



Infographics and their role in the IS propaganda machine

by Michael Glausch



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Abstract

Although infographics form only a small portion of Islamic State (IS) propaganda, they provide an insight into the organisation's self-perception, strategy and long-term plans. This research paper analyses more than four hundred infographics published by official IS media units using Winter's (2018) thematic framework to categorise these images beyond the violence for which IS has become known. The three principal IS propaganda themes that Winter identified – Victimhood, Utopia and War – define the core themes of these IS infographics. This paper's analysis shows that Religious Life and Summaries make up the majority of infographic sub-themes, while the primary theme Victimhood exists in the background, ultimately demonstrating that IS uses a combination of religiously based justification and state-building to solidify their position as a lasting power in the region.

Keywords: *Islamic State; ISIS; infographics; propaganda; media; terrorism*

Introduction

As a West Point report on the Islamic State (IS) summarised, 'a new "long-war" narrative is emerging in Islamic State propaganda that portends the media network's future trajectory' (Munoz, 2018). As one of the most prevalent extremist regimes, the Islamic State (IS) regularly deploys symbols, typefaces and slogans in an effort to trigger emotive responses in their body of propaganda.^[1] In much of the media studies literature about contemporary propaganda, scholars, such as Baines (2013), have underlined the power of images in building states and waging war. For example, Belousov (2012) identified how present-day Russia utilises propaganda to reinforce Putin's 'vertical power' in state-building, while MacDonald (2002) showed how a unified conception of victimhood helped to build nations in the Balkans. Indeed, the power of political propaganda rests in its ability to transcend language, class and culture to communicate deeply nuanced meanings of governance, unity, shared mythologies and more. In the hands of IS, propaganda has become a useful tool of war.

IS's propaganda, which has transcended borders to spread their messages of extremism, has attracted a great deal of internal and external attention. At first, witnessing the brutal violence for which IS has become famous, scholars and analysts frequently reduced IS propaganda to a tactic for frightening their enemies and demonstrating merciless strength. While that interpretation may indeed be the case, there are other aspects of IS propaganda completely unrelated to violence that transcend its use of brutality. Given this, many scholars have begun to move beyond a focus on violence in IS propaganda. As the most important example for this research, Winter's (2018) analysis of IS propaganda displays a nuanced picture, enabling a more accurate and useful examination of

[1] Simply defined, propaganda is 'an amalgam of myth [which Barthes (1957/1992) usefully outlines as a false signifier commonly accepted as fact], symbolism [when signs express meaning beyond their obvious content], and rhetoric [mixing wordplay and persuasion].' For more information, including specific categories of propaganda, see: Baines and O'Shaughnessy, 2014.



IS's message. This research draws upon this analysis and, attempting to follow suit, examines the more unwieldy messages of IS propaganda.

In particular, infographics have become a critical component of IS's propaganda as it has developed. Alongside other forms of propaganda, such as images, the production of infographics has increased since their emergence in 2014.^[2] Therefore, their examination goes beyond ascertaining the validity of the information that the IS presents, but rather shows how the organisation sets priorities, creates narratives and, ultimately, perceives itself (Bilger, 2014). Although IS's ideology differs from that of other rivals, such as Al Qaeda, Aly et al. (2017) argue that IS's sophisticated use of propaganda has built on Al Qaeda's example. In developing its style, IS first imitated Al Qaeda before adopting its own version of propaganda machinery to replace and exceed the outreach of its competitors. The effective use of propaganda, and especially data-driven infographics, renders a noteworthy subject for further investigation.

Given this context, this research critically assesses four hundred previously unstudied infographics that IS has created and disseminated using Winter's (2018) analytical framework on propaganda. This research argues that, instead of mere brutality directed towards its adversaries, IS also relies on a combination of utopian promises and religiously inspired imagery to justify its actions, implement policy and project longevity as a state, in order to communicate with its constituents.

Why infographics?

As the rapid transmission of information has increased due to the burgeoning use of the Internet and social media around the world, the deployment of infographics has also increased, notably among political and extremist groups such as IS. Their popularity can be ascribed to an infographic's ability to present information in a visibly appealing and informative manner. While media and governments have often used infographics as a form of propaganda, their impact as a medium of mass communication has recently grown in importance because of their use of images to offer unifying information and rally action. This has allowed both legitimate and illegitimate organisations, states and companies to communicate important and complex information to internal and external audiences simply and effectively.

Infographics are powerful because they allow their producers to convey an immense amount of information using symbols, visual data and images that resonate with the experiences, culture and emotions of the viewer. The visual aspect of infographics simplifies convoluted information in an intuitively understandable manner, capitalising on the fact that around fifty per cent of the human brain is directly or indirectly devoted to visual functions. As such, the brain responds more readily to infographics, allowing viewers to process and synthesise visual information more efficiently than textual (Smiciklas, 2012). Due to their use of symbols, colours and motifs, infographics convey content-laden information using a streamlined design. The use of infographics in politics has been on the rise recently, in a trend Amit-Danhi and Shifman (2018) term 'digital political infographics'. As these scholars highlight, 'digital infographics constitute new ways of discussing and understanding politics' because of their ability to 'facilitate data-based and easily accessible political discourse' (p. 3541). Infographics, and the worldview for which they provide evidence, propel IS's message to the fore and may attract more 'slivers of attention' than conventional formats (Smiciklas, 2012).

In this way, infographics have stood out amidst the deluge of IS propaganda. IS focuses on content production, particularly by saturating its audience with a large volume of daily content. From 17

[2] An infographic can be defined as 'a larger graphic design that combines data visualisations, illustrations, text, and images together into a format that tells a complete story' (Krum, 2013, p. 6).



