Mounting a Facebook Brand Awareness and Safety Ad Campaign to *Break the ISIS Brand* in Iraq

by Anne Speckhard, Ardian Shajkovci, Claire Wooster and Neima Izadi

Abstract

This article reports on the International Center for Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE's) most recent Facebook ad campaign aimed at raising awareness about the realities of living under ISIS and protecting vulnerable potential recruits from considering joining. During the course of 24 days in December of 2017, ICSVE researchers mounted the campaign on Facebook using a counter-narrative video produced by ICSVE. The Facebook ad campaign targeted Iraq, where Facebook is the most widely used social media platform, with ISIS also driving powerful recruiting campaigns on Facebook and enticing youth into joining. The results were promising in terms of driving engagement with our counternarrative video materials, leading close to 1.7 million views and hundreds of specific comments related to both our video content and ISIS in general. In terms of policy implications, in addition to raising awareness about the dangers of joining ISIS and our Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter Narrative Project, the campaign served as an important platform to challenge extremist narratives as well as channel doubt, frustration, and anger into positive exchange of ideas and participation.

Keywords: Counter narrative, radicalization, Internet, violent extremism online, Islamic State, ISIS / ISIL, Facebook

Introduction

In 2014, the so-called Islamic State militants poured over the Syrian border into Iraq, ultimately taking control of up to one third of the country. Iraqi citizens living under ISIS control, including those outside of ISIS territory, were met with a barrage of both in person and over the Internet recruiting messages. ISIS blanketed the Internet with videos of its newly declared "Caliphate" and made use of the immediate feedback mechanisms of social media, allowing them to contact and swarm in on vulnerable persons who shared, retweeted, or otherwise endorsed their products. ISIS is credited with attracting over 30,000 recruits from over 100 countries to the conflict zones in Iraq and Syria, at times attracting entire families to come live under their Caliphate.

Much of the recruiting in Iraqi territory controlled by ISIS was carried out in mosques and face-to-face encounters. These were areas where local Iraqis often lost their abilities to earn a livelihood and survive without being co-opted into the group. Likewise, at least in the beginning, ISIS cadres we have interviewed in Iraq for the ICSVE *Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter Narrative Project* (n=30 out of 78 globally) have stated that Islamic State militants made many promises to local Iraqis. They promised them dignity, justice, freedom and prosperity to the Sunni population of Iraq, which made joining, at least in the beginning, an attractive option.

While most ISIS recruiting inside ISIS-controlled territory occurred by face-to-face interactions, ISIS was also making full use of the Internet to demonstrate and propagate its messages, as well as to expand their reach beyond ISIS-controlled areas in Iraq. ISIS cadres (n=30) interviewed in Iraq for the ICSVE *Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter Narrative Project* spoke of watching ISIS-produced videos as well as reading about ISIS battles with the Iraqi security forces on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Moreover, some Iraqi ISIS cadres interviewed were recruited out of Baghdad, including other areas, with the initial outreach occurring via Internet recruitment. Thus, we have learned that even inside conflict zones Internet recruitment over Facebook and other social media platforms occurs, and also serves as important medium of communication to lure in new recruits.

As of June 2017, Iraq had fourteen million Internet users.[1] A 2015 statistical report on the share of Facebook users in Iraq showed that Facebook (see Figure 1) remains an extremely important social media communica-

tion platform, particularly to Iraqi youth between the ages of 16 and 34. In our sample of 78 interviews with ISIS cadres we also found Facebook to be especially popular among the 14-35 age group.

Figure 1: Preferred Social Media Platforms in Iraq
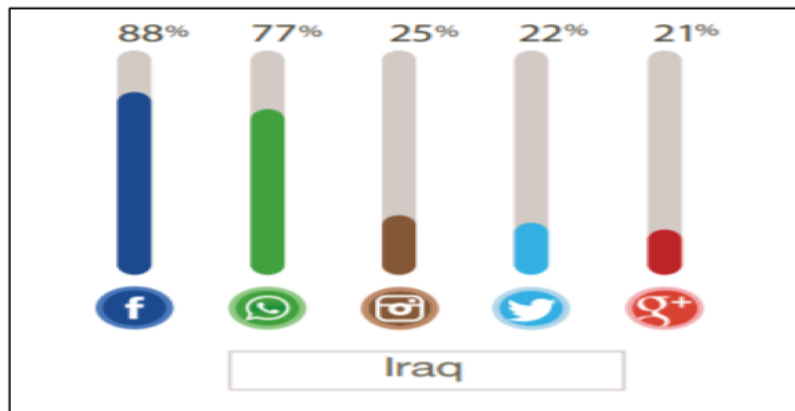
Source: Arab Social Media Report[2]

Even before the US-led coalition invasion of Iraq, ISIS recruiters were active on all the major social media platforms, including Facebook, and continue to be active to this day. While Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have instituted strict take-down policies in recent years, making it difficult to openly recruit on these platforms, such policies are slower in languages other than English, which makes detection and take-downs delayed somewhat. However, Islamic State militants continue to get around these policies by creating fleeting fake accounts that attract recruits on Facebook. It is through such accounts that they manage to quickly lure their new recruits off Facebook onto encrypted sites to further move them along the terrorist trajectory. More recently, ISIS militants and recruiters are also known to take advantage of Facebook's live streaming mechanisms by announcing when they will be live-streaming on encrypted sites such as Telegram. Such work-around makes it hard to detect terrorist recruiting activity until it is too late.

After almost four years of combat operations to drive ISIS (ISIL/Daesh) out of the territory it once held and controlled, Iraqi forces officially declared ISIS' defeat in December of last year. Yet, despite these significant territorial victories against ISIS, the security environment in Iraq remains volatile. The ongoing insecurity posed by ISIS sleeper cells in certain parts of the country and unfolding humanitarian crisis that followed the recapture of Mosul and Fallujah from ISIS remain problematic. There is serious worry among the intelligence community and political elites that ISIS, or similar groups, could reemerge. Political instability and public dissatisfaction with governance and grievances, both real and perceived, over widespread government corruption remain worrisome. These factors are also propagating discontent and spawning a dangerous climate in the country. Indeed, such environments serve as breeding grounds for terrorist organizations like ISIS to reemerge. The ISIS ideology and their dream of building a "Caliphate"—that would deliver dignity, significance, pure living, justice, prosperity and purpose for Sunni Muslims—remains virulent as terrorists position themselves as the antidote to Iraq's socio-political problems.

