

2018

Hard Copy versus #Hashtag: Examining the Channels of Terrorist Propaganda

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Suggested Citation

Copello, Evan, "Hard Copy versus #Hashtag: Examining the Channels of Terrorist Propaganda" (2018). *UNF Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 802.
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Hard Copy versus #Hashtag: Examining the Channels of Terrorist Propaganda

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Psychology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Psychological Science

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

April, 2018

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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Entitled: Hard Copy versus #Hashtag: Examining the Channels of Terrorist Propaganda

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Master of Science in Psychological Science

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Abstract

In recent years, terrorism and radicalization has been a consistent issue that many countries have faced. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has been the most recent in a long trail of organizations that have sought to strike terror against the western world. However, ISIS is distinguished from other groups, like Al-Qaeda, in that ISIS supports a complex propaganda machine. Although ISIS is not the first organization to use the social media platform, they are the first to use it with such diversity. The two main channels that ISIS uses to spread their propaganda messages are through social media sites such as Twitter and through online journals such as the *Dabiq*. Recent research has attempted to determine how recruitment messages are being received and which messages trigger recruitment. It is the goal of this paper to determine which messages are salient, and the psychological constructs that support them. By coding messages for appeals to identity, need for cognitive closure, time pressure, and appeals to ideology, the researchers expect that the two main channels of ISIS propaganda differ in their messages. We hypothesize that Twitter messages will be targeted towards novice ISIS sympathizers, whereas the *Dabiq* will be focused on already-radicalized individuals who have moved past the introduction of the radical ideology.

Keywords: Terrorism, propaganda, extremism, ISIS, social media, intergroup biases

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In the past several decades, countries in the Western hemisphere have been on the defense from terrorist organizations. Terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS), promote the spread of their beliefs through violence, by threatening the lives of non-combatants. Leaders and policy makers attempt to reduce the number of attacks by terrorist organizations by both military action and policy. In the United States, policy makers have approach the threat of ISIS with the same counterterrorism measures they used against Al Qaeda (Cronin, 2015). Governments around the world, such as Turkey, Russia, Canada, and France combat ISIS controlled territories with near daily bombing campaigns, soldiers, and economic sanctions (Fantz, 2015; United Nations, 2015). Although ISIS is losing ground in Syria and Iraq, the organization has been able to launch deadly attacks in Western countries (e.g., Brussels airport attack on the 22nd of March, 2016; Charlie Hebo attack in France on the 7th of January, 2015). Also on the rise are directed lone-actor terrorist attacks (Gill, Horgan, & Deckert, 2014).

Terrorist organizations flourish by their ability to recruit new members to their cause and to their methods. The current project addresses ISIS's methods of recruitment of foreign fighters, in hopes that an understanding of terrorist recruitment of these actors will lead to a reduction in the threats of terrorism to those targeted by such attacks.

Early Recruitment Methods

In 2009, a document titled *A Course in the Art of Recruitment* was retrieved by the United States Government. This document was designed for novice Islamic Terrorist recruiters as a way to grade the performance and pathways of potential recruits (Fishman & Warius, 2009). The handbook identifies the types of individuals that Al-Qaeda targeted; primarily uneducated, non-religious, and non-questioning individuals. This recruitment handbook contained recruiter

decision points that served as a flow chart, where certain reactions by the recruit would lead to different responses from the recruiter. For example, the recruit may discuss that they are interested in Islam, which would cue the recruiter to discuss Islamic teachings related to Jihad. The discovery of this recruitment manual indicates that recruitment by terrorist organizations is becoming more directed and individually tailored to accommodate specific audiences.

Foreign Fighters

Unlike Al Qaeda, who focused recruitment locally and in surrounding areas, ISIS recruiters have broadened their reach and expanded their recruitment methods. Instead of focusing its efforts on local recruitment and recruitment from surrounding areas, ISIS recruiters have targeted recruits from Africa, Europe, and North America (Day, 2016). ISIS releases non-Arabic propaganda, such as the *Dabiq* (a news and propaganda magazine) and messages on Twitter, in an effort to reach those who are interested in their message but restricted by language and location (Winter, 2015b).

These expanded target areas and techniques seem to be working. Since 2014 there has been an estimated 27 to 31 thousand foreign fighters from over 86 countries who have traveled to the Syria and Iraq to fight for ISIS, with only about 20-to-30-percent of fighters returning to their Western countries (The Soufan Group, 2015). Of those thousands of foreign fighters, roughly 300 came from the Americas (The Soufan Group). The Soufan Group (2015) showed that the numbers of fighters leaving from Asia and Russia are rapidly increasing at a rate of 300-percent from 2014 to 2015. The same report showed that in 2014, 2,500 foreign fighters from Western Europe had made the voyage to fight with ISIS. This number doubled in 2015. The lack of growth in foreign fighters in the North America does not represent the substantial growth in recruitment around the globe. For instance, ISIS recruits from the Balkans doubled, and perhaps

tripled, from 2014 to 2015 (The Soufan Group, 2015). Scholars attribute the success of ISIS recruitment of foreign fighters largely to its use of social media and creative promotion of its activities through the *Dabiq* magazine.

The type of individuals who join extremist organizations vary by the region (Gates & Podder, 2015; Rosenblatt, 2016). The variety in the profiles of foreign recruits makes it difficult for security professionals to monitor the number of people leaving their countries in the Western hemisphere to fight for groups like ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban. Terrorist recruits face many dangers as they attempt to subversively travel to the Middle East to train and fight on the front lines. Numerous cases exist of individuals who were captured attempting to leave their home countries to join ISIS. In Turkey, a 24-year-old Japanese man was detained and prevented from traveling to Syria to join ISIS (Shankar, 2016). To date, 108 men and women from New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, etc. have also been detained and prevented from joining ISIS (Goldman, Yang, & Muyskens, 2017).

To combat the challenges of asking foreign fighters to join the front lines in Syria, ISIS has instructed foreign fighters to remain in their home countries. James, Jensen, and Tinsley (2015) found that instead of making pleas for *hijrah* (travel to fight in the middle east), groups like ISIS are pushing for foreign fighters to stay in their Western countries and fight from within, to conduct terrorist attacks in their home countries on behalf of ISIS. This method of fighting prevents detection of ISIS recruits as they would attempt to travel to the Middle East. The recruits can reach the aims of the terrorist organization by committing acts of terror and violence in their home countries.

Online Recruitment

If ISIS asks foreign fighters to remain in their home countries, recruitment efforts and contact with these recruits must occur over a distance. For ISIS this distance is bridged through the Internet and social media. The first terrorist organization to use the internet to spread their ideology was The Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement in 1996. The Internet made it easier for The Túpac Amaru to spread their message globally without involving external media outlets, like BBC or CNN (Denning, 2009). Since then, the process of terrorism recruitment has become globalized and decentralized (Gates et al., 2015; Pace, 2014). Decentralization proves to not only increase security for ISIS's leaders, but it also allows for tactical innovations and the establishment of brother/sister organizations working towards the same goal (Pace, 2014).

