

# Global Media Journal, Indian Edition

## November 2018

Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal

### **The influence of online content generated by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) on young adults in Kerala**

**-Nayan Anand**

#### **Abstract**

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, is an enigmatic third actor in contemporary world politics. Having waged a 'war of religion', the fanatic terrorist organisation stands tall with one objective; to establish its religious supremacy over the world and recreate the ancient territory of 'Muslim Brotherhood'.

Though there are many other organisations existing in the present terror landscape, the ISIS stands out, maybe because they have realized and tapped the potential of communication mediums for effective circulation of their thoughts and ideologies. Making use of new age communication channels has led the ISIS to not only reach out to millions of people within seconds, but also disseminate their messages effortlessly. From uploading brutal videos of killings to conducting Skype interviews for recruitments, the ISIS sure has ushered in a new wave of communication revolution.

A rising influence of the ISIS can be seen on the youth of India in the present day as well. With a total of 75 people having joined them from India in the past year as compared to 35 last year, the influence of their content and ideas can be said to be at an all-time rise. The main source through which this organisation is said to spread its messages far and wide is undoubtedly the internet, especially the various social media platforms.

This research paper thus aims to establish how the Islamic State creates content that effectively resonates with the 'millennial generation' and its influence on them, often, resulting in them abandoning their placid lives to live one of desertion. For the purpose of this

research, the area of focus will be the Indian state of Kerala alone since out of the 75 people who reportedly joined the Islamic State, 21 of them were from this state alone, the highest number of people to do so amongst all the states (The Hindu May 5, 2017).

### **Key Terms:**

1. Extremist Group- According to Oxford dictionary, a person who holds extreme political or religious views, especially one who advocates illegal, violent, or other extreme action are termed as extremist. When a faction of people come together to form a group holding a common extremists' approach towards a particular common topic, then that group will be called an extremist group.

2. Jihad- According to Muslim terminology, jihad refers to a spiritual struggle within oneself or a struggle or fight against the enemies of Islam. In this context, the term Jihad refers to the fight that these militant groups have waged against the people exclusive of their group, in order to establish their religious dominance and ideologies.

3. Jihadist- According to Oxford dictionary, a jihadist is a person involved in a jihad or an Islamic militant. In this research paper, the latter definition of this term is used.

4. Caliph- The chief Muslim civil and religious ruler, regarded as the successor of Muhammad.

5. Millennial- This term is used to describe people born in the early 1980's as starting birth years, to mid-1990s to early 2000s as ending birth years. According to Oxford dictionary, a millennial is someone who reaches young adulthood in the 21st century.

### **Introduction**

“Whoever recommends and helps a good cause becomes a partner therein, and whoever recommends and helps an evil cause shares in its burdens”

Qur'an:4:85

The above quote from the Quran that could have been interpreted otherwise perhaps holds an entirely different meaning to the present-day extremists' groups. The ongoing „war of religions“ in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and the other Islamic countries, makes one wonder as to what is the right cause that is so often spoken about? For the people who have constituted

themselves in extremist jihadi groups like the Islamic State, the right cause is perhaps to kill and die in the name of religion with the sole purpose of establishing their religious predominance in the world.

The formation year of the terror group Daesh, the Arabic name of what is commonly known as Islamic State, can be traced back to the year 1999. The evolution of the Islamic State, to a great extent, can be attributed to the situation that had emerged in Iraq in the aftermath of the US invasion in 2003, the former citing the latter's possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) as the reason of the incursion. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordan born jihadist, is the main facet in creating what was known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), which later changed names and leadership to become the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as its chief or Caliph.

Before the Islamic States gained grounds, there were present other terrorist organisations like the Taliban, Al-Qaeda to name a few, but never were their reach or their agendas so widely spread or so prominent. The strength of the ISIS lies in its propaganda mechanism. They have effectively discovered the relevance of the internet in today's time, magnifying its reach by manifolds by not only showing their presence on popular social media platforms alone, but also by making use of mobile phone applications and peer to peer messaging podiums.

