



ISIL recruiters as social media influencers: Mechanisms of legitimation by young Australian Muslim men

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of ISIL recruiter influence on Australian Muslim identity through social media. McCall and Simmons' "Mechanisms of Legitimation" (MoL) framework will be applied to fifty online ISIL-inspired exchanges and postings through five Australian Muslim case studies. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the mechanisms in each case study will be analysed in order to develop better understandings of how ISIL-inspired outputs provide examples of both identity legitimation and ISIL recruiter influence.

Keywords: ISIL, Radicalisation, Identity, Social Media, Australian Muslims, Mechanisms of Legitimation

Setting the Scene: Australian Muslims, ISIL and the Role of Psychology

Since September 11, 2001 (9/11), there has been an increase in scholars seeking to understand why individuals will risk their lives and freedom to engage in terrorist acts (Kilcullen 2015; Stern and Berger 2015). Of growing concern are the increasing instances of homegrown terrorism appearing in Western countries (Malet, 2014; Vidino, 2009). In particular, Australia has witnessed a significant increase in young Australian Muslims involved in homegrown terrorism since the rise of the ISIL (Zammit, 2017). Among other factors, scholars have associated this with issues of identity and belonging (Dawson, 2018; Ingram, 2017; Yusoufzai and Emmerling, 2017), which is linked to the complex construction of Muslim identities in Western states and the multiple factors that can lead to radicalisation (Abdel-Fattah, 2017; Kabir, 2013; Rane, Ewart and Abdallah, 2010). Therefore, the objectives of this paper are to explore how young Australian Muslim men inspired by ISIL view themselves; how they believe they are viewed by others; and how negative discourses on Islam can affect their identity construction. This objective is significant because, to date, there is a paucity of research that examines radicalisation from the perspective of the 'recruited'.

These personal perspectives help to lay the foundations of understanding how terrorist groups utilise identity constructs in their propaganda to recruit Western foreign fighters (Farwell, 2014; Ingram, 2017; Pelletier, et al., 2016). For groups like ISIL, social media is a vital tool for constructing identity frames in order to recruit Muslim sympathisers from Western countries (Amarasingam and Dawson, 2017; Wesphal, 2017). Therefore, exploring the themes of young Australian Muslim identity and ISIL recruitment together form the second objective of this paper, which is two-fold: firstly, to highlight the importance of ISIL recruiter influence in shaping the identity of young Australian Muslim men on social media; and secondly, to develop a better understanding on how ISIL-inspired exchanges and postings by young Australian Muslim men provide examples of ISIL recruiter influence.

Scholars have also highlighted the important role that psychology continues to play in understanding terrorism and the need for greater application in the field (Horgan, 2004; Lynch, 2018; Taylor, Roach and Pease, 2015). Due to the interdisciplinary nature of identity studies, the final objective of this paper is to apply a psychological framework to understand ISIL's role in influencing the



identity of young Australian Muslim men. Therefore, this paper, utilised George McCall and Jerry Simmons' Mechanisms of Legitimation (MoL; 1978) framework to unpack ISIL-inspired exchanges and postings by young Australian Muslim men on social media to understand how MoL may assist in explaining ISIL's recruiter influence.^[1]

Identity Theory, Australian Muslims and ISIL Recruitment

Identity theorists Jan Stets and Peter Burke (2009, p.3) define identity as a "set of meanings" that define an individual as having a "particular role in society", "being part of a particular group", or claiming particular "unique characteristics". In many ways, identity is deeply intertwined with terrorism, radicalisation and Islamism, which provides a foundation for these processes and actions. However, the role of identity in the path to terrorism is rarely straightforward (Taylor and Louis, 2004; Yusoufzai and Emmerling, 2017). To narrow the scope of research, this literature overview will briefly discuss the four bases of identity, how this relates to the social structure of Muslim identity, and how ISIL uses identity in their recruitment strategy.

Identity Theory from a Psychological Perspective

Identity theory seeks to explain the meanings of identities and how they influence behaviour, thoughts, emotions, and society as a whole (Stets and Burke, 2010). There are four main identity categories addressed by the mainstream identity literature. At the base level, "personal identity" is what makes every individual unique (Stets and Burke, 2010, p.125). Michael Hogg (2006, p.115) describes personal identity as the "idiosyncratic personality attributes or meanings that are not shared with other people". Unlike other identity bases, personal identity is constantly activated as an "identity standard" for other social interactions (Stets and Burke 2010, p.125). In this case, an individual may apply their identity meanings of being "moral" and "brave" to the role identity of a terrorist. Pioneered by McCall and Simmons (1978, p.92), "role identity" can be defined as internalised meanings and societal expectations of a role that guide an individual's attitudes and behaviour. The role of a terrorist, for example, may require an individual to carry out attacks and inspire others.

Since role identities are relational, individuals tend to interact with each other in a way that has been discussed in the literature on "social identity" (Stets and Burke, 2010, p.128). Social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) developed Social Identity Theory (SIT) in order to understand how identity is intertwined with group membership. Through "categorisation", "identification" and "comparison", Tajfel and Turner's (1979, p.33-37) work has provided a useful framework for understanding identity within "in-group and "out-group" behaviours. SIT has also been highlighted as a theory best suited to analysing "how social cognitive behaviours are associated with group membership" (Hogg and Terry, 2000, p.121). As a result, terrorism scholars have employed SIT in order to better understand how individuals come to identify with terrorist groups (Al Raffie, 2013; Kfir, 2015). In turn, social identity is closely related to the theory of collective identity (Stets and Burke, 2010). Collective identity can be described as "the self" in action, working together on shared goals and plans which in turn creates a shared sense of identity (Melucci, 1995, p.41). Collective identities are especially applicable to social and political movements, including terrorism (Stets and Burke, 2010). For example, ISIL slogans such as "This is our Call of Duty" and "We are all ISIS" regularly highlight the themes of collective identity and duty (Speckhard 2015, p.4, 23). The

[1] Due to contestations surrounding what deems an individual radicalised, this project has opted to use the term 'ISIL-inspired'.



application of these theories to young Australian Muslims and their complex identity construction will be explored further below.

Australian Muslim Identity

Two centuries of Muslim immigration to Australia has created a plethora of multi-ethnicities and associations which has generated interest in how Australian Muslims view their own identity. Many Australian Muslim leaders have suggested that Islam is “malleable and adaptable to Australian culture” (Sohrabi and Farquharson, 2016, p.398). Indeed, participation in Australian sporting, cultural and economic activities has highlighted how many Muslims identify strongly with their Australian citizenship (Voloder, 2015). In this regard, it is not surprising that Australian Muslims are “sensitive and responsive” to public concerns about Islam (Sohrabi and Farquharson, 2016, p.398). Some research has highlighted that Australian Muslims feel labelled as a “suspect community” which has created feelings of guilt and increased anxiety (Cherney and Murphy, 2016, p.481).