ISIS has also successfully globalized itself, allowing for a greater spread of fear, a gain in sympathizers, and a larger spread of attacks (Cozine, 2016). Part of this globalization has been the use of borderless avenues, such as Twitter and the online journal titled the *Dabiq*, which is published in over 4 languages including English, French, and German. Social media has removed the border lines and opened communication between members of terrorist organizations and individuals living in other countries who might be sympathetic to the terrorist cause (Thompson, 2011). For instance, ISIS supporting Twitter accounts had an average of 1,000 followers, much larger than the average of 208 followers for regular users (Berger & Morgan, 2015). These efforts helped ISIS gain pledged affiliates from 18 countries/territories, foreign fighters from 80-90 countries/territories, and over 20,000 English-language Twitter followers (Cozine, 2016). Social Media is the new platform for recruitment, yet there is little research as to what messages are being sent, as well as what types of individuals are receiving them.

Channels of Recruitment

ISIS uses several channels to disseminate their radical ideology to the masses. They have assembled an intricate web of media outlets that cater to their message. There are around 35 small media outlets, feeding into six larger outlets, which are all encompassed under the umbrella of ISIS's Central Leadership (Winter, 2015b). There are two primary forms of globalized radical recruitment, namely online journals and social media (Berger & Morgan, 2015; Gambhir, 2014; Nacos, 2016). The *Dabiq* has the most publications of any journal that ISIS has yet to release, their first being The Islamic State Report (June 3rd, 2014 to July 5th, 2014) and most recent being the Rumiya (Gambhir, 2014; The Clarion Project, 2014). Twitter is also the most widely used open access social media engine by ISIS, partly due to other sites, like Facebook, becoming more strict (Berger, et al. 2015; Winter, 2015a). These two channels of recruitment are important to the structure of ISIS and their recruiting base, as each of them offer something different to the reader.

Dabiq. The *Dabiq* is a journal published online and distributed by the Al-Hayat Media Center (ISIS's propaganda hub). The purpose of the *Dabiq* is to confirm the in-group identity of ISIS, by using messages that focus on demonization of the Western world (Ingram, 2016). Gambhir (2014) claims that the *Dabiq* is much more than a propaganda magazine, rather is a vehicle to carry the religious and ideological superiority of ISIS to current fighters, future fighters, and enemies alike. The *Dabiq* is mainly used to present the supposed countless military "victories", in an attempt to garner support and instill fear (Gambhir, 2014). The journal uses these stories of military victories, and justifications of political violence to trigger "awakenings" in its readers, reinforcing the draw to join (Ingram, 2016).

The *Dabiq* is readily available online, giving access to anyone who knows it exists and is interested in its messages. The journal focuses more on theology, and blurs the lines between politics and religion (Greene, 2015). The *Dabiq* takes a staunch moral high ground, enforcing the idea of a lack of freedom of choice, and a firm distinction between right and wrong (Greene, 2015). The *Dabiq* makes no attempt to spare the readers the gruesome and violent details and imagery of their conquests (Gambhir, 2014; Greene, 2015). It also reinforces the message of an impending Armageddon, pleading for faithful Muslims to take arms in their cause (Winter, 2015b). The *Dabiq's* messages are targeted to open-minded Muslims, as well as those who are already very familiar with ISIS's brand of religious doctrine.

Twitter. Twitter has gained popularity among ISIS members and sympathizers in recent years, with roughly 60% of their total accounts from 2008 to 2015 being created in 2014 (Berger et al., 2015). Twitter has allowed for not only thousands of foreign fighters to be recruited, but it also has led the way to group cohesion among ISIS recruiters who can now easily communicate with each other (Greene, 2015). Due to this new form of spreading ideology, ISIS has adapted their tactics to carry their messages further, mastering the use of social media (Vitale & Keagle, 2014). To spread their message on a larger scale, ISIS created an application called "The Dawn of Glad Tidings" which automatically disseminated pre-approved ISIS messages via Twitter posts (Irshaid, 2014). Although ISIS's posts on Twitter are not directly religiously oriented, they impart religious rhetoric, such as "Allah is good", "sins", "disbelievers", in part to infuse their messages with religious ideology (Bodine-Baron, Helmus, Magnuson, and Wikelman, 2016).

ISIS is using to spread strategically planned messages to a broad audience. These messages are very specific to the audience, focusing on foreigners. Klausen (2015) found that 70-percent of tweets by Westerners were "retweets" (shared posts from other accounts) and not

original content. This suggests that those sharing these messages with others are a novice audience. Reaching out to a new audience is the goal of ISIS' Twitter campaign. ISIS supporters have co-opted popular hashtags, such as the ones popular during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil (Vitale, et al. 2014). Since these new followers are not well-versed in the Quran, ISIS focuses more on spreading the political messages of their organization, rather than the religious ones (Magdy, Darwish, & Weber, 2015). ISIS is also greatly concerned with the image that they are representing to their new audience. Winter (2015a) found that the most common theme of their tweets was a "Utopia". The reason for the focus on less violent themes on Twitter seems to be that Twitter is primarily used to reach a new audience, lower in the stages of radicalization. This "Ground Floor" on the staircase to radicalization is where recruiters and sympathizers introduce individuals to ideas of political injustice and perceived deprivation, which would appeal to a broader audience (Moghaddam, 2005). The speed, pervasiveness, and openness of Twitter allows ISIS to spread their ideas and capture the attention of potential recruits.

Need for Cognitive Closure, Ideology, and Urgency

Earlier work by Kruglanski et al. (1983) found that elevating the need for cognitive closure (NCC) through time pressure increased subjects' tendency to succumb to primacy effects in impression formation, causing them to make judgments with little investigation into the problem. Need for Cognitive Closure inhibits an individual from forming alternative hypotheses. Webster et al. (1994) found a small positive correlation for impulsivity and need for closure, indicating that these are not distinct concepts. Further, those with high need for closure were more confident in their judgments (Webster, et al. 1994). The judgment process under time pressure is disrupted, leading to decisions based on limited evidence. This is "epistemic freezing", where the layperson becomes unaware of conflicting arguments, causes a judgment

change in the individual, reducing the evaluation made before making a decision (Kruglasnki, et al. 1983). This pattern shows that although individuals are making baseless decisions, they are not inherently impulsive, and strongly adhere to their decision.

