". If the plan fails, platforms crash or accounts get deleted it is good to have a plan how to react and what to do in these types of situations.

Finally, the control step includes measurement, reviewing and modifying. The plan of this stage measures the performance of the social media strategy. By watching the analytics, it is important to take notice on if the traffic reacts stronger on a particular platform or type of posting. This will help the organization to guide its messages even stronger to the direction of its target audience. Social Media Optimization, SMO, can be considered to be the new SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and inevitable for organizations. Using key words and key phrases, titles, descriptions, tags and links, the target audience is more likely to find the organization and get its message in social media.

Figure 1. SOSTAC social media strategy model
Source: http://e-xtreme-marketing.blogspot.fi/2013/02/sostac.html

Social media requires high-quality content to be successful and the message has to be 'crystal clear'. The key messages have to be agreed within the organization so that the every message comes out as organized and comprehensive. The messier the communicating, the more confused feelings the audience has. The message has to be valuable to the audience the organization is communicating it to. Social media is not for direct marketing the messages; it is about the engagement and discussion with the people who the organization wants to have a relationship with. Having a social media team within the organization is one of the easiest solutions to maintain a consistent stream. The team is aware of the guidelines, wanted tone of voice and content that the organization is aiming to be associated with, which secures the usefulness of the content and the functioning of the strategy. The members of the team have specific roles and responsibilities, which secure the comprehensiveness. What is as important as having a social media team is to share the social media strategy with the whole organization; offline and online communication walk hand in hand.

1.3 Social media strategy in a multinational corporation: McDonald's

McDonald's is one of the top examples of a social media strategy executed in a multinational corporation or organization. It is one of the most succeeding strategies in its industry, and has been ranked number one in, for example, the Sprinklr ranking of top 25 restaurants in social media (Walter, 25.11.2014). McDonald's is one of the world's leading fast food chains with more than 32,000 restaurants in more than 100 countries. Its strategy has been developed centrally in the communication team, which was then approved and aligned by the board. In the beginning, the corporation did listening and research in different social media channels for several months to see whom were the people discussing about them, what they were saying and in which platforms. In addition, a narrative was considered after finding the target audience. This was the situation analysis. (Lambelet 2011) The objectives of the McDonald's strategy were identified as interaction related as the corporation sees social media being the channel where it communicates with governments, consumer organizations and customers. (Lambelet 2011) This, of course, leads to the wanted outcome, which is to raise corporate credibility and brand visibility that leads to increase in profit.

McDonald's has organized its base strategy into levels. The first stage is a worldwide global strategy followed by a second stage of local teams. In both of the levels, the

organization has one person in the communications department responsible for the social media strategy and its execution, so that the narrative and content would be consistent and high quality. However, local teams are given their own independence, as the corporation firmly believes that the best way to interact is locally; social media management done from the headquarters located in the United States to each market area around the world would be very inefficient and poorly targeted. The tactics of what, when and how much are put in place successfully, thanks to the appointed social media managers in each local McDonald's. (Lambelet 2011) This stage model has resulted in 70 million followers across the world and on different platforms. (Walter, 25.11.2014) In addition, McDonald's has created a global risk management plan, in case something goes horribly wrong in the strategy. (Lambelet 2011)

McDonald's currently has accounts on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. There is one account in each platform for the global brand followed by each regional McDonald's has its accounts. In Facebook the problem of multiple accounts has been solved easily as depending on the user's geographical location, the page "McDonald's" shows targeted postings for the country the user is located in with the local language. In addition, it actively uses hashtags on Twitter and Instagram and links its YouTube videos to the posts on the other platforms. This is a concrete example of SMO. From the newer platforms, it is also active in Snapchat and Vine. (Rae, 28.02.2014)

McDonald's also uses social media internally to make everyone within the company comfortable to use it and that everyone are aware of the McDonald's social media strategy and the key message. For this, the corporation has developed a web and mobile application, where employees can communicate with each other. In addition, the senior management is trained to social media even though they might not use it on a day-to-day basis. (Lambelet 2011)

1.4 ISIS theoretical social media management model

During the time of its existence, ISIS has been named online jihad 3.0. Its social media strategy is systematic and professional, like an international organization or corporation's. In the strategy, one can clearly identify the strategic steps from the model described in the previous section as presented in Figure 2, and recognize the same elements that McDonald's uses in its own social media strategy.
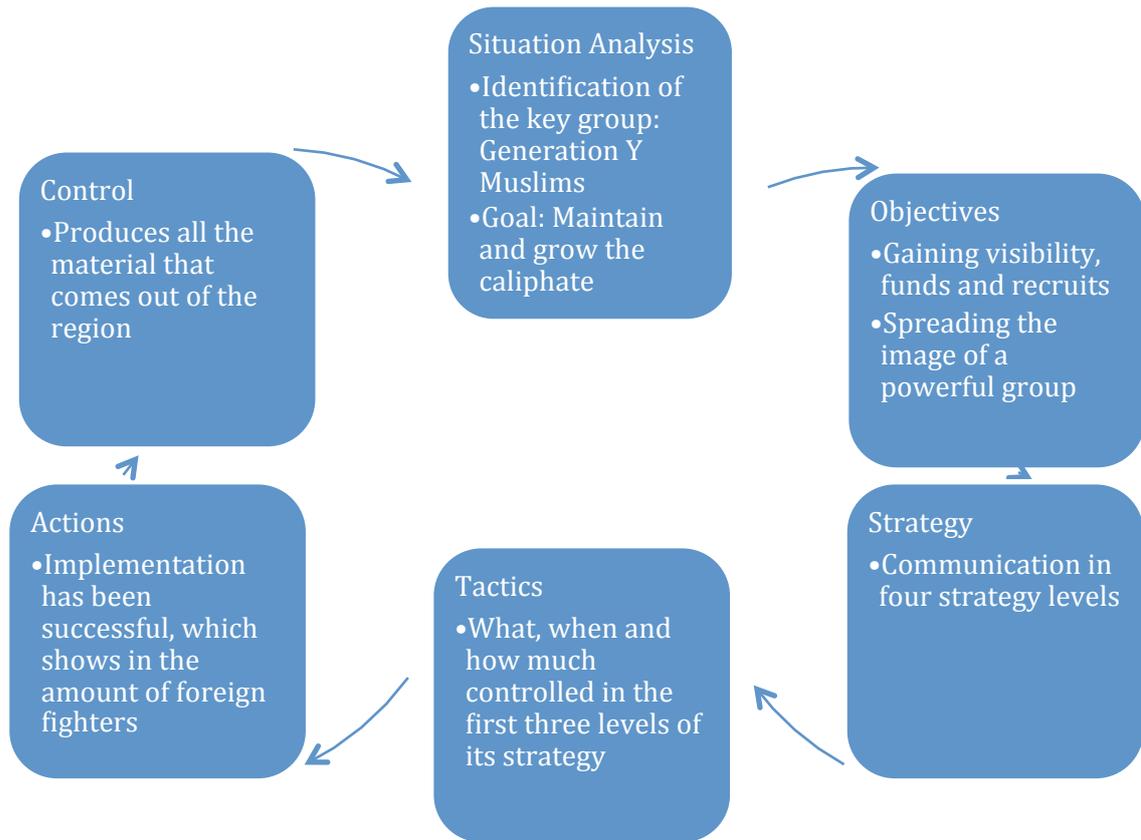
Figure 2. ISIS social media strategy presented in SOSTAC model

When starting to look from the theoretical perspective, the success of ISIS strategy is based on an efficient situation analysis, as it has been extremely efficient in doing target segmentations and finding its key people, this way also attracting the attention of traditional media (Gartenstein-Ross, 07.05.2015). It has done intensive research on its target groups online, just like McDonald's, which is why its strategy has been so well targeted. It has managed to really get a hold on its "key group": the generation Y Muslims that are fluent in the language of social media. The ISIS strategy's wanted outcome is to maintain the power of its established caliphate and gain more of it. As the ISIS power has constantly weakened on the ground and on its territories, the social media strategy has showed its importance in achieving this (Gartenstein-Ross, 07.05.2015).

The objectives set to help reach the outcome are all related to the defined target markets and audiences. These can be identified as sympathizers and supporters, potential recruits who are often socially excluded, generation Y Muslims from the Western countries, donors, international media, local audiences in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria,

and wider international community (Nissen 2014). Especially the sympathizers and supporters play a big part in the target audience as they work as disseminators in the strategy. As mentioned in the section 1.2, objectives are factors that help with achieving the wanted outcome. ISIS has set itself strategic information objectives such as gaining attention and visibility through international media, fundraising, new recruits and members, connecting in online networks with supporters and putting them in the light with other jihadist organizations and coming out as powerful as possible (Nissen 2014).