In response to negative discourses, a great deal of literature has described Australian Muslim identity as diverse and peaceful (Akbarzadeh and Saeed, 2001; Kabir, 2011). Through multiple interviews, Nahid Kabir (2011) has explained the positive ways that Australian Muslims integrate Australian culture into their Islamic way of life. Many of these methods, such as sporting and education, have emphasised the compatibility of Australian and Muslim identities (Kabir, 2011). In addition, Rachel Woodlock’s (2011) study of two-hundred Australian Muslims and their perception of identity found that the sample valued both their Australian and Muslim identity. This in turn relates to the body of literature addressing misconceptions of Islam in Australian society. Scholars have highlighted Australia’s tendency to take a ‘broad-sweep approach’ to Muslims by categorising Islam as a single monolithic identity (Akbarzadeh and Saeed, 2001; Mitha, Adatia and Jaspal, 2017). Part of this has been the ‘othering’ of Muslim identity within Australian mainstream media in order to promote a more homogenised view (Aly, 2007; Hopkins, 2011). Douglas Pratt and Rachel Woodlock (2016, p.146) explain that categorising the ‘other’ threatens to produce “two tiers of Australian identity”, where the first tier are considered “true Australians” and second tier can only achieve “official status” if they assimilate. Contrastingly, Gary Bouma (2016, p.201) advocates that Australia’s multicultural policy has “avoided” the “othering” of Australian Muslims and is a “successful multicultural and multi-faith society”. For Bouma, a policy of social inclusion and mutual respect has promoted Muslim communities and reduced inter-group conflict (Bouma, 2015, p.201). As described below, it is through these negative discourses of Australian Muslims that ISIL’s recruitment strategy benefits.

ISIL’s Recruitment Strategy

Elements of organisation, ideology, and technology encompass ISIL’s recruitment strategy. The organisation of ISIL’s propaganda has been highlighted as a major factor in their recruitment strategy (Ingram, 2015; Klausen, 2015; Pelletier, et al., 2016). Haroro Ingram (2015) notes that ISIL’s information operations rely on a mixture of pragmatic and perceptual factors for message effectiveness. Behind this strategic logic, Ingram (2015) highlights that security and social identity factors aid the effective messaging structure for building followings. Similarly, Laura Pelletier et al. (2016) describe the specific tactics ISIL employs when constructing messages to achieve strategic objectives. These include highlighting historical roots, aligning actions with Islamic law, and utilising catalysts to construct messages (Pelletier, et al., 2016). Scholars have also cited the ideological elements of ISIL’s recruitment strategy (Bunzel, 2015). Through political rhetoric that mixes ideological goals with ancient Islamic texts, ISIL attempts to glorify war against apostates and hail fighters as soldiers of Islam (Haykel, 2016). If foreign fighters cannot immigrate, ISIL has



also encouraged Muslims to wage war behind enemy lines (Malet 2014). This all-encompassing recruitment ideology has seen ISIL promote a leaderless resistance of self-sufficient terrorism, limiting central leadership to an ideological role (Malet, 2014).

By attracting over 40,000 foreign fighters through social media propaganda, many academics have proclaimed ISIL to be agents of technological change (Farwell, 2014; Siboni, Cohen and Koren, 2015). ISIL's social media videos incorporate violent propaganda, slick production techniques and a simple narrative to attract young Muslims to identify with their cause (Friis, 2015; Winter, 2016). In this social media environment, individuals facilitate jihad by personalising and publishing experiences which leaves an online template for others (Hoskins, Akil, and O'Loughlin, 2009). Charlie Winter (2016, p.15) describes this process as the "symbiosis between the propagandist and the propagandee" whereby users disseminate material across public and private spheres. In particular, the literature has described ISIL's use of Twitter as the 'multiplatform zeitgeist' of terrorist activism (Klausen, 2015). Through the form of 'Tweets', ^[2] messages can reach a plethora of individuals with cross-links to other platforms through embedded URLs (Stern and Berger, 2015). Applications such as 'The Dawn of Glad Tidings' have been analysed by researchers for their ability to create cells of belonging through ISIL updates, interactions and propaganda (Saltman and Winter, 2014).

Seven Mechanisms of Legitimation

For those who fall victim to ISIL's recruitment techniques, it is important that their new identity is accepted in their social environment. Stets and Burke (2010, p.69) refer to this process as "identity-verification", whereby an individual's actions correspond to the identity they have prescribed for themselves. In the case of ISIL, an individual may receive support from the terrorist group, though others may not support this new identity. It is under these conditions that individuals seek to justify their new identity (Stets and Burke 2010, p.43). Known as the "Mechanisms of Legitimation", McCall and Simmons (1978, p.92) outline seven negative emotions or "mechanisms" that individuals may employ to legitimize their new role identity if necessary. The first mechanism is *Short-Term Credit (1)*, which refers to how a new identity is temporarily accepted by others because of the individual's previous successful identities in that group (McCall and Simmons, 1978, p.92). Stets and Burke (2010, p.43) explain that individuals in this instance will draw upon a "line of credit" they have developed from previous identities to "ride out" an unsuccessful new role identity. In regards to terrorism, an individual inspired by ISIL may convince his peers to accept his new identity as they are his friends.

The second mechanism is *Selective Perception (2)* which refers to individuals only "attending to cues that they think support an identity of theirs" and avoiding all others (Stets and Burke, 2010, p.44). Using the above example, the ISIL-inspired individual may attend to his friend's positive non-verbal cues such as laughing and smiling but ignore verbal cues that reject his ISIL identity. Closely linked is the mechanism of *Selective Interpretation (3)* which refers to individuals interpreting cues as supportive when they are not (McCall and Simmons, 1978, p.92). In the case of the ISIL-inspired individual, he may interpret his friends' negative verbal cues that reject his new identity as sarcasm rather than honesty. Other mechanisms to justify one's identity may be *Blaming Others (4)* for not supporting an identity (McCall and Simmons, 1978, p.92). Here, the ISIL-inspired individual may criticise his friends for not supporting him in his new identity. Further, an individual may *Disavow (5)* a new identity as an unintended performance (McCall and Simmons, 1978, p.92). An ISIL-inspired individual may explain to his friends that he instead identifies with some of the ideologies of the group rather than identifying as a sympathiser. An individual may also *Switch Identities (6)*

[2] A post made on the social media platform Twitter.



or *Withdraw* (7) from social interaction to avoid a new identity being threatened (Stets and Burke 2010, p.44).