July to 15 August 2015, Winter (2015) recorded over one thousand separate events produced by official IS media outlets, which averages out to over thirty eight unique propaganda events per day. This includes, but is not limited to, photo essays, videos, audio statements, news bulletins, posters and theological essays. In addition to the barrage of information from official channels, pro-IS supporters posted an estimated 133,442 messages per day on Twitter alone during IS's peak operations in 2015 (Berger and Morgan, 2015). Although infographics are just one of many types of images that IS uses in its propaganda, they present internally created data and simplified information to solidify the organisation's image and instruct its constituents.

Literature on IS media production and propaganda

As IS evolved out of the complex context of the War in Iraq and Afghanistan and has its origins in many pre-existing organisations, the academic literature on IS extends beyond the scope of this research (Mabon and Royle, 2017). There are two bodies of study on IS propaganda, however, that ground this research. The first began shortly after IS's rapid expansion in 2014, with the majority of academic analyses focusing on the brutality of IS propaganda, its impressive production techniques, the sheer quantity of its media output and its use of social media in marketing its particular brand (see Hall, 2015; Stern and Berger, 2015; Weiss and Hassan, 2016). While these publications provide a comprehensive assessment of IS's communication strategy, the research remains limited to content released by IS's central media units and, therefore, does not contribute a framework of analysis for better understanding the actions of IS outside of its ability to make war (Ingram, 2015) wilayat information offices and broader supporter base, this study examines the strategic logic of IS information operations (IO).

The second wave of literature on IS propaganda emerged using the first body as a foundation, but expanding to focus on the organisation's use of communication technologies, its political goals and the development of its media operations (see Al-'Ubaydi, Lahoud, Milton and Price, 2014; Winter, 2015; Berger and Morgan, 2015; Fisher, 2015). This trend of analysing themes other than violence became a tenant of the second body of literature. For example, Zelin (2015) analysed one week of the entire IS official media output and discerned eleven different focal points in IS's media releases. Out of these focal points, six comprehensive main themes emerged but, in spite of this, Zelin concluded that his sample was not representative of the entirety of IS's media output over longer periods and urged future researchers to adopt a more holistic view of IS media over time.^[3] Similarly, Milton (2016) examined more than nine thousand IS visual products that IS operatives had embedded on Twitter from January 2015 to August 2016. Milton presented similar findings to Zelin and also identified six themes in the infographics and images of IS.^[4] Both studies allude to the notion that the majority of IS media focuses on non-military themes, such as governance and religious activities, rather than solely focusing on violence. Nonetheless, and despite the great detail of their analyses, Zelin and Milton delve on IS's propaganda strategy at a single moment in time, instead of implementing a comparative analysis over an extended period. The present research, thus, responds to Zelin and Milton's recommendations by analysing an entire body of IS infographics, rather than merely a subset.

Adding to the discussion on IS propaganda, Winter (2018) fills several of these gaps by sorting the content of IS into six distinct categories of analysis, which constitute the basis of this study. In order to understand better the structural and thematic shifts in IS propaganda, Winter uses a propaganda archive compiled in mid-2015 as a baseline comparison for an identically structured

[3] Zelin's (2015) categories: Military, Governance and Hisba, Da'wa, Promotion of the Caliphate, Enemy Attack.

[4] Milton's (2016) categories: Military, Commercial, Governance, Religious, Lifestyle, Other (p. 30).



propaganda archive compiled in January 2017. Contrasting the six themes in his own 2015 research, he categorises IS propaganda into three umbrella themes: *Victimhood*, *Utopia* and *War*, with multiple sub-themes. His comparative analysis reveals significant structural and thematic rearrangements within IS propaganda over time and challenges basic assumptions about how IS attracts followers. Winter's findings are also consistent with Milton (2016), who identified a decline in overall IS propaganda output due to territorial loss, collation operations and cyber warfare. Due to this, Winter concludes that IS's Central Media Office ordered an emphasis on military over utopian narratives with the objectives being to sustain internal moral affiliations and attracting external support.

It is important to note that, while Winter's three central themes enable an accurate and efficient examination of the intricacies of the objectives of IS propaganda, many of the sub-categories of *Utopia* and *War* are either not relevant to IS infographics or too general for any practical application. In particular, the sub-theme *Religious Life* would benefit from further division into more nuanced sub-categories. Since religious infographics touch on multiple facets of the teachings of the Qur'an, one option would be to categorise them in accordance with the ten major themes outlined by Rahman (2009). Not only would this enable a better understanding of how IS justifies and legitimises its war as built upon religious principles, but doing so would also provide opportunities to investigate potential overlap with other non-religious themes. In spite of this, however, Winter's categories remain the most cutting-edge in the literature and provide the strongest theoretical basis for this research due to the greater categorical detail that they offer as opposed to Zelin (2015) or Milton (2016).

Although many political scientists and media studies experts have conducted extensive research on IS's official media production and propaganda output as a whole, only a few articles discuss IS's infographics. The author of one such article, Adelman (2018), argues that infographics remain a valuable tool for IS because they weaponise unassuming information in a way that rivals its enemies in the United States (US). Due to her background in media and communication studies, Adelman employs an epistemological examination of infographics as a shared mode of warfare between Western governments and IS. She demonstrates how US media uses infographics to reduce the brutality of IS into numbers and to transform the organisation into a knowable enemy. She continues to explain that IS incorporates infographics as a technique to do the same to the US. She disregards the fact, however, that a substantial proportion of IS infographics are predominantly directed at internal audiences. This is especially true for infographics released in the weekly newsletter Al-Naba. Although Adelman's findings are an indispensable starting point in understanding IS infographics, this research will take them further, arguing that they are also used to address internal audiences.