Ideologies that are established and have highly structured formats are more readily accepted by people who have a high Need for Cognitive Closure (Brandt & Reyna, 2010). Webster and Kruglanski (1994) divided individuals into two types, certainty- and uncertainty-oriented individuals. Certainty-oriented individuals tend to have a closed-minded attitude towards new information. Conversely, uncertainty-oriented individuals are more open to novel information that is inconsistent with their current viewpoint. This predisposition to new ideas could potentially be a reason why some individuals are more receptive to radical ideas than others.

Many feel that the war against terrorism is just as much an ideological war as it is a physical one, as ISIS commonly uses the idea of helping out Muslim brothers against an oppressor (Daymon, 2015). In a press conference on terrorism, President Barrack Obama (2015) stated that, “you cannot fight an ideological war with guns; you must defeat it with better ideas.” The wide spread of ideology is not limited to internet websites for adults and children alike, ISIS also makes use of entertaining media (Thompson, 2011).

Although there are obvious inconsistencies between ISIS doctrine and traditional Islam, many journalists and politicians still hold that ISIS is based on a religious ideology (Pelletier, Lundmark, Gardner, Ligon, & Kilinc, 2016). Because of ISIS’ perceived tie to Islam, the ideological drive that is used for recruitment is the narrative that, by joining ISIS, one would be helping Muslim brothers in combat against outsiders (Daymon, 2015). The overarching theme in

this type of rhetoric is that there is a clear right versus wrong, and someone is to blame for the suffering of Muslims (Borum, 2011).

Unlike Al-Qaeda, ISIS thrives on this idea of the “impending apocalypse”, and uses this narrative to pressure individuals into “getting right with Allah” (MoCants, 2015, p. 28). By priming a person with high Need for Cognitive Closure with a time-sensitive ideological message, such as an apocalyptic message from the Quran, a recruiter can manipulate the urgency of the message to drive the person to agree with their goals. Messages appear to target ideology, with a time pressure focus using an “apocalypse” narrative (MoCant, 2015; Kruglanski & Freund, 1983). Other messages are identity driven, reaching out to individuals by targeting those who are already isolated from their surrounding networks (Borum, 2011).

Isolation

Colleen LaRose (aka Jihad Jane) was a community outcast that was isolated from her family and friends (Halverson & Way, 2012). Researchers have suggested that loose community ties and a feeling of isolation predicts the joining of an extremist organization (Borum, 2011). The manipulation of this isolation is used in determining an individual’s chances of successfully completing the recruitment process (Al Qa’idy, 2010). Borum (2011) found that a sense of *belonging* to an organization that offers comradery helps an individual avoid a sense of isolation. For instance, the lack of a social identity can lead to an individual to seek out group membership, even with extremist groups like ISIS (Borum, 2011). In a case study of foreign fighters, Lankford (2014) found that social isolation was one of four main factors (along with depression, guilt and shame, and hopelessness) that cause an individual to join a terrorist organization. Whether it be isolation or “needing to belong”, the result is the same, a push for an individual to accept a new doctrine and fight for a radical cause.

Identity Theory and Intergroup Biases

Once an individual perceives unfairness, disenfranchisement, or dissatisfaction with their current situation, the next step would be seeking out a group with which they identify. A person considering to join an extremist group will go through three identity cycles: cultural identity, social identity, and personal identity (Schwartz, Dunkel, & Waterman, 2009). Social identity theory is used to explain how individuals link their self-concept as a member of a larger entity with intergroup relations. The process of an individual identifying with ISIS works the same way, by using the demonization of Islam by those in the West to create a polarization of beliefs, and eventually the involvement in an extremist organization (Raffie, 2013). Moghaddam (2005) describes the disgruntled feeling, directed at the Western world, as the Ground Floor on the staircase to terrorism, where an individual feels dissatisfied with how they are being treated or perceived by society. This ground level that Moghaddam (2005) describes catapults an individual to the “first floor”, which involves seeking out a group with which to fight this unfair treatment. Further, when dealing with feelings of unfairness, an individual will experience uncertainty in their identity and will be more likely to identify with a group they feel is higher in entitativity (cohesive group qualities; Hogg, Sherman, Dierselhuis, Maitner, & Moffitt, 2005).

Religiosity and Conservatism

In a review of causes for extremism Borum (2011) found that religion and theological understanding only showed prominence in a subset of examined recruitment cases. Borum concluded that religion is merely a vehicle for fulfilling goals, not necessarily the goal itself. If terrorist recruiters use ideological messages to convince others to join their cause, they must select ideological statements that connect with the population they are trying to reach. The base assumption of many Americans is that all terrorists are devout believers in Islam. However, this

often does not necessarily transfer over to those who become radicalized. For example, Colleen LaRose (aka Jihad Jane) was a White, middle-aged American woman who had multiple divorces and no background in Islamic teaching, yet she was picked out by an online recruiter as a wife for a fighter (Halverson et al., 2012). The recruit may not have any Islamic knowledge, but the recruiters themselves also tend to struggle with their religious knowledge. The online recruiter manual uncovered in 2009 (Fishman & Warius, 2009) even states that the “Individual *Da'wa*” (preaching Islam to the individual) used online makes it easier for recruiters who are not very familiar with sharia law to convey the message of Islam. The religious component of the messages may not be what’s important to the recruit, rather it signals the credibility of the extremist group.

Summary and Hypotheses

Research to date has shown conflicting results on plausible psychological warning signs of an individual’s likelihood to join a terrorist organization, and material indicators are even less predictive. Actions, such as acquiring weapons, often do not indicate a capability to commit a terrorist act (Schurman & Eijkman, 2015). More to this point, Schurman et al. (2015) noted that when looking back at terrorist’s patterns of behavior before their attack, attackers engage in more chaos and non-linear action than a clearly established organizational structure. Due to the diversity in the initial stages in leading to radicalization, behavioral indicators related specifically to security concerns might not be the best option for research. Other research has indicated that even focusing on the “psychology of terrorism” based on mental disorders does not result in predictive power (Borum, 2014). Borum (2014) suggests that it might be more useful to explore vulnerabilities and propensities towards terrorism.

The messages of ISIS's propaganda are targeted at an individual's vulnerabilities. The *Dabiq* uses religious justification and politics to motivate individuals to join ISIS and commit *hijrah* (engage in a sacred journey; Gambhir, 2014). Twitter, on the other hand, offers more about the progress of the insurgency, using false claims of victories as motivation (Klausen, 2014). We hypothesize that the *Dabiq* will be targeted more towards individuals further through the stages of radicalization (Schurman & Eijkman, 2015), when ideological development is at an extreme level and when organizational development is focused on strengthening an existing group identity. One feature of the *Dabiq* that supports this hypothesis is that the *Dabiq* is harder to attain compared to Twitter messages, which are readily accessible to a broad audience. Also, articles in the *Dabiq* likely will have more motivational messages, appealing to those further along in the radicalization process, whereas Twitter posts will have more idealistic and personal-oriented posts, appealing to those at the early stages of radicalization, when group identity is at its weakest.