This Mechanisms of Legitimation (MoL) framework was selected as it allowed exploration into the relationship between identity and ISIL recruitment. Various scholars have highlighted MoL as a useful lens for understanding various aspects of identity (Stets and Burke, 2010; Stryker, 1994; Swann, 1990). Stets and Burke (2010, p.45) described McCall and Simmons' (1978) framework as providing identity researchers with a "theoretically rich and fruitful way of understanding the self and other interactions". The process of legitimation is well covered by terrorism scholars (Crenshaw 1983; Gilley 2012; Sprinzak 1991). However, little research has applied MoL to terrorism studies. Focusing on radicalisation and the media, Andrew Hoskings, Akil Awan and Ben O'Loughlin (2011) discuss how the Global Jihadist movement has employed MoL to propound their ideology and narrative. From a different perspective, Raimondo Catanzaro (1991) discusses how the 'Red Brigades' used self-legitimation mechanisms to justify left-wing terrorism. Although the MoL framework has seldom been applied to terror studies, other fields such as psychology and economics have used this theory extensively (Burke, 2001; 2006; Silveira, et al., 2015). Therefore, this paper aims to fill the gap in terror research by applying a psychologically-rooted version of MoL in an attempt to understand the role of ISIL in shaping the identity of ISIL-inspired Australian Muslim men on social media. The next section will discuss the methodological approach to interpreting MoL through the use of case studies and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Interpreting ISIL-Inspired Social Media: MoL, Case Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis

This study applied the MoL framework to five case studies of ISIL-inspired Australian Muslim men and their social media activity. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an analytical technique to interpret social media posts into the MoL framework, researchers attempted to understand the role of ISIL in shaping the identity of young Australian Muslim men on social media. Below is a breakdown of the participants, procedures, measures and analyses used in this study.

Participants

Although not all cases of radicalisation involve young adults, the majority of reported cases appear to be so, with a trend towards even younger ages (Bekker, 2009; Dawson, 2018). Young Australian Muslim men were chosen for analysis because they are arguably a prime target of ISIL's social media strategy and therefore likely to represent examples of identity (Harris-Hogan, 2017; Zammit, 2017). Despite growing figures of women radicalising, the data available on Australian Muslim women and their radicalisation remains small, making it hard to determine whether there are gender-specific interpretive links (Dawson, 2018). Therefore, the study sample comprised of five case studies involving young Australian Muslim men as they provide the best publicly available examples of ISIL-inspired social media activity. Below is a brief overview of each case study:

Neil Prakash is a 26-year-old Australian Muslim from Victoria and ISIL recruiter. Prakash reportedly converted from Buddhism to Islam in 2012 and then travelled to ISIL-controlled territory via Malaysia in 2013 (LeGrand, 2016). Since 2014, Prakash's social media activity has grown with countless ISIL-inspired posting and exchanges under various pseudonyms. He has appeared in many ISIL propaganda videos and provided an important link for ISIL's recruitment of Australian Muslims. Prakash was arrested in November 2016 and remains imprisoned in Turkey (Counter Extremism Project, 2018).



Khaled Sharrouf is a 36-year-old Australian Muslim from New South Wales with a history of terrorist involvement. First imprisoned by *Operation Pendennis* in 2004 (Welch and Dredge, 2017), Sharrouf was again arrested in 2005 for terrorist-related offences and was involved in the planning of 2012 Sydney anti-Islam film protests. Despite being subject to a travel ban, he travelled to ISIL-controlled territory in 2013. Sharrouf rose to global prominence in 2014 after disseminating a picture of himself and his seven-year-old son holding the heads of ISIL victims (Welch and Dredge, 2017). He was falsely reported killed in a July 2015 and eulogised on social media by Australian ISIL recruiter Neil Prakash (Counter Extremism Project, 2018).

Jake Bilardi was an 18-year-old Australian Muslim from Victoria who converted to Islam in 2013 following his mother's death (Bachelard, Burke and Spooner, 2015). In 2014, he expressed sympathy for Osama bin Laden on Facebook and travelled to ISIL-controlled territory the same year. Bilardi's social media exchanges came to prominence in 2015 in his manifesto blog *From Melbourne to Ramadi: My Journey* (2015) (Bachelard, Burke and Spooner, 2015). He died in March 2015 from a suicide attack in Ramadi, Iraq. ISIL has been using his death as recruitment propaganda (Safi, 2015).

Abdullah Elmir was a 17-year-old Australian Muslim from New South Wales who travelled to ISIL-controlled territory in June 2014 (Welch, 2014). Elmir was featured in ISIL propaganda videos from October 2014, coming to prominence by threatening political leaders such as Tony Abbott and Barack Obama (King, 2015). In 2015, he utilised Twitter and Facebook extensively to post ISIL-inspired messages. It is suspected Elmir was killed by air strikes in late 2015 (Tran and Quinn, 2015).

Numan Haider was an 18-year-old Australian Muslim from Victoria who, on September 23, 2014, stabbed two police officers while holding an ISIL flag before being shot and killed in suburban Melbourne (Neubauer and Loyd, 2014). Despite apparently not holding extremist views for most of his youth, his social media posts had indicated he had become radicalised and increasingly frustrated by injustices in the Middle East and his perceived hounding at the hands of policing and intelligence services (Roose, 2016).

Procedures

This study analysed fifty ISIL-inspired exchanges and postings by five young Australian Muslim men (described above) on social media from 2014 - 2017. This time period was selected because it is when ISIL-inspired exchanges and postings by young Australian Muslim men have arguably been most prominent (Ingram, 2017; Pelletier, et al., 2016; Zammit, 2017). Captured data was retrieved by analysing dormant social media postings and exchanges from publicly available online sources. Each output was collected in its entirety and selected quotes from each output were analysed verbatim. Captured data represented any combination of videos, images or text from any social media platform. All output types were evenly analysed. However, images were focussed on less in this analysis as they provided less opportunity for analysis when compared with other output types. For example, a common theme among images in the study sample was the re-tweeting of ISIL propaganda in the form of images, which provides little insight into MoL or cases studies. Lastly, the collected data from each case study was then qualitatively analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for evidence of McCall and Simmons' MoL framework (1978, cited in Stets and Burke, 2010) in order to explore the influence of ISIL recruitment in shaping the identity of young Australian Muslim men on social media.

The researchers encountered the following ethical considerations when carrying out the study. Firstly, there was the physical risk to researchers gathering primary data from highly dangerous and violent individuals through traditional methods such as interviews. Therefore, the secondary analysis of social media accounts was chosen, as it avoids any immediate risks to researchers. Secondly, there was the risk of psychological distress for the individual participants in this study and their families by analysing the social media activity of deceased individuals. Associated with this was the potential to raise suspicion from law enforcement or intelligence services regarding accessing the social media of convicted terrorists. To counter these problems, researchers collected only social media postings and exchanges from publicly available online sources that had already been viewed, interpreted and associated with each case study by the public, thus minimising the risk. Further, the collected data in this project may provide impartial accounts of social media exchanges and postings as opposed to media reports which can distort events and provide biased accounts of political situations.

