



(ATINER)

# The Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications



(ATINER)

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## Mission

ATINER is an Athens-based World Association of Academics and Researchers based in Athens. ATINER is an independent and non-profit **Association** with a **Mission** to become a forum where Academics and Researchers from all over the world can meet in Athens, exchange ideas on their research and discuss future developments in their disciplines, **as well as engage with professionals from other fields**. Athens was chosen because of its long history of academic gatherings, which go back thousands of years to *Plato's Academy* and *Aristotle's Lyceum*. Both these historic places are within walking distance from ATINER's downtown offices. Since antiquity, Athens was an open city. In the words of Pericles, *Athens "...is open to the world, we never expel a foreigner from learning or seeing"*. ("Pericles' Funeral Oration", in Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*). It is ATINER's **mission** to revive the glory of Ancient Athens by inviting the World Academic Community to the city, to learn from each other in an environment of freedom and respect for other people's opinions and beliefs. After all, the free expression of one's opinion formed the basis for the development of democracy, and Athens was its cradle. As it turned out, the Golden Age of Athens was in fact, the Golden Age of the Western Civilization. *Education* and *(Re)searching* for the 'truth' are the pillars of any free (democratic) society. This is the reason why *Education* and *Research* are the two core words in ATINER's name.

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# The Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

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The current issue is the second of the sixth volume of the *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications (AJMMC)*, published by the [Mass Media & Communication Unit](#) of ATINER

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Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
ATINER



## Athens Institute for Education and Research

### *A World Association of Academics and Researchers*

#### **18<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, 11-14 May 2020, Athens, Greece**

The [Mass Media & Communication Unit](#) of ATINER organizes its **18<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, 11-14 May 2020, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the [Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications](#). The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers of Communications, Mass Media and other related disciplines. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2020/FORM-MED.doc>).

#### **Important Dates**

- Abstract Submission: **27 April 2020**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **13 April 2020**

#### **Academic Members Responsible for the Conference**

- **Dr. John Pavlik**, Head, [Mass Media and Communication Research Unit](#), ATINER & Professor, Rutgers University, USA.
- **Dr. Yorgo Pasadeos**, Director, Social Sciences Division, ATINER & Professor Emeritus, University of Alabama USA.

#### **Social and Educational Program**

The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Atiner.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit
- Ancient Corinth and Cape Sounion

#### **Conference Fees**

Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€  
Details can be found at: <https://www.atiner.gr/2019fees>





## Unthinkable to Acceptable: How Stories can make Controversial Ideas More Mainstream

By Chris Underation<sup>\*</sup> & Rachael Graf<sup>±</sup>

*Though it has recently fallen on difficult times though the loss of land the death of its leader, The Islamic State is a brand of Islam that styles itself as the new caliphate. ISIS fights for the liberation of the Sunni faithful and claims to be the leader of the world's Muslim population. Westerners and others who oppose ISIS have used a good deal of ink trying to explain what gives this group its power to engage the imagination—is it the extreme violence it uses on the battlefield, or is it the fact that they have boldly claimed a new caliphate and that it is obligatory for the world's Muslims to support them? This paper argues that the power of ISIS comes from the stories it tells. These stories are assessed according to the paradigm of Jim Signorelli's StoryBranding, which explains how stories can become powerful tools of persuasion that create loyal, committed followers that make lasting brands.*

**Keywords:** branding, caliphate, Islamic State, marketing, terror.

### Introduction

Since declaring itself a caliphate in June 2014 (Ford, 2016), the movement known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in the press (hereafter referred to as ISIS), has drawn the attention of nations around the world because of its boldness and rapid territorial and philosophical expansion. Although the group has had reverses on the battlefield and lost a good deal of its land, observers note the group seems to continue even when ISIS does not prevail on the battlefield (Vick, 2016).

The self-proclaimed caliphate has been reduced to a handful of villages in the Syrian desert, but the "virtual caliphate" fights on, a diminished but still formidable presence focused on rallying the group's followers in the face of crushing military defeats. (Warrick, 2018a, para. 5)

From where does this growth—or sense of growth—come? It comes from the narrative ISIS has created and communicates to its prospective members. ISIS has a sophisticated, professional storytelling arm that uses historic images, sleekly produced video, and social media to reach out to people in order to sell them on the ISIS brand (Byman, 2016; Tome, 2015; Von Drahle, 2015). This is in stark contrast to earlier groups similar to ISIS. These groups allowed the media to shape and carry their message, often releasing grainy videos or audio

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for the media to use (Bloxham, 2011). This did not allow these groups to extend their reach in the way that ISIS has due to the fact that these groups were unable to control their own story (Brooking & Singer, 2016). ISIS can. The ease and portability of modern media technology that allows information to be created and released quickly is a new thing that is helping the movement develop an international brand.

(ISIS) was originally built around seasoned veterans of the Iraqi insurgency, who were joined by a new generation of millennial recruits. A...study by the New America Foundation found that the average age of Westerners who travel to join ISIS is 24—they've grown up with Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Working together, these battle-hardened jihadists and social media savvy recruits have developed a loose framework that turns social media into a potent weapon of war...What ISIS has discovered—the very weird, effective new way of war—is not a novelty or a one-time thing. ISIS may have been the first to wield this potent mix of social media, terror and war, but it will not be the last. (Brooking & Singer, 2016, pp. 60–61)

ISIS has created the template of war-as-unfolding-individual-story, and the stories are creating adherents who may travel to them or who may decide to remain where they are to carry out the group's mission because they resonate with the ISIS story (Calabresi, 2015–2016). This new template is different from traditional propaganda efforts, because the mode of communication is not one-to-many, trying to evoke emotion that creates a group feeling without any real ability for that group to communicate with the source of information (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001). Instead, the new template is focused more on single prospects who hold particular worldviews or who harbor certain feelings about the interplay between nations, governments and religion (Phillips, 2014).