The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE) team have spent the last two years capturing ISIS defectors, returnees, ISIS cadre prisoner, and parents of ISIS fighters, most on video, in their *Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter Narratives Project* interviews. To date, they have conducted seventy-eight interviews, with thirty of these being of Iraqi ISIS cadres. Eighteen short counter-narrative video clips have thus far been produced from the longer videotaped interviews. The interviews are edited down to their most damaging, denouncing, and derisive content. The videos are used to fight against ISIS and its ideology. [3]

During December 2017, the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE) ran 19 ad campaigns on Facebook using one or two videos: (1) *Today is the Female Slave Market Day in ad-Dawlah* – a Syrian male, ISIS defector's account of the abuse of women by ISIS—and (2) *Promises of ISIS to Women* – a Belgian

female, ISIS defector's account of how she was lured to Syria from Europe. The campaigns targeted English, Arabic, Russian, Somali, and Albanian speakers from various countries around the world. This report concerns the Iraqi campaign, where Facebook is a prominently used social media platform. ISIS in Syria and Iraq has been especially active on Facebook. They resort to using powerful images and videos of the war in Iraq and Syria—glamorizing ISIS fighters and ISIS ideology—and serving as a virtual playground and echo chamber for ISIS-related extremist viewpoints.

The purpose of the online Facebook intervention in Iraq was to raise awareness of the futility of ISIS' promises of bringing about the desired utopian Caliphate and its failure to deliver any of its promises. This was to be accomplished using our *Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter Narrative* videos to drive online engagement among the citizens of Iraq over Facebook. The goal of the Facebook video ad campaign was to showcase the realities of belonging to ISIS and offer opportunities for those considering joining to reconsider their decisions. Given Facebook's strong presence and penetration in Iraq, especially among youth, and the fact that ISIS has previously made use of Facebook and may continue do so again in the future, ICSVE researchers decided that mounting an awareness campaign on Facebook using counter narratives of ISIS insiders denouncing the group would be a protective and preventative action in the fight against ISIS and violent extremism.

Campaign Type and Methodology

Counter narratives serve as important communication strategies to counter and prevent radicalization and violent extremism. Alternative narratives, counter-narratives (sometimes called direct counternarratives), and government strategic communications comprise the three most widely used counter narrative approaches with respect to Countering Violent Extremism (CVE).[4] Alternative narratives emphasize positive stories about democratic values, tolerance, and freedom, among others,[5] while government strategic communication campaigns are aimed at clarifying government policies, stances, or actions towards an issue. They also include public safety and awareness activities. Direct counter-narratives, which characterize the work of our organization, are used to target and discredit terrorist groups and their ideologies by deconstructing and demystifying terrorists' messages to demonstrate their lies, hypocrisy, and inconsistencies.[6] We firmly believe that the best counter-narratives are those coming from disillusioned insiders. They must not be labeled as counter-narratives, but instead appear to be in the ISIS video genre, so that those already engaging online with ISIS propaganda will be likely to also encounter our counter narratives and get a very different message. For that reason, we label our *Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter Narrative* videos with pro-ISIS or ambivalent names and illustrate them with ISIS generated footage. We also promote them with an ISIS- like thumbnail. Government strategic communications and alternative narratives can be particularly useful when used to inoculate innocents against terrorist recruitment but are unlikely to reach those already being seduced by terrorist ideologies and groups. This is partly because those already moving along the terrorist trajectory are already narrowing their focus to messaging only from terrorists and are already disenchanted with government narratives.[7]

The ICSVE awareness campaign ran for 24 days, specifically between December 7, 2017, and December 31, 2017. The purpose of the awareness campaign was to attempt to reach as many Iraqis as possible to drive engagement with our counternarratives. For this campaign, ICSVE ran one of its videos, *The Promises of ad Dawlah,* which features the testimony of a Belgian female ISIS defector who had taken her young son to live in ISIS territory. ICSVE's Facebook ad generated a total reach of 1,287,557, while also leading to 2,339,453 impressions and close to 1.7 million video views, which are further discussed in the ensuing sections.

At the campaign level, we opted for an awareness campaign, as we know that ISIS has been "selling" itself as a group legitimizing violence as a means of reaching a utopian society run by what they claim to be Islamic ideals. Our ISIS insiders know and share that the reality is far different from what ISIS claims. Our insider testimonies can make those vulnerable to the ISIS message aware, so that, in the words of the U.S. State Department recently launched anti-ISIS campaign, they have a chance to "think again and turn away."

Historically speaking, public awareness campaigns have been initiated to raise awareness about domestic abuse, alcohol abuse, depression, gender-based violence, and HIV prevention—to name just a few.[8] They are

used for several reasons. First, they serve to either promote a cause or raise an awareness or knowledge about a certain issue. Secondly, they are strategically tailored to reach and target a specific audience and to deliver a message that is specific, unique, and pertinent to that group. Thirdly, they are powerful if delivered in a format and language that is appealing and understood by the target audience. Lastly, public awareness campaigns are especially useful if the goal is early detection and intervention, meaning if the focus is to explain both what can gained by changing a specific behavior and what can be lost by not doing so.[9] Awareness campaigns differ from other campaigns (e.g. conversions) in that they focus on the question of "How can we reach the most target users and engage them with our message," versus driving them to a website or to purchase something.[10]

Strictly speaking in the context of CVE, awareness campaigns (i.e. community, youth, Internet-based, etc.) are crucial to understanding how individuals may become radicalized and mobilized to violence. For instance, as a Department of State led initiative, Peer2Peer (P2P) awareness campaign serves as a platform to raise awareness about violent extremism while also offering an outlet for discussion and exchange of ideas towards collective problem-solving in addressing violent extremism.[11] Similar awareness campaigns continue to be held worldwide among populations deemed vulnerable to recruitment into violent extremism. Our hope was that increased awareness about the dangers of joining ISIS and similar terrorist groups would lead to changes in attitude that we would be able to measure in comments, as well as to changes in offline, real world behaviors, which are beyond our ability to measure using Facebook data alone.

Several important considerations have influenced our decision to initiate an awareness campaign. In line with research on recruitment into violent extremism and terrorism, we considered two important factors: 1) The ability and potential for our target audience (Iraqis) to come into online contact with and be influenced by terrorist groups like ISIS and 2) the level of exposure to environments that are supportive of terrorist ideologies and facilitate recruitment into terrorist organizations.[12] Iraq fits well in both of the categories. Secondly, given different stages in which individuals come to embrace extremist content online—from simple online search to seduction to persuasion to engaging in violence, as we have come to learn in our *Breaking the ISIS Brand* interviews, including in Iraq—we considered the importance of targeting vulnerable individuals at a particular stage in the process. In other words, compared to our recent Facebook studies focused on reaching audiences that were already highly supportive of ISIS ideology and engaged with ISIS material online (e.g. have progressed further in the grooming process),[13] consideration in this campaign was given to individuals ages 18-50 in Iraq who might be engaged with, or simply exposed to for the first time, extremist narratives online and who might continue down the path of sustained engagement and exposure to violent narratives propagated by terrorist groups like ISIS.