Measures

The framework for this study were the seven negative emotion mechanisms used by young Australian Muslim men to legitimise their new ISIL-inspired identities. This construct was measured using McCall and Simmons' (1978) Mechanisms of Legitimation framework. There were fifty outputs drawn from social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and they were analysed using this measure across five cases studies. Table 1 below provides a definition of each mechanism.

Coding	Mechanism	Description
1	Short-Term Credit	An identity that is not being supported is temporarily accepted by others because of the support received from previous identities.
2	Selective Perception	Attending to cues that support an identity and avoiding cues that do not support an identity.
3	Selective Interpretation	Interpreting cues as supportive of an identity when the cues are not supportive.
4	Blaming Others	Criticising others for lack of support or not confirming an identity.
5	Disavow	To deny responsibility for an identity by revealing alternative intentions.
6	Switch Identities	Switching to an alternative identity.
7	Withdraw	Withdrawing from interactions that threaten an identity.

Table 1 Mechanisms of Legitimation and their associated definitions (McCall and Simmons, 1978, cited in Stets and Burke, 2010, pp.43-44).

Analyses

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was the analytical technique employed for interpreting data in this study. Cynthia Hardy, Bill Harley and Nelson Phillips (2004, p.19), describe this type of analysis as a "methodology for analysing social phenomena that is qualitative, interpretive, and constructionist".

Similarly, Norman Fairclough (2013) describes that CDA can be used to interpret and focus on the complex layers of social relations, such as connections between individuals, events and objects. CDA can also be used to assess a range of materials such as articles, books, periodicals and other sources to inform analysis (Gerring, 2007; Fairclough, 2013). In this project, CDA was utilised to explore exchanges between individual Australian Muslims and ISIL in order to understand how the power relations between the individual and group. For example, ISIL-inspired social media exchanges and postings can represent self-empowerment, but also highlight the power of ISIL recruitment strategies. Secondly, CDA can be described as all-encompassing in the sense that one discourse is linked to another, allowing for the cross-fertilisation of thoughts and ideas (Philips and Harley, 2004). In this regard, themes of identity in ISIL-inspired exchanges and postings are representative of broader discourses such as the evolution of terrorism and power of collective action.

An example from the study sample is a Tweet from Khaled Sharrouf's case study:

“@AFP Media by the way you cowards I am running to my death I want martyrdom that's why I am blessed u rock spiders” (Sharrouf, 2015).

In this case, an output represents a tweet which is then analysed using CDA to see whether the meaning embedded in the text represents one or more of the seven mechanisms provided by McCall and Simmons' (1978) MoL framework using the definitions provided in Table 1.

The study also adopted the following methodological strategies to ensure the reliability and credibility of this measure: the engagement of meticulous record keeping for consistency of results; the provision of verbatim descriptions to support findings; and systematic documentation during data collection, analysis and interpretation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Noble and Smith, 2015). Despite being underutilised as a measure, McCall and Simmons (1978) MoL framework has been identified as a reliable framework for measuring aspects of identity through negative emotions arising from an identity being questioned (Burke, 2006; Kiecolt, and LoMascolo, 2003; Silveira, et al., 2015; Stryker, 1994; Swann, 1990).

ISIL Identity Legitimation: Results and Discussion

Overall findings

From the findings, a few generalised points can be presented. Firstly, each mechanism was observed throughout the study sample, and all case studies included at least three observed mechanisms. This suggests that ISIL identities were readily legitimised through a variety of mechanisms, which supports the aims of this study. *Selective perception* (2) and *blaming others* (4) were the most common mechanisms evidenced in the data set, with all case studies observing these strategies. A potential reason for this trend could be that both these mechanisms are regularly observed in ISIL propaganda through their selective perception of the Koran and denouncement of the West (Stern and Berger 2015). Considering the data set is comprised of ISIL-inspired outputs, ISIL recruiter influence in each case study is a high possibility.

Some mechanisms were more prevalent than others. *Selective Interpretation* (3) and *Disavow* (5) were each only found once in the data set. Three reasons could explain this. Firstly, some case studies had more publicly available exchanges and postings than others to analyse.^[3] This raises the

[3] Exchanges and postings will also be referred to as “outputs” as highlighted in Table 2.

possibility that some mechanisms may not be captured as readily in the data set as others due to the study sample size. Secondly, some platforms may enhance the amount of mechanisms observed in outputs. Blogs, such as in Jake Bilardi's case, offer more dialogue to address all mechanisms when compared to an image or a "Tweet" that has a 140-character limit. Lastly, the number of outputs analysed in each case study did not correlate to the amount of mechanisms observed. Rather, it was the quality, length and type of output that determined the amount of mechanisms observed. For example, despite Numan Haider's case study having the least amount of available outputs, his contributions provided lengthy, direct interaction with others which translated to a variety of mechanisms to legitimise his role identity. ^[4]

Name	Years active	No. of outputs analysed	Output type	Platforms used	Observed mechanisms
Neil Prakash	2013-2016	11	Videos, Images, Text	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube	2,4,5,6,7
Khaled Sharrouf	2013-2015	13	Images, Text	Facebook, Twitter	2,4,6
Jake Bilardi	2013-2015	10	Images, Text	WordPress, Facebook, Twitter	2,4,6,7
Abdullah Elmir	2014-2015	10	Videos, Images, Text	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube	1,2,4,
Numan Haider	2014	6	Images, Text	Facebook, Twitter	1,2,3,4

Table 2 Data matrix of each case study and their observed mechanisms.

Mechanisms of Legitimation

Below is an in-depth CDA analysis of each mechanism and their associated case studies. Mechanisms representing similar characteristics have been grouped together to highlight their interconnection. Following a brief explanation of the mechanism, each case study with the best output examples of the observed mechanism are discussed. The observed outputs were then analysed for ISIL recruiter influence.

Short-Term Credit (1)

Short-term credit refers to "an identity that is not being supported but is temporarily accepted by others because of the support received from previous identities" (Stets and Burke 2010, p.43). Actors essentially draw upon a line of credit they have earned from prior identity support to "ride out" a current, unsuccessful role performance (Stets and Burke 2010, p.43). This mechanism was displayed in both Abdullah Elmir's and Numan Haider's case study. Numan Haider's case study provided the best example of the short-term credit mechanism through his exchanges on Facebook. Haider's case also offered the smallest amount of data to analyse with only six ISIL-inspired outputs.

[4] Direct social interaction refers to conversations between the case studies and other individuals through social media.