This pattern will be revealed further by the *Dabiq* showing more time-pressure messages targeting individuals with a high need for cognitive closure, and Twitter messages using encouraging individuals to connect with the group through a broad social identity message (e.g., one highlighting the plights of Muslims in the Middle East). We expect to see this pattern because the *Dabiq*, given its targets tend to be those further along in the radicalization process, is intended to keep fighters informed and motivated, whereas Twitter messages are meant to entice new recruits. Lastly, we expect to see that *Dabiq* articles will contain far more religiously-oriented content, targeted at already-indoctrinated individuals who would more readily accept the social identity of ISIS, compared to Twitter messages that are more broadly targeted at ideologies held by those at the beginning stages of radicalization. This study will determine the

types of messages in each of the channels of propaganda as a way to identify how counter terrorism research can be targeted to different audiences, and formulated to fit into different channels.

Hypotheses

1. Printed Channels (*Dabiq*) will be targeted more towards individuals further down the stages of radicalization, showing more social identity directed messages, compared to Twitter posts.
2. Columns in the *Dabiq* will have more motivational messages, represented by time pressure appeals, whereas Twitter posts will have more idealistic and personal posts, represented by a high push for enlistment.
3. *Dabiq* columns will have more religious content compared to Twitter posts (tweets).

Method

Participants (Sample)

The sample for the current study is a random draw from a bank of 450 publically available Twitter posts of suspected ISIS sympathizers and recruiters. The Twitter post bank came from a search of 9 popular ISIS-related hashtags (see Table 1), such as #DespitetheDisbelievers, #Urgent, and #IslamicCaliphate (#Caliph, #Khilafah; see Magdy, Darwish, & Weber, 2015). The comparison group was taken from publically available written columns inside 13 of the 15 issues of the Islamic State journal, the *Dabiq* Magazine (Clarion Project, 2014) Issues 12 and 13 of the *Dabiq* were removed from these analyses, as the columns in them did not correspond to the previous issues or the following issues. The analyzed issues contained Articles (N = 39), Statements (N = 5), and Reports (N = 31), whereas issues 12 and 13 used different titles for their columns that were not comparable to other issues or

mentioned in previous research.

Materials/Coding

Researchers in the current study coded ISIS propaganda distributed through two distinct channels, Twitter and the *Dabiq* magazine. Tweets were collected in batches on Twitter associated with relevant hashtags, whereas the *Dabiq* was collected through non-disclosed sites on the internet. Tweets were collected from March 13th, 2017 to March 14th, 2017. The dates of initial tweet posting ranged from the 14th of May, 2014, and extended to the 14th of March, 2017. Tweets collected from 2014 to 2015 made up 28.57-percent (N = 16) of the sample, whereas tweets from 2016 to 2017 made up the majority of the sample, 71.43-percent (N = 40). The issues of the *Dabiq* were collected from August 1st, 2016, to February 22nd, 2017. The issues of the *Dabiq* span from April, 2014 to April, 2016 (see *Figure 1*).

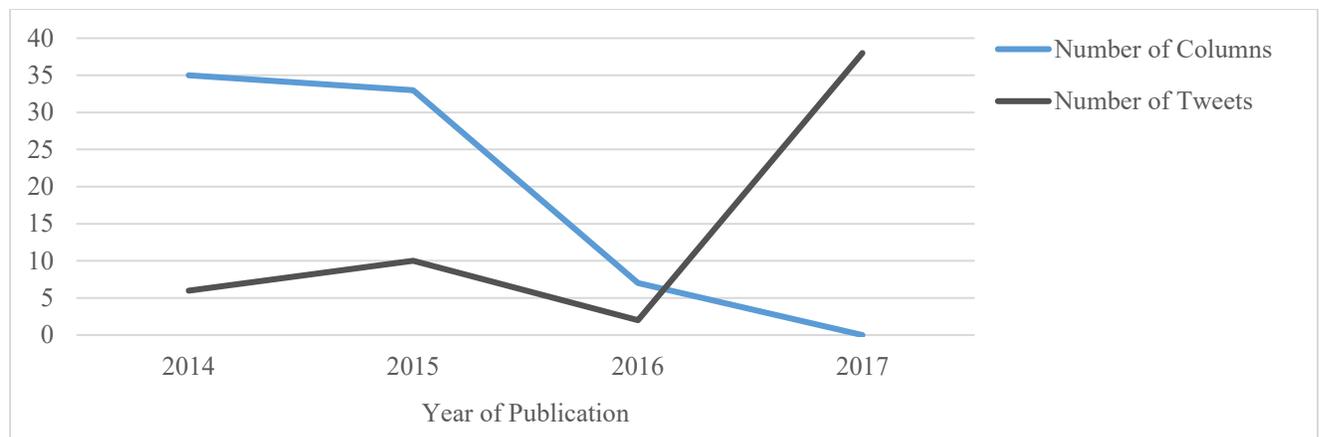


Figure 1. Comparing the Publication Date of Columns and Tweets

Dabiq. In total, researchers in the current study coded 74 written columns, with an average page length of 2.91 pages (*Std.* = 2.21), with a range of .5 pages to 11 pages. Findings indicated that Allah was mentioned in 71 columns (95.9%). Allah being mentioned was broken

into three subcategories: Formal, Informal, and Both. Allah was mentioned in a formal context in 7 columns (9.9%), informally in 26 columns (36.6%), and mentioned both formally and informally 38 columns (53.3%). Each column only contained one subcategory of “Allah Mentioned.” This high usage of “Allah” was expected, as ISIS uses Religiosity as a cornerstone of their ideology. By calling themselves a “Caliphate” they are claiming themselves to be an overtly religious organization. We then were interested in the types of columns written, whether they were Articles, Statements, or Reports. The *Dabiq* explicitly stated the column type on each page. Between the 13 issues, there were 39 Articles (52%), 5 Statements (6.7%), and 31 Reports (41.3%). Other types of columns, such as “Interview,” “Special,” and “Enemy’s Words” were not coded, as they were not consistently a part of every Issue. The single Statement piece was included, as it was also included in previous research by Gambhir (2014).

Twitter. For Twitter, 53 tweets were analyzed from the original 450 that were collected. Tweets were discovered using 9 hashtags (Table 1). These 9 hashtags were either collected from previous research (i.e. Magdy et al., 2015), or determined relevant due to their current popularity among confirmed ISIS accounts. Some hashtags, such as #Inshallah, are used by the Muslim community at large, and do not indicate automatic ISIS affiliations and were not treated as such. Univariate statistics showed that Allah was mentioned in 14 tweets (26.4%), and of those, only mentioned in a formal context (ex. at the end of a sentence, the author states “Inshallah”) 4 times (8%). The other 10 times Allah was mentioned were considered informal (ex. “Allah is the one and true God”). Next, the types of tweets were examined, whether they were Retweets ($n = 3$, 5.7%), Statements ($n = 49$, 92.5%), or Reports ($n = 1$, 1.9%; see Table 2).