Similar to our findings in other regions of the world, this particular age group in Iraq is most active on the Internet and social media platforms. It is on such platforms that they are likely to develop and form their ideas. It is also on such platforms that they are more likely to become susceptible to violent ideologies and narratives, particularly in face of the upcoming elections and discontent currently brewing in Iraqi society. Lastly, although many among the targeted age group in this ad might not favor extremist narratives or succumb to such narratives, the campaign serves as an invaluable opportunity for such target groups to access resources—and to learn of these invaluable resources—that openly target terrorist groups like ISIS. They can also use them to educate and target those who might be vulnerable to such extremist narratives.

We chose demographic targeting based on location, age, and gender. We also attempted to narrow our audience by interest and behavior categories but did not find that possible in Arabic. We are still exploring if narrowing the focus using Facebook interest groups, as we have done in English language campaigns, is also possible on Facebook in Arabic.

Our target group comprised of individuals between the ages of 18-50. Our target areas in Iraq included: al Anbar Governorate, Basra Governorate, Muthanna Governorate, Babil Governorate, Baghdad Governorate, Dohuk Governorate, Diyala Governorate, Erbil Governorate, Nineveh Governorate, and Wasit Governorate.

Table 1: Video Views by Age Group

Ad Name	Age	10-Second Video Views	Video Watches at 25%	Video Watches at 50%	Video Watches at 75%	Video Watches at 95%	Video Watches at 100%
12-2017 Iraq Promises to Women	13-17	4	2	2			
	18-24	124,519	50,408	38,772	27,471	18,226	4,578
	25-34	127,308	52,639	41,572	30,252	21,251	6,414
	35-44	53,896	21,511	17,052	12,592	9,244	3,370
	45-54	18,313	6,951	5,434	4,169	3,228	1,448
	65+	0	0	0	0	0	0

Awareness metrics (i.e. reach, impressions, frequency, video views, video retention, etc.), engagement metrics (i.e. clicks, likes, shares, comments, etc.), and impact metrics (i.e. Indicators of behavioral changes, supportive of our ad comments, negative comments, etc.) were applied as quantitative measures to analyze the data.[14] Comments were also analyzed qualitatively to measure the impact of the awareness campaign.

Awareness Metrics

The content of our video ad in Iraq was shown to 1,287,557 individuals. This denotes the number of unique people targeted who had the content of our video ad enter their screen or newsfeed. A total of 2,339,453 impressions were generated, which indicates the number of times our video content ad was displayed, regardless of whether clicked or not. The demographic breakdown of impressions shows that our ads are generating impressions with the right target group in terms of demographics (See Table 2). Impression frequency of 1.82 indicates the average number of time each individual has seen our ad over the period of 27 days. The relatively low frequency rate suggests that we are not oversaturating our target audience with our ads.[15] This is a significant metric in terms of measuring the rate of exposure to our ad/project. In future interventions, we will exercise more control over the frequency of our ads (e.g. by limiting to max number of days running) to ensure that we do not overwhelm our target audience with ads, but instead use the metric to complement direct responses to our campaign ads (e.g. website clicks, conversion rates, etc.).

An advantage of looking at the frequency rate in the context of an awareness campaign—in this case administered over the course of 24 days—is that an increased frequency number would likely lead to greater recall, or the ability of our target audience to remember the product we are promoting (See Table 2). We plan to keep experimenting with audience sizes and frequency rates through either trying to increase to 3-5 impressions per persons over the course of a month-long campaign or reducing the size of our target audience with interest groups, which would likely also increase ad recall.

Table 2: Key Awareness Metrics

Ad Name	Results	Reach	Impressions	Frequency
12-2017 Iraq Promises to Women	126,400	1,287,557	2,339,453	1.81697

When broken down by age group, the data indicate a higher reach among the 18 to 44-year age group, with 25 to 34-year age group having the second highest reach. The 18 to 44-year age group also generated the highest number of impressions (See Table 3).

Table 3: Key Awareness Metrics by Age Group

Ad Name	Age	Results	Reach	Impressions	Frequency
12-2017 Iraq Promises to Women	13-17	1	0	22	0
	18-24	47,700	479,698	867,074	1.807541
	25-34	50,600	521,422	933,637	1.790559
	35-44	21,400	221,419	408,874	1.846608
	45-54	6,690	65,018	129,845	1.997062
	65+	0	0	1	0
		126,390 Estimated Ad Recall Lift (People)	1,287,557 People	2,339,453 Total	1.82 Per Person

Estimated Ad Recall Lift (People) rate is 126,400, which refers to the number of people in our target audience who are likely to remember the content of our ad within two days of viewing it. The metric is calculated based on "attention and the reach of a campaign being compared with historical data [not related to our campaign] about the correlation between attention and ad recall."[16] Estimated Ad Recall Lift Rate (calculated as Recall Lift (People)/Reach) is 9.8%. See Tables 4 and 5 for the breakdown of the two by age and gender, respectively.

Table 4: (Estimated Recall Lift (People) and Estimated Ad Recall Lift Rate by Age)

Ad Set Name	Age	Estimated Ad Recall Lift (People)	Estimated Ad Recall Lift Rate
Baghdad, Fallujah, Ramadi, Aski Mosul, Ninawa, Mosul - 18-50	13-17	1	0%
	18-24	47,700	9.94%
	25-34	50,600	9.70%
	35-44	21,400	9.66%
	45-54	6,690	10.29%
	65+		0%
		126,390 (total)	9.82% (average)

Table 5: (Estimated Recall Lift (People) and Estimated Ad Recall Lift Rate by Gender)

Ad Set Name	Gender	Estimated Ad Recall Lift (People)	Estimated Ad Recall Lift Rate
Baghdad, Fallujah, Ramadi, Aski Mosul, Ninawa, Mosul - 18-50	Female	23,200	10.18%
	Male	103,100	9.73%
	Unknown	60	11.72%
		126,360 Estimated Ad Recall Lift (People)	9.82% (average)

As shown in Tables 4 and 5, the metric appears to be relatively uniform across both gender and ages. As a metric used to measure relevance, and not quality, the recall lift metric is based on a Facebook-generated algorithm. As such, it is difficult to know with certainty who in our target audience will remember our content. The number also suggests the need to constantly evaluate and measure the impact of our content by analyzing who saw it, how people interacted with it, and so on, to further adjust our ads and optimize our awareness campaign. This metric also suggests that not all will remember our content after seeing it the first time, despite being aware of it. To strengthen the metric, and by extension our *Breaking the ISIS Brand* awareness campaign,

we will also continue to emphasize our brand personality (e.g. by emphasizing logo, etc.) and repeat and add additional videos in the *Breaking the ISIS Brand* to additional ad campaigns.