Like the McDonald's strategy, the ISIS strategy has levels. According to Thomas Elkjer Nissen (2014), ISIS base strategy can be said to have four of them, as presented in Figure 3. The top-level consisting of ISIS official Twitter accounts and accounts on other social media platforms, where information is uploaded centrally from the Al-Hayat media center. Al-Hayat Media Center is especially targeted at non-Arabic speakers and its material output is following the mainstream media standards. It has its own nice-looking logo and produces material in multiple different languages such as German, English and French. The material is professionally produced and uses various technical elements and different techniques, especially in the video productions. The formats vary, as a production can be anything from a minute-long video to be shared in Twitter to a full-length documentary that looks like it is straight from Hollywood. Al-Hayat also produces its own "jihadi travel show" that shows foreign fighters in the ISIS territory telling the camera how happy they are to be there. The English-language online magazine Dabiq is also one of the products of Al-Hayat. (Rose, 07.10.2014) The second level is built of regional accounts posting, for example, live reports from the battlefield and doing localized messaging. The third level is content produced by individual fighters that post about their own experiences from accounts that at least seem like they are their personal ones. The posts are personal and targeted to be emotional. This level is especially important when appealing to the target audience. The fourth level consists of the content re-posted or translated by the disseminators – key people. This level is not under the control of ISIS media management as in addition to the actual disseminators, it is possible that the some of the content creators are not ISIS members or even their supporters. They can be just people who share and translate ISIS content for information sharing in a different context. In all these levels, the produced content is very high quality, which definitely helps ISIS gain credibility. More about the used tools in the strategy will be discussed in the next section.

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Level 1  •Al-Hayat Media Center
  └──▶ Level 2  •Regional accounts
          └──▶ Level 3  •Individual ISIS fighters
                  └──▶ Level 4  •Disseminators
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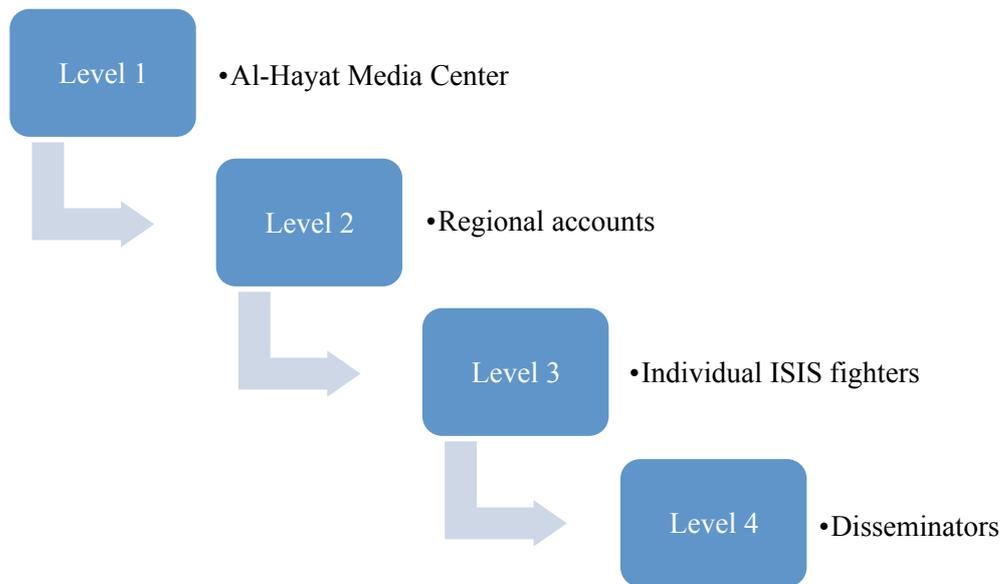
Figure 3. Levels of the ISIS social media base strategy

Source: (Nissen 2014)

ISIS tactics are also very well planned out. The stream of published content is smoothly flowing and the first three level streams follow a plan of what, when and how much. The feed is not flooded randomly with useless content and what is published follows the wanted narrative and offers something for the target audience, like in any organization or corporation's social media strategy. The Al-Hayat media center is like a marketing team in a corporation, or a communications team like in McDonald's case, and is one of the reason's the ISIS strategy has been so effective. The implementation of the plan has been successful in the action stage, which has been showing as the flood of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. Although, there is little information of who actually runs the whole media center one thing is certain: they know their social media and know how to control it. Especially the strict control of Internet and mobile network access helps the strategy as the ISIS produced messaging is the only source of information coming out from the region (Koerner, April 2016).

The narrative has stayed strictly the same from the start of ISIS's social media conquering. "Be part of something that's bigger than yourself and be part of it now", as Shane and Hubbard (31.08.2014) address in the New York Times article, is the key narrative of ISIS strategy. It sounds as attractive as a marketing headline a company uses on its target markets but targeted towards the young potential recruits of jihadism. As a whole, ISIS narrative relies

on four different factors: success, political grievance, religious obligation and sense of adventure. The biggest narrative is that ISIS is winning and that people should join and support because everyone wants to be a winner. Political grievance narrative brings out the different varieties of it but mainly that the West hates Muslims and this is why ISIS should be the choice of all Muslims. This leads to religious obligation as ISIS claims that Muslims from around the world have a "religious duty" to support ISIS and the established caliphate and that if they cannot travel to Syria or Iraq, they should execute attacks in their home countries in the name of ISIS. Sense of adventure is especially targeted for those young, socially excluded (usually male) potential recruits who do not really have anything better to do. This narrative encourages coming to Syria or Iraq to live an exciting life with action and "cool things". This narrative also includes the promises of wealth and beautiful girls (Gartenstein-Ross, 07.05.2015). The narrative is carried out especially in the strategy levels one and three. With the consistent narrative and high quality content, the message of ISIS comes out loud and clear, which is, as mentioned in the section 1.2, is one of the biggest factors when succeeding in social media.

What comes to measuring and Social Media Optimization, there is not much information about the ISIS approach on this. However, to succeed in such a large scale with a social media strategy, it is very likely that ISIS measures their flow of information and does optimization to target messages to, for example, certain age group or geographical are, just like McDonald's. It is also likely that they have done testing on different platforms, which work the best for them to pass their message through.

Only a few things differ the ISIS strategy significantly from the traditional social media management frame and the McDonald's strategy. First, it cannot focus its accounts to only one "corporate account" per platform globally or regionally but has to use many different accounts with back-ups. ISIS is known to have many official accounts on both level one and two, which share official information from the caliphate as well as other ISIS content. The dimensions of this can be seen from, for example, in the number of found active Twitter accounts in late 2014, which came to the number of 46,000 to 90,000. Many of these were located in ISIS territory in Syria and Iraq as well as Saudi Arabia (McCabe, 04.12.2015). A second point how ISIS strategy differs from the traditional frame is the number of used social media platforms. Usually the saying "less is more" is the key in the success of a social media strategy but due to the nature of ISIS, it is forced to use every possible platform available.

Only the amount of used messenger apps comes near to ten different platforms in total, if counting even the little used apps.

1.5 Used social media platforms in the ISIS strategy

ISIS considers the West as one its biggest enemies, which is most likely the reason why it is using "West's" media tools against it. ISIS has proved itself fluent in multiple different platforms and as mentioned in the previous section, uses multiple of them. ISIS does not operate in the dark shadows but uses the tools of the current daily life. It uses the Western culture to fight against the West. (Koerner, April 2016) These platforms are used to execute the different purposes of its strategy explained in section 2.

1.5.1 Twitter

Twitter, founded in 2006, is one of the most popular social media platforms currently available. It currently has 320 million active users per month with 79% of accounts located outside the United States. (Twitter, 16.04.2016) It is classified as a microblog in which the users "tweet" 140 character long messages to their followers or community. By using a hashtag on the tweets, users form communities on subjects that they are tweeting about. Popular topics and hashtags are easy to find as they either trend regionally or worldwide. (Brown 2012). Usually Tweets also include a link to a video or a longer blog post and therefore is an excellent platform to create interest and share content. One of the key features of Twitter in addition to hashtags is the re-tweeting possibility and favoriting. It makes it possible for users to pass along someone else's tweets to their own network and followers, which is why information in Twitter spreads so fast and can widen ones network significantly. Popular tweets are highlighted in the platform, as the first search results of a topic are always the most popular tweets of the topic in question (Smith & Zook 2011).

Twitter has also gained a position as a significant source of news. Thanks to its quick real-time sharing, it is quicker than any other platform to share current events and help them go viral. The observations made on Twitter end up in other platforms such as Facebook or YouTube. Mainstream media is more and more using Twitter as a source for the news, which really shows the value of the platform (Brown 2012). However, the main thing with Twitter is

that it is a platform to build relationships. Like microblogs in general, Twitter demands its users to keep up a dialogue, follow and analyze conversations and take part in the communication (Leino 2010).

Jihadi organizations like ISIS have continuously seen to use Twitter. As there is a huge stream of tweets constantly flowing in the platform, services like Twitter are not able or even inclined to control or monitor the feed themselves. Most of the Twitter's monitoring comes from other users who report accounts and flag tweets that violate the policies. Some think that Twitter is allowing jihadist or other extremist accounts to grow and succeed as ISIS has been hijacking hashtags to promote their message with a minimal interference for several years. This and the other possibilities it offers have resulted in strong ISIS presence in the platform to use it in the different purposes of its strategy (Altman, 12.09.2014).

The purposes, which are explained more carefully and practically in section 2, can be identified as propaganda and recruiting, causing fear in the West and gaining visibility on the Western media and communicating within the organization. Twitter plays a major role in all of these, as due to the platform's functionalities, ISIS is able to find the wide audience it is looking for but still able to disappear enough to the flood of tweets.