Connecting to individuals in this way is not just something that happens by chance. It is part of a process that marketing expert Jim Signorelli (2014) calls StoryBranding. This study will examine the ISIS communication effort to show how they are using the aspects of StoryBranding to extend their power by connecting to individual prospects who are willing to identify with the group's story and adopt it as a part of their personal identity.

### **Research Objective and Method**

Free societies have sometimes been challenged by the rise of regressive ideas. As hinted earlier, these ideas often come on the scene with great power. The purpose of this study is to help aid understanding about why and how these kinds of ideas gain a foothold against the classical liberal beliefs of western society.

In order to answer this question, the study will borrow a paradigm from product marketing. The trafficking of ideas across wide geographic distances and cultures requires a commonality of communication. The paradigm that best serves this need is known as StoryBranding (Signorelli, 2017). This paradigm provides a clear, step-by-step approach that explains how stories carry deep

meaning and become sticky in the mind and heart of particular prospects. It is the intention of the research to show how this process works when selling any idea, no matter how antithetical to basic society beliefs that idea may be.

The paper then examines the literature surrounding ISIS and how they communicate their ideas across cultures and languages, even though they are now considered only a virtual caliphate (Warrick, 2018a). Using examples from the media and a variety of other media types, it is the goal of this paper to illustrate how stories can make ugly realities seem normal, and even enticing, as they move through the StoryBranding paradigm. ISIS has grasped the reality that we live in a post-fact world (Fukuyama, 2017). Facts are not the ultimate decider when it comes to what ideas are accepted and which are not. Today it is feelings and impressions that draw us in and that move people to engage with an idea or philosophy that could alter the path of his or her life.

Though ISIS likely is not familiar with the ideas of Signorelli, the organization has been able to use these ideas instinctively and with great success. In order to set the stage for this study, it is best to turn to an explanation of StoryBranding and how this paradigm explains and amplifies meaning.

### **StoryBranding**

The StoryBranding process has six main steps that help bind an individual to an organization, idea or product. The six are the Backstory, the Brand's Inner Layer, the Brand's Outer Layer, the Obstacles, the Prospect's Outer Layer, and the Prospect's Inner Layer (Signorelli, 2014). Each of these adds up to a portion of the overall brand story that ISIS tells, and at each level the prospect is drawn more deeply into the story.

The Backstory provides a prospect with a sense of where the brand has been and where it is today. This is also the place where the brand will differentiate itself from any other brands that are similar to it (Signorelli, 2014). This includes important historical points in the brand's history and providing a sense about what the goals of the brand may be for the future. This provides the context for everything the brand is and does.

The Brand's Inner Layer is essentially the soul of the brand, which is much deeper than a mere mission statement. Here, a brand states what foundational belief it promotes. If it has an archetype that it connects with, then this is the place that it is set forth. (Archetypes will be discussed shortly.) This meaning comes from the top of the organization (not via focus groups), and it sets forth this "sense of self" directly (Signorelli, 2014, p. 90).

Signorelli (2014) says that in order to succeed, the inner layer has to be authentic to what the brand actually is. This makes the brand the hero of its story—the person or thing that resolves the tension that is created through the brand's backstory. If the brand can be seen as the best way to resolve the tension, it stands a good chance to win over prospects who feel or accept the same tension. Heroes win supporters in the same way, because they are seen as champions who triumph over obstacles, allowing people to affiliate with a winner.

Brands may also embrace an archetype to support the hero. Archetypes may also be used in place of a brand's backstory if that story lacks tension that needs a resolution. These archetypes are The Purist (one who is wholesome, ethical and virtuous); The Pioneer (an individualist who seeks adventure and, in that, freedom); The Entertainer (a fun-loving free spirit who lives in the moment); The Conqueror (noble and meets adversity head-on, relentless, resilient, and confident); The Wizard (seeks to change the ordinary into the extraordinary, embraces mystery, thrill and novelty); The Protector (puts others first, compassionate and generous); The Seducer (romantic, intimate, strong sex appeal); The Imagineer (an innovator and dreamer who wants to creatively express his vision of the world); The Emperor (the boss who exerts authority over others); The Rebel (unsatisfied with the status quo, protects self-expression); The Source (the all-knowing provider of knowledge and expertise); and The Straight Shooter (no pretense and no nonsense, friendly and informal) (pp. 102–113). The best brands know what their inner layer is and they do not shy from it, understanding that they will attract some prospects and turn away others. Brands that embrace StoryBranding do not try to be all things to all people.

The Brand's Outer Layer is an explanation of the brand's unique advantages and benefits. The important thing is that this explanation has to fit tightly with the inner layer so there is consistency of conviction (the inner layer) and how it publicly speaks of itself (Signorelli, 2014). This is sometimes done by developing an I Am/We Are statement that sets forth a clear sense of the benefits of the brand.

The next step is assessing the obstacles that impede an individual from affiliating with the brand. These obstacles can take on a variety of disguises. Some of them are external obstacles, such as culture, economics, consumer attitudes, and public perception (Signorelli, 2014). Other obstacles are internal, the politics of the organization, logistical issues, and competition from similar brands. StoryBranding considers these things, but it also looks at obstacles a bit differently.