Table 1

9 Hashtags used for this study

Hashtag	Source
#DespitetheDisbelievers	Magdy et al., 2015
لج عاج# (#Urgent)	Magdy et al., 2015
#Mujahideen	Popular in March, 2017
#Hijrah	Popular in March, 2017
#IslamicCaliphate (#Caliph, #Khilafah)	Magdy et al., 2015
#IslamicState (#ISIS, #ISIL)	The ISIS Twitter Census, 2015
#Jihad	Popular in March, 2017
#Inshallah	Popular in March, 2017
#Dieinyourrage	Popular in March, 2017

Table 2

Types of Tweets with Descriptions and Univariate Statistics

Tweet Type	Description	<i>N</i>	%
Retweet	No statement, just a repost/direct quote	3	5.7
Statement	Opinion, can have a repost/quote with it	49	92.5
Report	Informative post, no opinions.	1	1.9

Procedure

Trained researchers coded tweets and columns for relevant themes reflecting the use of ideology, time pressure, religiosity, isolation, and social identity (see Table 3). To test the reliability of coding decisions, two researchers coded 30 tweets from each of the nine hashtags categories ($n = 270$). Both researchers identified whether the tweet represented an ISIS-affiliated.

Table 3

Examples of Types of Messages within the Dabiq and Twitter

Type of Message	Keywords in Twitter and the Dabiq
Time Pressure	End Times, Apocalypse, Day of Resurrection, Judgment
Religiosity/Conservatism	Quran, Hadith, Mujahideen, Hijra, Caliph, Islam
Social Identity	Kuffar, Brotherhood, Organization, Caliphate, Superior
Isolation	Family, Community, Close-knit, Muslim, Lonliness
Ideology	World Domination, Sharia, Evangelize, Superiority
Allah	Allah (formal vs. informal)

The same two researchers then coded the tweets for the presence or absence of the relevant themes (see Table 4).

Table 4

Interrater Reliability for Two Coders, for the Dabiq and Twitter

Variable	Dabiq (N = 34)		Twitter (N = 56)	
	<i>K</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>K</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Allah Mentioned	x	x	.96	<.0005
Religiosity	.80	<.0005	.93	<.0005
Time Pressure	.85	<.0005	.81	<.0005
Social Identity	.94	<.0005	.95	<.0005
Isolation	.79	<.0005	x	x
Ideology	.84	<.0005	.74	<.0005
Push for Enlistment	.80	<.0005	x	x

x – variable was not computed because coding was constant across items.

The 13 issues of the *Dabiq* were first coded for the three column types (articles, statements, and reports). Researchers initially read the columns, then identified key phrases relating to our constructs of interest during a follow-up reading. Researchers coded whether the relevant themes were present or absent in each of the columns according to the statements identified in the column. Interrater reliability for these decisions can be viewed in Table 4.

Interrater Reliability

Dabiq. To determine interrater reliability for the coding of the *Dabiq*, a series of Cohen's Kappa (k) analyses were conducted on whether Allah was mentioned, religiosity, time pressure, social identity, isolation, ideology, and push for enlistment. The K -values are displayed in Table 4. Interrater reliability was significant for all variables, showing that the coding between the two raters was very similar. As discussed by Viera and Garrett (2005), a rating of .610 and above constitutes "substantial agreement."

Twitter. A series of Cohen's Kappa tests were also conducted for both tweet selection and the coding of the tweets themselves. For the tweet selection, there was substantial agreement between the two coders, $K = .682, p < .001$. Agreed upon tweets were then further analyzed. Cohen's Kappa analyses were conducted on the same factors as the *Dabiq*: whether Allah was mentioned, religiosity, time pressure, social identity, Isolation, ideology, and push for enlistment. All of the K -values were above the .61 threshold, except for isolation and push for enlistment, which could not be calculated because the ratings were constant, indicating complete interrater agreement on those factors. Table 4 shows interrater reliability for coding of the selected Tweets.

Results

A series of Pearson chi-square tests were conducted to determine the pattern of relationship between our series of categorical variables. Some of the chi-square cells frequencies

were less than five, violating the sample size assumption of the chi-square test. Because of this, a Yate's correction test was conducted, and showed no discernable difference in direction, magnitude, or significance values. All the statistics for the relationships between our Dependent Variables and Independent Variables can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Chi-Square Statistics for Comparison of Twitter and Dabiq

Variables	<i>Dabiq n(%)</i>			<i>Twitter n(%)</i>			<i>N</i>	χ^2
	Absent	Present		Absent	Present			
Allah Mentioned	3 (4%)	71 (96%)		40 (71%)	16 (29%)		130	65.37**
Religiosity	12 (16%)	62 (84%)		27 (48%)	29 (52%)		130	15.54**
Time Pressure	55 (74%)	19 (26%)		51 (91%)	5 (9%)		130	5.94*
Social ID	18 (24%)	56 (76%)		12 (21%)	44 (79%)		130	.15
Isolation	64 (89%)	8 (11%)		56 (100%)	0 (0%)		128	6.64*
Ideology	17 (23%)	57 (77%)		12 (21%)	44 (79%)		130	.04
Enlistment	54 (73%)	20 (27%)		56 (100%)	0 (0%)		130	17.89**
Allah Formality ¹	Formal	Informal	Both	Formal	Informal	Both		
	26 (37%)	7 (9%)	38 (54%)	11 (65%)	6 (35%)	0 (0%)	88	17.68**

* Significant at the level of <.05

** Significant at the level of <.005

¹Only valid for Allah Formality, where options are: Both, Formal, and Informal. Absent and Present titles are not used in this row.

Dabiq. Religiosity was a large part of the columns in the *Dabiq*. Coding found religious¹ messages in 62 columns (83.3%). Lastly, we looked at whether or not there was a clear push for enlistment in each column. Of the 13 issues examined, we found that 54 columns (73%) had a clear targeted message for recruitment. The presence of time pressure, social identity, isolation, and ideology was assessed in each column. Any single column could have any combination of these constructs. Findings showed 20 columns (27%) that included time pressure messages, 56 columns (75.7%) with messages targeted at social identity, 8 columns (11.1%) containing isolation-driven messages, and 57 columns (77%) with ideological messages. There was also no uniformity in the number of column types present in each issue. This variation in the column type may be explained by key events in their timeline, presented in Figure 2.