To support the correct usage of Twitter, ISIS disseminators have published a propaganda manual. The document titled "Oh Media Correspondent, You Are The Mujahid" has been published in both English and Arabic and is available also as a 16-minute long video (Shiloach, 27.10.2015). The guide gives guidelines on how to correctly publish on Twitter (see Appendix 1), which is by using trending hashtags and not only the caliphate ones. The link to another platform or website should also be published in the body of the tweet and fill the rest of the 140 marks with hashtags (Shiloach, 27.10.2015).

1.5.2 Self-developed apps

ISIS has so far developed two apps, both for Android. Due to security reasons, one is not allowed to have Apple products in the Islamic State (Hall, 25.11.2015). The first app ISIS developed was a Twitter app called the Dawn of Glad Tidings. The Android app developed in 2014 is already unavailable but served for a while during one of the highpoints of ISIS social media success. "The Dawn" offered its users news and information about ISIS and when signing up with their Twitter account, they gave permission for ISIS, in addition to the Twitter account, to use the users' personal photos, media and files and Wi-Fi connection information, as seen in Appendix 2. The tweets that were sent through these accounts were usually sent periodically from hundreds or even thousands of other accounts at the same time. The app also helped ISIS to get pre-approved hashtags trending on Twitter in certain geographical locations with tweets tagged with the hashtag spreading the ISIS message (Trowbridge, 16.06.2014). During the FIFA World Cup 2014, ISIS got, with the help of the Dawn, the world's attention by publishing its content with the hashtag #worldcup2014, which was in common use worldwide among football fans following the tournament (Melchior, 15.10.2014. This is exactly the type of hashtag the disseminators' guide to Twitter recommends to use in addition to the caliphate ones. In addition, after President Obama approved air strikes on the fight against the terrorist organization, ISIS gave a strong response online by firing revenge tweets with the hashtag #MessageFromISIStoUS. The secret of the app was its ability to space out its posts to avoid Twitter's spam-detection algorithms (Melchior, 15.10.2014). The Dawn has especially helped ISIS to gain the visibility it needs on Twitter to gain the attention of the possible recruits and Western media.

A counter-terrorism network called the Ghost Security Group, which has reportedly also exposed ISIS communications in Telegram, discovered the second app development. A messenger app for Android called Alrawi is an encrypted chat app, which makes it harder for third parties, such as governments and security agencies, to fish information of terrorism plans. The spark for a messenger app development came after ISIS communications has been kicked out from other messenger apps such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Kik. Even though the Alrawi might not be as advanced in security as the other messenger apps just mentioned, it still has that encryption shield to protect its users. It also allows ISIS to use the app freely as there is no company behind it to kick it out of it. The app cannot be downloaded from Google

Play or any other Android app store so it is installed "from shady back alleys of the Internet". (Constine, 16.01.2016) It can be assumed that the app is used in the internal communication in the ISIS strategy. Even though the app gives an opportunity for better and more secure communication, most of the ISIS messaging still runs in external communication platforms, which will be introduced in the next section.

1.5.3 Messaging apps

ISIS is known to use many different messenger apps. Most known of these are WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber and Kik. WhatsApp is a cross-platform mobile messaging app nowadays owned by Facebook, which bought it for 16 billion USD in 2014 (Graham, 20.02.2014). It offers the possibility to send text, video and audio messages and do phone calls with just an Internet connection on the phone and without extra charges. Inside the platform, people can form group chats up to 100 people in addition to individual 1-on-1 chatting.

WhatsApp was not an encrypted app until the first week of April 2016. Its conversations were easier to hack, which is why ISIS also reduced the use of the app in operation. However, it is expected that the traffic will move back to WhatsApp now that the app has "fully implemented strong end-to-end encryption on its platform and across all mobile platforms for which it offers apps". WhatsApp currently has over billion active users word-wide and what this encryption means in practice is that the content produced by the users is not stored in plaintext in the servers of WhatsApp, nor does the company have the ability to decrypt the messages sent in the platform. Concisely, WhatsApp is unable to hand over any messaging data even if authorities with a warrant want it. (Lomas, 05.04.2016)

Telegram is a messenger app created by Russian Pavel Durov in 2013 and is a competitor of WhatsApp. It claims to be more securing than other mass-market messenger apps and uses two layers of secure encryption as well as a cloud-based system. One can share messages, photos, and videos and differing from WhatsApp, different file types such as doc, zip and mp3. It offers the possibility to create group chats up to 5000 members or channels for broadcasting to unlimited amount of people. Telegram is also built on open source code, which means developers can use the code to build their own Telegram apps or specialized tools for the app. (Telegram, 16.04.2016)

Viber originally started with offering phone calls that were possible to make with just an Internet connection on one's phone but has since expanded to individual messaging and group chats as well as public chats with brands and celebrities. (Viber, 16.04.2016) About its security policy, Viber states in its homepage: "All text messages sent through Viber on its supported platforms are encrypted."

A group of University of Waterloo students founded Kik messenger in 2009. Unlike other messenger apps introduced in this section, Kik uses usernames instead of phone numbers so it is very easy to talk to complete strangers without giving in anything personal to the opposite person. It has 275 million users in 230 countries and is especially popular with the millenials who share their Kik usernames in other social media platforms with a simple sentence: "Kik me". Kik messenger is encrypted in transit but not end-to-end encrypted. (Kik messenger, 15.04.2016) It has the lowest security protection of the applications discussed in this section.

These messenger apps play a big role in actually getting the potential recruits recruited as well as in internal communication. The encryption level matters: the more encrypted the platform is, the safer it is for ISIS to use it in communication without being exposed. Kik messenger is usually the first place to move to from another platform such as Twitter or Facebook, as it does not require sharing a phone number. From there the conversation transfers to the more secure apps mentioned in this section. More about the use of messenger apps will be explained in sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.3.

1.5.4 Blogging platforms

Instagram is a picture blog platform where users can share their favorite snapshots with their followers and add hashtags to the pictures so that they are linked to a community. From Instagram, users can share their photos on a photo-by-photo basis to Flickr, Facebook and Twitter. Additionally users can add their location to the picture with the help of Foursquare. Instagram is an open platform and the user's profile is either public or private. (Instagram, 15.04.2016)

Tumblr is one of the most personalized blogging platforms out there. Founded in 2007 and acquired by Yahoo! Inc. in 2013, it has 290.4 million blogs, 47,859,755 posts only on the day this section is written and 132.6 billion posts in total. It functions in 16 languages and lets the users share any content they want: text, photos, quotes, music, links and videos. Tumblr

functions in browsers but also has iPhone and iPad apps as well as an app for Android devices. It is possible for users to keep themselves anonymous on Tumbrl but the blogs are public by default. All the content is there for visible for other users in the platform and people who know the users email address can find the blog. In addition, the platform has the right to store information of where IP addresses are located and therefore covert the address into a geographical location. (Tumblr, 17.04.2016)

These blogging platforms are used in the third base level of ISIS strategy and individual fighters mostly operate the accounts in them. The platforms play a significant role in recruiting, as the accounts appeal personal to the possible recruits. The use of Instagram and Tumblr will be further discussed in section 2.1.1. The security level of the platforms is significant as if being hacked, the accounts can be used as a help to trace locations of the ISIS fighters. This means ISIS is taking a systematic risk in its strategy when using the open platforms like these.

1.5.5 Facebook and other social networking sites

Facebook is probably the most known social media platform in the world. It was founded in 2004, reached billion users in 2015 and is still maintaining its popularity. The platform builds on a user profile and a personal newsfeed, which collects updates from the users' Facebook friends as well as joined groups and liked pages. Facebook is a personal communication platform but it is easy for people to communicate outside their social circle as well thanks to these mentioned groups and pages. However, Facebook is not the safest platform to use and its chat application Messenger is only fully encrypted in transit. Accounts can be easily hacked and information can be given to the authorities if needed with warrant (Facebook, 16.04.2016). Facebook has sort of the same policy as Twitter what comes controlling the published content. The flood of information in the platform is enormous and it struggles like Twitter to control the extremist content that is against it policies. This has led to extremist thinking growing almost freely in the platform (Altman, 09.09.2014).

Accounts being deleted from other platforms has lead ISIS to turn to other similar social networking sites as well such as Friendica, Diaspora and VK. These are more obscure social media platforms but have limited amount of users compared to Facebook. For example, VK is a Russian government owned social networking site and the user group is mostly located in Russia and other Eastern European countries. (Altman 09.09.2014) Some of the

ISIS messaging has even moved underground to the "Internet's dark Web – a murky world of often illegal sites that can be accesses only using specialist software, such as Tor". The software makes it possible for anonymous communication to take place as it bounces the user's communication "around a volunteer-run network of relays" so that it is not possible to trace the message back to its source. (Gidda, 12.04.2015)

The social networking platforms are mainly used for recruiting and used in all ISIS base strategy levels. There are pages and groups formed to find the recruits, spread the ISIS content and share videos from YouTube. An ISIS recruit Asher Abid Khan, then 19, was exactly radicalized this way. According to his defense attorney, he was exposed to ISIS recruitment videos through Facebook and almost ended up joining ISIS in Syria before getting cold feet in Turkey and calling his parents. (Geiger, 20.11.2015)

1.5.6 YouTube

YouTube is a video-sharing platform founded in 2005 and currently owned by Google. YouTube offers a possibility to search, watch and share videos produced by the users of the platform. It is a forum where users can stay in touch with others and share information and inspiration (YouTube, 15.04.2016). YouTube videos can be embedded in to a blog, social network site or any website so that the video is also available on YouTube when searched. Both platforms attract different audiences so key phrasing and labeling videos is critical for the videos to be found (Smith & Zook 2011). YouTube bases its actions to the American copyright law, Digital Millennium Copyright Act (Leino 2010). According to the act, the corporation is not responsible to go through content beforehand but only to remove it when asked.