As a foundation for this research's investigation of these internal audiences, Winkler's data (2016, p. 16) argues that IS 'relies much more heavily on infographics in its publications targeting internal audiences than it does in those aimed at external audiences'. Winkler examines infographics published in Dabiq, a multilingual magazine focused on attracting external viewers, as well as in the weekly Arabic newspaper, Al-Naba, that targets an internal Arabic-speaking audience. Both publications are media outlets under the direct control of the Central Media Office. While the former lacks any strategic message, Winkler observes that Al-Naba provides a clear strategic intent for IS's internal audience with a particular focus on physical and psychological security. Winkler's categorisation of Al-Naba infographics into just two sub-groups remains insufficient to provide a granular assessment of IS propaganda. Although Winkler conducts a preliminary examination of IS infographics, he did not study their evolution over time nor did he provide a comprehensive overview of all Al-Hayat Media Centre infographics, specifically neglecting Rumiya literature. The



exclusion of Rumiya is particularly promising for further investigation, since Dabiq released only a single infographic across all of its fifteen issues.

This paper attempts to fill these research gaps by assessing IS publications using Winter's (2018) thematic approach and findings on both internal and external target groups. While Winkler's analysis, however, focused on fewer than twenty Al-Naba issues in addition to the one Dabiq infographic, this research paper adds to the literature by assessing all known released issues, which currently total more than one hundred and twenty Al-Naba publications. As such, this research expands on the goals of Winkler, gaining crucial insight into how the infographics of IS speak to its constituents as members of the burgeoning IS state.

Methods and Methodology

The publication sample comprised 122 issues of Al-Naba, 15 issues of Dabiq and 12 issues of Rumiya, as well as more than a hundred Amaq News Agency publications, dating from mid-2013 to early 2018. The researcher chose the sample based on three principles: 1) popularity, 2) representation and 3) completeness. As these publications are all considered core pieces of the IS propaganda machine, they represent the ideology, beliefs and strategy of the organisation. Further, by examining three different publications, it is possible to analyse the many different sides of IS portrayed. A total of 412 infographics were extracted using the principle of universality, as opposed to a randomised or case-study sampling strategy, which represents the most comprehensive analysis available.

Winter's (2018) theoretical framework underpins the analytical approach. He identified three principal themes in effective IS propaganda: *Victimhood*, *Utopia* and *War*, which were used to sort and classify the infographics. While *Victimhood* stands alone as a theme, *Utopia* and *War* are each divided into seven sub-categories. For *Utopia* these are: Combination, Economics, Justice, Governance, Social Life, Landscape and Nature, and Religious Life. For *War*, the sub-categories are: Preparation, Offensive, Defensive, Deterrence, Aftermath, Eulogy and Summary. This categorisation assesses and defines the objectives of the infographics and their respective impact, demonstrating the intent and strategies of IS.

The three main categories encapsulate the nuanced strategy of IS to evoke a bond with or a reaction from its audience. First, the category of *Victimhood* identifies infographic information that puts emphasis on the damage caused by the international coalition against vital IS infrastructure, such as the demolition of bridges. In this, IS is presented as the victim. Interestingly, IS infographics do not include statistics regarding human collateral despite the heavy use of such visuals in IS propaganda imagery. Second, *Utopia* captures efforts made by IS to display the most basic elements of statehood, such as education and health services or the collection of taxes. Infographics in this category also focus on religious teachings, such as the *hadith*, to legitimate the actions and laws of IS. By manipulating the views of supporters through the use of religious texts in ways that many argue are misconstrued, IS grounds and justifies its actions and methods in pre-existing belief structures (Boutz et al., 2017). Significantly for this research, this category defines the beliefs and promises of IS outside of simply brutalising or violent tactics, showing its use of culture and religion to boost its moral image. The final category, *War*, focuses on IS battlefield exploits, which include mainly statistical summaries of IS martyrdom and military operations. Some infographics also provide practical advice in this aspect, such as how to prepare suicide missions or how to survive a sarin attack. This research builds upon these three categories to construct a more informed portrayal of IS. In addition to analysing the occurrence of these three primary themes among IS infographics, this research paper also identified the twelve most common types of infographics, according to



Krystian (2017).^[5] This categorisation aimed at blending Krystian's study on infographics with the larger body of work on IS propaganda, discussing infographics that fall into both categories.

The sorting of infographics into themes and types as discussed above was achieved using a qualitative reading of each infographic. Following Winter (2018), the researcher used keywords to identify into which category each infographic fell. Some level of subjectivity was exercised in order to categorise the data.

During the research, three main challenges arose: accessibility, language and verification. Accessibility was an immediate barrier, as these sources were not published in a readily accessible manner outside of the region. Luckily, the complete run of all three publications – the Al-Naba newspaper and the Dabiq and Rumiya magazines – has become available through a comprehensive and verified database on Jihadi primary source material (2018) hosted by the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University of Oslo. Conversely, Amaq infographics are not readily accessible via open-source databases and their dissemination is often limited to encrypted messenger channels for IS supporters. Accessibility issues were overcome as users with access to such channels frequently forward releases via open-source social media platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr. While it is possible that some sources have been overlooked, a relatively complete set of infographics from the Amaq News Agency from late 2015 to early 2018 was compiled (to the best knowledge of the researcher).

The language barrier presented the second challenge. While all Dabiq and Rumiya infographics are in English, only slightly more than half of Amaq infographics are released in English. To the contrary, Al-Naba infographics are exclusively published in Arabic. In order to bridge this gap, the researcher assigned a native speaker to translate the titles of the infographics. Further translation would be too costly and extend beyond the focus of the research, as the titles of the infographics alone were adequate for the researcher to assess the general topic. This was done in accordance to the objective of the research, which has always been to provide a set, rather than an archival presentation of all translated graphics. The risk of misunderstanding or miscategorising some of the infographics is offset by their number, which should compensate for this margin of error. Adding to this, in order to verify the accuracy of this work, the researcher compared a randomly selected sample of thirty Al-Naba infographics, which had been translated for the research, with the officially IS-translated counterparts in Rumiya. The translated versions were found to be similar in meaning to the official translations provided by Al-Hayat.