The way that the Islamic States uses its crowd sourcing technique is distinctive, they do not take part in any hidden actions and rather it is all very widely accessible to the extent that even children are not spared from their hogwash. The entire idea behind using these channels for propagation is basically two; to frighten a certain segment of people and to motivate the others

to join the organisation in their stance. Though their main aim is to redeploy the medieval Caliphate, their methods of spreading their messages are in no way archaic.

The Islamic State has learnt what it takes to catch the eye of the present-day youth. The tactic of calling out to young men to join their forces in the name of religion may have been used in the past; the Islamic State understands what it takes to garner the attention of the millennials now. From following the latest online trends of using popular hashtags as captions accompanying their photos to launching new age video games based on a life of jihad, the Islamic State knows how to get the youth to be a receptor of their messages. Though many Indians have prior been involved in terrorist activities within the country, there has been

noticed a sudden ascent in the number of Indian youths abandoning their lives here and joining the Islamic State in Syria. According to a report by the Indian Express (2017, May 11), the number of Islamic State affiliated members from India has shot up from 35 in the year 2015 to a whopping 75 in 2016. The reason behind this may not be linked to religious extremism alone, but also may well be a reaction of political and social issues.

Fighting the Islamic State just in physical combat is proving to be futile; now they have waged an even greater war; an ideological war that is becoming harder to block with each passing day, thanks to the internet. The overwhelming usage of social media services by them continues to augment the value of their propaganda. The ISIS is making terrorism „popular“, in other words more desirable and domestic in nature.

This paper would hence try to provide valuable insights into how the content created and shared online by the Islamic State has an impact on the psychology of young adults. This research is region specific and pertains to the Indian state of Kerala alone.

## **Review of Literature**

To comprehend and support the points put forth in this research paper in a substantial manner, numerous research papers and journals written by a diverse range of writers were considered. These research papers also helped the researcher in identifying further potential areas of research within this topic and further suggested new angles for research within the same topic. By going through the following papers, a thorough and diverse understanding of the viewpoints of many different researchers was procured to further aid the developments of this paper.

Many researchers, both foreign and national alike, have examined the topic of mass media effectively influencing people into taking actions that a chosen few deem fit. The media is playing its role of being a message carrier effectively, though the consequences of which are sometimes negative. Keeping in sync with this theme, many researchers have done specific work on the Islamic State and its propaganda scheme using the methods of modern communication.

The Islamic State has made use of an effective combination of technology, language expertise and centralized management to create such a media image for them that disseminates power and order. By making sure that everyone is aware about their ideologies and intent, the ISIS is

making sure that it emerges as the single most popular yet ferocious opponent to all those who oppose its functioning. This image is working as a force multiplier for them as a sudden increase in their followers has been noted (Milton, 2016).

Much has been spoken about the ways in which the Islamic State uses both traditional and social media to make its content attention worthy. The earlier media contents produced by AlQaeda and the like along with the videos generated by the ISIS resembles the accepted 'Hollywood style of videos' full of special effects and available in high definition. The videos are made attractive to be used as a marketing technique for them to sell their ideologies to the 'faithful keepers of Islam'. (Williams, 2016). The content is not only of a good print but also visually attractive, suiting the taste of both the extremists and the less-religiously inclined. The organisation also uses many mediums to transmit such content like CDs, DVDs, magazines etc (Milton, D). The distribution of their messages through podcasts are also a very viable method that the IS uses (Awan, 2017). For the generation of such content, the ISIS requires professional people with expertise in this field. They need people to guide their attention gaining campaign and provide them with the necessary number of eyeballs. They thus make use of professional media people from the West who has an idea on making the content attention worthy (William, 2016). By recruiting people from all around the globe to fulfill their media and terror needs, the ISIS has managed to form a localised network of effective circulation and distribution of their content everywhere, gaining the interests of furthermore people (Williams, 2016). The ISIS has established media institutions that aid their needs. Apart from circulating online magazines like Dabaiq and Rumiya for propaganda and recruitment purposes on a frequent basis, they have also established AlFurqan Institute for Media Production that was their official medium to release propaganda videos and messages of the organisation. This shows that how this terror outfit understands the necessity of using media to gain support and popularity. (Milton, D)