YouTube is the most important video content sharing tool in the ISIS strategy. It is used to fulfill the purposes of recruitment and spreading propaganda as well as causing fear in the West and getting the attention of the Western media, as discussed further in sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.

1.6 Social media in terrorism before ISIS

As mentioned earlier, ISIS has earned the name online jihad 3.0 while it has conducted its social media strategy. However, before ISIS social media had already been used in some extend, namely by al-Qaeda and Al-Shabab. Al-Qaeda started the trend with first-generation Iraqi insurgents, who discovered that "perception management following guerrilla or terrorist operation" was equally important as the operation itself. After a couple of years, the fighters could execute and spread a HQ video of the operation in approximately a matter of hours (Metz, 19.06.2015). Before this, it was mainly Bin Laden staring into a single static camera with a long speech in formal Arabic. After filming, the video was smuggled to a television network who would air the video for the terrorist group (Shane & Hubbard, 31.08.2014).

The second generation was led by its "most prominent figure", YouTube star Anwar al-Awlaki. He was an American born cleric who spoke to Westerners in an everyday English through a blog and a Facebook page while helping to produce an English-language online magazine called Inspire for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. He reportedly died in a drone strike in Yemen in 2011. (Shane & Hubbard, 31.08.2014) However, it was al-Qaeda of Iraq, the pre successor of ISIS, which was really "the first group to do Internet outreach very effectively" according to Clint Watts, a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and counterterrorism expert. It started the strategy of glamorizing jihad with publishing battlefield footage online as well as beheadings. A decade before the American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff were beheaded by ISIS, a tape of beheading the American contractor Nicholas Berg by al-Qaeda of Iraq went viral. (Altman, 09.09.2014)

Al-Shabab, a Somali Islamist group took over Twitter in 2011, which was around the same time most of existing terrorist organizations started using the platform. It had an official account that made fun of its enemies, shared images of its battles and triumphed its battlefield. It also shared tweet battles with its political opponents with using pretentious English. Al-Shabab also had the less murderous users using Twitter to promote its brand and share news regarding the organization. In 2013, the group took the use of Twitter even further, as one of its accounts live-tweeted a carried out terrorist attack in Nairobi shopping mall. (Altman, 26.06.2014)

The ISIS strategy and its effectiveness truly became clear in 2013. It is the early adopter of the proper cross-media approach and therefore represents the third generation of online jihad (Nissen 2014). As ISIS started to use Twitter in the later part of the last decade, al-Qaeda mainly stuck to the old school forums with moderators (Greenberg, 21.11.2015). Its main differences with al-Qaeda of Iraq and al-Shabab is that both had been controlling and organizing over its terror cells when ISIS is optimistic to crowdsource its social media activity and violence to third parties – to individuals to whom it may not have any concrete ties. In addition, ISIS has targeted its social media campaigns to foreigners rather than local people (Koerner, April 2016). The ISIS media professionalism truly is something new in this field and the first comprehensive strategy model that can be identified. As Steve Rose put it in his article (07.10.2014): "It's almost as if it looked at Osama bin Laden's fuzzy, monotonous cam recorder sermons of a decade ago and concluded that extremist Islam really needed a snappier marketing strategy."

2. ISIS STRATEGY IN PRACTICE

2.1 What is it used for?

ISIS is using the levels of its social media strategy and different platforms to mainly spread propaganda and recruit fighters, intimidate its enemies, promote its caliphate and brand and communicate within the organization (Shane, Hubbard, 31.08.2014). These factors are inevitable for ISIS and its existence. An overview of the use of different platforms is presented in Figure 4.
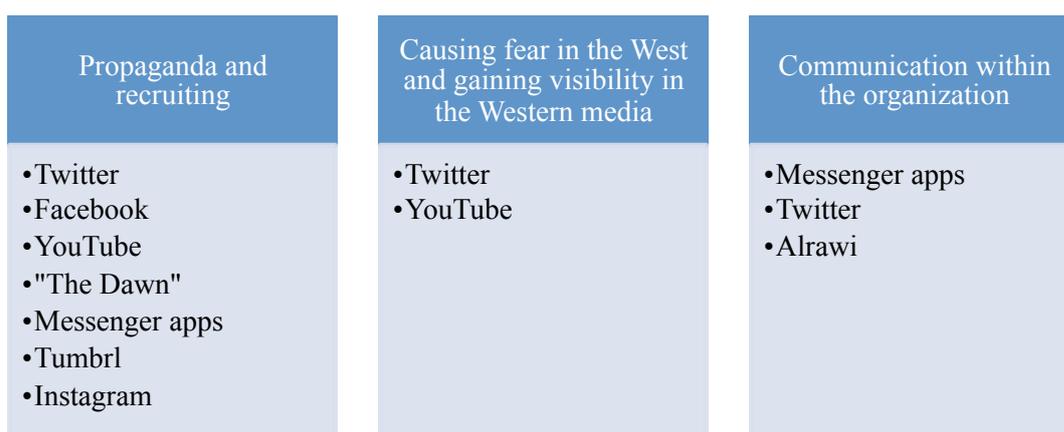
Propaganda and recruiting	Causing fear in the West and gaining visibility in the Western media	Communication within the organization
•Twitter •Facebook •YouTube •"The Dawn" •Messenger apps •Tumbrl •Instagram	•Twitter •YouTube	•Messenger apps •Twitter •Alrawi

Figure 4. Overview of how different social media platforms are used by ISIS

2.1.1 Propaganda and recruiting

As mentioned before in this paper, the ISIS narrative and tone of voice has been carefully planned. This pitch is usually targeted directly for generation Y Muslims in the West more than local people and has been very successful. One of the most recent estimates is that there are nearly 30,000 foreign jihadists, which includes several thousand from Europe as members of ISIS (McCabe, 04.12.2015). This was especially highlighted after the November 13, 2015 Paris attacks and showed that not all recruits have traveled to Syria or Iraq. ISIS has

introduced the world to a different route for radicalization, which is through social media. For ISIS, social media offers a stage where it can present "a carefully packaged image of itself as the fulfillment of a kind of ultimate jihadi fantasy" (Torok, 29.01.2015). This has caused platforms like Facebook and Twitter to be a minefield of marginalized Western Muslims who are vulnerable to the exposure of ISIS's image of "pure" Islam. Facebook and Twitter offer a good platform for this as they are created for networking. Jihad and martyrdom are showed as encouraged actions, so that it is okay to die for jihad, and virtual groups offer interaction between likeminded individuals. Its strategy has also made extremist beliefs seem normalized in social media and ISIS actions seem as how dedicated Muslims live. It has made it worse that many, especially Muslims, are suspicious of the traditional media and people are struggling to discern and filter content they read from the newspapers or see on TV (Torok, 29.01.2015).

In general, the ISIS recruits hold many different motivations. Local recruits are usually seeking status or adventure but in the West, it is more radical. The Western recruits can be divided into two groups: to those, who believe that the Islam ISIS represents is the pure and real one and that it is the way that a true Muslim society should be like and to those, who are considered "devoutly murderous" (McCabe, 04.12.2015). The second group is usually consisted of younger, diverse generation, which feels like they should defend Islam from unbelievers; make sure that Shia Islam is not taking over Sunni Islam, or just simply show their hostility towards Western society (McCabe, 04.12.2015).

ISIS recruitment is executed in all four of its base strategy levels. In the first and second levels it is within the form of the already mentioned news about battles, videos and online magazine Dabiq that are spread through its "official" head and regional accounts mainly on Twitter and YouTube. This material includes bragging about victories, both real and imagined, and emphasizing how powerful ISIS is. The videos, including polished recruitment videos as well as beheadings, usually spread out to other platforms via YouTube and are only deleted from there when someone flags them. (Shane & Hubbard, 31.08.2014) This means it usually depends on the user activity how long the videos will actually stay up on YouTube. However, usually at the point when the videos are taken down, they have spread to multiple other platforms. An example of a polished recruitment video is a video of a Canadian recruit called Andre Poulin telling North American Muslims to follow him to Syria and bring their families too. In the video, he is explaining how "you would be very well taken

care here" and how the fighters' families would live in safety in the ISIS territory just like back home (Shane & Hubbard, 31.08.2014). However, these English-language videos are not softened up, which is also considered one of the success factors of ISIS. The glossy video of fighter Poulin shows and celebrates his death in the front line (Shane & Hubbard, 31.08.2014).