However, his analysed social media activity provided important accounts of his interaction with others revealing the short-term credit mechanism. On the 18th of September 2014, Haider posted a picture of himself wearing a balaclava and holding the ISIL flag (Haider, 2014). In response to this photo, a friend of his commented, "So what now? You killing Shias too?" This comment can be seen as the point at which Haider's identity is threatened, triggering the response from him "if necessary", which was then quickly followed up with "Kb dw bro im not gonna kill you" which received two "likes".^[5] Haider's friend then replied with "HAHAHAHHA" (Haider, 2014).

This ISIL-inspired dialogue is an example of the short-term credit mechanism as his Facebook friends temporarily support his new role identity with ISIL through both liking his comments and laughing at his reassurance that he will not kill his friend. It can be suggested that Haider's prior line of credit earned from his friend allows him to "ride out" his current unsuccessful role performance (Stets and Burke, 2010, p.44). This conversation displays elements of ISIL recruiter influence through his dehumanisation of the out-group, Shias in this case (Miller, 2013). By ascribing to ISIL's worldview, he is able to justify killing anyone who does not adhere to ISIL's belief system through labels of 'good' and 'evil' (Yusoufzadi and Emmerling, 2017).

Another example of short-term credit is Abdullah Elmir's posts on Facebook. Elmir's case study was more varied in content and platforms than Haider's, providing both Facebook and Twitter posts as well as YouTube videos to analyse. In late 2014, Elmir posted the following message on Facebook:

"To my brothers and sisters back in Tony Abbott's caliphate of Western decadence. Does anyone wanna buy a heavily discounted camping ticket for the Byron Falls festival? I'm not going to be able to make it ☹" (Elmir, 2014a).

Through this comment, he appears to be referencing his new role identity as an ISIL terrorist due to the fact that he had travelled to ISIL-controlled territories by that time (Welch, 2014). In response to this post, a friend of Elmir's threatened his new role identity by replying, "bro were the fuk r u?". This was quickly followed by the comment, "How much? my bro might be keen" (Elmir, 2014a). Similar to Haider's interaction online, short-term credit seems applicable here as Elmir's friends initially challenged his role identity, but temporarily accept the change by responding to his original question. Through this mechanism, Elmir's post also displays elements of ISIL influence, as his criticism of the West as "decadent" is consistent with ISIL's ideological denouncement of Western culture (Bunzel, 2015; Pelletier, et al., 2016). Additionally, there appears to be a trace of ISIL recruiter influence in Elmir's post, as he posted about his absence from the festival and did not reply to his friend regarding his whereabouts.

Selective Perception (2) and Selective Interpretation (3)

Selective perception refers to "attending to cues that support an identity and avoiding cues that do not support an identity" (Stets and Burke 2010, p.44). All five case studies displayed this mechanism through their outputs, but the best example in the data set is evidenced by Jake Bilardi. This case study provided ten posts and exchanges that highlighted mechanisms of legitimation. The most salient of these for selective perception, was his blog entry, *From Melbourne to Ramadi: My Journey*:

"As I read through the Qur'an, I couldn't help but make strong associations between the speech of Allah (azza wa'jal) and the chaotic scenes around the world today.. It was my conversations with brothers from the State online though that began getting me to

[5] A "like" refers to the thumbs up emoji in Facebook showing support for a comment (Emojipedia 2010).

question my view of the organisation and the stories I had heard about it. As the Islamic State began to expand, seizing the cities of Raqqa, Fallujah, Mosul, Tikrit and others, Allah (azza wa'jal) Himself exposed the lies of the liars and humiliated the enemies of the State, a clear sign that they were upon the truth. Slowly but surely, I would come to love the State, recognising that they are the only people in the region establishing the Islamic system of governance, providing services for the people and most importantly they possess a sound aqeedah and manhaj that has led to their correct and effective implementation of the Sharia" (Bilardi, 2015a).

Through this passage, we see that he has employed selective perception by attending to the cues that support ISIL as an "Islamic system of governance" and avoiding cues (particularly Western) that refer to it as a terrorist organisation (Bilardi 2015a). What is interesting about his blog is the self-reflective thinking that gives an in-depth insight into the legitimisation process of his new role identity. As seen above, many posts in the data set reveal selective perception by referencing excerpts of the Koran in order to support their ISIL identity, while avoiding passages that do not. A common quote highlighting this mechanism was, "know that paradise is under the shade of swords" (Bilardi, 2015a; Elmir, 2015; Sharrouf, 2014a). According to Khouwaga Yusoufzai and Franziska Emmerling (2017), Islamism provides a clearly prescriptive "black-and-white worldview" that eliminates uncertainty for Western Muslims battling with their identity. In this way, it could be argued that Bilardi's output is highlighting ISIL recruiter influence by legitimising his new role identity through violent interpretations of Islam.

Another example of selective perception is evidenced through a YouTube video in late 2014 where Elmir sends a threat to Western political leaders:

"To the leaders, to Obama, to Tony Abbott, I say this: these weapons that we have, these soldiers, we will not stop fighting. We will not put down our weapons until we reach your lands, until we take the head of every tyrant and until the black flag is flying high in every single land, until we put the black flag on top of Buckingham Palace, until we put the black flag on top of the White House." (Elmir, 2014b).

The emotionally charged delivery in this video points to Elmir's identity being threatened by Western political powers. Through the depiction of Western political leaders as "tyrants" and the reference to the black flag "flying high in every single land", he is engaging in selective perception to legitimise his ISIL identity. Additionally, the imagery of armed ISIL fighters congregated together with flags chanting "Takfir" in response to Elmir's words also highlights a collective agency engaging in selective perception (Elmir, 2014b).^[6] Many scholars have highlighted the significance of YouTube as a platform for jihadist groups and their supporters to disseminate propaganda (Farwell, 2014; Veilleux-Lepage, 2016; Winter, 2016). This video appears to highlight how ISIL propaganda can use YouTube to convey MoL. Combining his words, collective agency, and the platform utilised in this video, it could be argued that ISIL recruiters have directly influenced the selective perception mechanism in this output.

In some outputs, rather than disregarding cues that do not support an identity, ISIL-inspired messages have interpreted cues to be supportive when they are not intended to be (Stets and Burke, 2010). Known as a *selective interpretation* (3), only one case study evidenced this mechanism, which could be due to the limited number of direct social interactions within the study sample. This mechanism can be viewed in the continuation of Haider's post via Facebook on the 18th of September 2014. Following the short-term credit he received, two friends appear to reject Haider's role identity.

[6] Takfir is a term referring to a Muslim who accuses another Muslim of apostasy (Esposito 2013).



Haider's first friend replies, "Do you purposely want to get raided or what?" (Haider, 2014). In response to killing Shias, his second friend replies, "I'm not saying you are, i'm trying to say isn't that what this group is doing atm". He then responded with:

"What group are you talking about exactly? I haven't mentioned groups or "terrorist" organisations, I support Taliban 100% because by Australian Law they are not a "terrorist" organisation" (Haider 2014).