Localizing and humanizing their doings in their videos is another way through which they are seen getting a hold on a number of people at one go, forming an online community which is loyal in its followership. It is seen that people actively sort such recruiters rather than just being their passive receivers. The need to contribute to the 'just cause' instills power in individuals that they so easily get swayed with all the media propaganda done by such organisations. (Joplin, T). The videos circulated by them that shows beheading of the

'Western people' or the jihadis enjoying their lives are all a part of a much wider online series called the 'Mujatweets' (Awan, 2017).

Popular social media channels like Twitter and Facebook by and large remain the most favoured means of disseminating messages and communicate with their followers by the Islamic State. This organisation is known to make use of these media channels to connect with their potential adherents on a one to one basis. Due to the free speech approach of Twitter and the latest trends of using hashtags, the content posted by the ISIS on Twitter becomes much more visible. By making use of commonly used hashtags, the content visibility of their posts increase manifolds; at the same time making it difficult to isolate and delete these posts by the concerned authorities (Weimman, 2014). They are also known to conduct hashtag campaigns

like #AllEyesonISIS, the goal being to increase the visibility of their posts along with putting pictures of them engaged in humanitarian work in order to rationalise and normalise their actions (Joplin, 2015). Facebook on the other hand is especially important for letting them find mainstream Islamic youth who may be occasional viewers of jihadist content on this site and link them to more conspiratorial jihadist forums that primarily attract already hard-core jihad sympathizers, thus effectively further radicalising them in the process (Weimman, 2014).

There has been enough research done to show that children and young people are the most effected by popular media content since they accept these opinions as the norm. Be it Bandura's Social Learning Theory or the Hypodermic Needle Theory, there are enough facts and hypothesis to support that people are greatly influenced by the things that they read and see on a frequent basis in the media. Banking on this factor alone, the strategy of the ISIS to rope in the youth of various nations seems to be working in their favour. According to reports, teenagers are the most frequent of all to leave their peaceful lives and join the ISIS in their missions. Looking at videos of militants leading a life of glorified adventure and scare, the teenagers often compare this to their relatively dull real-life, and thus want to take the chances of doing things that they can only do as a passive player in video games (Joplin, 2015). Calling their missions better than playing 'Call of Duty' a very popular video game, the effect of adventure and a sense of purpose is added to tasks by these organisations, which in turn is important to gather a strong followership amongst the youth of today who relate to

such games (Awan, 2017). They are also known to make use of celebrity turned followers of the ISIS to attract youngsters towards their missions. For example, the famous German rapper Denis Cupert was shown playing with other fighters in the snow which was accompanied with the caption, "In Syria, we also have fun." When the youth see their idols supporting such causes, they naturally get drawn towards the same with a new zeal. Songs with popular tunes, glorifying the strength of the ISIS are also a common phenomenon to attract the younger crowd (ADL, Law Enforcement, 2014).

Not only just young adults, but children as small as 4 years old are also being dragged into this ideological war, both actively and passively. Apart from children who are abducted and taken away by the ISIS, according to statistics, there are more than 30,000 pregnant women within the ISIS 'Caliphate', already sealing the fates of the children to come. These children, instead of being influenced at a later stage with the radical ideologies, are subjected to it since birth and thus, will be even lethal fighters than the existing fighters of Islam. By being trained in schools run by these militants on areas like Quran reading and gun firing, these children not just only meet the present-day requirements of propaganda, but would also ensure the expansion of the ISIS after they have grown up, thus ensuring that the ideologies of the ISIS stays for a long time (Benotman and Malik, 2016).