ISIS messaging at this level has also been very efficient, for example, when ISIS managed to take over Mosul in June 2014, it had a calculated social media plan putting out 40,000 tweets in a single day. This means that any search result near Baghdad on Twitter would show an image of the ISIS flag among the first results. (Melchior, 15.10.2014) At that time, the app "The Dawn" was still available for download and it can be concluded that most of the tweets were sent centrally from Al-Hayat using the Twitter accounts registered through the app.

The third level is probably the most effective what comes to spreading propaganda for recruits. This level also uses most of the social media platforms in the ISIS strategy. In this stage of the strategy, fighters, mostly foreign, casually tell about their lives in ISIS. It is unclear how strategically planned this stage actually is, as some sources tell that all the fighters have to give their mobile phones and passports when they arrive to fight for ISIS (Shane & Hubbard, 31.08.2014). The posts can seem sincere, but it can be doubted that Al-Hayat has given special permissions for some fighters to promote and open up about their lives online. For example, some British fighters have answered hundreds of questions on the question and answer website Ask.fm about joining ISIS (Shane & Hubbard, 31.08.2014). These have included questions such as what kind of shoes to bring and if there was a possibility to get a toothbrush. When asked in more detail what to do when one arrives to Turkey or Syria, the fighters have often turned the conversation to continue in the messaging platform Kik, where it can be continued privately but also anonymously. (Shane & Hubbard, 31.08.2014)

Another known social media blogging fighter is a Dutch jihadi that goes by the online username "Chechclear" and had a blog on Tumblr from early 2014 until it was deleted in November 20, 2015 (see Appendix 3). Israfil Yilmaz, as he goes by his real name, is a 29-year-old former soldier of the Royal Netherlands Army born in Brunei, who traveled to Syria in 2012 to fight against Bashar al-Assad's forces. In his Tumblr blog, he was regularly answering people's, mostly other young Muslim men either worried or interested about Syria,

questions and commenting on current events. His blog was a rarity at first, which is why it gained such a big amount of interest bot by regular people as well as media as they were trying to cover the situation in Syria. Yilmaz other accounts in Twitter, Instagram and Ask.fm were shut over and over again but for some reason, his Tumblr account remained online. (Hall, 25.11.2015)

He was still fighting as a "freelancer" in the spring of 2014 but soon posted that he had joined ISIS. "At one point I was a critic of IS, but after following the direction of the many arrows of the Kuffar and staying with and around other groups, I soon came to realize that here in Syria the most forward, the most sincere brothers are those who have joined IS", he explained. He also said to like the clear ideology of ISIS and how the most complete Sharia in the whole Syria had been implemented in the area. He added that he once thought ISIS was a one big joke but came to a different conclusion after seeing the group with his own eyes. Yilmaz's posts usually filled up with questions as curious people wanted to know more. After the Paris attacks, Yilmaz answered many questions about his feelings towards the acts of terror and saw them perfectly justified by what Western countries had done to Muslims in the Middle East. He also answered questions on his account about ISIS practices of taking female slaves and said to journalists' interview requests that all of that goes through the official ISIS channels. (Hall, 25.11.2015) This facts hint to the way that the ISIS social media management team controls the content the fighters publish. Yilmaz openly encouraged to make the journey to Syria and join ISIS in his blog, saying that life in Mosul or Raqqa was just like anywhere else: "Hehehhe, I wish you could see Mosul, or Al-Raqqa, it's just like any other city where people go about their daily lives. Shops, cars, parks, restaurants, gyms, schools etc." The Tumblr blog also showed pictures of his newborn son, heavily veiled Azerbaijani wife and all the nice things, including shiny guns, he claimed to have gotten when joining ISIS (Hall, 25.11.2015). These made the final touches for a perfect recruitment tool for young radicalized Muslims as these types of postings make life in ISIS very approachable and desirable in their eyes.

Individual fighters also use Instagram in addition to Facebook, Twitter and the messenger platforms listed in section 1.5.3, where the conversation usually turns after there has been a shown interest in joining ISIS on the open social media tools. In Instagram there is, for example, a subgroup of fighters posting pictures to the platform of their guns, snacks and

cats by using the hashtag #catsofjihad (Steadman, 26.06.2014). This also aims to show the soft and emotional side of the ISIS fighters.

The level four supporters – disseminators- are the most efficient spreaders of the ISIS content – from news to graphical images and videos. As they do not usually create any content of their own, sharing in this case is caring. In a March 2015 report by J.M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan from the Brookings Institution, the authors revealed insights of a typical disseminator at the strategy level four. First, almost one in five of their Twitter accounts use English as the primary language. The accounts have an average of 1000 followers, which is a high number compared to an average Twitter user. Inside the group of disseminators, there is a smaller group of hyperactive users from 500 to 2000 accounts, who contribute the most to the ISIS strategy (Javers, 05.02.2016).

2.1.2 Causing fear in the West and gaining visibility in the Western media

Before the Paris attacks in November 2015, it was long thought that even though ISIS was sending threat messages towards the West, their main objective was the caliphate and not so much attacks towards the West as al-Qaeda has always had. Within the last year, however, ISIS has lost territory in Syria and Iraq, which has caused a shift in its operative strategy. This has increased the actual threat of ISIS messages even though the material it has posted for recruiting has worked in two ways before: getting people excited, interested, and shake the rest of the world. Especially the videos in YouTube of the beheadings of the American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff as well as aid workers David Haines and Alan Henning have been a part of the reason why United States and its allies are back in the combat in the ISIS region (Rose, 07.10.2014). The fact that ISIS has managed to find a working two-way message simplifies their social media strategy a lot, as they do not have to think two different type of content to post.

In the previous sections in this paper, there has been talk about the fourth level of the base strategy - disseminators. One of ISIS goals is to gain the attention of the Western media and get visibility through it. This has been successful as well, as the Western media has constantly worked as one of its disseminators by publishing ISIS content and helped it portray itself stronger than it actually is. This is mainly because media has published pretty much everything ISIS has given them as a fact, even the false or exaggerated stories. ISIS is

completely dominative of the media environment on its territory and it is extremely difficult to get anything else out of the area than ISIS produced "news" (Gartenstein-Ross, 07.05.2015). It has also helped ISIS that Twitter is considered as sort of a source for news these days, as explained in section 1.5.1 so it is more common than ever to pick news stories straight from the feed of a microblog.

2.1.3 Communication within the organization

The communication within the organization takes place mainly through messenger apps like WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram and Kik (Steadman, 26.06.2014). These apps are available worldwide and like mentioned earlier, WhatsApp and Telegram offer very efficient group chat possibilities. In addition, now that ISIS has coded its own messenger app Alrawi, it is most likely to use that especially when sharing crucial information. In addition to these specific messenger apps, communication is executed through Twitter by using specific hashtags. In the microblogging platform, it especially shares information for the citizens in the caliphate. From the documents, it has been identified that a new curriculum for the University of Mosul has been put to place and the teaching of philosophy, English and French literature and tourism has been removed. ISIS also has shared children's vaccination timetables, updates on electricity availability and information on shortage of medical supplies (Firth, 11.04.2015).

2.2 Why is it working?

ISIS media team has done a thorough job when building the strategy with extensive research of the target audience and the purposes for it. Like any corporation or organization that do social media, if one has everything carefully planned out, one will succeed. Success in this scale of size is no accident.

ISIS is offering dreams, pure religion, adventure and opportunities for those who want to take it. The previously mentioned Asher Abid Khan wanted to help his brothers and sisters in Islam (Geiger, 20.11.2015). As ISIS had made itself seem very powerful and about the religion, the recruits believe that they are really helping Islam and Muslims all around the

world by joining the group. The two-way narrative has guaranteed the attention of the potential recruits as well as visibility in the Western news outlets, which has helped spread its word widely and is one of its main success factors.

It is easy to be dragged into the world of ISIS due to its online presence. When one is recruited, it is done in the comfort of his or her own home. It is done from behind the screen, which possibly makes it even more attractive. The recruiters use very personalized efforts and take advantage of the young people's need to do something bigger with their lives, as most of the recruits feel like they do not fit or belong (Geiger, 20.11.2015). Therefore, one could consider if it is also a question about failed integration of Muslims into the Christian West, which creates the target audience. The common hatred towards the United States and the West in general has already increased this, as many blame these countries for the destruction of the Middle East. Like the Dutch fighter, Israfil Yilmaz, explained in his Tumblr blog: "As much as the French government is all for the bombing and terrorizing of innocent Muslims in Iraq and Syria (and elsewhere), I am for the attacks in France" (Hall, 25.11.2015).

However, one could argue that the main reason why the ISIS strategy has succeeded is that no one had ever used "corporate" social media strategy in terrorism before. One could say that at first the strategically planned social media operations of ISIS caused mostly confusion. That is also the reason why tackling it has been hard and in a way, it has been given the space to succeed. As Senior National Security Analyst Juan Zarate stated: "We have not quite figured out how to not only counter the narrative but to interrupt that cycle of radicalization" (CBS News, 23.06.2016).