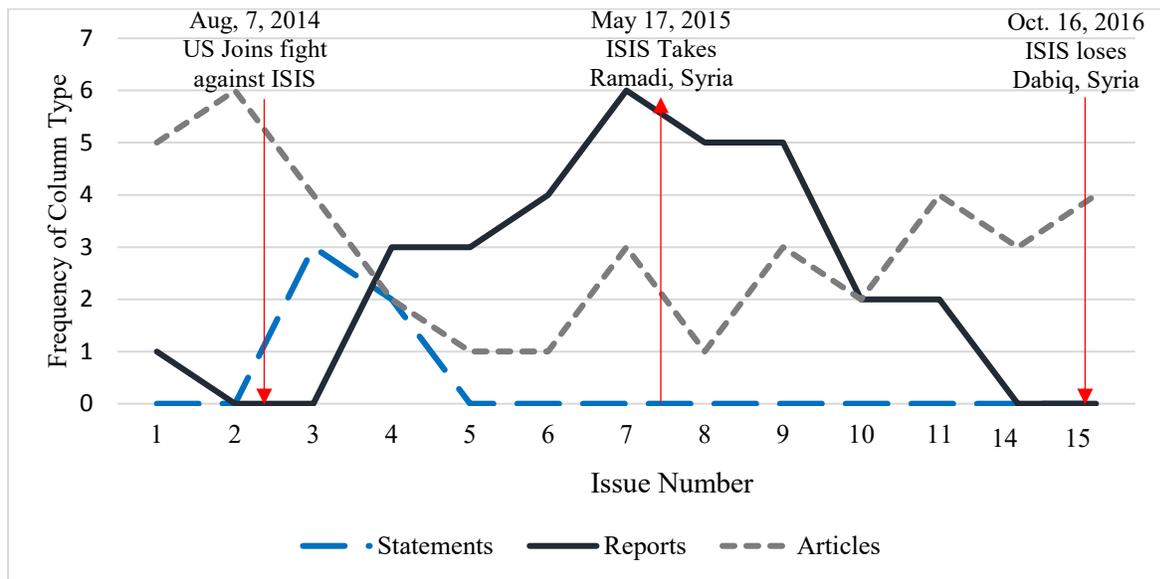


Figure 2. Columns present by issue of the *Dabiq*, with events from Appendix A.

¹ Religious messages excluded whether Allah was mentioned, as this did not indicate religiosity of the columns content, rather it was more of a formality.

Twitter. Next, the content of the tweets was examined. Any single tweet could have any combination of the following constructs. First, Religiosity of the messages was coded to determine whether religion¹ (i.e. scripture), recruitment, or isolation played a role in the content of tweets. Findings indicate that Religiosity was a part of 26 tweets (49.1%), and none of them had a clear message that pushed for recruitment or messages enforcing isolation. Following that, time pressure, social identity, and ideology were coded for each tweet. Findings indicate that time pressure messages occurred in five columns (9.4%), whereas the vast majority ($n = 48$, 90.6%) of tweets made no mention of time pressure concepts. Social identity, particularly relating to messages of intergroup biases, were present in 43 tweets (81.1%). Ideological messages were present in 41 (77.4%) tweets.

Hypothesis 1. The first hypothesis stated that the *Dabiq* would be targeted more towards individuals further down the stages of radicalization compared to Twitter, in the form of a higher amount of social identity driven content. Contrary to our first hypothesis, there was no statistical difference between the channels of propaganda in their focus on social identity, $\chi^2(1) = .15$, $p = .834$.

Hypothesis 2. The second hypothesis stated that columns in the *Dabiq* would have more motivational messages, whereas tweets would have more idealistic and personal posts. Partially confirming our second hypothesis, the issues of the *Dabiq* included significantly more emphasis on time pressure (Need for Cognitive Closure driven appeals) compared to tweets, $\chi^2(1) = 5.94$, $p = .02$. However, the *Dabiq* also presented significantly more appeals for enlistment compared to Twitter [$\chi^2(1) = 17.89$, $p < .0005$], which is contrary to the second half our second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3. Our last hypothesis stated that *Dabiq* articles will have more religious content compared to Twitter posts. Allah was mentioned significantly less in tweets, as

compared to the issues of the *Dabiq* which mentioned Allah more frequently, $\chi^2(1) = 65.37$, $p < .0005$. Also, the *Dabiq* focused far more on religious messages, whereas Twitter had a more even split between non-religious and religious rhetoric, $\chi^2(1) = 15.54$, $p < .0005$. These findings confirm our third hypothesis, that the printed channel (the *Dabiq*) contains more religiously oriented content than the online channel (Twitter).

Findings both supported and contradicted the empirically driven hypotheses in the current study. The different channels of propaganda (the *Dabiq* and Twitter) did not differ in their social identity driven content. It seemed that those sending messages through the different channels used social identity appeals, such as referring to outgroup members as Kuffar and ingroup members as brothers, similarly. Secondly, not only did the *Dabiq* contain more emphasis on time pressure, but it also contained more overt pushes for recruitment. This was contradictory to our hypotheses, suggesting that the *Dabiq* might have targeted those less connected to the terrorist organization and those individuals who might be compelled to join the organization. Lastly, results confirmed that the *Dabiq* relied far more on religious content than tweets. This suggests that these messages were targeted to a devoted group of followers, or at least to those who would be familiar with or identify with these religious messages.

Discussion

Research in the field of radicalization and countering violent extremism is growing, and there is a trajectory towards the interest of terrorist propaganda by violent extremist groups. To date, this interest has focused in observing only one of two distinct channels of propaganda, printed propaganda material and social media posts. Research of the content of different channels has yet to compare the differences and similarities of messages across channels. The current study was an attempt to compare these two channels to determine whether messages within these

two channels differed in their targeted messages. We found interesting results that challenged previously held conceptions of the differences between these channels. The *Dabiq* and Twitter were more similar than we originally hypothesized.

We hypothesized that the *Dabiq* would be targeted more towards individuals further down the stages of radicalization compared to Twitter, which would serve as an introduction to the ideology (Winter, 2015a). This was, in part, because the *Dabiq* was not as easy to access, and the journal itself was not as well-known as Twitter. Also, the *Dabiq* was terminated and replaced by *Rumiyah* (translation: Rome) in September, 2016, likely due to the fall of the ISIS held area of Dabiq, Syria. This change in title could have further restricted access to longer, narrative-style appeals.

The first hypothesis sought to determine if the *Dabiq* would present stronger social identity messages compared to Twitter. Statistics revealed that this was not the case, revealing no statistical difference in identity messages between both channels. This appears to be a direct result of the timeline of the issues of the *Dabiq*, as they relate to key tactical victories and losses. As shown in Appendix A, the first 11 issues of the *Dabiq* were released in periods when ISIS was gaining ground and capturing strategic locations in Syria. The strategic position of ISIS changed, however, before the release of Issue 12, when ISIS began losing previously-held territory, due in large part to Turkish and Free Syrian Army operations as well as Russian and U.S. Airstrikes (Glenn, 2016). The entitativity of ISIS began to be challenged with these losses, likely leading to uncertainty among its members. Research in political polarization shows that when the entitativity of a group changes, it can cause members to either flee, change the direction of the group, or even attempt to regain normality (Forgas, Fiedler, & Crano, 2015).