Finally, the third challenge was to verify that IS had produced each of the infographics used. In order to do so, the researcher identified and verified that each infographic carried one of the three official publisher logos, in particular with regards to the Amaq infographics that were collected via an open-source platform. Considering that IS supporters and sympathisers produce and disseminate their personal IS propaganda, including infographics, this research ensured that all infographics included in the dataset were validated as IS-produced through the use of the official publisher's logo.

Thematic and Content Analysis

This section provides an overview of the themes and sub-themes found in IS propaganda, and also shows the type of infographics published.

[5] Krystian's (2017) categories: Data Centric, Timeline, How-To, Geographical, Comparison, Hierarchical, Flowchart, List, Anatomical, Visual Resume, and Photo-Based and Interactive.

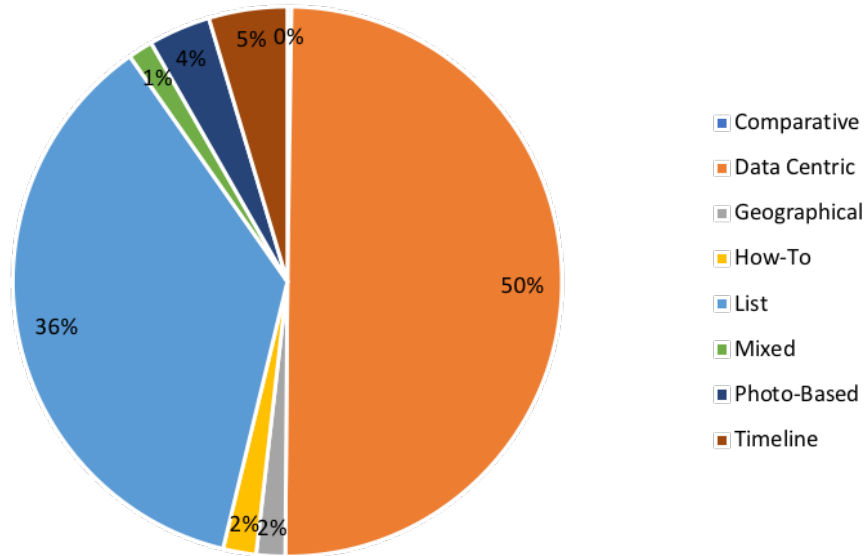


Figure 1: IS infographic types

While different types can and are often used in individual infographics to relay information, this research concentrates exclusively on the types that are most predominant across the sample as a whole. Figure 1 shows that *Data Centric* and *List* are the principal infographic types preferred by IS media distributors. While the former is primarily used to present complex statistical information, such as IS military operations (see Figure 2), the latter is commonly used to provide religious information and guidelines (see Figure 3).

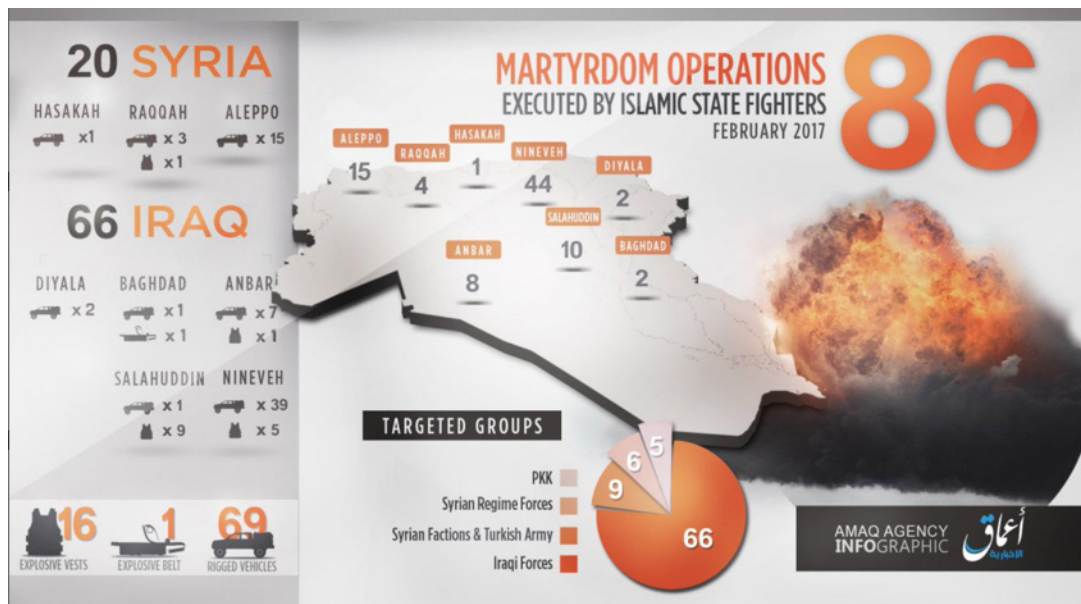


Figure 2: Data Centric (Amaq, March 2017)