Organisations like the Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State has affected lives in Southeast Asia because of the presence of a lot of counties with Muslim majority like Malaysia, Indonesia or with significant Muslim minority like India. Focusing on the geographical region of Asia and India specifically, a vast amount of research is done in order to determine the reasons why this

continent remains the ISIS' favourite. The influence of such online and print content has led to a definite increase in the number of people who have joined the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (Hashim, 2015).

Many people have blamed lower educational and income levels of people in South-Eastern countries like India, that make them easy targets for such propaganda. However, some people argue that contrary to popular belief, in religious extremism, there is a need of commitment to the organisation's goals which are often politically based. Hence there is a need to understand these political and religious goals. Only the educated people can be expected to have a better understanding of such political principals and thus lower educational level cannot be a strong

reason attracting people to the ISIS. Similarly, in a technologically advanced world, there is a need for these jihadis to be able to have enough technical competence, which is where again a slightly higher education level is needed (Gupta, 2015).

The reason stated for this sudden upspring in people joining the ISIS from India can not only be attributed to religious extremism alone, but is also a reaction of political and social issues. A paper by researcher Taruni Gupta (2015) links the cause of this upspring to the issue of Babri Masjid demolition. The paper provides statistics on the total number of educated Indian youths who have gone on to join the ISIS later this mosque demolition hit the limelight. The researcher also specifies how with India being the 2nd largest Smartphone market with the 3rd highest internet users, and political unrest, the possibility of online radicalisation has increased manifolds in this country.

In the present day, the Islamic State has become instrumental in making the word cyber terrorism popular and increasing the process of online hate. (Awan, 2017). However, ISIS stands separated for its modern utilize and comprehension of online networking to accomplish its objectives. The use of new age technology alongside the misuse of the prevailing press implies that these messages have contacted crowds from the world over (Farwell, 2014).

In this effect, many researchers have suggested methods of counter terrorism in order to diminish the large-scale effects of such content by the ISIS by introducing new strategies like online warfare, intelligence gathering and training people against cybercrimes. Apart from organisations like the CIA or FBI, the need here is for researchers from all fields to come together and develop tools and techniques that would help in countering this online terrorism effectively (Weimman, 2014). There is also a need for both political and military strategies to be put in use in order to find a proper solution to this menace. It is also suggested that the public should be made aware about the difference in the idea of Islam that these terrorist organisations portray as compared to what Islam actually stands for (Hashim, 2015).

**Theoretical Framework** Much work has been done on the various ways that mass media influence people. Social scientists time and again, both in the past and present times have conducted researches that point to the extent and degree that contents generated by the mass media affect its consumers. Many such theories and hypothesis have been constructed that further provides researchers a



theoretical framework to base their future researches on. To understand the thinking that goes behind avid media consumers getting influenced by media content, certain pre-established media theories known to us were made use of in this research that emphasis on the kind of influence that media has on people.

One such theory that was made use in this research is the Agenda Setting Theory. The agendasetting theory describes the ability of new media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda. Developed by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw, this theory says that if a news item is covered frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more important. In this respect, if an individual comes across the same type of content on a frequent basis, he or she is more likely to stick with the person and they are bound to pay more attention to it. Similarly, they will term the issue as important and even relevant and would further dig up or consume this kind of content. This will in turn affect their psychology towards the issue and may even desensitize them to it.

Another theory that is relevant to this research is the Reinforcement Theory. This theory generally states that people seek out and remember information that provides cognitive support for their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. If people meet a mediated message that coincides with their “schema” of that certain situation then the “schema” of that person is reinforced. For example, if a mediated message shows certain unacceptable behaviors like violence or crime, those behaviors are going to be reinforced in people with violent or criminal schema. Similarly in this case, people who are already deeply religious may react to media messages calling out to true holders of Islam to come fight for the safety of their religion in a positive way since it coincides with their schema. In this respect, the Selective Perception Theory also comes into play. This theory says that individuals perceive what they want to in media messages while ignoring opposing viewpoints. It is a broad term to identify the behavior all people exhibit to tend to "see things" based on their frame of reference.