Demographic Data and Geographic Location

82 percent of the reached population is male and 18 percent female. A majority of them (78%) were between 18 and 34 years old (See Figure 2 and Table 6 for demographic and reach breakdown across two genders).
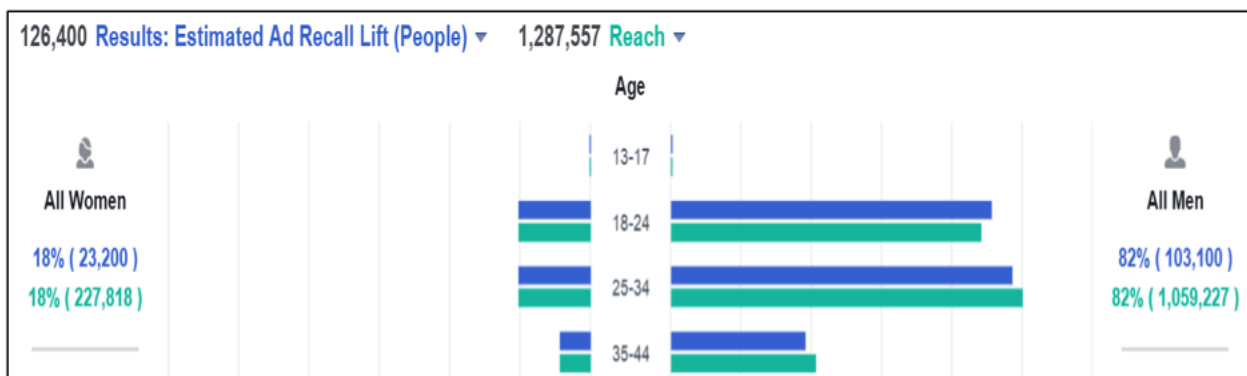
Figure 2: Demographic Breakdown

Table 6: Key Awareness Metrics Breakdown by Gender

Ad Name	Gender	Results	Reach	Impressions
12-2017 Iraq Promises to Women	Female	23,200	227,818	394,396
	Male	103,100	1,059,227	1,943,658
	Unknown	60	512	1,399
		126,360 Estimated Ad Recall Lift (People)	1,287,557 People (total)	2,339,453 Impressions (total)

In terms of geographic breakdown, our ad campaign targeted the following areas in Iraq: al Anbar Governorate, Basra Governorate, Muthanna Governorate, Babil Governorate, Baghdad Governorate, Dohuk Governorate, Diyala Governorate, Erbil Governorate, Nineveh Governorate, and Wasit Governorate. As depicted in Table 7, we captured a representative sample of both Shia (e.g. Basra Governorate) and Sunni (e.g. Anbar Governorate) dominated areas for the first ad campaign, although for the most part our main target audience would be Sunni (except in the case of Shia converts to ISIS). Baghdad Governorate has the highest reach (predominantly Shia) while no reach was recorded in Basra Governorate and Babil Governorate.

Table 7: Reach by Geographic Location

Ad Set Name	Region	Reach
Baghdad, Fallujah, Ramadi, Aski Mosul, Ninawa, Mosul - 18-50	Unknown	0
	Al Anbar Governorate	61,946
	Basra Governorate	0
	Muthanna Governorate	26,621
	Babil Governorate	0
	Baghdad Governorate	862,638
	Dohuk Governorate	5,120
	Diyala Governorate	5,887
	Erbil Governorate	161,265
	Nineveh Governorate	164,080
Results from 1 ad set		1,287,557

Video Views

The primary objective of our awareness campaign was to attempt to reach individuals who might be vulnerable to giving support or join terrorist groups like ISIS. In Table 8, we present data on how much of our video content was watched, as both percentage and seconds watched. As the table indicates, most views were recorded at 3-second intervals, though there are also a significant number of views at 25%, 50%, 75%, 95%, and 100 % video watches (117,552).

Table 8: Video Views Across Different Intervals

Ad Name	Gender	Video Percentage Watched	3-Second Video Views	10-Second Video Views	Video Watches at 25%	Video Watches at 50%	Video Watches at 75%	Video Watches at 95%	Video Watches at 100%
12-2017 Iraq Promises to Women	Female	9.56%	145,460	62,571	29,696	23,656	18,400	13,391	3,548
	Male	8.05%	635,484	261,256	101,706	79,094	56,025	38,516	12,249
	Unknown	10.10%	472	213	109	82	59	42	13
		Average: 8.34%	Total: 781,416	Total: 324,040	Total: 131,511	Total: 102,832	Total: 74,484	Total: 51,949	Total: 15,810

Several assumptions can be made about the observed data. Firstly, views include both videos that play due to an auto-play or due to the viewer actively clicking on them. In practice, given that Facebook videos may play automatically, coupled with the fact that Facebook counts as a view any video watched for 3 seconds or more, any passive non-watching would be counted as a view.[17] As shown in Table 9, however, there is a total of 117,552 clicked-to-play recordings shared among 25%, 50%, 75%, 95%, and 100% recorded video watches. Note that % watched indicates one or more watched videos, meaning those who watched the full length of the video and those who skipped to the end of the video.

Table 9: Video Views Auto-played vs. Clicked-to-play

Ad Set Name	Video View Type	3-Second Video Views	10-Second Video Views	30-Second Video Views	Video Watches at 25%	Video Watches at 50%	Video Watches at 75%	Video Watches at 95%	Video Watches at 100%
Baghdad Fallujah, Ramadi, Aski Mosul, Ninawa, Mosul - 18-50	All Impressions	781,416	324,040	186,341	131,511	102,832	74,484	51,949	15,810
	Auto-Played	619,396	232,129	128,947	90,316	70,633	51,041	35,955	11,089
	Clicked-To-Play	162,020	91,911	57,394	41,195	32,199	23,443	15,994	4,721

As the data also suggest, the difference between almost 1.7 million video views and the 266, 857 "clicks- to-play" (at 3- sec, 10- sec, 30- sec, 25%, 50%, 75 %, and 100 %) are due to auto-play feature. However, it would be wrong to assume that all auto-play videos were unintentional. Also, it is not uncommon for a person on a computer to watch the whole video posted on their screen while it is silent, although this is only likely to be powerful if the video is subtitled, which ours was not. This fact highlights that our future ads will make use of subtitled videos, even though the speaker is in Arabic, to capture those who might watch on auto-play. Secondly, there are approximately 1.7 million views vs. a 1.3 million reach. This could be explained by the fact that views may include multiple views from the same person. For example, one can watch a video on their mobile device and then later watch it on a desktop. This will count as one reach and 2 views.