Haider evidences selective interpretation by appearing not to understand his second friend's negative cue and then preceding to discuss his beliefs, despite posting a picture of himself bearing the ISIL flag. There is also an overlap between perception and interpretation in this exchange. By stating that he has not referred to "terrorist" organisations but he supports the "Taliban 100%", he is using selective perception by avoiding terrorist labels while supporting ISIL's goals (Haider, 2014). This cryptic response could be to avoid law enforcement detection while still validating his role identity with ISIL. Further evidence of selective interpretation is shown when he interprets these negative cues as supportive of his identity by using inclusive language to provide a more generalised narrative of Western aggression towards Islam:

"Let's not put the focus on other things, the main message I'm sending with these statuses and photos is to the dogs AFP and ASIO who are declaring war on Islam and Muslims, ASIO go fist each other up the ass" (Haider, 2014)

This comment marked the end of the discussion thread and received nine "likes" suggesting that through a process of both selective and interpretation perception, Haider has successfully interpreted negative cues towards his identity as positive (Haider, 2014). The hardened view he espouses in these comments suggests a strengthening of his ISIL identity in response to the threat posed by his friends. Research by Yusoufzai and Emmerling (2017) on Islamist terrorist behaviour has highlighted that individuals tend to harden their views and convictions when faced with uncertainty. Putting these two things together, it could be suggested that utilising both selective perception and interpretation allowed him to validate his role identity with ISIL, while remaining covert enough to avoid prosecution. Through this logic, the influence of ISIL recruiters becomes apparent when, upon Haider's death, ISIL recruiter Prakash congratulated Haider on his martyrdom despite the Australian government confiscating his passport (Prakash, 2015a). Similar to the interrelation between selective perception and selective interpretation, the mechanisms of blaming others and disavowing will be explained below.

Blaming Others (4) and Disavowing (5)

The mechanism of *blaming others (4)* refers to criticising others for lack of support regarding a new identity or not confirming identities altogether (Stets and Burke, 2010). All case studies evidenced this mechanism but in two primary ways. Either by blaming the West and non-Muslims for trying to destroy ISIL, or by blaming Muslims for their lack of ISIL support. Khaled Sharrouf's case study prominently displayed this mechanism in seven out of the thirteen outputs analysed. Primarily through Twitter, he targeted Western governments and their agencies through posts such as:

"@AFP Media blow myself up is because I love to slaughter use & ALLAH LOVEs when u dogs r slaughtered" (Sharrouf, 2014b)

"@AFP Media by the way you cowards I am running to my death I want martyrdom that's why I am blessed u rock spiders" (Sharrouf, 2014c)



In both these posts, Sharrouf's group and role identity appears to be threatened by Western agencies, in this case the Australian Federal Police (AFP). In order to legitimise his ISIL identity, he appears to attack the AFP with derogatory terms such as "dogs" and "rock spiders" while highlighting his religiosity through "ALLAH" and "martyrdom" (Sharrouf, 2014b; Sharrouf, 2014c). These prescribed labels in Sharrouf's Twitter posts highlight how perceived injustices and attacks on Islam can generate resentment toward Western society (Abdel-Fattah, 2017; Murshed and Pavan, 2011). Terrorist groups such as ISIL use these types of grievances to recruit individuals to their cause (Ingram 2017; Stern and Berger, 2015). In fact, negative sentiment towards the Australian police was widespread throughout the data set as three case studies referred to the AFP as "dogs" (Bilardi, 2015b; Haider, 2014; Sharrouf, 2014b). Through the repetition of this reference in the data set, it could be argued that the case studies are using this term due to their influence from ISIL recruiters. Other posts showing Sharrouf and his sons behind ISIL flags and holding the heads of "kuffar" (non-Muslims), also highlights ISIL's influence in shaping this blame towards non-Muslims (Sharrouf, 2014d).

Blaming others was also used in the data set to criticise Muslims for their lack of support (Elmir, 2014b; Prakash, 2015a). The case study of Neil Prakash provided eleven outputs to analyse. Many of these were more transactional in nature, offering technical advice to those looking to travel to ISIL-controlled territory (Prakash 2015b). However, an excerpt from Prakash's YouTube video entitled *The Story of Abu Khaled – Al Cambodi from Australia* (2015), produced by al-Hayāt Media Centre, evidences this mechanism:

"I also send a message to my brothers of Islam in Australia, now is the time to arrive, now is the time to wake up, now is the time to rush for what Allah has promised you! You must start attacking before they attack you, look at how many of your sisters have been violated. All I hear on the news in Australia is that this sister was hurt, that this sister's hijab was ripped off. But no, brothers are sitting, and I ask brothers, when is the time that you are going to rise up and attack them for attacking you?" (Prakash, 2015a).

Through his twelve-minute message, it can be suggested that Prakash is criticising Australian Muslims for their lack of support in confirming his new role identity. This is shown through his remarks that "brothers are sitting" despite "sisters" being attacked (Prakash, 2015a). Through this rhetoric, it is observable that his use of this mechanism is different to Sharrouf's. While Sharrouf blames the West through sporadic and aggressive Twitter Posts, Prakash blames Muslims for inaction by building a narrative and context through his YouTube videos. Prakash's more calculated approach could suggest that he is not only legitimising his ISIL identity, but is using it as a recruitment tool for ISIL. Strengthening this argument is Prakash's reputation as a prominent ISIL recruiter (Zammit, 2017). In 2016, the Australian government identified him as "actively involved both in recruitment and in encouraging of domestic terrorism," making it clear that ISIL has influenced Prakash's use of MoL in this output (Zammit, 2017, p.26).

Interwoven into this narrative is the disavowal mechanism. *Disavowing* (5) an identity refers to denying responsibility for an identity by revealing alternative intentions (Stets and Burke 2010). This mechanism was only displayed once throughout the data set. Once again, Prakash was the instigator of this mechanism. In the following excerpt from the same video, he highlighted how he came to follow ISIL:

"As spoke to a Muslim and he said, why are you following the religion of buddism? I said because my family is. He said, well that is not a reason to stay somewhere, you should keep searching...I just want to say to you before me here, I was idle. And by the will of Allah the Islamic State destroyed this idle." "I turned to Allah and I asked him,



Allah please guide me towards the group that will bring you victory. He said, ad-Dawla.” (Prakash, 2015a).