### **Objective**

To analyze the influence of the content generated and shared by the Islamic State with the aid of different social media platforms on the youth of Kerala.

### **Methodology**

For the purpose of research in this paper, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies will be used. In order to support the qualitative aspect of the research, a strong theoretical

framework using theories like the Agenda setting theory, Reinforcement theory amongst others will be taken into account. An in-detail Literature Review will also aid us in answering our research objective effectively.

For the quantitative part of the research, the target audience has been narrowed down to the age group of 16-22 in order to evaluate the influence of such content on them. This age group has been selected since they fall under the category of Generation Y or Millennial. A total response of 75 respondents will be recorded to have an unbiased opinion with the area of research pertaining to the state of Kerala alone in order to gain knowledge about the density of people who are aware and influenced by the online content produced by the Islamic State. An attempt will be made to rope in a slightly greater number of males than females to see the authenticity of researches that point out to the fact that males tend to get more influenced by such content and join the Islamic State in their fight for jihad, as compared to woman who may or may not get influenced by such messages but then again have only have limited options to act upon it since the ISIS is solely a male dominated organisation and their fanatic ideologies looks down upon women walking and fighting alongside men.

The questionnaire samples will be created through Google forms and sent to respondents from the aforementioned age group. These forms will then be collected from the respondents using social media platforms, mainly WhatsApp and Facebook to ensure a faster response.

### **Sampling**

For the course of this research, the response of 75 respondents will be recorded that pertain to the category of young adults, belonging to the age group of 16-22 years.

The reason behind choosing young adults as the target group of respondents of this research is because on paper, young adults are said to have more social media presence as compared to any other age groups, and thus, the chances of them coming in direct contact of any such material by the Islamic State is more as compared to people of other age groups.

The region of study for this paper is Kerala as it proves to be a viable option for this research on the influence that online content produced by the Islamic State has on young adults, as there has been seen a steep increase in the number of people from Kerala going to Syria to join the Islamic State. According to a report by The Hindu (2017, May 5), out of 75 people arrested for alleged link with the Islamic State, 21 were from the state of Kerala alone as

opposed to a maximum number of 6 from Madhya Pradesh and the like, making Kerala the Indian state with the highest number of people to join the Islamic State.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

As discussed in the methodology, the questionnaire was filled by 75 respondents. Due to the region specific research, all the respondents were either presently residing in Kerala or were natives hailing from there presently residing in other states for less than 2 years. Out of the said 75 individuals 60.9% were males and 39.1% were females. 21% of the respondents fell into the 18-20 age group category while 2.2% were from the 16-18 age group. The majority of respondents however were in the 20-22 age group making 76.1% of the total respondents. The respondents for this research were not just urban dwellers; an effort was made to rope in both urban and semi-urban section of youth.

For this research, it was important to know the name of the village, town or city of the respondents in order to know if a greater concentration of people getting influenced by such content hailed from major cities or from small towns in Kerala. The maximum respondents were from Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala, while others were from Ernakulam, Kasargod, Kottayam, Kozikode, Palakkad and Wayand respectively. This finding clearly showed that the influence of the internet and its content along with the intent of taking part in such studies was concentrated more in the bigger cities as compared to the smaller towns.

It is often noted that lack of education results in people getting easily swayed by things that they read and see. People, who are less educated, in turn have less exposure of the world, something that results in a limited perception and opinion on an issue. Though as seen, this is not the case for this situation wherein learned and high-profile people have also joined the Islamic State, however, many fighters of this organisation still belongs to the low education level. It was thus important to find out if the education level of a person did in fact impact their online media presence and further, the type of content that they consume online. For the same reason, the educational background of the respondents was asked for. As the researcher expected, majority of the respondents had in fact passed high school and were now pursuing a degree course. This result was expected since all the respondents had earlier mentioned that they belonged to big cities and towns of Kerala. The added question of their monthly income also helped establish the kind of respondents that had answered this research questionnaire.