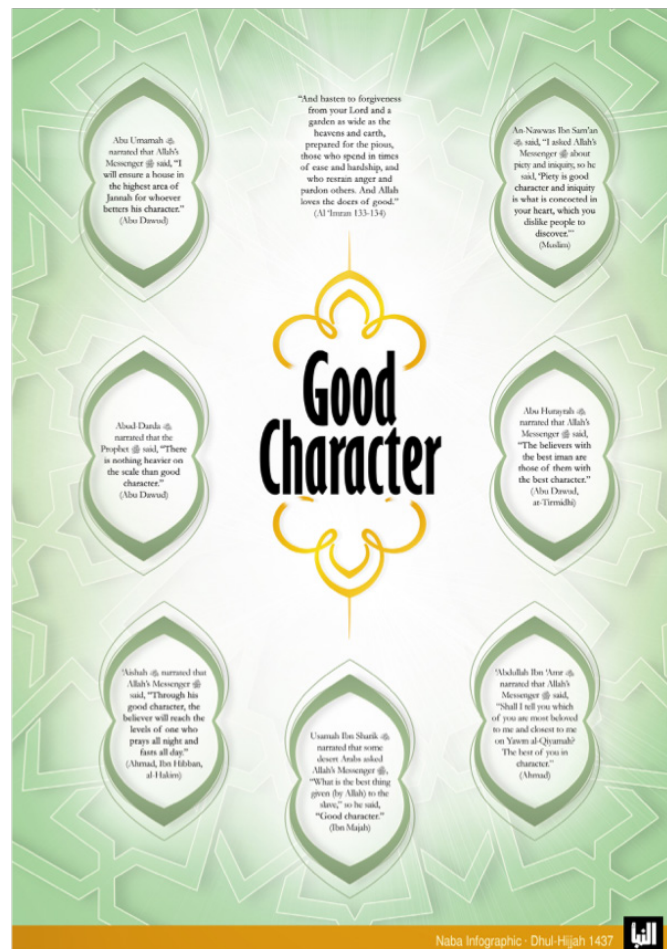


Figure 3: List (Rumiyah #2)

The Central Media Office of IS is primarily responsible for the creation and distribution of official IS content, of which infographics are a component (Al-'Ubaydi et al., 2014). Out of the many media distributors and producers reporting directly to the IS media office, only the Al-Hayat Media Centre and the Al-I'tsam Foundation produce infographics. While the Al-Hayat Media Centre publishes the monthly English language magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, the Al-I'tsam Foundation issues the weekly Arabic newspaper *Al-Naba*. In addition to these outlets, the Amaq News Agency is an auxiliary organisation operating quasi-independently from the IS Central Media Office (Al-Tamimi, 2017). Despite its self-proclaimed objectivity, it echoes the official IS stance on many topics. Al-Hayat and Al-I'tsam infographics are published in magazine and newspaper format. In contrast, Amaq infographics are distributed as individual files via encrypted messenger platforms.

Publisher	Number of Infographics
Al-I'tsam Foundation	252
Amaq News Agency	93
Al-Hayat Media Centre	67
Total	412

Table 1: Total number of IS infographics per publisher

The 412 infographics considered in this analysis are classified by publisher in Table 1. Considering that the Al-Hayat Media Centre did not create independently the only infographic ever released by Dabiq, it is excluded from the following content analysis, thereby reducing the total number of Al-Hayat infographics to 66. Also, while over 84 per cent of Rumiyah infographics are English language duplicates from the Al-Naba newsletter, this paper considers these documents as lying outside of the scope of this research because they aim to appeal to an external, English-speaking audience, rather than internal followers. Table 2 shows the distribution of the analysed infographics according to source.

Infographics	Original content	Duplicated content
Dabiq	0%	100%
Rumiyah	15.2%	84.8%
Al-Naba	100%	0%
Amaq	100%	0%

Table 2: Original and duplicated content between publications

Figures 4 and 5 show the three main themes identified by Winter (2018) – *Victimhood*, *Utopia* and *War* – as they are represented in different IS media publications. Figure 4 clearly shows that *War* is a topic rather evenly distributed throughout publications, whereas Amaq infographics focus mainly on *Victimhood* and *War*, and Rumiyah prioritises *Utopia* and *War*. Conversely, Al-Naba touches on all three main themes.

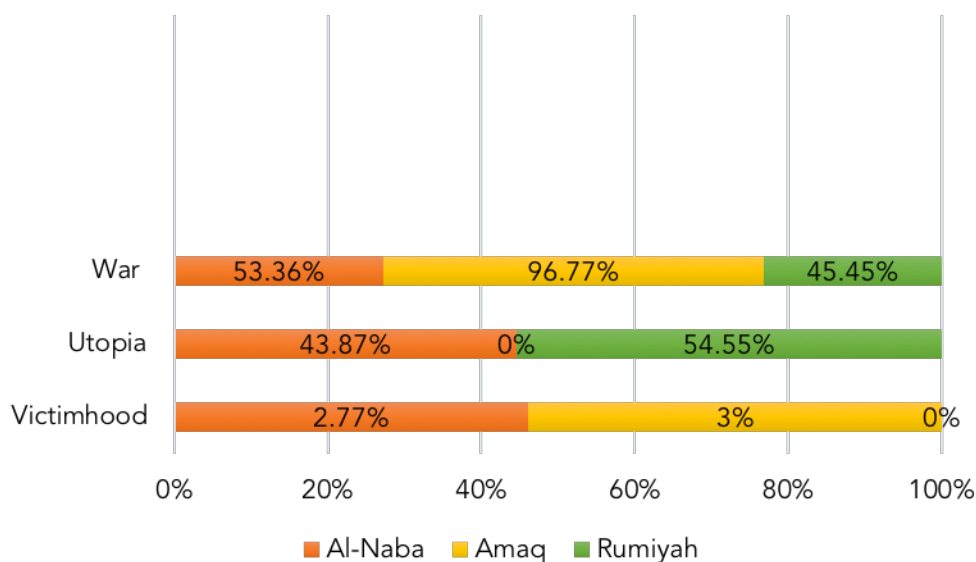


Figure 4: Presence of Winter's themes in the different IS media publications

In Figure 5 it becomes evident that within the infographics analysed, *Utopia* and *War* are almost equally represented in Rumiyah and Al-Naba publications. Al-Naba published a small number of graphics on *Victimhood*, while Rumiyah published none. In contrast to Rumiyah and Al-Naba, Amaq has no infographics on *Utopia* but a rather small number on *Victimhood*.