3. HOW TO TACKLE THE ISIS STRATEGY

Countering the ISIS social media strategy has started in its full power after the Paris attacks as it was seen that ISIS strategy had shifted and created a severe threat outside the Middle East as well. Many critics of, for example, #OpParis have questioned the impact of deleting social media profiles when people are shooting civilians on the streets (Gidda, 12.04.2015). However, the fact is it does have an impact. Currently the most known propagandist of ISIS was a 21-year-old British hacker Junaid Hussein, who was accounted as the leader of ISIS cyber war. United States has confirmed that they killed him in an airstrike in Raqqa in October 2015 (Nieminen, 22.11.2015). However, airstrikes are not the answer to how to counter the social media strategy, the other way around actually. Airstrikes always create new material of the West for ISIS to use to recruit new fighters. In addition, most of the online jihadists are impossible to kill with an airstrike in Raqqa or Mosul as they might sit in front of their computers anywhere in the world.

As ISIS has lost significant amount of territory and the amount of foreign fighters has been on a decline, it has transformed its powerful social media strategy into a necessity. The ISIS social media strategy is also very much dependent on the image of a winner and on momentum and if ISIS is proven to be losing, it most likely becomes unattractive to its target audience. The disruption of the flow of its social media strategy would tell about its weakening and it is the last thing they want. As mentioned in this paper earlier ISIS mainly relies on foreign fighters, other jihadist organizations who think alike and other rebel groups in Syria and Iraq. ISIS social media strategy is specialized on recruiting and propaganda, which is how the group can reach people who would not be exposed to ISIS other way. If this strategy is stopped, ISIS is left with a weaker position (Gartenstein-Ross, 07.05.2015). This section presents factors that can help counter the ISIS strategy.

3.1 Governments

The main responsibility for destroying online propaganda is with government intelligence officials and them battling a cyber war. However, it is important to understand jihadism and the ISIS social media strategy, as it is impossible to counter it if one does not understand it. It is especially important to understand, that radical Islam is going to exist as long as the conflict between Shia and Sunni Muslims in the Middle East continues, Iraq's Shia government keeps oppressing Sunni Muslims, Gulf of Persia's oil countries are supporting the radical Sunni Islam and there are millions of young, unemployed, poor and frustrated Muslim men willing to buy a black-and-white view of the world (Nieminen, 22.11.2015).

The government of the United States has been especially active when it comes to countering the ISIS strategy. The State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC), founded in 2011 by President Obama, launched an online campaign called #ThinkAgainTurnAway first on Twitter in December 2013 and expanded it to Facebook in August 2014. The campaign aims to counter radicalization with a stream of postings that share information and videos that say to reveal the truth about living with ISIS and put any extremist activity on a negative light. (Gidda, 12.04.2015) The CSCC works in Arabic, Urdu, Somali and English and tries to find radicalized material online starting from Twitter to Yemeni tribal forums and then "counter and rebut jihadist claims". According to Alberto Fernandez, the former ambassador to Equatorial Guinea who now works as a coordinator of the CSCC, the staff of the center is seeking for an opportunity to engage in the center's "particular brand of adversarial engagement" (Altman, 09.09.2014). For now, the campaign seems more as a failure. For example, an ISIS fighter called Abu Turaab posted on Twitter the following "For those who want to come but are facing obstacles, be patient and keep desire for Jihad alive with you always". To this, the State Department campaign account replied: "ISIS recruits' 2 choices: commit atrocities and die as criminals, get nabbed and waste lives in prison". After a few days, Abu Turaab's comment had been favorited 32 times and the number for State Department's response was zero. (Shane & Hubbard, 31.08.2014)

In addition, other governments have started the battle. In November 2015, UK's finance minister George Osborne announced the government would double the investment in online security to $2.9 billion in hope to prevent online attacks happening against the UK, which is one of the scares that ISIS could execute (Gidda, 12.04.2015). In addition, Iraq government has tried to stop the terrorist group by blocking social media and multiple video sites across the country from 13th of June 2015 (Steadman, 26.06.2014).

So far, the actions trying to defeat ISIS social media strategy on the government side has been ineffective. Perhaps the reason lies on the fact that approach and the narrative has been completely wrong. For people who are under religious virulence, conspiracy theories as well as victimization and triumphalism the narrative that, for example, the United States is using in its campaign is not doing it (McCabe, 04.12.2015). By showing the brutalities that ISIS, United States straightly repeats the terrorist organization's own narrative and works as a disseminator (Gartenstein-Ross, 07.05.2015). In addition, parody videos that the ThinkAgainTurnAway channel publishes are not the way to go. An example of this is an ISIS recruitment parody video, which is sarcastically listing jihadist activities: "Crucifying and executing Muslims… Suicide bombings inside mosques! Travel is inexpensive, because you will not need a return ticket" (Rose, 07.10.2014). Mocking is not going to work, as these are what ISIS uses in its own propaganda against the West.

To make the governments' counter strategy work, first they need to think about the structure of their organizations to keep up and compete with such a high-speed social media strategy. However, the most important factor is the narrative in the messaging. ISIS's biggest weakness is showing that they are weak. This is what needs to be used as the narrative and focus on undermining the strength and momentum of ISIS (Gartenstein-Ross, 07.05.2015). The governments have one of the best opportunities and potentials to the tackle the ISIS social media strategy, as they are equipped with funds and resources as well as power what comes to legal terms.

3.2 Anonymous and other hacker groups

Multiple "soldiers" in the virtual world battle against ISIS from their keyboards. These are some on the government payrolls and some working just on their own time to help taking

the terrorist group down. Most important players of these keyboard soldiers are hacker groups.

In 2015, Anonymous as well as other hacker groups like Ghost Security Group and CtrlSec declared a war with ISIS. Anonymous is classified as a hacker group even though the members are only loosely affiliated with each other. During its years of existence, it has done hacking from private data retrieval to network shutdowns. The origin of the group is a bit fuzzy but it is in common knowledge that it traces to 4chan, which is an online forum where "users' identities are obscured by forced anonymity" so no usernames are allowed. The group started out with Internet trolling but later joined into some movements such as anti-scientology and united over an anti-piracy company for The Pirate Pay. It got involved into politics during Arab Spring protests, helped with cyber-attacks against the Tunisian government, and shared information that was blocked by the Egyptian government. (Gilbert, 17.11.2015) Due to the anonymity, no one knows who are involved in the group but from the work that it has conducted, the members are most likely one of the most talented hackers in the world.

The Ghost Security Group, or GhostSec, is a hacker group of seven "ghosts" specifically on a mission to eliminate the online strategies of extremist groups like ISIS, al-Qaeda, Al-Nustra, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. On Saturday, 16th of April 2016, it has been active for 364 days and in addition to OpISIS, it lends it skills and experience to other causes like OpBeast (removing animal pornography), OpDeathEaters (removing child pornography) and OpCloudflare (highlighting DCN misuse). (Ghost Security Group, 16.04.2016) The operating officer of the group, who goes by the name of Mikro, is also the founder of CtrlSec. CtrlSec is relate to GhostSec as both group arise from Anonymous and share staff and resources, the only difference being that CtrlSec is no longer affiliated with Anonymous as it is an organization with structure, (28 operatives of which many understand Arabic) leadership, roles and money – unlike Anonymous, which is non-hierarchical and gets its support from outsiders. (The Atlantic, 08.10.2015)

These organizations aim to expose the main social media people behind the ISIS strategy as well as destroy ISIS websites, social media accounts, stop new terror attacks from happening and look into the organization's money traffic. (Nieminen, 22.11.2015) They report their success mainly on Twitter with the hashtag #OpParis, just to inform the terrorist group about their success (Gidda, 12.04.2015). As mentioned earlier in this paper, the Ghost

Security Group was the one who revealed ISIS action in Telegram as well as found the terrorist organization's newly developed messaging app. It also reported that it has uncovered assault plans for New York, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. Anonymous has especially helped in closing social media platform accounts: it reported on Twitter that it has helped taken down more than 20,000 pro-ISIS accounts on the platform after the Paris attacks.

Professionals think that these individual hackers and hacker groups matter significantly. They are the most talented hackers in the world and have the potential to reveal information that none of the intelligence services can get (Nieminen, 22.11.2015). Hackers and government officials have now found the common enemy and the most efficient thing to do would be to cooperate. Governments need what the hackers have and can give resources to them. It is doubtful that ISIS has more skillful people than these hackers working on the other side. This comes across in, for example, the ISIS response to the Anonymous' declaration of war, instead of threatening to attack back, ISIS issued a guide for its supporters how to avoid being hacked (Gidda, 12.04.2015).

3.3 Social media movements

As ISIS uses Twitter to flood the feed, the same can be done against it as well. An example of this is a social media movement on Twitter called #BrusselsLockdown. The movement took place in Brussels last November after the Paris attacks as an anti-terrorist police operation was conducted to search for the Paris attackers. The Belgian police asked not to share any details on social media what was happening outside so that the terrorist group could not track the movements of the operation from anywhere. Therefore, as ISIS is known to use the hashtag #catsofjihad when posting pictures about cats and guns, citizens of Brussels started flooding the Belgian area Twitter with cat memes and GIFs (see Appendix 4), "downplaying the threat and mocking the extremists" (Sifferling, 21.11.2015). As ISIS uses Twitter to fish information about what is happening and what is discussed, this way it is possible to block that source of much needed information and its strategy fails for a while.