StoryBranding wants to move people past simple awareness of the brand and knowing reasons for its general superiority to a personal affiliation with the brand. The first obstacle in StoryBranding is developing brand function awareness. Essentially, brands have to let people know that they exist. Once this is accomplished, the prospect moves to the second obstacle—knowing why the brand is superior (Signorelli, 2014). This means that a prospect has some awareness of the things that make the product better than competing offerings.

The third level obstacle that StoryBranding seeks to overcome is a lack of association with the brand. Signorelli (2014) describes this as "the confidence obstacle" (p. 151) because the goal is to move people to develop positive associations with the brand. These associations should be strong, not mere assent. Once people have a confidence in the brand—a certainty that it is what it says it is and does what it says it will do—it becomes easier for a prospect to develop affiliation with the brand.

Affiliation is the fourth obstacle to be overcome. Once there is confidence in a brand, people will be more easily moved to resonate/affiliate with it. To get here, Signorelli (2014) writes:

To be achieved, affiliation has to be felt by the prospect. Resonance cannot be forced...To get through the obstacles to making a strong Level IV connection the things the brand stands for (the inner layer) must link with the things that the prospect considers to be personally important. It must represent an important human value that the prospect readily identifies with. (p. 153)

The fifth step in StoryBranding is to define the Prospect's Outer Layer. This requires having a sense of the descriptive attributes that define the prospect—things like the demographics. Along with this, a brand also has to know the most functional needs of the prospect (psychographic measures such as respect, honor, happiness, peace, and so forth) so that it can frame these needs for the prospect. It is also vital that the functional needs identified by the brand are consistent with the brand's outer layer.

The final step is identifying the Prospect's Inner Layer. Just as the prospect's outer layer has to be consistent with the brand's outer layer, the prospect's inner layer has to be consistent with the brand's inner layer. At this stage, the brand should define the prospect's most functional need and speak to it. This functional need is the core of the prospect, and if it matches the core of the brand it often follows that a Level IV connection—affiliation with the brand—develops, making the prospect and the brand one in a practical and emotional sense. Brand affiliation is the ultimate goal, but it all begins with a story that is properly constructed. Signorelli (2014) says:

Clothe truth in a story in order to make your truth real for others. Good stories don't point a finger at us while telling us how to think and feel. Rather, they invite us to think and feel for ourselves...successful brands don't rely solely on facts, they want us to know about their products. They place a good deal of emphasis on "clothing the truth." Specifically, they promote their product claims by wrapping them in the "clothing" of the causes they support and in life causes their audience can identify with. (p. 33)

Scholars Samuel Perry and Jerry Mark Long (2016), in their study about how ISIS convinces people to embrace martyrdom, have found ISIS engages in this StoryBranding practice. Their approach does not command or in any way imperatively state that one *must* become a martyr. Instead, one is invited to be great and to leave a story of honor behind for others to follow, and the way to do this is to become a martyr.

ISIS offers potential adherents the *opportunity* [emphasis added] to enter into a narrative that specifically recapitulates Islamic history and develops a compelling new identity based on that history. That powerful inducement speaks to those who believe themselves dislocated from their own cultural milieu...sometimes as a result of this alienation, many jihadists find individual identities within the constitutive, instrumental and mythic appeals found in ISIS messaging. (p. 1)

Before moving to the assessment of ISIS's overall StoryBranding, the reader will notice several aspects of Signorelli's steps in the comment of Perry and Long. There is the backstory, where prospects are invited to take part in the narrative

spun by ISIS. This is followed by the ISIS inner layer where they promise a new identity for those who are faithful, even to death; and the ISIS outer layer promises a role—and ultimate glory—in the history of the culture that has rejected them, thus showing the culture they did not recognize courage and truth; the prospect's outer layer is the functional need of recognition and purpose, which fits with the offer made by the ISIS outer layer; and the inner layer of the prospect (recognition and purpose) connects to the ISIS inner layer that promises a new identity and new hope for those who are faithful enough to join with ISIS.

## **StoryBranding the Islamic State**

### **The Backstory**

When it comes to an organization's backstory, there has to be verifiable history in the myths in which the group attires itself. In the case of ISIS, its backstory is not about its actual origins in the late 1990s (Bilger, 2014; Byman, 2016; Gartenstein-Ross & Jensen, 2015; Kavalec, 2015), it is about the prophetic myths they have appropriated and molded into a story.

Robert Rowland and Kristen Theye (2008) point out that terror organizations and the actions they undertake are fundamentally rhetorical in nature. Because of this truth, the backstory ISIS has crafted to send out into the world is carefully sourced, closely connected to well-known aspects of Islamic history, and looking forward to a time when the mostly corrupt state of present Islam is redeemed and made pure again so that the return of the Mahdi (the end-of-times redeemer of Islam) can take place and usher in a period of peace (Chua, 2015).

The first step in this plan came when ISIS declared itself a state under the leadership of Caliph Ibrahim (Ford, 2016). By taking this step, the late Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim-al-Badri had to prove that he fit the Islamic prophecies that claim the End Times will be ushered in by a man descended from the Prophet Mohammed. Pointing to his nom de guerre—Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Quraishi—al-Badri made his case.