With 80.4% of the respondents belonging to the 1 Lakh and above bracket (per month), majority of the respondents hence belonged to affluent families.

The ISIS as seen earlier, mainly uses the internet and the various social media platforms to disseminate their messages and enhance their propaganda mechanism, it was important to understand whether most of youth in Kerala were in fact available on these social media sites and if yes, then on which all sites were they active on. As a direct result, it was found that 93.5% of the respondents showed an online presence, a result which was not surprising in this age of technology. However, 6.5% or 3 out of the 75 respondents though had online presence; they were not active on it. For the purpose of understanding the various platforms through which viewers could access content generated by the ISIS, the respondents were asked about the social media platforms that they were most active on. The respondents could choose multiple options. With Facebook being the most popular, 89.1% (41), Instagram followed suit with 84.8% (39) while people opting for YouTube were of 69.6 percentile (32). Interestingly, the most favoured social media site of the ISIS, Twitter, was chosen only by 11 of the respondents accounting for a mere 23.9% as compared to Facebook and Instagram while people who opted for Snapchat constituted only 21.7% (10).

For the purpose of research, it was very important to study the social media behavior and usage patterns of the respondents to know the reason that may lead them to be easily influenced by online generated content. For the same, the respondents were asked about the amount of time that they spent online as well as the purpose that they used these sites for. While 63% replied that they used these medias for 2-5 hours every day, 6.5% of the people used it for more than 8 hours a day whereas only 1 person out of the 75 replied that he used the internet for less than an hour. The main reason stated for using these social media sites was entertainment (93.5%) followed almost equally by the need to communicate and pass time at 82.6% with 65.2% people using it for news. Apart from this 26.1% people used these sites for their professional work while

71.7% people used it to gain general information. A question about the credibility of the news found on these sites was also asked where 4.35% believed they were indeed credible while 1.35% opted for it to be non-credible, however, 76.1% people opted for the option of it being neutral.

To know the influence of online content by the ISIS specifically, it was important to know

whether people were aware about this organisation. Out of the 75 respondents, 73 said that they were aware about the ISIS whereas 2 people said that they had never heard about them. Out of the 73 people, 80% had heard about them through news channels and 60.9% from newspapers while 52.2% had got to know about them through social media channels further proving that the online presence of the ISIS has already garnered a lot of attention. The ISIS is known to use online tools and content that resonate well with the youth, a direct consequence of which is an increasingly high number of articles, videos and the new trending fad of memes being made on this organisation. 93.5% of the respondents said that they have read at least one article online pertaining to the ISIS. Not so surprisingly though, 63% of them have also seen memes on this organisation. Thus, it can be said that the most popular form of content by this organisation online are articles followed by their photographs (67.4%) and memes, while the least popularly consumed content are their videos (58.7%) and posters (4.3%). When asked about the frequency of times that the respondents have come across such content related to the ISIS, only 19.6% people opted for often while 21.7% said that they have seen their content just once or twice. 28.3% people said that they rarely see such content on their social media feed while 15.2% opted for hardly ever or never. This makes it clear that these respondents did not have much direct access to online content generated by the ISIS. However interestingly, when asked if they have seen these contents first hand voluntarily, the response was 91.3% no while only 8.7% opted for yes where they mentioned that they had seen such content on YouTube alone. Out of those who had opted for No, 34.8% had seen such content as a secondary indirect viewer where 15.2% had seen it either when their friends shared it or on their friend's newsfeed while 13% had been made to see such content by a known person. Only 6.5% of them had voluntarily seen such content when it popped up on their social media feed but didn't access them online actively by themselves. 1 respondent had seen their video content pop up as a recommended video on their feed while another one came across an arbitrary Facebook profile that had shared such content by the ISIS. For the 8.7% who had opted yes for having viewed at least one video by the ISIS by searching for online for it, the content of such videos was asked for. 54.3% said that the video contained beheading of people while 37% said that it reflected the Syrian issue. 23.9% said that the videos were propaganda videos.