Video percentage rate for auto-play was 6.98 % while for click-to-play 17.95 %. The video average watch time for females was 19, while for men 16, calculated as the video total watch time/total number of video plays (this includes replays). That the entire video was not watched highlights the usefulness of making shortened versions of the videos for complementary ads, as some will only watch very short videos and may click through a short version once hooked to watch the longer version.[18]

These data represent a way of measuring our campaign awareness, including or audience growth. In the future, given that videos on Facebook often play automatically, it would be also useful to generate a more efficient strategy for measuring these effects. While our counternarrative videos placed on Facebook vary anywhere between 2-3 minutes in length, a majority of our audience spent significantly less time watching them. This may also indicate the need to try a shortened version of our video materials. We will also have to closely follow our viewer retention rate and mark important points where they start dropping off.

Facebook Ad Access

Breakdown under Placement category was used to measure whether our counter-narratives placed better on a mobile device or desktop. As indicated in Table 10, Android Smartphone was the most used device to access our ad. Android Smartphone was followed by iPhone. This data is crucial to further adjust our targeting efforts in terms of device and platform used.

Table 10: Counternarrative Placement Mobile vs. Desktop

Ad Set Name	Platform	Impression Device	Reach
Baghdad, Fallujah, Ramadi, Aski Mosul, Ninawa, Mosul - 18-50	Facebook	Other	768
	Facebook	Desktop	5,375
	Facebook	iPhone	272,614
	Facebook	iPad	1,280
	Facebook	Android Smartphone	994,721
	Facebook	Android Tablet	18,430
	Facebook	iPod	0
			1,293,557 people

Engagement Metrics

In the previous section we presented relevant metrics related to our video views. Awareness and engagement metrics, such as viewer retention rate (% watched) and viewer drop off rates, are helpful in further adjusting our awareness campaign. While the previous section served to mostly explain quantitative data related to our campaign, engagement metrics covered in this section offer a clearer indication as to *if* and *how* our Facebook ad resonated with our audience.

The Facebook ad was responsible for 787,743 ICSVE page engagements, including 700 new ICSVE page likes. In addition to our directly targeted audience, 121,928 people came across the ad by "word-of-mouth" (i.e. the

ad came up in their news feed as something a friend commented on/reacted to/shared, etc.).

Of those 121,928, 64% watched or interacted with the ad. This means our video was seen by near-ly 80,000 people simply thanks to the engagement of our initial viewers. Also, there were a total of:

- 338 shares
- 303 original comments, 35 replies
- 4,991 reactions
- 4,500 likes
- 195 love reactions
- 63 wow reactions
- 45 sad reactions
- 31 haha reactions
- 27 angry reactions

Several key points can be deduced from such data. As the qualitative responses (e.g. comments) in the last section of the paper also suggest, the Facebook ad campaign has led to a number of emotional responses to our video content. That being said, we must be careful not to attribute certain observed behaviors online (e.g page likes) as necessarily an indication of supportive behavior in relation to our campaign ad, as some could have also been motivated by curiosity, morbid infatuation, or a number of other factors.

Our Facebook ad generated a relevance score of 8, as calculated on a 1-10 scale. The higher the relevance score, the better in terms of how our audience is responding to our ad. According to Facebook, "a relevance score is calculated based on the positive and negative feedback we expect an ad to receive from its target audience."[19] In other words, it implies actual feedback and expected feedback. It is calculated based on a number of factors, such as the positive vs. negative feedback it is expected to receive. For instance, video views, shares, and likes constitute positive indicators, whereas the number of times our ad is hidden, or someone clicks "I don't want to see this" on our ad, represent negative indicators. Before a relevance score is generated, our ad must have been served or shown 500 times (i.e. 500 impressions are received). The relevance score is especially important to better identify our target audiences and use it for our campaign optimization. We must be careful with the interpretation of relevance score, as it is used to measure *relevance* of our Facebook ad campaign and not the *quality* of our campaign. It is generated based on interaction and interest in our ad. However, the metric is use-ful in discerning the extent to which our target audience is considering our ad and engaging with our material.

Positive feedback and negative feedback were both reportedly "high" (out of the options "low," "medium," or "high"). This means a lot of people were estimated to interact with our Iraq-targeted video, but a lot of people also chose *not* to view it. This is typical of all ICSVE ads, especially those that receive higher relevance scores of 8, 9, or 10. It is presumably due to the nature of our polarizing and traumatic subject matter, which will inevita-bly make many people engage and react, and many turn away, no matter where or how the topic presents itself. While the relevance score is even higher for other ICSVE ads, the Iraqi ad had the greatest success in terms of reaching the most people and therefore generating the most actions taken (note that actions taken measure people and not the number of actions).

While we will continue to work towards increasing or maintaining high relevance scores, we will also reevalu-ate the relevance score based on how well our Facebook ad campaign is meeting our current objective of raising awareness. Put differently, ad campaigns work just fine even with relatively low relevance scores as long as they meet expected campaign objectives, which, in our case, is raising awareness.

The following section contains a qualitative analysis of comments and discussions generated by our ad. We in-terpret and analyze our audience's comments and discussions related to our video and campaign. We also look at the possible changes in online behavior.

Qualitative Impact Analysis

There were a total of 338 comments. Although, not intentionally targeted, most of the Iraqi responses to the ad appear to be Shia, as indicated by many in-comment references to Ali ibn Abi Talib (the cousin and the son-in-law of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, regarded by Shia Muslims as the rightful immediate successor to the prophet). These comments were translated from Arabic to English by an ICSVE translator (as opposed to Facebook's online translation). Generally speaking, comments fell under two main categories: comments about the defector and comments about ISIS. Smaller trends presented themselves under each category.

Comments about the Defector featured in the Counter Narrative Video

The top trends among those who commented were simply remarks of astonishment at, or insult to, the Belgian female ISIS defector (Laura Passoni) featured in the video for having joined ISIS. There were also comments threatening or wishing death upon her. Additionally, most commenters expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that the defector's ISIS cadre husband only received a 4-year prison sentence. This was seen as problematic given that captured and convicted ISIS fighters in Iraq for the most part receive death sentences.