3.4 Islamic influencers

The view of other Muslims of ISIS stands in an important position while battling against its social media strategy and radicalization of the possible recruits. Majority in the Muslim world are against ISIS and its interpretation of Islam: a polling shows that 94 percent in Iraq, including Sunni Arabs, considered ISIS a terrorist organization. The percentage to the same question was 82 in Yemen, 73 in Jordan, 72 in Syria and 72 in Libya. The polling also showed a little support for ISIS in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia or Egypt. (McCabe, 04.12.2015) The strongest influence can be made with Muslim fighters and supporters of ISIS who have turned their backs to the organization later. One example of these people is an around 20-year-old Abdullah from Southern Finland who had turned into Islam. He was one of the Twitter supporters of ISIS from 2013 to 2014 and tweeted its propaganda to over 10 000 followers. After fall 2014, he turned his back to the terrorist organization and now tweets against it to the same amount of followers. (Nieminen, 22.11.2015) Who need attention in social as well as the mainstream media are these people, not the propaganda that ISIS feeds. These people can actually make the difference and influence those who radicalizing and thinking about joining a terrorist organization. A real life portrayal of what foreign fighters actually experience, what does it do to their families and how can you ever return from it. These are influential factors to show those who consider and especially governments should take advantage of this (McCabe, 04.12.2015).

3.5. Used social media platforms

The platforms that ISIS uses in its social media strategy are one of the most powerful tools to counter the strategy as well. Especially after the Paris attacks, Facebook, Twitter and Google have stepped up with the efforts to fight against online terrorist propaganda and recruiting. The pressure has started to come also from the White House as it has hosted meetings with the Silicon Valley companies concerning the battle against ISIS social media strategy (Shaban, 08.01.2016). The companies are arguing that their policies are simple: they

remove everything that is against their terms of service and especially after other user accounts flag them. As mentioned in the introductory sections of the social media platforms, they do not filter the content before it is published but remove it after it is being reported, for example, YouTube's officials quickly review videos that have gained a significant amount of complaints compared to the amount of views. In addition, it has expanded its "trusted flagger" program, which allows groups from the British anti-terror police unit to a human rights organization, the Simon Wirsenthal Center, to do flagging on large number of videos and get them removed almost immediately. Facebook has claimed that it banned any content praising terrorist last year. (Reuters, 12.09.2015)

Twitter's situation is the most difficult. The platform has the most "spammed", free flowing social media feed of the three, and its tension with the US government concerning ISIS messaging is not with the first government. Tension with the Turkish government has steadily grown since summer 2013 when Turkish protesters used Twitter to organize demonstrations. From time to time, the government responded to the by blocking the platform in Turkey. Last December, Turkish government took a different battle to the table as it fined Twitter 50,000 US dollars for not removing terrorist propaganda. So far Twitter has stayed as a platform with one of the "most liberal free speech policies among major social networks", which is why it has been reluctant to do filtering policy. (Hempel, 08.01.2016) However, after the Foley beheading video and its spreading on Twitter, many started opposing this reluctance. First individual users, then governments who warned against re-tweeting and any kind of sharing and then finally later also Twitter made corporate decisions and started to campaign against the re-distribution of the video by removing tweets and accounts as well as actively trying to locate closes ISIS accounts which might have been primary sources for the video. (Nissen 2014)

In addition, Tumblr has been addressed in the fight against ISIS social media strategy. According to the social media blogging platform, it is a place for creativity and self-expression but have lines drawn around important categories of content and behavior, which are explained in the Community Guidelines. Its Trust and Safety team will review all content that has been reported on a case-by-case basis. Unlike Facebook, which has clearly stated that terrorist organizations are not welcomed to use its platform, Tumblr does not have the same type of strict guideline but define that Tumblr is not for the use of "malicious speech". (Hall,

25.11.2015) Telegram has reportedly also blocked pro-ISIS channels, public streams that were broadcasting to dozens of followers, after the Paris attacks (Gidda, 12.04.2015).

It is a controversial battle for these social media companies, as they should at the same time stop any ISIS content for being published in their platforms and cooperate with the governments but then again they should be independent and stick with the spirit of their products, which are used to embrace the freedom of speech (Hempel, 08.01.2016). However, there is a significant case to force the platforms fully on board with the content filtering as each time ISIS content is filtered and removed, it has a disruptive effect on ISIS and its social media strategy. Some part of the audience always disappears after account is deleted, which means they have to find those people again (Altman, 12.09.2014). As the filtering and removal actions would get stronger, ISIS would have to constantly meet new challenges and develop their strategy into new ways to avoid censorship or go completely underground from mainstream social media (Nissen 2014).

4. DISCUSSION

It is a fact that ISIS cannot only rely on the social media strategy. They need something concrete behind the strategy. ISIS reports about successful attacks against its opponents whether it is true or not. To counter the ISIS social media strategy, it has to start from countering the narrative. Those who want to turn into jihadism want to join a powerful and winning organization. If the counter strategy proofs that ISIS is the opposite of this, it will have a direct effect on the organization (Gartenstein-Ross, 07.05.2015). The counter narrative should present what matters about jihadism ISIS opposes as well as in Islam in general. It should expose the harm and the ultimate violence that ISIS does on other Muslims and especially on children (McCabe, 04.12.2015). The counter narrative should also show the rapes, abductions, and destruction of Islamic institutes such as mosques (Rose, 07.10.2014). This and the fact that it is losing territory are the key weaknesses of its social media strategy. This is what governments should embrace in their anti-radicalization campaigns, while using real-life stories of those who have turned their backs. The meaning of stopping radicalization has become even more important after the Paris attacks because it turned out that one of the attackers was an active recruiter and ISIS online propaganda spreader. Other men like Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who was also featured in the ISIS online magazine Dabiq and many of the group's propaganda videos, could be stopped if online communication channels were shut down more efficiently and there was another efficient narrative functioning.

For this reason, social media platforms and hackers are in the key role to keep slowing down the ISIS social media strategy and both parties should coordinate with government officials. Especially hackers have showed that they have the capabilities to dig out very sensitive information about ISIS, including location data. This is also is one of the ISIS weaknesses. It has to rely on "open" platforms meaning that some corporation has developed them. ISIS cannot only operate in places such as Thor because it would not reach enough visibility and traffic, which are crucial for its strategy model.

However, instead of a counter strategy there is another option: to let the information flow. As it has been seen from the hacker groups and government intelligence services, ISIS

shares very sensitive information on the platforms it uses. By allowing ISIS to use the platforms, it is possible to gather more information from the organization than from anywhere else. As for now, there are no other ways to gain information concerning what is happening in eastern Syria or Iraq for that matter, as ISIS publishes every success they have. William McCants, a former State Department senior adviser who directs the project of US Relations with the Islamic world at the Brookings Institution, thinks there is value in that and says that some government officials may like the accounts to be open. The amount of information that you can gather from the accounts concerning, for example, foreign fighter networks is better than from any other source. (Nissen 2014)

This leaves two possible solutions to destroy ISIS and its social media strategy. The first option is to figure out the best possible counter strategy by mixing the factors mentioned in section four that may have a beneficial influence. In a good case scenario this would lead to ISIS disappearing from people's social media and therefore vanishing at least from the digital world. This would have a serious impact also to its ground operations, as the flow of recruits would decrease radically as well as its funding and possibilities to make allies from other similar organizations. Ultimately, it would lead to an 'easier' battle against it on the ground. The other option is to allow the information flow freely and use it to dig out strategic information on locations, possible attacks and recruits. Eventually the destruction of the organization would be handled by military forces with the help of the hacked accounts.

When looking at all the factors, the counter strategy comes up as the more efficient one. Even though there has been criticism that online warfare does not matter, however the truth is, that it does. ISIS takes advantage of people who are easily radicalized and as long as ISIS is on their general newsfeeds, it is gaining recruits. By vanishing ISIS from the mainstream social media, the organization would experience a severe loss of power, which would affect its forces on the battlefield as well. By tackling the ISIS social media strategy, it is more likely that the organization will be taken down.

CONCLUSION

ISIS social media strategy is constructed extremely well and is quite similar to a social media strategy used by multinational organizations and corporations as seen when compared with the presented McDonald's strategy. This shows that the ISIS strategy is systemized and an extensive background research has been conducted. One of the biggest reasons for its success is the used narrative that works in two ways and ISIS can reach all its wanted purposes with it: spread of propaganda and recruiting, causing fear in the west and getting visibility in the western media and communicating within the organization. The ISIS strategy is more advanced than any other jihadist group has had before. It is something that the world has not previously experienced, which has allowed ISIS to have the space and time to implement and exercise the strategy. It has taken advantage of the generation Y who are fluent in the language of social media.

However, there are good opportunities for the strategy to be tackled, especially if governments and hackers join their forces against a common enemy. It is likely that even though ISIS seems to have many skillful people working in the Al-Hayat media center, the world's most talented people operate in different hacker groups and government intelligence services. Governments should especially take advantage of those who have turned their backs to ISIS since they will have the most influence on those who are thinking of joining the group. Content monitoring is also crucial. If social media platforms increase their filtering and monitoring, ISIS is forced to go underground where it will not reach the same visibility as in mainstream social media.