This shift in entitativity might have resulted in a reduction of identity-based messages over time in the *Dabiq*.

Our second hypothesis stated that columns in the *Dabiq* would have more motivational messages, whereas tweets on Twitter will have more idealistic and personal posts. Twitter posts tend to focus more on idealistic messages, pushing an idea of a Utopia (Winter, 2015a). This Utopian ideal translates to a push for enlistment. Conversely, the *Dabiq* used stories and apocalyptic messages specifically designed to reinforce an urgency to enlist (Ingram, 2016). The messages in both channels were similar, encouraging individuals to join the Caliphate; however, the channels differed in the methods employed to obtain recruits. Results revealed that the *Dabiq* contained significantly more time pressure messages as compared to the Twitter. Contrary to our hypothesis, however, the *Dabiq* also contained significantly more explicit pushes for enlistment compared to Twitter. As ISIS lost ground throughout the first half of 2016 (see Appendix A), they began to spread stronger messages of time pressure as a plea for recruitment. As with the first hypothesis, this may have been a result of a widespread uncertainty among ISIS's members. In an attempt to steer their members back to normality, ISIS materials encouraged enlistment and focused on time pressure within a journal that was primarily used by active members (Forgas, et al., 2015).

Our last hypothesis was that *Dabiq* articles would have more religious content compared to Twitter posts. Previous research has shown that the *Dabiq* focused more on theology (Greene, 2015), whereas Twitter posts tend to steer clear of blatant religiosity (Bodine-Baron, et al. 2016). Our findings supported our hypothesis, finding that Allah was mentioned significantly more in the issues of the *Dabiq* compared to tweets. In support of this finding, results also showed that the *Dabiq* contained significantly more religious messages compared to Twitter. These results

support previous research showing that the *Dabiq* focuses on justification for action using theology. Social media messages merely acted as a light introduction to potential recruits, only using enough religiosity to create entitativity (Bodine-Baron, et al. 2016).

Limitations

Dabiq. There were several limitations to consider when using the *Dabiq*. First, it was published in 4 languages, including English and Arabic. For this study, the researchers only used the English version; therefore, English coders might have missed subtleties contained within the Arabic language in Arabic versions of the *Dabiq*. Arabic readers could potentially have found different results based on this deeper level of understanding of the language. Second, the *Dabiq* is jargon-heavy, including many references to language from the Qur'an. Although the researchers in the current study did their best to define this language, someone who is comfortable with the Qur'an may have also found different results, particularly in terms of religiosity. Third, the *Dabiq* was terminated. It is unclear why this happened, but it may have coincided with the downfall of Dabiq, the city, as the capital of ISIS (Withnall, 2016). Because of its termination, it is unclear that future issues would be any different than the 13 that were analyzed, or the journal that replaced it, titled *Rumiyah*, would have had a different focus. It is clear, however, that there would be some variation based on real world events (see Figure 2 as a reference).

Twitter. Researchers and security personnel alike have increased their focus on Twitter and other social media channels because the amount of ISIS members and sympathizers who use their platform (Magdy et al., 2015). As the number of ISIS affiliates grew on Twitter, so did the pressure to remove them. Business leaders of Twitter used a variety of methods to address the issue of online radicalization leading to violence, but the strategy that seems most effective is the

Twitter community itself. Other users on Twitter have been able to effectively disturb the distribution of ISIS material by either using their hashtags (called #OpISIS), or by hunting and reporting the accounts (#Anon). The reports by members of the Twitter community have caused Twitter employees to routinely suspend suspected profiles. Although the removal of tweets supporting violent groups is a positive sign, the deletion of these profiles has impacted research into online recruitment. For instance, searching the hashtags used in Magdy et al. (2015) will result in blank searches. Although removing these tweets is a major step forward in ending ISIS's Virtual Caliphate, it has proven difficult for the researchers in the current study to identify a substantial amount of confirmed ISIS tweets.

Another potential confound between the different channels of the *Dabiq* and Twitter is that, at the time of data collection, Twitter was restricting the author's word count to 140 characters. This restriction does not exist in the *Dabiq* and may have caused the difference in content. If an individual is restricted to character count, they might be more likely to focus on the key points of their message, radicalization. Infusing tweets with religiosity or other types of appeals would limit the types of recruitment messages that a poster could make. The *Dabiq* was unrestricted, allowing for the authors to expand and add multiple concepts to a single column.

Recommendations

ISIS no longer has an influential presence on Twitter, and the platform has begun a campaign to eliminate all extremist accounts. The lack of security on publically accessible social media networks for radicals has led them to expand to other platforms. These new platforms are virtual treasure troves of information about terrorist groups and their recruiting methods. Future researchers will benefit from expanding their analyses of social media radicalization to more burgeoning platforms, such as Telegram (Berger & Perez, 2016). Telegram began as a backup

for Twitter, but became the main platform for ISIS due to the creation of “Channels” (similar to Facebook Groups). These Channels allowed the spread of ISIS propaganda to an unlimited number of followers (Berger, et al. 2016). In order to gain even wider diffusion, ISIS created Telegram Channels in multiple languages, using female fighters to administrate the accounts (Yayla & Speckhard, 2017). Telegram also became an application to allow ISIS engineers and scientists to communicate about their projects in designated Channels (Almohammad & Speckhard, 2017). These features make Telegram the perfect home for extremists who seek to conceal their activities and still maintain widespread propaganda dispersal.

Researchers will also benefit from pursuing research into newer printed publications. The *Dabiq* was terminated in mid-2016, so its content is not relevant or accurate to their current geopolitical situation. ISIS had several journals, and each was terminated and replaced. The differences between these journals remain unclear, but the timing of each publication is important. Many terrorist organizations release their own journals, such as the Al-Qaeda journal *Inspire*. It is beneficial to use current materials from groups that are active at the time of data collection (Reed & Ingram, 2017). The current study began at the height of ISIS’s *Dabiq*, and finished shortly after it was terminated. Researchers should find the most recent publications in order to gain the most accurate view of a particular organization, at a particular point in time. For instance, Twitter was at its peak popularity during the publication of *Dabiq*, so it would be inappropriate to use Twitter as a comparison group for a later published journal, like ISIS’s *Rumiyah*.