Below are some examples:

> *"She left safety and all the good things in her country and came here looking for religion with Isis??!!"*
>
> *"4 years of prison for an Isis member? Are you insane?"*
>
> *"I swear to Allah if I grabbed you, even if in Belgium, I will put a bullet in your head because you guys have destroyed my life" / "If it was in my hands, I would've burnt you and your husband and your filthy offspring" / "I swear that burning you is not enough" / "The sentence should be #execution to her and her husband"*

Several commenters typed out sounds of spitting on someone, sounds of mocking someone, and curses.

There were also those who did not believe the defector, but these remarks only made up 11 of the 338 comments. Some implied that the defector was dishonest, while others implied the entire video was unreliable. Examples include:

> *"Lies lies" / "Ha ha the biggest liar" / "Fucking liar. She could make a simple search in Google about Syria to know the truth"*

A couple commenters referenced TV shows or films to illustrate how the ICSVE video seems exaggerated, unbelievable – like a production.

There were even fewer comments showing sympathy for the defector or seeking to understand her. Below is all there was.

> *"What brought her to ISIS, poor girl, it's good that she was able to go back to her country with her son"*

Some people merely commented sad, crying, or heartbroken emojis, which might be interpreted as sympathy for the defector, but it is unclear.

Overall, comments mentioning the defector directly were overwhelmingly negative. Comments in the second category – ISIS as a greater entity – were equally angry but displayed more diversity in content and delivery. When one considers that these are Iraqis who at one point had one third of its territory overtaken by ISIS and faced tens of thousands of foreign fighters supporting the group, the anger and lack of sympathy for a European ISIS joiner is understandable.

Comments about ISIS

Notably, there were no pro-ISIS statements. (This compares differently to our ICSVE YouTube channel comments in which there are pro-ISIS statements made much more frequently.)

There were very few anti-Islamic (not to be confused with anti-ISIS) comments. Only two commenters engaged in brief conversation where they laughed and said, "She says this is not Islam […] this is all Islam."

The lack of anti-Islamic comments is likely due to Iraq being a predominantly Islamic and religiously conservative country. Comparatively speaking, ads which ran in regions with greater non-Muslim populations received significantly more anti-Islamic remarks and generated arguments about competing religions, religious support for terrorism, and definitions of Islam as a violent religion. Still, commenters on the Iraq ad did not need anti-Islamic remarks to spark defense, as many were quick to separate ISIS from Islam on their own (which is very helpful counter-messaging to other Muslims who might be vulnerable to messaging by ISIS). Some commenters mocked ISIS by referring to it as "the myth state" or "the falsehood state."

Here are some examples:

> "They, ISIS, is not an Islamic state and Islam is innocent from them… because Islam is a religion of peace and prophet Mohammed is a mercy to all human beings"
>
> "ISIS members are infidels"

Trends of comments expressing solidarity for the Iraqi people in their fight against ISIS were also present, with fierce refusal to be intimidated and invoking their own fierceness to defeat ISIS once again. In fact, some commenters seemed to think of ISIS as already defeated, daring ISIS to try again. These comments coincide with Iraqi Prime Minister's recent declaration of territorial victory over ISIS. Other comments refer to the bravery of those living under ISIS and who did not join the group. Some refer to Islamic martyrdom in the fight against ISIS. In doing so, they invoke some of the same narratives that ISIS uses, although from the Shia point of view. Other comments reflected a societal unease and fear in Iraqi society that ISIS could return.

Examples include:

> "We beat you and even kicked you out of Syria. Come if you dare. Bastard I swear that we will beat you" / "I dare you to come you fuckers"
>
> "[…] Alhamdulillah we got rid of them due to the efforts of our heroic al Hashd Al Sha'abi, (i.e. the Shiite militias that supported the Iraqi army)"
>
> "We were under their invasion for 3 years and we didn't join […]"

Furthermore, there was a trend—common in the Middle East—of political comments and conspiracies about who " really" comprises ISIS and who is helping them (al Maliki was criticized by a couple people). Most often the blame for ISIS/infidels was put on Israel, although in Iraqi society it is not uncommon to refer to Jews as a way of insulting ISIS rather than necessarily seriously attributing cause to Israel. However, there were also assertions that ISIS is a product of America, Europe, and Turkey.

Examples include:

> "Terrorism is originally from Europe and America"
>
> "ISIS is an American production, and our stupid people welcomed them"
>
> "This is what you have done to my city and our people […] so that they facilitate something you've prepared which is a plan made by Israel, America, and Europe and it's one the Cold War's threads between the Soviet Union and America... do you think we're not aware of your deeds […] we will expose all your plans […]"

"What Muslims, these are Jews that pretend to be Muslim to distort Islam, conspire and separate between Muslims for the sake of tearing Mohammed's nation"

"The source of terrorism is Turkey"

While not stated enough to be a trend, there were two comments worth noting, as they demonstrate encouragement of critical thought about the bigger picture and the need to generate political solutions to the grievances that originally gave rise to ISIS in Iraq:

"This one repented, but what about the rest? A new organization will appear and they will go and join them because there's no awareness."

"They are the hard-minded people, weapons are not enough to kill them. We need a cultural war under the supervision of different programs."

These comments are also positive sign that our videos have the power to provoke productive thought, and to inspire discussion about why terrorism happens and how to ultimately prevent and stop it.

Finally, miscellaneous comments – comments which were too few and/or insignificant to include as trends – included jokes, sexual remarks about the defector, nonsensical comments, and two statements that Iraq is doomed. Numerous comments were simply Facebook users tagging their friends, which is still good as far as spreading the counter-narrative message.

Limitations of the Study: Content Selection and Ethical Considerations

The *Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter Narrative* videos are intentionally named with ambiguous titles that could be considered pro-ISIS, so that those already consuming or searching for ISIS content will be more likely to click on them. While misleading to some extent, the intentions are noble. The primary objective is to attempt to redirect those potentially going down the terrorist pathway away from it by offering them an instructive message from someone, who like them, was at first attracted to ISIS—and even joined—but had a bad experience inside the group. While those who are already seriously dedicated to ISIS may be turned away from ISIS by watching the counter narratives, there is also the possibility they may have a negative reaction to finding out the ICSVE video is not an ISIS-produced clip and that they were misled into watching it.

Indeed, some viewers of the counter-narratives who openly support and sympathize with ISIS have expressed anger in their comments by calling the researchers unbelievers, government stooges, and so on. Their anger, however, has been tempered and has up to now—as found in our recent studies or the ones we know about—never led to any direct or indirect threats of violence. We do acknowledge that the feeling of being tricked may lead to angry reactions, but also indicate that we are indeed reaching committed ISIS followers who are usually far angrier at perceived and actual grievances and are unlikely to spend much time on attacking the counter narratives. Most of the attacks and violent responses to counter narratives have been in regard to those groups that directly assault Islamic beliefs, ideals, or mores. The ICSVE videos, despite the ambiguous names may make them initially attractive to a viewer already consuming ISIS materials are always respectful of Islam itself, show true care for the viewer and aim only to discredit the group and its behaviors as corrupt, un-Islamic and highly brutal, but never attack Islamic beliefs themselves.