The counter strategy and its narrative have to show ISIS's weaknesses instead of mocking the group. Power and promises lure ISIS's target audience towards it. Therefore by showing ISIS as a weak, losing group it will become less attractive. This causes ISIS to lose the factors which it depends on: winner's image, foreign recruits and disseminators.

In conclusion, the hypothesis was proven true. As ISIS is losing power on the ground, it has come too dependent on its well-structured social media strategy and the image it is spreading through it. If the image is destroyed online with a counter strategy, ISIS is left in a

weaker position. Even though the failure of ISIS is not only dependent on the social media strategy, it is proven that as well as fighting ISIS on the ground, it is important to utilize a counter strategy to tackle ISIS online. Without recruits, ISIS will not be able to fight the actual battles in its territory, which can lead to the loss of its ultimate goal: to maintain and grow the caliphate.

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Twitter, 16.04.2016
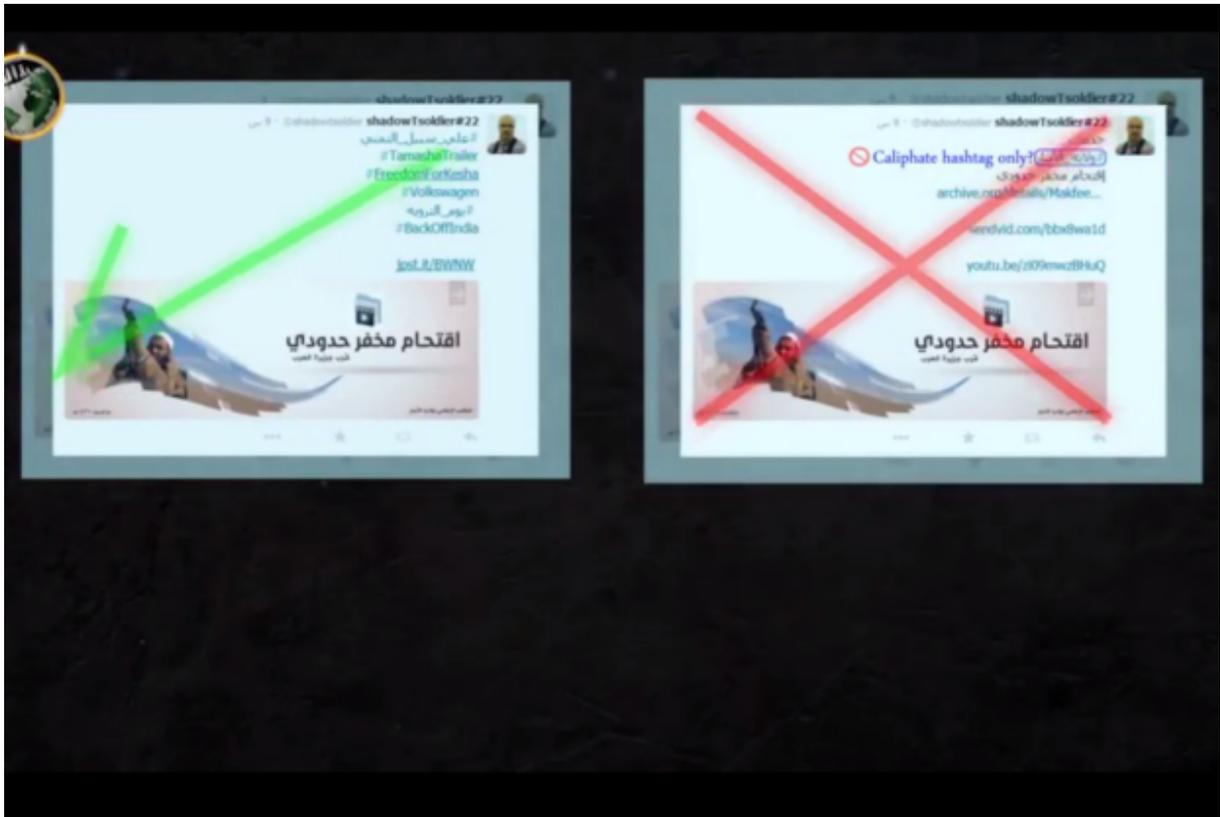https://about.twitter.com/

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http://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/how-mcdonalds-wins-social-ranking-number-one (April 2016)

YouTube, 15.04.2016
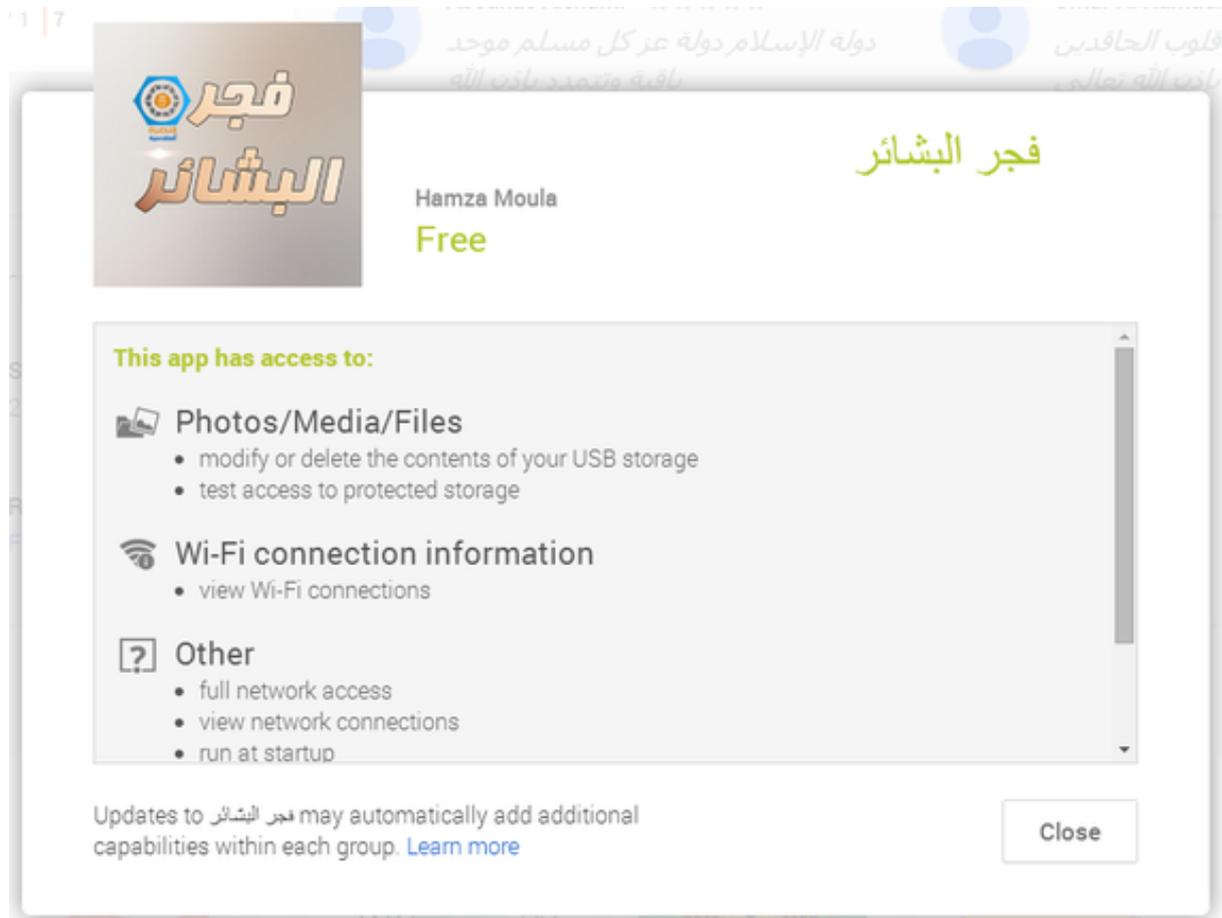https://www.youtube.com/yt/about/fi/

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Screenshot from the ISIS propaganda guide

Source: Shiloach, Gilad. 27.10.2015. Inside ISIS' Social Media Strategy: "Monitor The Media For Lies"

http://www.vocativ.com/243967/isis-social-media-strategy/ (April 2016)

Appendix 2. Screenshot of the Dawn of Glad Tidings app from the Google Play store

Source: The Atlantic, 08.10.2015. The Cyber Activists Who Want to Shut Down ISIS

> http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/anonymous-activists-isis-twitter/409312/ (April 2016)

Appendix 3. Screenshot of Chechclear's Tumblr account

Source: Hall, E. 25.11.2015. Ask a Jihadi: An ISIS Fighter's Blog About Life in Syria
      http://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/ask-a-jihadi-an-isis-fighters-blog-about-life-in-syria#.oxaorMR9m (February 2016)

Appendix 4. Screenshot of a cat GIF posted during #BrusselsLockdown

Source: Twitter @HobbitLindsey, 25.11.2015

https://twitter.com/HobbitLindsey/status/668565116749791233 (March 2016)