Implications

Multinational terrorist networks such as ISIS pose a unique threat to the safety and security of sovereign countries worldwide. The current project attempted understand ISIS

recruitment through an investigation of how their messages changed across distribution channels. The current study showed that messages in support of ISIS seem to harbor implicit rather than explicit recruitment appeals. The true intent of a particular message may be tempered to make it more palatable to outsiders (Borum, 2011; Magdy, et al., 2015; Winter, 2015a). In the current study, we observed that Twitter appeals contained less explicitly religious content than the *Dabiq* columns. Social media platforms such as Twitter likely are used to introduce individuals to the ideology of ISIS. The *Dabiq*, and similar formal media channels, seemed to appeal to a more targeted, informed audience.

Through a variety of media publications, ISIS fills the psychological needs of their media consumers. Borum (2011) found that ISIS offers a sense of belonging to individuals who are feeling disconnected from society. ISIS achieved this by creating a sense of connectedness, using the idea of a religious group identity. For individuals who are isolated or outcasts, this group identity would promise a well-established caliphate, a place for like-minded individuals to thrive. These messages to followers are not unitary in their focus, however, as the *Dabiq* provided diverse messages to reach a diverse audience.

This study confirmed that there is no “one size fits all” solution, where one could create a Twitter account and offer strength to vulnerable people. This was clearly seen when the U.S. State Department created a social media campaign and Twitter profile called “Think Again, Turn Away.” This program was widely regarded as a failure, as it oversimplified the approach to countering violent extremism (Katz, 2014). The current study showed that this issue is a complex one, and the oversimplification of a counter approach would likely lead to a failed program.

Past studies have offered multi-faceted solutions to the complex issue of online extremist recruitment, to avoid the pitfall of simplicity. Sorenson (2014) suggested that to combat the

message of ISIS, you must use Islam. ISIS continually uses Islamic teachings to support their actions, so the counter narrative should also include Islamic teachings. Tucker (2016) supported this idea, showing that theologically literate Muslims are the strongest opposition to ISIS. These Muslims are wise to false interpretations that are disseminated to the less-informed recruits.

To apply these principles, policy makers need to first understand how the terrorist's online recruitment machine is organized. This study showed that the *Dabiq* contained much more religiously oriented messages than Twitter. Twitter served as an introduction to the ideology whereas the *Dabiq* provided more in-depth, religious explanations for recruitment. Adding religious references to counterterrorism social media posts could serve as an inoculation (McGuire, 1964) to the messages that recruits will receive later through more formal channels like the *Dabiq*. This concept is called "forewarned and forearmed," where an introductory message warns the listener about the impending persuasive message, allowing the listener to put up a guard against it. These forewarning messages lead to persuasive resistance if the forewarning message appeals to the need of the receiver (i.e., the recruit) to avoid being duped by extreme messages (Wood & Quinn, 2003). A social media message that points out flaws of the religious appeals of ISIS supporters with a caution not to be fooled by such messages, for example, especially if they come from a credible source (Braddock & Morrison, 2018), could serve as effective countermeasures to reduce the persuasive religious appeals that will come later in the recruitment process through more official extremist group channels.

Conclusion

During the initial stages of this study, ISIS was at its peak. Now that ISIS's strength is depleting, other groups will likely rise to take their place; much like the Lernaean Hydra in Greek mythology. As other groups, like Al-Qaeda, are resurging in the Islamic State's shadow,

policy makers need to focus on new ways to limit recruitment. The goal of this research was to better understand the threat that faces Western Civilization. Regardless of the title or ideology of the next terrorist group, the methods they use will likely be improved from the previous group. The current study adds to a growing body of research aimed at preventing groups like ISIS from gaining membership. If researchers, policy makers, and government agencies can understand the structure and channels of radical appeals made by terrorist organizations, perhaps they can create effective, individualized, counter appeals. Whether it is a hard copy or a hashtag, researchers and security professionals must continue to monitor, study, and interpret recruitment appeals by extremist groups. Terrorism is now a daily reality, and as radical terrorist groups adapt and change to practical realities, so must our ways of understanding them.

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Appendix A

Timeline of Notable ISIS Events as they relate to Dabiq Issue Releases

Year	ISIS Critical Event	Dabiq Issue
2014	June 29: ISIS announces the establishment of a Caliphate and rebrands itself as the “Islamic State.”	<i>Dabiq</i> Issue 1, July 5 th , 2014 <i>Dabiq</i> Issue 2, July 27 th , 2014
	Aug. 7: President Obama announces the beginning of air strikes against ISIS in Iraq to defend Yazidi citizens stranded in Sinjar.	<i>Dabiq</i> Issue 3, September 10 th , 2014
	Sept. 23: The United States launches its first air strikes against ISIS in Syria.	<i>Dabiq</i> Issue 4, October 11 th , 2014
	Oct. 15: The Pentagon names the campaign against ISIS “Operation Inherent Resolve.”	<i>Dabiq</i> Issue 5, November 21 st , 2014 <i>Dabiq</i> Issue 6, December 29 th , 2014
	2015 Jan. 26: Kurdish fighters, with the help of U.S. and Coalition airstrikes, force out ISIS militants from the Syrian border town of Kobani after a four-month battle.	<i>Dabiq</i> Issue 7, February 12 th , 2015 <i>Dabiq</i> Issue 8, March 30 th , 2015
2015	May 17: ISIS take overs Ramadi, Iraq. May 20: ISIS seizes the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra. May 21: ISIS militants take full control of Sirte, Libya – Muammar Qaddafi's hometown.	<i>Dabiq</i> Issue 9, May 21 st , 2015 <i>Dabiq</i> Issue 10, July 13 th , 2015 <i>Dabiq</i> Issue 11, September 9 th , 2015
	Sept. 30: Russia begins airstrikes in Syria. It claims to target ISIS, but U.S. officials allege that many of the strikes target civilians and Western-backed rebel groups.	

	<i>Dabiq</i> Issue 12, November 18 th , 2015
Dec. 10: U.S. officials announce that airstrikes killed ISIS finance minister Abu Saleh and two other senior leaders in Tal Afar, Iraq.	
Dec. 27: Iraqi military forces seize Ramadi from ISIS.	
2016	<i>Dabiq</i> Issue 13, January 19 th , 2016
April 11: Iraqi forces seize the town of Hit, which had been under ISIS control since October 2014. The same day, ISIS recaptured Rai, a Syrian town on the Turkish border, from the Free Syrian Army.	
	<i>Dabiq</i> Issue 14, April 13 th , 2016
May 19: Iraqi forces retake the western town of Rutbah.	
June 26: The Iraqi army retakes Fallujah from ISIS.	
	<i>Dabiq</i> Last Issue, 15, July 31 st , 2016
August 24: Turkish Military began offensive against Dabiq, Syria.	
	<i>Dabiq</i> is terminated and replaced by <i>Rumiyah</i> Issue 1, September 3 rd , 2016
October 16: ISIS officially loses prophesied stronghold of Dabiq, Syria.	