This name ties to well-known Islamic history on three levels. The original Abu Bakr was the closest friend of Mohammad, and Abu Bakr was the first caliph. Bakr is widely considered the one who put Islam back on the "straight path of early Islam" (Ford, 2016, p. 17). The middle name al-Badri selected—al-Baghdadi—potentially resonates, because the goal of ISIS is to revive the caliphate and rule from Baghdad as the pure Abbasid caliphs did during the "golden age and building boom...an era of historic significance and pride that Muslims have for this period of history," and the name is also a message that the city will ultimately be theirs (p. 20). The last name, al-Quraishi, was selected because Mohammed was from the Quraish tribe (p. 19). Supporters of the ISIS leader have given out a genealogy that allegedly proves Baghdadi is descended from Mohammad, even though his real name and place of birth (Samarra) is public record (p. 18).

Symbolically, ISIS also advances under a black flag, which has long been

considered a prophetic symbol of Islam's advance in the world (Gunther, 2014). In one iteration of its English-language magazine, ISIS has shown its flag flying over well-known buildings and parts of the world, such as the Vatican (Roche, 2017).

As such, the black flag, a recurrent motif in jihadist images, is heavily charged with meaning: The black banner is connected to a prophetic tradition, which according to the renovators of "genuine" Islam would arise and bear the black flags that would lead them to a final victory against the rule of tyranny and restore justice. (Ford, 2016, pp. 41-42)

This flag serves as a symbol that a purer form of Islam will rise and reclaim the religion's past glory, which is the glory of Islam's founding when it was pure and undefiled. ISIS is the group that takes the challenge seriously, even going so far as to kill fellow co-religionists who do not join with them.

Islamists regard the Quran and (the sayings of Mohammed) as God's will and believe that most of the countries that call themselves Muslim are far from adhering to them. Those countries that fail to implement Muslim law are instead seen as corrupt, guided by leaders who have defiled themselves through contact with non-Muslim nations of the West. Consequently, ISIS believes that reordering society in accordance with the God-given tenets revealed in the Quran and the (teachings of Mohammed) is the antidote for the moral bankruptcy of Western society. (Kibble, 2016, p. 29)

The forward-looking message ISIS sets forth in its stories is that it is helping to purify the religion—and the world—for the Islamic eschaton, though J. Y. Chua (2015) wonders if "the Islamic State's propaganda is motivated by a genuine belief that the end-times are imminent, or if it is a convenient tool for indoctrination" (p. 8).

The core promises of the Islamic State's apocalyptic argument are as follows: the world as we know it will come to an end; the present conflict in Syria represents the beginning of the end times; the Islamic State is on the right side in this dualistic battle between good and evil; and, because they are in the right, joining Islamic State guarantees salvation. (p. 8)

Though ISIS clothes its truth in an Islamic dress, it also sets forth a message for those who are disenchanted with their life and surroundings who may not be moved by strong religious arguments. In the Muslim community, there is a respect and honor for the so-called strong horse, the person who fights and perseveres (Gartenstein-Ross & Jensen, 2015). ISIS, through its rhetoric and its action, provides an appeal to those who feel disenfranchised.

Many may harken to the group's dynamism—it's actually fighting, not drifting, as many Muslims say their global community has been doing since the last acknowledged caliphate was abolished at the close of World War I. When he established his caliphate in June 2014 ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's call to arms appealed to the sense of aggrievement that has bedeviled Muslim politics since: "So rush O Muslims and gather around your (caliphate), so that you may return as you once were for ages, kings of the earth and knights of war. Come so that you may

be honored and esteemed, living as masters with dignity. (Vick, 2015, p. 14) "

With these messages—a return to truth and dignity; becoming masters of their own fate; creating the conditions for the End of Days; being winners; and getting on the right side of history—ISIS establishes its context and the parameters of its brand story. But the question still looms: what is ISIS? What do they claim themselves to be? It is to this question that we now turn.

### The ISIS Inner Layer

In the context of StoryBranding, the inner layer consists of what the organization believes about itself (Signorelli, 2014). The inner layer has nothing at all to do with that people think of or say about the product. The inner layer exists "...for the purpose of arriving at an authentic story, meaning that the management, not the voice of the consumer, should determine what the inner layer is comprised of and that it should reflect genuine, rather than synthetic, values" (p. 89).

Military experts and communication scholars such as David Kibble (2016), Theresa Ford (2016) and J. Y. Chua (2015) point out the ways in which ISIS fails to live up to its religious claims. But inconsistent or not, the inner layer reflects how the organization sees itself and believes what it is in substance. ISIS sees itself as a religious entity that is *reclaiming* Islam and *embracing historic truth; promoting faithfulness and boldness* in Islam; with the ultimate goal of bringing *glory to God* and gaining *glory in the world*.

ISIS's self-identity, according to scholar Luis Tome (2015), is based in large part on reclamation of the faith. He says this represents the largest part of the group's identity.

Islamic State...wants the Islamic community to return to "pure" ancestral practices, making a clear separation between the true believers and the unbelievers, who are considered to be apostates or infidels. They view themselves as the defenders of the original Islam that the Prophet Muhammad and his companions preached, and they consider that Islam is now under attack by the infidels. (pp. 119–120)

Picking up on this theme, Christoph Gunther (2014) writes that the attack on Islam means ISIS's actions cannot be defensive, they must be offensive. ISIS believes today's Muslims are "under siege and they have to actively fight back in order to renovate the Islamic mission" (p. 42). Though western nations see ISIS as an aggressor, ISIS believes they are fighting western corruption in their attempt to return Islam to a more authentic place, which ties directly to the ISIS use of historic names and images.