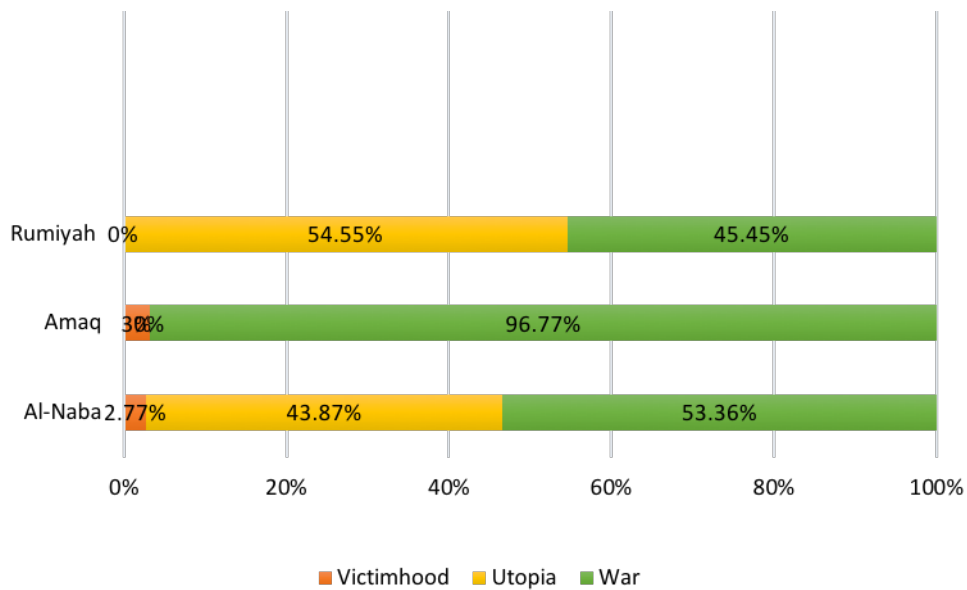


Figure 5: Distribution of Winter's themes in the different IS media publications

Figures 6, 7 and 8 give more details about the distribution of sub-themes, sorted by publication. In Rumiyah, as outlined in Figure 6, the main sub-themes identified were *Summary* infographics, as well as those focusing on *Religious Life*. Out of the ten infographics exclusively produced by Rumiyah, three are summative, five fall under *Religious Life* and two under *Preparation*. As shown in Figure 7, Al-Naba's sub-themes are more diverse than those of Rumiyah and reflect the broad scope of coverage of the publication. Figure 7 also shows that despite the wide variety of sub-themes, *Summary* and *Religious Life* emerge as dominant, with the remaining sub-themes accounting for only five per cent of the total content. Finally, Figure 8 shows that in Amaq publications there are only two sub-themes: *Summary* and *Victimhood*.