Strictly speaking from a psychological standpoint, it is important to acknowledge the potential impact when ideologically attenuated individuals view counter-narratives such as ours, primarily cognitive dissonance that may lead them to back away from the group. It is also important to acknowledge the potential impact on those who are unsure of what to believe and are searching for ISIS propaganda material, as it is to discuss if our counter-narratives could impact human cognitive aspects or actions in positive or negative ways. In this regard, we are cognizant of the fact that while our counter-narrative videos have a huge potential to make a positive difference in the fight against ISIS, there is also a small potential for harm, though such a potential for harm remains minimal. For instance, through our counter-narratives we try to underwrite [initial] sympathy towards ISIS, given our defectors were at some point in ISIS as well as the many reasons for wanting to join, without

validating the violent means that the terrorist group propagates. Likewise a dedicated believer may harden his beliefs in the face our testimonies and become angered by them, however we always try to show sympathy and care for the viewer. We also try to highlight human costs of engaging in terrorism both for the recruit and those harmed by the group, which serves in opposition to sleek and deceitful ISIS propaganda videos. Lastly, our overall objective is to target the terrorist group and discredit them in the eyes of potential recruits—and not intimidate or anger potential recruits—to save potential recruits from the costs, including loss of their own lives and of others, of engaging in terrorism.[20]

In the process of creating counter-narratives, we paid particular attention to the "active ingredients" that are intended to influence the desired campaign outcome, namely:

Characters: ICSVE-produced counter narratives rely on ISIS insiders speaking—the defector, returnee, or actual ISIS cadre prisoner—about their experiences in the group. The insiders may have had similar experiences, grievances, or motivations as [some] viewers for joining the group and also viewed the ISIS ideology and aims as good prior to actually experiencing it. It is our belief that is a strong component of the counter narrative. ISIS defector statements call attention to ISIS brutality, corruption, and un-Islamic nature of their actions, which are all turn-offs from the group. Arguably, the fact that ISIS defectors—or those imprisoned for participating or serving in the group—speak about paying a high price for belonging to the group is a strong evidence that it may not work out well to join.

The emotionally evocative nature of the video: The music, the images, and the emotionally laden aspects of the story being told serve to draw the viewers in and engage their emotions to turn them away from ISIS. This was directly modeled after ISIS propaganda, which is highly emotional in content and often uses images of Muslim victims to draw potential recruits in. In our case we are using revulsion and negative experiences in ISIS to turn the viewers away from ISIS rather than draw them to the group. The aforementioned ingredients interact to influence the desired campaign outcome. One ingredient may be more strongly experienced for one viewer than another.

Acknowledging authorship: The ICSVE branding and final slides are put on the videos so that the viewer may find out about the source of the content created rather than assume they are from government or other entities trying to influence them. ICSVE researchers make it clear via their branding and websites that can be visited, that they have been researching terrorism for years and that these are legitimate research interviews that the viewers can trust as credible, versus fabricated or manipulated interviews.

Show respect and care for the viewer: ICSVE researchers are always careful not to insult Islam and show care through the selected elements of the interviews that make up the counter narratives in which the speaker often shows sympathy for and a desire to protect the viewer.

It should also be noted that this research involved testing with an already constructed counter narrative to attract an audience, engage them, and show evidence of being able to turn viewers away from ISIS. In other words, the new content creation was not a part of the research itself. The hundreds of comments, the 1.7 million video views and other engagement metrics indicate that the counter-narratives could attract attention and result in engagement. While turning individuals away from radicalization or extremism trajectory is harder to measure, there is evidence to suggest that the videos are able to evoke emotions and comments that show disdain for ISIS.

The videos which are not created as part of any experimental process are produced by selecting the most emotionally evocative and delegitimizing material from a longer two-to-five-hour research interview. These selections are made with knowledge rooted in the research evidence already existing of why ISIS cadres defect: disgust over corruption, brutality and the un-Islamic nature of the group, and exhaustion and fear for themselves and their loved ones of continuing in it.[21] The authors selected the content along with the video editor based on years of experience of studying the motivational patterns of terrorists and on how to deradicalize and disengage them.

In our future studies, we will be testing multiple videos in the same audiences allowing comparison of different counter narratives and groups in our research design to more confidently attribute metrics/measurement of outcomes to the counter-narrative and we are also testing them in focus groups to be able to run control groups. This will be done in an effort to more confidently determine causality (i.e. isolating active ingredients and controlling all other variables) and to infer generalizability of the findings. While it may also be possible to also experimentally produce and test the videos themselves for selection of certain elements over others, those experiments are beyond the resources of the current team.

Conclusion

The purpose of this online intervention was to raise awareness about the realities of ISIS and to protect vulnerable potential recruits from considering joining. In this regard, the ICSVE *Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter Narrative* videos on Facebook were used. Compared to our recent Facebook studies focused on reaching Albanian and English-speaking users who were endorsing, supporting, and engaging with ISIS online material found on Facebook, this Facebook ad campaign focused on individuals ages 18-50 in Iraq who might be engaged with extremist narratives found online and who might continue down the path of sustained engagement and exposure to violent narratives propagated by terrorist groups like ISIS. Moreover, targeting this particular age group was especially important given they are most active on the Internet and social media platforms in Iraq. Equally important, this particular age group remains the same audience that ISIS has been targeting. It is on such platforms that they develop and form their ideas, potentially also becoming susceptible to violent ideologies and narratives.

The results were promising in terms of driving Iraqi engagement with our counter narrative materials. The ICSVE Facebook ad generated a total reach of 1,287,557, while also leading to 2,339,453 impressions and close to 1.7 million video views. Our Facebook campaign generated hundreds of specific comments related to both our video content and ISIS in general. In addition to raising awareness about our *Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter Narratives* and the dangers of joining ISIS, the campaign served as an invaluable resource and platform to channel doubt, frustration, and anger into positive exchange of ideas and participation. Many raised their opinions and, in line with our research objectives, challenged extremist narratives that offer facile solutions to contentious socio-political issues. This is particularly important at a time when Iraq is facing elections and widespread societal perturbation about sectarian rifts, political corruption, and a slow recovery following war and experiences with terrorism. While we could not observe or report any direct cognitive shifts among those who support ISIS and its ideology, we hope that may be occurring without our being able to measure it.