When pairing this statement to the disavowal mechanism, Prakash appears to deny responsibility for his old Buddhist identity by stating that he was “idle” before Islam and only followed Buddhism because of his family. Building on this point, Prakash explains that through “Allah” his “journey began” to ISIL. Facilitating Prakash’s disavowal of his previous Buddhist identity are the multiple camera angles, montages, and slow-motion action shots during this excerpt (Prakash, 2015a). Scholars have highlighted that high-quality imagery from al-Hayāt Media Centre helps to legitimise ISIL’s identity and promote its state-building ambitions (Saltman and Winter, 2014; Veilleux-Lepage, 2016). Acknowledging these factors, Prakash’s disavowal of his previous Buddhist identity in this statement also highlights ISIL recruiter influence through his pro-ISIL narrative: if you are lot or idle, Allah will guide you to ISIL for fulfilment.

Switching Identities (6) and Withdrawing (7)

In some instances, individuals will switch to an alternative identity in order to avoid further negative emotions from an identity threat (Stets and Burke, 2010). This mechanism was highlighted in two of the five case studies: Prakash and Bilardi. Through Bilardi’s blog entry, we can observe the logic that convinced him to adopt his new role identity in ISIL:

“Then things took a turn, something I did not fear as an Atheist but began to fear as a Muslim, was supporting the mujahideen, convinced that I had been ‘radicalised’ by violent terrorist organisations. So, what I can say is one of the most shameful periods of my life, the research I had been doing all these years and the beliefs I had held so strongly to despite no-one around me sharing them were thrown aside. “However, as I read through the Qur’an, I couldn’t help but make strong associations between the speech of Allah (azza wa’jal) and the chaotic scenes around the world today... Is this not the reality of the kuffar today? Who claim to be helping to free the people while doing nothing but increasing their suffering. As my realisation of this reality re-kindled my previous views about global revolution, I began to truly understand what I had focused on studying for more than five years, the motivation of the mujahedeen: The doctrine of jihad and it’s superiority in Islam.” (Bilardi, 2015a).

Through this statement, Bilardi is discussing his identity switch from Atheism to Islam. The interesting thing to note is that he appears to be aware of ISIL recruiter influence by stating that he had been “radicalised by violent terrorist organisations”. Despite this claim, his next words suggest he sees it as necessary to identify with ISIL in order to remove the negative emotions arising from the “kuffar”. In his final passage, Bilardi appears to confirm his new role identity by proclaiming that he “began to truly understand what I had focused on studying for more than five years, the motivation of the mujahideen”. Through this mechanism, he separates old and new identities by associating the “kuffar” with increased suffering, which he contrasts with the “motivation of the mujahedeen” and superiority of Islam (Bilardi, 2015a). Indeed, many scholars have highlighted how “in-group” identity is strengthened by highlighting “out-group” difference (Hogg, 2006, p.115). In relation to ISIL, research has shown that propaganda readily glorifies the ummah while simultaneously denouncing the out-groups through derogatory labels such as “apostate” (Christein, 2016; Ingram, 2017; Pelleter, et al., 2016). Through these understandings, it is evident that ISIL recruiter influence has shaped Bilardi’s MoL.



Prakash also provides an in-depth discussion of his progression to ISIL role identity in another excerpt from *The Story of Abu Khaled – Al Cambodi from Australia* (2015):

“I started thinking deeper and started getting a lot of thoughts to myself. And the thoughts were telling me why don’t you leave your religion and enter Islam. But then other thoughts would come to me saying would you leave the religion of your forefathers to follow something that is new and strange. My family took me to a trip of Cambodia, I finally saw what the meaning of this religion was for me, and it didn’t make sense to me... If anyone was to ask me three years ago and tell me I was living under Sharia amongst Muslims I would tell them they’re crazy, but by the mercy of Allah look what he has planned for me, he can plan this for you too, all you have to do is put to do is put your trust in him.” (Prakash, 2015a).

It appears that his trip to Cambodia was the tipping point for his identity to switch to Islam. Research has highlighted the difficulty of balancing separate identities with different cultures and belief systems (Maalouf, 2011; Meuus, 2015). This is especially prevalent in second and third-generation Australians that have interrelationships between cultural and inherited ethnic identities (Asghari-Fard and Hossain, 2017). This excerpt suggests that he entered ISIL to remove the negative emotions arising from his lost faith in Buddhism. Compared to Bilardi’s blog, Prakash’s highly produced video ,complete with visual montages and *nasheeds*^[7], suggests that ISIL’s influence was much more direct in Prakash’s output. This is shown in the final sentence when he uses his personal narrative of identity to rally others to ISIL, “Allah, look what he has planned for me, he can plan this for you too, all you have to do is put to do is put your trust in him” (Prakash, 2015a).^[8] Through this sentence, we can see the importance of ISIL in shaping Prakash’s identity. In turn, once an individual switches identity, it is likely that they will withdraw altogether.

Thus, the last mechanism discussed by McCall and Simmons (1978, cited in Stets and Burke, 2010) is to *withdraw* (7) oneself from interactions that threaten an identity. Three out of the five case studies addressed this mechanism, all with similar themes referring to leaving the West to be purified by Islam (Bilardi, 2015a; Elmir, 2014b; Sharrouf, 2014e). This similar ideology in all three case studies suggests ISIL recruiters have influenced these outputs. Both Sharrouf and Bilardi evidenced this mechanism but approached their articulation in different ways. Sharrouf sought to blame Australian society for forcing him to leave:

“We live better than we lived in our country” ... “@AFP Media u can’t stop and trust me if I wanted to attack aus I could have so easily I chose to leave as a Muslim”. (Sharrouf, 2014e).

In the first sentence, it can be argued that he is comparing the Caliphate to Australian society, believing that life with ISIL is better. Associated with this post, was an image of an armed Sharrouf in front of a BMW and an ISIL Flag. Applying MoL, it could be suggested that he is articulating that his old life no longer threatens his Muslim identity because he has withdrawn from it. It could also be argued that he believes ISIL life is better due to his wealth, weapons and cause. This reasoning is consistent with ISIL’s media strategy of promoting both material and ideological wealth in order to appeal to and recruit from diverse audiences (Farwell 2014; Saltman and Winter, 2014). Through political rhetoric that mixes ideological goals with ancient Islamic texts, ISIL has laced their traditional religious zeal with interpretations that resonate with today’s jihadist movement (Bunzel,

[7] Prakash, N. (2015a). *The Story of Abu Khaled – Al Cambodi from Australia*. Available at: <https://jihadology.net/2015/04/21/al-%E1%B8%A5ayat-media-center-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-stories-from-the-land-of-the-living-abu-khalid-al-kambudi/> (Accessed: 19 May 2018).

[8] Ibid.



2015; Stern and Berger, 2015). Through this logic, ISIL recruiters have influenced his withdrawal by catering towards an interest in material goods as well as practising Islam.