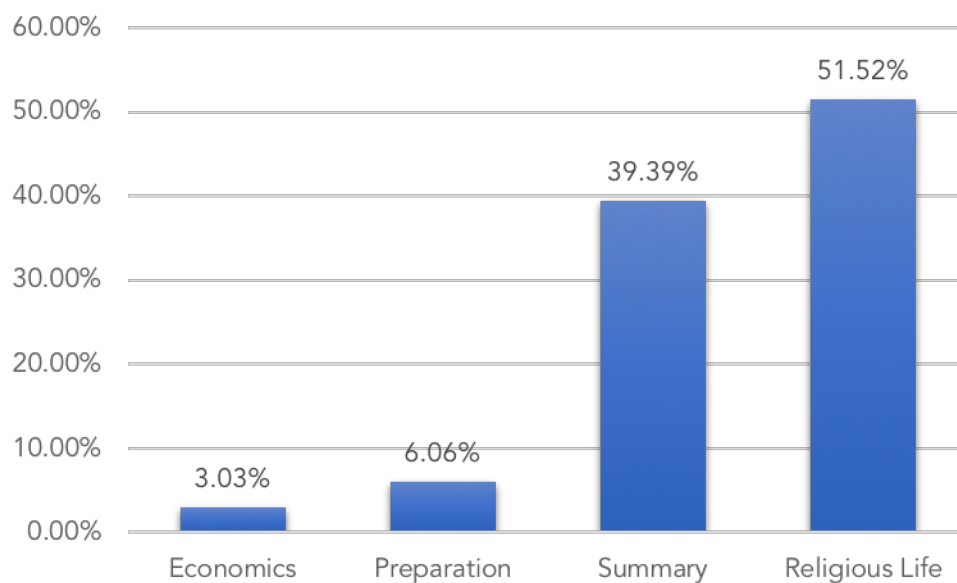


Figure 6: Rumiyah Infographic Sub-Themes

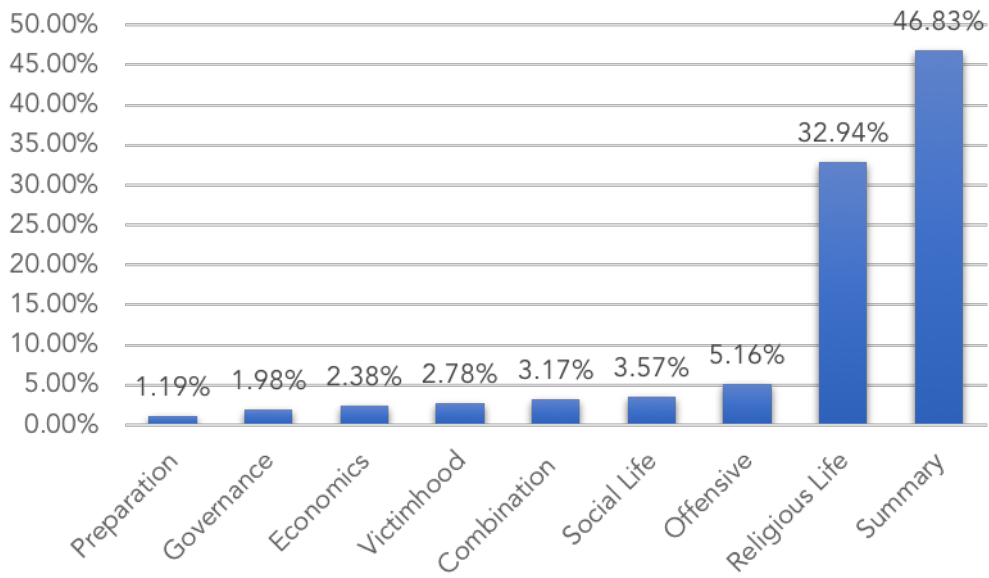


Figure 7: Al-Naba Infographic Sub-Themes

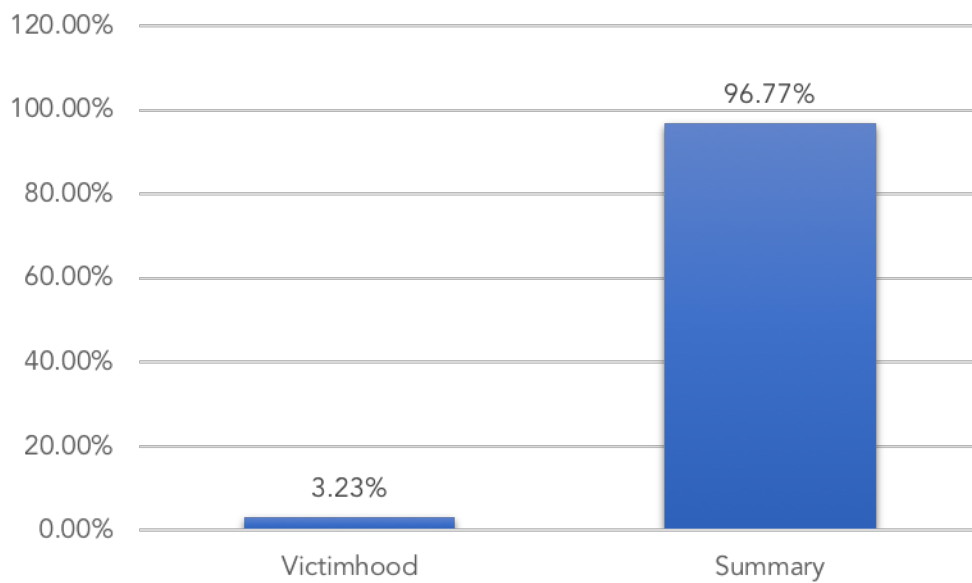


Figure 8: Amaq Infographic Sub-Themes

Discussion

The analysis provides support for the relevance of Winter's (2018) framework to IS's propaganda. The interplay of the main themes of *War*, *Victimhood* and *Utopia* illuminate the ways in which IS speaks to its internal audience about matters that are essential to everyday life. The infographics demonstrate a tendency towards religious messaging, as well as summative works that reinterpret military reports and findings, which are then presented to target audiences in a manner aligned with the overarching IS narrative. Content in Al-Naba and Rumiya is more closely aligned with the themes of *War* and *Utopia*. *Religious Life's* role as a sub-theme, therefore, appears to be an important supporting pillar to the other two more dominant themes legitimising war, as IS portrays its use of violence as the carrying out of religious principles. To the contrary, Amaq infographics draw upon

War as the main theme, which can be interpreted as seeking to instil a “correct” interpretation of the war among IS constituents.

Amaq infographics’ heavy utilisation of the *War* and *Victimhood* themes manifests itself as an almost exclusive focus on military summaries. A plausible explanation for the complete exclusion of the theme of *Utopia* is that Amaq seeks to establish itself as being quasi-independent from the IS Central Media Office (Al-Tamimi, 2017). As such, it concerns itself largely with arguably “objective” statistical data rather than any subjective narrative. The *War*-themed infographics map includes, amongst others, territorial gains, attacks and the types of weapons used, as well as categorising so-called martyrdom operations. In a similar vein but featured to a much lesser extent in IS propaganda, *Victimhood* infographics depict the damage to vital IS infrastructure in numbers.



Figure 9: Just Terror Tactics (Rumiyah #9)

Human collateral, such as dead or dying civilians, are limited to IS propaganda imagery and are not statistically represented. Although *War* overshadows *Victimhood*, it acts as a core tenant of IS propaganda and provides a thematic atmosphere within which the idea of IS operates better (Winter, 2015). By providing audiences with figures, statistics and images that condense the overall

devastation of war into an easily digestible infographic, the propaganda of IS remains effective. Adding to this, infographics in this category challenge assumptions about IS's self-presentation as a brutally violent organisation, since they focus the audience's attention on tragedies warranting revenge. IS's use of imagery depicting murdered civilians goes beyond banal explanations of medieval violence, instead showing the emotional justification and daily operations of the organisation.