The group's claim for genuineness is connected to the claim for the Prophet Muhammad's spiritual and physical heritage. This notion...is signified by the black flag and the second part of the writing on it...whose upside-down writing order is explainable by its deliberate resemblance to the Prophet's seal. Using the seal in this way symbolically transfers the Prophet's authority as a political and religious leader upon the Islamic State of Iraq. (pp. 46–47)



As a self-declared state and keeper of historic truth, the things the group says through its local leaders and media outreach allow it to set the parameters for what it means to be a faithful Muslim—even when these actions are not in clear accord with the Quran. As opposed to being a problem for ISIS, the things it defines as true (but that cannot be defended scripturally) make it appear strong and bold and help clothe the movement with a sense of honor.

Flagrant acts of barbarity bestow on them a moral legitimacy; in the eyes of the local public, these ragtag groups and their fanciful reenactments of precolonial purity represent acts of moral reclamation. Unlike their vastly corrupt governments whose leaders placate the international community for fear of losing the aid packages with which to pad their private fortunes, these groups stand apart... Western horror represents not moral pressure to change a local practice, but rather the affirmation of its purity and rightness. (Zakaria, 2015, p. 24).

All of these ideas represent the core of ISIS. From these convictions, the group communicates its messages to its potential prospects. This communication happens through the organization's outer layer, which is the face it puts forth to the public. In order for these messages to be effective, they have to connect with the inner layer. Successful messages in StoryBranding do not bring into existence something that does not exist. It taps into and amplifies what already exists within its prospects. As Signorelli (2017) writes: "The best stories agree with what the audience already believes" (p. 36).

### **The ISIS Outer Layer**

The backstory of the brand provides the context for all the actions the brand takes. The inner layer is the convictions the brand holds. The outer layer is the plots and/or themes the brand deploys in order to clothe its convictions in truth (Signorelli, 2014). Some of the themes ISIS uses will be familiar from some of what was detailed under the Backstory. It is also at this phase that the brand story of an organization or product begins to take shape.

According to communication scholars Megan Hastings and Kenneth Rogerson (2016), the best stories are focused but not prescriptive. In a paper that offers some suggestions about how to contest ISIS stories using social media, they are critical of western efforts to undercut the ISIS brand story, because the message typically amounts to a direct statement that terrorism is bad. Even direct attempts to destroy the networks that carry the ISIS message do not win the day, as a recent attack against the group's media center in Amaq show (Warrick, 2018b).

The mixed success of the Amaq takedown effort reflects the challenges and frustrations faced by governments worldwide as they try to stop violent extremist groups from using the Internet to recruit and radicalize. While the Islamic State has been defeated militarily in Iraq and Syria, the group's online empire—its "virtual caliphate"—has shown remarkable resilience, producing, with few

interruptions, a steady barrage of propaganda videos and communiques, despite cyberattacks, territorial losses and the deaths of dozens of top officials and technicians in its media division. (para. 5).

ISIS's effort is much stronger and more powerful, they say, because it is "flexible and has a more compelling narrative" (Hastings & Rogerson, 2016, p. 22). The flexibility comes from the variety of media ISIS uses and the various stories they tell prospects.

One of the stories is the evocative story of the Gray Zone. This story connects to the inner layer value of purity. As ISIS sees things (and sets forth the story), there is a vast Gray Zone that is made up of societies where true religion and false religion exist together.

The gray zone turns out to be IS's term for any society in which Muslims and non-Muslims coexist. It sounds simple because it is. (Islamic State) sees the world as black and white and abhors the middle group—the gray zone—where everyday life is lived. (Vick, 2016, p. 6)

True Islam, ISIS claims, cannot be restored until a time comes when people take a side for the right and true or against it (Chua, 2015). In order to help individuals see how the right and true is advancing, ISIS has adopted a number of images and symbols to mark their mental territory. We have earlier mentioned the use of the black flag, which is an apocalyptic symbol that marks the advance of ISIS and truth. Within this territory—and through the internet—nasheeds are often used to help reinforce the group's message and stories. Ford (2016) explains that nasheeds are a form of Islamic devotional music that would be roughly similar to contemporary Christian music. These chants are effective in getting the message into the memory of the listener because songs and lyrics are easier to remember than words alone (Mitchell, 2013). They also drive home the themes ISIS wants people to remember.

The reason this works so well is due to the lack of knowledge of their religion among many Muslims. In the first ISIS iteration of a sleekly produced English-language magazine (which went by the title of *Dabiq*, named after the city where Islamic scholars believe the final battle of good against evil will take place), they write that many adherents to the faith "...are ignorant of their religion and they thirst for those who can teach them and help them understand it" (Kalifah, 2014, p. 11). This is the brand as hero of its story that was mentioned earlier. In the case of the inner layer convictions and the outer layer stories, the answer to the problems that ISIS sets forth in its simple way is that support for or affiliation with them will bring a positive resolution to the tensions they feel.

On social media, ISIS operates on several levels. On one hand, they reassure people within their territory that life is normal by announcing the opening of public buildings and showing the services they offer to people. Some of it is an offshoot of western social media silliness—such as "Cats of Jihad," which allows fighters to pose with their cats and weaponry (Brooking & Singer, 2016). This shows that ISIS is not just angry and dangerous but that it can have fun too.