As we continue to experiment with these interventions in the future, we hope to further expand our reach, home in our Internet targeting, and increase the interest of our target audience, specifically among those who may be willing to act as influencers and magnify our impact. Furthermore, we hope to reach to more vulnerable individuals and provide links to a newly designed call to action website (TheRealJihad.org) and introduce *call to action* buttons and *lead forms*, among others, to expand and strengthen the line of communication with them. We will also attempt to generate enticing leads from those among those who believe in and are convinced of our work and wish to help in the fight against ISIS.

Acknowledgements

About the Authors: **Anne Speckhard, Ph.D.** *is Adjunct Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University in the School of Medicine and Director of the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE) where she heads the Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter Narratives Project. Dr. Speckhard has interviewed nearly 600 terrorists, their family members and supporters in various parts of the world including Gaza, West Bank, Chechnya, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, the Balkans and many countries in Europe.* **Ardian Shajkovci, Ph.D**. *is the Director of Research and a Senior Research Fellow at the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism*

(ICSVE). He is also an Adjunct Professor at Nichols College teaching counterterrorism and cybersecurity courses. **Claire Wooster** *is a Junior Research Fellow at ICSVE with a Bachelor's Degree from George Mason University.* **Neima Izadi** *is a Junior Research Fellow and Administrative assistant at ICSVE.*

Notes

[1] See for example Internet World Stats; URL: https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm

[2] Arab Social Media Report, 2015; URL: https://www.wpp.com/govtpractice/~/media/wppgov/files/arabsocialmediareport-2015.pdf

[3] The decision to use such videos is based on clinical judgement (clinical psychologist) and decades of work in the field by the lead author. Over the past two years, the research team has also consulted with U.S. Department of Defense (Web-ops teams; CENTCOM, MIST, MISO, etc.) teams who work close on this issues on the ground. Equally important, one of our video editors is an Iraqi who also worked in the Detainee Rehabilitation program (applied to 23,000 detainees and over 800 juveniles in Camp Bucca, Iraq) between 2006-07, and is very familiar with what resonates with violent extremists and ISIS terrorists in Iraq.

[4] Rachel Briggs and Sebastien Feve, "Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism: What Works and What the Implications for Government," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue,* 2013; p. 6, URL: https://www.counterextremism.org/download_file/117/134/444/

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] See RAN for examples of counternarrative and alternative types of messages and campaigns; URL: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_cn_oct2015_en.pdf

[8] See for example, P2P Depression Awareness Campaign; URL: http://www.depressioncenter.org/education-outreach/programs/schools/aaps/peer-to-peer/; Let's Stop HIV Together; URL: https://www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/campaigns/lsht/index.html

[9] Lacey Mayer, "Are Public Awareness Campaigns Effective?" March 10, 2008; URL: https://www.curetoday.com/publications/cure/2008/spring2008/are-public-awareness-campaigns-effective

[10] Mike Le, "Six Major Differences between Facebook Awareness and Conversion Campaigns," March 9, 2018; URL: https://searchenginewatch.com/2016/09/09/six-major-differences-between-facebook-awareness-and-conversion-campaigns/

[11] See for example Bureau of Educational and Cultural Awareness; URL: https://eca.state.gov/highlight/p2p-challenging-extremism-together

[12] Noemie Bouhana and Per-Olf Wikstrom, "Al- Qai'da- Influenced Radicalisation: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory," *Home Office,* 2011; URL: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116724/occ97.pdf

[13] The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE) Facebook studies targeting ISIS supporters online can be accessed here: http://www.icsve.org/research-reports/fighting-isis-on-facebook-breaking-the-isis-brand-counter-narratives-project/ and http://www.icsve.org/research-reports/bringing-down-the-digital-caliphate-a-breaking-the-isis-brand-counter-narratives-intervention-with-albanian-speaking-facebook-accounts/; See also Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovci, "*Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter-Narratives*—Part II: Ethical Considerations in Fighting ISIS Online," *VoxPol,* March 7, 2018; URL: http://www.voxpol.eu/breaking-the-isis-brand-counter-narratives-part-ii-ethical-considerations-in-fighting-isis-online/

[14] See Henry Tuck and Tanya Silverman for more detailed discussions on metrics used, available at http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook_1.pdf

[15] Please note that this can also be interepreted as our target audience seeing our ad but deciding to turn away immediately from it. On the other hand, also note that this was a small-scale intervention. In addition, low frequency of exposure does not necessarily mean that our intervention was not persuasive. Ideally, we would want our target audience to see our ads more frequently. The higher the frequency rate, the bigger the payout in terms of clicks, etc. We are also aware of the fact that the lower the number of frequency, the less likely to get our point across. That said, we also are satisfied with low(er) frequency rates so as not to annoy our target audience. Our ongoing targeting efforts are focused on driving our target audience to actually act. Higher frequencies are needed to impact behavior change, though given the limitations of our study, this metric remains positive at this point.

[16] John Batler, "A Guide to Measuring Brand Lift on Facebook," February 16, 2017; URL: https://searchenginewatch.com/2016/09/09/six-major-differences-between-facebook-awareness-and-conversion-campaigns/https://www.adgo.io/

blog/2017/2/2/guide-to-measuring-brand-lift-on-facebook

[17] Please note that videos will auto play, unless the feature is disabled on Facebook. See for example: https://www.facebook.com/business/help/community/question/?id=10154935163080944; See additional discussion on video play https://www.facebook.com/help/633446180035470

[18] Note that our research experience in the field, including consultations with DOD and other entities engaged in producing counternarratives, suggest that shorter videos tend to lead to more consumption and a higher retention rate among our target audience.

[19] Facebook Business, "Showing Relevance Scores for Ads on Facebook," February 11, 2015; URL: https://www.facebook.com/business/news/relevance-score

[20] Literature suggests that aggressively and directly targeting potential recruits could potentially be counterproductive. Such an approach could elicit defiance on the part of recruits (e.g. perceived as an insult when trying to contribute to a good cause, for instance, helping to fight against Syrian President Bashar's forces. See for example Infante, D.A., et al., "Initiating and Reciprocating Verbal Aggression: Effects on Credibility and Credited Valid Arguments," *Communication Studies* 43, no. 3 (1992): 182-190.

[21] Anne Speckhard and Ahmet S. Yayla, "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no.6 (2015): 95-117; Peter R. Neumann, " Victims, Perpetrators, Assets: The Narrative of Islamic State Defectors," *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence*, 2015; URL: https://socialutveckling.goteborg.se/uploads/ICSR-Report-Victims-Perpertrators-Assets-The-Narratives-of-Islamic-State-Defectors.pdf