Figure 10: The Spain Attacks (Rumiyah #13)

Additionally, research can gain deeper insights into IS propaganda by studying the subtleties of infographic content that *prima facie* appears to be similar. As a large number of infographics published in Rumiyah are copies from Al-Naba, it comes as little surprise that the principal themes found in infographics produced by the Al-Hayat Media Centre and the Al-I'tsam Foundation are almost identical. Without further scrutiny into the seemingly minor, but potentially significant, differences between the infographics published by the two, one might be led to believe that while both media outlets target different audiences, the IS Central Media Office follows a similar propaganda strategy for both internal and external audiences. While this could be the case, this paper's examination of the subtle differences between Rumiyah and Al-Naba infographics, especially as far as the *Utopian* main theme and the respective sub-themes are concerned, focuses attention instead on the internal conversation that infographics push forward amongst those whom IS governs.

Interestingly, there are some infographics that extend outside regions that IS controls, but still speak to internal audiences. Although only ten of Rumiya's infographics are original productions, the majority seems to focus exclusively on internal audiences in Europe and the US. For example, the infographics series entitled 'Just Terror Tactics' gives how-to advice on planning knife and truck suicide attacks in these contexts (see Figure 9). Moreover, *War* infographics focus predominantly on military operations that took place in Europe and North America rather than in the Islamic State itself and other IS territories, as compared with the infographics in Al-Naba and Amaq (see Figure 10). These small but deliberate divergences indicate impressive awareness of differing interpretations of current affairs and strategically bridge the gap between re-interpreting and rectifying them through religious means. It also indicates how IS might operate in the future, as it continues to lose territory in Syria and Iraq.



Figure 11: TV Antenna: An Enemy In The House; some of the hazards of TV antenna (Al-Naba #11)

Some of the *Utopia*-themed infographics published in Al-Naba but not in Rumiya appear to be predominantly intended for citizens of IS, and highlight the notable role of infographics in the transmission of information in IS society in recent times. For example, the government department



responsible for the enforcement of public morality, also known as the Islamic police, published a statement in 2015 which ordered the banning of satellite TV receivers in all IS territories (Al-Tamimi, 2016). Within the same month, issue 11 of Al-Naba (2015) featured an anti-satellite infographic (see Figure 11). Mirroring policy initiatives, infographics often show audiences how to carry out IS mandates. Thus, these infographics extend beyond recruitment, representing a form of state-making by IS.

Al-Naba infographics that fall within the *Utopia* theme explain basic, but essential, quotidian processes. Some examples that appear in these infographics include guidelines for the collection of taxes, how to provide medical services, and the broadcast frequencies of the Al-Bayan radio station. These instances show how the IS uses infographics, not only to draw sympathy to its cause from its constituents, but also to explain critical, albeit mundane, aspects of governance. This internal view of how the IS disseminates instructions in much the same way as many other governments, through infographic public service announcements (PSAs), illustrates both how it governs and how it views itself as a long-term government.

This research, which focuses on how IS uses infographics for emotional messaging and governance, expands upon Adelman's (2018) findings to show how IS speaks to its proponents. Similar to Adelman's argument that the IS directs its propaganda towards external audiences, this research shows that IS infographics are also explicitly used for internal communication. While the audience of Amaq infographics is arguably ambiguous, as they are predominantly distributed via the encrypted mobile app Telegram that has a worldwide user base, the Al-Naba newsletter's target audience is remarkably clear. The newsletter is not only made available in soft copy like Amaq infographics, but is also distributed via hard copy to local residents at so-called 'media points' located in the areas controlled by IS (Stalinsky and Sosnow, 2015). Al-Naba exclusively publishes in Arabic, and supporters of IS only sporadically produce unofficial translations in English or other languages. Furthermore, Al-Naba infographics often address social issues that are only relevant to residents of the Islamic State. Therefore, only a fraction of IS infographics are actually intended for consumption by Western audiences, while the majority is still reserved for an internal audience. Such an understanding of the target audience of infographics is in line with Winkler's (2016) findings that Al-Naba infographics are meant for IS's internal audience with an emphasis on physical and psychological security.

Conclusion

Informed by existing literature on IS propaganda and utilising a thematic analysis of infographics present in IS publications, this paper has demonstrated that the IS uses infographics for explicit internal consumption, instilling religious justification for their use of violence, and communicating vital information for their governance. Although infographics form only a small proportion of the overall IS propaganda output, they provide useful insight into the internal communications of IS governance and culture. Winter's three main themes – *War*, *Victimhood* and *Utopia* – are present in the different media outlets, communicating more than IS's willingness to use extreme violence. Within these categories, *Religious Life* and *Summaries* are the most popular sub-themes, while the IS draws upon the primary theme of *Victimhood* less frequently. Taken together, it appears that the primary objectives of IS infographics are to communicate military summaries, religious interpretations of Islam and seemingly mundane information on daily life to IS citizens.

Building upon the established notion that Al-Naba, Amaq and Rumiyah are each designed to appeal to different demographics (Winkler, 2016), it is suggested here that the infographics found in the respective publications are indeed tailored to suit the interests of the identified target audiences.



In this way, only a fraction of IS infographics are actually intended for consumption by Western audiences, with the majority reserved for an internal audience. Regardless, IS infographics seem to be an instrument of propaganda that extends across their territories and goes past the simple desire for war.

Although some barriers or inherent assumptions most likely limited the findings, ultimately this research built upon the second body of literature focusing on IS propaganda by investigating the ways in which seemingly mundane information has become a central theme in IS infographics. To date, IS stands as the only terrorist organisation that produces and publishes infographics, rendering it ripe for study. As such, future research should verify further the findings of this study by translating the entire infographic text of this dataset, validating whether it significantly alters the categorical meaning on offer. Further qualitative research should also focus more closely on whether the instructional and daily infographic information passed on necessarily translates to IS's objectives for further governance in the region and, if so, how. Finally, research should focus more attention on the differences between internal and external infographics, questioning how IS uses both of these types for recruitment, justification and the conduct of successful warfare.

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