The success of these stories flows from the simplicity with which they are told. There is a Gray Zone, there is normalcy within the ISIS state, there is benevolence as those who desire to know the truth are taught it, and there is a reason that Islam is not now great—it is being undermined by those who do not believe. The power in stories like this is that they invite people to apply them to their personal experience—as Signorelli (2014) says, "...stories intend to sell us something. Whether it has to demonstrate the importance of love, courage or freedom, some human value always underlies the reason a story is told. But the beauty of stories is that they reveal truth; they don't hit us over the head with it" (pp. 4–5).

## Obstacles

As brands strive to make disciples of their prospects, there are always obstacles that have to be overcome. ISIS is no different. As they strive to gain adherents and create a caliphate, they face challenges. Some of these are external—such as the resistance from the West and from Muslims who do not agree with their interpretation of the Quran (Shahi, 2012). Some are internal, such as infighting due to scarcity of resources as a result of the decline in oil prices that funded most of their war effort (Browne, 2016; Warrick, 2018a).

In StoryBranding, obstacles are whatever gets in the way of converting people to a sense of resonance with the brand. Resonance is not simply intellectual agreement, it is a feeling that a prospect develops for a product or organization (Signorelli, 2014). As the previous section demonstrates, ISIS has gone to some lengths to separate itself from the typical terror organization. It wants to show a normally functioning state that has many of the challenges of a functioning state, but that can deliver on its promise to create a true Islamic utopia (Kavalec, 2015).

Signorelli sets out four main obstacles that brands have to overcome in order to get to the point where a prospect feels resonance. In the case of an organization like ISIS, the feelings of the people who are unpersuadable are not taken into account. They are focusing on the people who are open to the story they are telling (Walt, 2015).

ISIS has already gotten past the first obstacle—a lack of product function awareness (CBS News, 2016). Signorelli (2017) says the purpose at this level is to make people aware of the primary function of the brand. Generally speaking, ISIS is a known brand because of its primary goal, which is to wage jihad. It has also gained general awareness for most of its various personas—maker of war, oil broker, state actor, and so forth (Trofimov, 2016).

At the second level, a brand has to establish some sense of what makes it superior to its competitors. In the places where it held land, ISIS told a different story that connected to its conviction to restore Islamic society and culture. ISIS tells this story by focusing on topics like the environment and healthcare, in addition to other projects.

ISIS claims it has committed itself to caring for the land in the territory it occupies. *Time* magazine reports that, in Mosul, citizens can be fined for

failing to dispose of their trash properly (Cambanis & Collard, 2015). If citizens refuse to pay the fines, they can be detained. These environmental efforts are in keeping with its mission of practicing a pure, redeemed form of Islam. Although the Quran instructs all Muslims to care for the environment, many Islamist groups—such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, and Hamas—have failed to carry out the dictates of the Quran (Yildirim, 2016). In this, ISIS distinguishes itself from other Islamist factions because they give off the sense they are true believers, down to the faith's smallest points.

Additionally, ISIS has gone to great lengths to provide healthcare for its members and for those living under its regime. In June 2015, ISIS began calling for Westerners—especially medical personnel—to join their cause (Vogel, 2016). Approximately 30,000 men and women left their home countries to serve as health care providers for ISIS that year, and "a small but alarming number" of them were doctors or medical students from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Israel (Vogel, 2016, p. 177). Though the reasons for Westerners joining ISIS are varied, many are attracted by ISIS's utopian ideals. Thus, some Western recruits view ISIS as promoting a "social justice" agenda (Vogel, 2016, p. 178). CNN reports that ISIS issues also birth certificates, runs maternity wards, and has mobile vaccination clinics (Shubert, 2015).

This is one thing that distinguishes ISIS from groups like the Taliban, which forbids vaccinations. Polio is a problem in Pakistan because the Taliban believes the vaccines are a forbidden substance. The Taliban forbids all female education. But ISIS allows girls to go to school, albeit in a segregated environment. (Shubert, 2015)

ISIS also conducts complex fund-raising operations and runs construction companies that develop infrastructure in cities like Raqqa and Mosul (Berti, 2015).

According to Lorne Dawson, codirector of the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security, and Society, "only about 10%" of ISIS's social media content is concerned with warfare (qtd. in Vogel, 2016, p. 178). That means the other 90 percent of ISIS's social media is devoted to nonviolent causes and campaigns, such as environmentalism and healthcare. ISIS reinforces the idea to its prospects and local critics that it is not just a backwater terrorist organization of cave-dwellers, but a reputable organization dedicated to a just cause.

The third obstacle is the confidence obstacle. At the first two levels, people can make a simple mental connection, but here emotions begin to become involved (Signorelli, 2014). Thinking back to the previous section, the "Cats of Jihad" social media presence and the stories that report on the normalcy of life under ISIS governance is an attempt to develop a third level connection with a prospect. At this level, a prospect makes a positive emotional association with the brand. This level creates a bit of the halo effect for a brand, where the other things it connects to are viewed positively. This is seen in the outreach to recruit fighters, where ISIS tries to show how much better

life is with Islamic State when compared with their home nation (Trofimov, 2016).