To understand the thinking that goes in the mind of people after watching such content, the

reaction of the respondents were asked after watching such videos. The respondents were also asked to opine on the kind of lives that they thought the ISIS fighters lived. The aim was to understand the psychological influence that these videos and content put consciously or unconsciously into the minds of the viewers. It was also perceived that more the number of people resonate with the lives of these fighters positively; more likely they were to justify the organisation's cause and actions. For these reasons, the respondents were asked about their reactions after having viewed such content where 67.4% people replied that they felt disturbed, 26.1% felt unhappy while 4.35% said that such content was heavily influential. 28.3% of the respondents also felt such online content served influential to its viewers while 32.6% people were against this statement, however, the majority of people (39.1%) had no opinions about this. It was also speculated that the viewers of such content relate to the ISIS fighters more because they find their life full of purpose and adventurous. When asked about the same, however only 4.8% people found their lives to be full of adventure whereas a clear majority of 54.3% found the lives of these fighters to be sad and 26.1% thought it to be lonely. 1 respondent also believed their lives were satisfying with 13% saying that these fighters were fulfilling their purpose of life.

## **Discussion**

Social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, Facebook are extremely powerful platforms, whereby people can stay connected and up to date with the current trendings of the world. Consequently, they have also become popular means for extremist groups like the Islamic State to create a hostile environment, by which people can be radicalised and targeted to further their missions.

The result that could be derived from this study was that while most of the people were aware about the terrorist organisation Islamic State, not everyone had seen their content first hand, that may be a consequence of most of the respondents being from the urban or semi-urban areas of Kerala and may also relate to their high education and economic levels. Though these respondents did not show signs of being heavily influenced by online content showcasing the organisation's agendas, it did affect their mood somehow with many of them being disturbed after having seen such content even as a secondary viewer. Majority of the respondents were found to be active users of the various social media sites available and had

stumbled upon some form of online content by the ISIS at some point; articles and photographs being the major form of content. For the people who said that they have witnessed the content generated by the organisation first hand also said that they had viewed their content on YouTube alone in the form of videos making it clear that the influence projected by the videos was far greater in than through any other medium. Those who had viewed videos by the ISIS were very specific about their description of what they saw in these videos even though it wasn't a compulsory question proving that all of them had seen some video related to the ISIS at some point.

Thus, even though not much influence was seen on the respondents by such content, a faint hint of some form of sub-conscious impact and perception of this organisation can be seen on the respondents.

### **Limitations of this research**

During the course of this research, certain limitations were faced that restricted the scope of this research. The limitations are as mentioned below.

While conducting the quantitative analysis, the researcher would have liked to involve more respondents in the survey, however, due to time and resource constraints, the recorded responses of a target group of only 75 people could be gathered. In the same survey, the researcher would have also liked to involve respondents till the age of 28 years as compared to 22 years as was the case here.

### **Scope for further research**

To conduct further research on this topic, an attempt can be made to rope in more people from the lower educational and economical background in order to see the extent of influence of such content on these people. Furthermore, an attempt should be made to get a greater number of respondents from other different villages and towns of Kerala and not only just the urban cities, aimed at finding the influence of such online content on the youth of Kerala.

### **Conclusion**

There is no denying the fact that such online content does impact the psychology of people especially the younger generations who are more inclined towards the usage of these new age

media platforms than the older generation. The influence of such content can be catastrophic as it may lead the youngsters to despise their peaceful lives and rather start justifying the actions of such extremist groups, joining or at least trying to join them in their stance, often getting killed in the process.

The Islamic State has slowly but steadily increased its ideological influence amongst the youth of today. The online content created and shared by the Islamic State has found hospitable receptors in the millennials, who are frequently subjected to their propaganda tactics through their social media presence which often results in the radicalisation of these youths. This has become a significant problem all around the globe as more and more radicalised youths are abandoning their peaceful lifestyles to live one filled with hostility and combat.

Thus, the need of the hour is to try and protect our younger generation from the clutches of cyber terrorism by educating them about the many wrongs that these groups possess unlike all the other glorified strengths that they portray in their online media content.