The second part of Sharrouf's post expands on his initial point by suggesting that he was forced to leave Australia in order to practice Islam because of the oppression of Western governments and agencies like AFP. Once again, he is highlighting how he was forced to withdraw from his Australian identity as his Muslim identity was being threatened. The interesting point here is his emphasis on personal agency in the last sentence. While he admits he has joined ISIL, he also communicates to the AFP that it was of his own volition to leave without attacking Australia (Sharrouf, 2014e). This personalisation of an ISIL-inspired post can be referred to as the "symbiosis between the propagandist and the propagandee", where users are also co-producers, facilitating jihad by personalising and publishing experiences (Winter, 2016, p.15).

Imran Awan (2017, p.138) refers to this personalisation process as "the virtual playground for extremist views", whereby individuals can share their own unique interpretation of Jihad to the cyber world. Terrorist groups such as ISIL allow these interpretations, thus providing a platform for Sharrouf to legitimise his identity, air grievances, and incite jihad.

Contrastingly, Bilardi's (2015a) reasons for withdrawing seem to extend from a desperation to leave Australian society and a yearning to live in ISIL-controlled territory. From an excerpt in his blog, he provides a detailed account of this:

"I was growing tired of the corruption and filthiness of Australian society and yearned to live under the Islamic State with the Muslims. I now had the determination to finally remove myself from this land. I continued my search for a contact, even at one point considering simply crossing the border alone without any assistance. Finally, I made contact with a brother online who promised to bring me across the border, it was a risky decision to trust someone online but I was desperate to leave and was confident the brother was genuine." (Bilardi, 2015a).

Through this excerpt, his negative emotions appear to arise from "the corruption and filthiness" of Australian society threatening his role identity with ISIL (Bilardi, 2015a). Bilardi describes at length the withdrawal mechanism through his desperation to leave Australia and "live under the Islamic State with the Muslims". It could be argued that his desperation to leave Australia was because he had already withdrawn from his old identity due to his deep research into Islam for 'more than five years'. Buriil (2016, p.2), describes cases like Bilardi's as "born-again Muslims", who have a "desperate need to please God after years of neglect". ISIL utilises these newfound religious experiences as recruitment tools to channel beliefs into the goals of the organisation (Buriil, 2016; Ingram, 2017; Pelletier, 2016). Further ISIL recruiter influence is observed when he describes making "contact with a brother online" (Bilardi, 2015a). Unlike other outputs in the data set, this passage provides us with a first-hand account of how an ISIL recruiter facilitated Bilardi's withdrawal out of his old Australian identity.

Limitations

The findings of this study must also be considered in the context of their limitations. Firstly, a limitation of using MoL was the inability to work directly with respondents through structured methods, such as interviews, to measure human responses to interaction (Amarasingam and Dawson, 2017; Dawson, 2018). Another issue is that identity-based theories can lack a distinction between 'individual' or 'group' psychology (Jenkins, 2004). These limitations were countered by



using the qualitative interpretative qualities of CDA to develop key themes centred on the data set. Additionally, case studies narrowed the breadth of discourse to analyse, making the analysis more manageable. Although beneficial for this study, CDA endures some limitations. Firstly, discourse analysis lacks consistency in the collation of data, making information difficult to quantify. Indeed, Powers (2001, p.64) explains that findings are subject to the researcher's qualitative analysis, thus generalisations with other discourses affect measurability. Furthermore, the impartiality of discourse can limit analysis as topics are inextricably linked to wider social practices. As Neta Crawford (2004, p.24) notes, discourse analysis can only ever be a partial representation of a wider social practice. Therefore, the analysis of Islamic texts can create issues for CDA as the language used spans multiple discourses, causing misinterpretation. James Gee and Michael Handford (2013) discuss how the analysis of language can present issues for researchers, such as misinterpretation of metaphors and their use in discourse. To counter these limitations, MoL should reduce inconsistencies by providing a conceptual framework for CDA to work through.

Implications for further research

Due to the generalisability of the MoL framework, future research could apply these findings to the broader terrorist network of actors, such as Al Qaeda. Furthermore, due to the interdisciplinary nature of identity studies, this research can be enhanced through contributions from other fields (Côté, 1996; Schwartz, 2005). For example, sociological and criminological perspectives could increase our understanding of ISIL-inspired social media postings and exchanges by young Australian Muslim men. Finally, this study focused solely on Australian Muslim men; therefore, investigation into ISIL-inspired Australian Muslim women could be an avenue for future research and highlight whether there are gender-specific links between ISIL recruitment and identity on social media (Dawson, 2018).

ISIL Recruiters as Social Media Influencers

Through the application of McCall and Simmons' MoL framework (1978 cited in Stets and Burke, 2010) this paper aimed to highlight how young Australian Muslim men inspired by ISIL view themselves; how they believe they are viewed by others; and how negative discourses on Islam can affect their identity construction. As a result, this study achieved this aim by offering a unique insight into ISIL radicalisation from the perspective of the 'recruited'. Through these perspectives, the second objective of assessing the importance of ISIL recruiter influence in shaping the identity of young Australian Muslim men on social media was also achieved. Critical discourse analyses of the data set revealed that all seven mechanisms were observed in the social media exchanges of radicalised young Australian Muslim men. The mechanisms *selective perception* and *blaming others* were observed in all five case studies, which may reflect ISIL recruiter influence in each case study. It was also found that some mechanisms were not observed as frequently, possibly due to the small sample size; the limitations of the social media platform used (e.g. word limited posts versus video posts); or the quality of the social media exchange (e.g. direct versus indirect interaction with others) which are likely to have impacted on the mechanisms used to legitimise role identity.

Thirdly, this paper aimed to develop a better understanding of how ISIL-inspired exchanges and posts provide examples of ISIL recruiter influence. Analysis of the data set provided insight into the variety of ways identity is shaped through ISIL. Through the application of MoL, the most common mechanisms, such as selective perception and blaming others, shared strong links with ISIL's ideology. For less common mechanisms, direct social interaction such as in Numan Haiders case study, offered rich insight into ISIL's influence. Descriptions of personal agency, such as in



Sharrouf's case study, and first-hand accounts of ISIL recruitment in Bilardi's, provided examples of the multiple ways mechanisms could be articulated. Lastly, this study highlights the important role that psychology continues to play in understanding terrorism and the need for its greater application in the field (Horgan, 2004; Lynch, 2018; Taylor, Roach and Pease, 2015). Therefore, by applying McCall and Simmons' MoL (1978) framework, this study provides more clarity on ISIL's role in influencing the identity of young Australian Muslim men. With additional comparative analysis into how other jihadists groups influence the identity of young Australian Muslim men on social media, it may be possible to generalise these conclusions to other jihadist organisations. Further, broadening the application of MoL to ISIL-inspired social media posts from both genders and various countries would be useful in providing a broader picture of how ISIL recruiter influence is permeated through social media activity.

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