Tunisia's functioning democracy remains an exception: Arab Spring revolutions elsewhere have either turned into civil wars, as in Syria, Libya or Yemen, or were crushed by re-established dictatorships, as in Egypt. Yet even in Tunisia, popular disappointment is spreading, said Moncef Marzouki, a human-rights activist who served as democratic Tunisia's first president from 2011 and until the end of 2014. While the country's Jasmine Revolution ushered in democracy, it failed to spur economic growth or curb rampant corruption, he said. "Why do we have educated people, people with jobs, who go to ISIS?" wondered Mr. Marzouki. "It's not the matter of tackling socioeconomic roots. You have to go deeper and understand that these guys have a dream—and we don't. We had a dream—our dream was called the Arab Spring. And our dream is now turning into a nightmare. But the young people need a dream, and the only dream available to them now is the caliphate." (para. 8–10)

With a positive emotional attachment driven by circumstances, the fourth level connection can take place. These are the people who resonate with a product to the point where they personally identify with it. To paraphrase what was quoted earlier in the paper, this happens when the brand taps into a belief that the prospect considers personally important—and that the prospect readily identifies with.

ISIS has orally and digitally proclaimed its message and its name to the point that, around the world, educational institutions, boutiques, and organizations with the name ISIS have had to spend millions of dollars rebranding or suspending use of the acronym, despite claiming it years before the group in some cases (In a Name, 2016). With a handful of annual reports, glossy magazines that were published through 2017 (Warrick, 2018a) and hundreds of Twitter channels all around the internet, ISIS has gone far beyond the obstacles of brand awareness and comprehension. It seems everyone knows ISIS, what they are about, and how to connect to them if they wish to do so.

As with the brand's inner layer, the obstacles have to be wrapped into a communication strategy that answers or somehow overcomes these obstacles. Doing this is not always as complicated as it may sound, which we will see as we look into the next step in StoryBranding—the prospect's outer layer.

### **Prospect's Outer Layer**

The outer layer of the prospect consists mostly of the traditional measures marketing and advertising use—demographics and a flat definition of the individual (Signorelli, 2017). ISIS has adopted an integrated communication effort. It does not merely communicate within the area where it dominates, it also reaches out, providing communication in English and other languages in order to project power (Vick, 2016).

In the Middle East, ISIS is the voice of the Sunni Muslim (Byman, 2016). The ISIS inner layer and interpretation of Islamic teaching flows from Abu

Bakr, the original Sunni (Ford, 2016). As such, ISIS looks to consolidate its power first in these areas of the Middle East and those areas that are Sunni controlled. This group is their primary local audience. However, in eliminating the gray in Islam, ISIS has slightly hampered its ability to persuade prospects to embrace the brand.

The Islamic State's decision to declare a caliphate and demand that all Sunnis swear allegiance to the caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was deeply divisive and a number of tribal sheikhs refused to pledge allegiance to Baghdadi. (Gartenstein-Ross & Jensen, 2015, p.F 108)

As we will note with the ISIS outreach to the West, the group acts as the hero who can come to the aid of Muslims who are unhappy with their lot in life (Trianni, 2015; Zelin, 2014). Rather than attempting to solve this dissatisfaction through governmental means, ISIS offers a different approach.

(Islamic State) follows al-Qaeda's precedent in challenging the most foundational principles of today's global order, in which political authority is institutionalized in a universal system of sovereign nation states, rather than anchored in a common system of religious authority. The vision of a revived caliphate may present to Westerners as an absurd totalitarian fantasy. But it taps into a deep disaffection with a world order that an angry minority of Muslims regard as the product of Western imperialism, designed to keep the Islamic community estranged from and God and from one another, as well as a hostage to a toxic Western secular modernity. (Phillips, 2014, pp. 496–497)

In the West, the ISIS story attempts to "crowdsource jihad," as Calabresi (2015-2016, p. 50) terms it. The group actively works social media to extend its brand, attempting to move prospects through each of the obstacle levels to affiliation.

This effort appears to be working, according to Holly Yan (2015). In her assessment of who is responding to the ISIS message, she notes that about 3,500 Westerners have joined with the group. Roughly 200 of those are Americans (Berlinger, 2015). Generally speaking, ISIS puts forth messages that aim to connect with those who feel disconnected from Western culture. This attempt to connect remains even if the prospect returns to his native country.

It is highly likely that even as the territorial caliphate shrinks and is increasingly denied an overt presence, its leadership will look to supporters overseas, including returnees, to keep the brand alive. Most returnees will be unlikely to experience anything in their lives at home that matches the intensity of their experience as a member of ISIS, whether or not they were fighting on the front line. If on return they begin again to feel as rootless and lacking in purpose as they did before they left, then they are unlikely to settle back easily into a "normal" life, and as IS increases its external campaign, both through action and propaganda, returnees may be particularly vulnerable to contact from people who were part of the network that recruited them, or appeals for help from ex-comrades in arms. It seems probable that the influence and involvement of returnees will grow as their numbers increase. (Barrett, 2017, p. 15)

In this way, ISIS is also engaged in a soft war, looking back to the earlier

statement that the work of terror groups is foundationally rhetorical in nature. They are engaged in a contest against the Western narrative that satisfaction comes from freedom and individuality.

As these actors seek to construct and communicate narratives about their place in the world using new media, contestation becomes inevitable as they seek to establish positions in the international system as they seek to shape the behavior of other actors. The contestation occurs along...a spectrum of persuasion. (Hastings & Rogerson, 2016, p. 4)

This persuasion often takes the form of granfalloon, drawing people into a shared community or identity based on ephemeral definitions (Kavalec, 2015). As ISIS recruiters troll for prospects who have a light connection with their physical community, they strive to draw these individuals into an online world that is shaped by ISIS philosophy.