#### **Citation:**

Awan, I (2017, Mar 15). Cyber Extremism: ISIS and the Power of Social Media. Retrieved on September 27, 2017 from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12115-017-0114-0>

Benotman, N and Malik, N (2016). The Children of Islamic State. Retrieved August 8, 2017 from <https://f.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2725/files/2016/04/the-children-of-islamic-state.pdf>

Casciani, D (2015, June 22). IS online: Can it be stopped? Retrieved August 3, 2017, from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33227809>

Farwell, J (2014, Dec 1). The Media Strategy of the ISIS. Retrieved on October 6, 2017 from <https://www.iiss.org/en/publications/survival/sections/2014-4667/survival--global-politics-andstrategy-december-2014-january-2015-bf83/56-6-04-farwell-97ca>

Gupta, T (2015, June). Youth and Radicalisation: The Threat to India. Retrieved August 14, 2017 from <http://www.orfonline.org/research/youth-and-radicalisation-the-threat-to-india/>

Hashim, A (2015, Feb). The Impact of the Islamic State in Asia. Retrieved on October 6, 2017 from <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wpcontent/uploads/2015/02/>

PR150211\_The\_Impact\_of\_the\_Islamic\_State\_in\_Asia.pdf

Janardhanan, V(2017, May 5).How Islamic State is spreading wings in Indian states, slowly



but surely. Retrieved August 13 from <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/how-islamic-state-is-spreading-wings-in-indian-states-slowly-but-surely/story-jdIwORercAOJ1bBUcf1WAM.html>

Joplin, T (2015, Sept 1). Understanding Why People Flock to the Islamic State. Retrieved on September 24, 2017 from <https://www.fpri.org/article/2015/09/understanding-why-people-flock-to-the-islamic-state/>

Morgan, J and Berger J.M, (2015, Mar 5). The ISIS Twitter census: Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter. Retrieved on August 12, 2017 from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-isis-twitter-census-defining-and-describing-the-population-of-isis-supporters-on-twitter/>

Singh, S (2017, May 11). Retrieved August 13, 2017 from <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/of-142-is-linked-indians-96-held-questioned-or-killed-says-study-4650315/>

Unnamed (2016, Jan). Daesh Information Campaign and its Influence. Retrieved on October 8, 2017 from [http://www.difesa.it/SMD\\_/CASD/IM/IASD/65sessioneordinaria/Documents/DaeshInformationCampaignanditsInfluence.pdf](http://www.difesa.it/SMD_/CASD/IM/IASD/65sessioneordinaria/Documents/DaeshInformationCampaignanditsInfluence.pdf)

Unnamed (2015, Aug 15). Islamic State the propaganda war. Retrieved August 3, 2017 from <https://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21660989-terrorists-vicious-messages-surprisingly-hard-rebut-propaganda-war>

Unnamed (2014, Aug 21). Hashtag Terror: How ISIS Manipulates Social Media. Retrieved October 3, 2017 from <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/reports/isis-islamic-state-social-media>

Unnamed (2017, May 7). ISIS seek to recruit Pakistani youth through social media. Retrieved August 7, 2017 from <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/world/neighbours/070517/isis-seek-to-recruit-pakistani-youth-through-social-media.html>

Weimann, G (2014). New terrorism and New media. Retrieved August 7, 2017 from [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/STIP\\_140501\\_new\\_terrorism\\_F.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/STIP_140501_new_terrorism_F.pdf)

Wihbey, J (2015, Mar 10). Social and news media, violent extremism, ISIS and online speech: Research review. Retrieved August 6, 2017, from <https://journalistsresource.org/studies/society/social-media/social-media-violent-extremism-isis-online-speech-research-review>

Williams, L (2016, Feb). Islamic State propaganda and the mainstream media. Retrieved

August 7, 2017 from [https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/islamic-state-propaganda-westernmedia\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/islamic-state-propaganda-westernmedia_0_0.pdf)