For the traumatized children of war-torn regions, the message might be: join us and kill your enemies before they kill you. For the disaffected loner in a European or American suburb, it might be the fellowship of a movement of strong Muslims. For a history-minded dreamer it might be the promise of restored Islamic greatness. (Von Drahle, 2015, p. 54)

Just as the ISIS narratives are flexible, so are the approaches to their prospect's outer layer. Reports show that people from about 90 nations have been drawn to ISIS, which makes it a more internationally diverse unit than the one that is fighting against it (Cohen, 2015). But since the ability to travel to join with ISIS has been greatly restricted,

(A) growing number of them have been urged to wage jihad in their homelands. "If you are not able to find an IED or a bullet, then single out the disbelieving American, Frenchman or any of his allies," an IS spokesman announced last year. "Smash his head with a rock or slaughter him with a knife or run him over with your car." (Von Drahle, 2015, p. 54)

The tight fit between ISIS's inner layer, outer layer and the prospect's outer layer achieves what brands typically hope for—a consistent, well-tailored message that results in a regular flow of like-minded prospects who have set aside or minimized the various obstacles the brand faces so they can move toward the fourth level, affiliation.

### **Prospect's Inner Layer**

It may seem as if connecting to the prospect's outer layer represents victory for a brand. But it does not, because the ultimate goal is not merely to share an idea in common with a person or a brand. The final goal is to develop shared values that add up to identifying with a brand. This identification takes the form of a similar world view, life priorities, values, and aspirations (Signorelli, 2017).

J. Y. Chua (2015) writes that the ISIS narrative that appeals to Muslims frustrated by being marginalized by their governments and by more powerful

nations also appeals foreigners, though for slightly different reasons.

Many foreigners who join Islamic State are seeking to reconcile the contradictions of secular society—the data of life—with Quranic visions of the good life—the model for life. Hence, joining the apocalyptic struggle of the Islamic State is an attractive option. (p. 10)

The fact that a story can appeal to two different individuals who are operating within very different contexts is evidence that ISIS has crafted a powerful, flexible narrative, but not so powerful that it is a one-way street. There is room within the narrative for people to hear the case ISIS makes and to apply that case to their personal beliefs and context. The response to the story is not mandated by ISIS, but it is implied, helping the prospect make his or her own decision. This makes the decision the prospect's, and we tend to embrace and build our identity around the decisions we believe we freely make because we tend to strive for internal consistency in beliefs that we publicly affirm (Cialdini, 2008).

Once internal consistency rises, the belief or series of beliefs that we try to make consistent becomes our hermeneutical grid. It is through this grid that we begin to interpret the things around us, and this, in turn, colors our view of the world.

The act of influencing others and winning them over requires some counterintuitive actions. The "Cats of Jihad" social media project is one attempt to lighten things up so the message does not become gloomy or oppressive. But ISIS does other counterintuitive things. For example, an ISIS recruiter on Ask.FM's website discussed the best beard oils and published memes such as the photo of him and his brother in combat gear with the text "This is our Call of Duty, and we respawn in Jannah" emblazoned across it (Segall, 2014). These softer touches put a human face on a brand that others are trying to brand as inhuman. For someone who is being converted to a level IV connection with a brand, the counter message about the inhumanity of ISIS is not in accord with that they have seen from the organization. The result is that they tend to see the message that does not fit with their experience as affirmative evidence that the group is being persecuted by opponents (Kibble, 2016). When one's tendency is to defend a brand in this way, it is solid evidence that an individual has developed resonance with it.

## **Conclusion**

The success of ISIS in the area of communication is due to the quality of the stories it tells. Thanks to the work of earlier terror groups, ISIS has been able to consolidate dissatisfaction with nations like Russia, the United States, the leadership vacuum following the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, into a series of stories that resonated with a reasonable minority of people from all over the world (Moutot, 2016).

A number of military analysts and communication scholars misapprehend the power of ISIS's communication efforts. They believe the group's power is



in cynically telling lies to gullible people or that their power comes from being first to colonize social media and short form video for purposes of jihad.

Neither of these takes into account two important facts. The first is that ISIS is telling the truth *as it sees it*. This is not to say the group is virtuous and telling the full truth. ISIS fully believes the things it is doing, and their assessment of the facts is their identity.

The second key fact is that the power of their story comes from the conviction this truth contains (Signorelli, 2014). It is consistency and conviction presented confidently that connect with individuals who have ideas, feelings or experiences that resonate with all or part of the brand's story. If ISIS's actions and words were inconsistent, the actions would undermine the words. But no matter how barbaric their actions may be, ISIS has been consistent in how they speak about these actions. This consistency flows from conviction.

It is also the quality of their story that draws people in. Sleek videos that are often like movie trailers and stories that bear the hallmarks of professional scripting and editing draw an audience (Perry & Long, 2016).

Muslim and Western nations that wish to counter conviction-driven stories can only do this by telling stories of their own. These stories have to contain an element of hope in them. Though their world is often dark, the stories ISIS has told contain glimpses of a positive dream. Potential suicide bombers talk about the glory that awaits them in heaven, and the wonderful stories of bravery others will tell about them after they die (Perry & Long, 2016). Recruits are encouraged to take a hand in honoring God by fighting wherever they are (Petroff, 2015).

The power in the ISIS virtual caliphate rests in the power of narrative. The examples in the paper show the ways the organization knows its own soul and the soul of its prospects. This makes it possible for them to develop a connection with certain people that can overcome the alleged power of facts. The StoryBranding paradigm, as it has been explained in this study, shows feelings trump facts.

All of these attributes have allowed ISIS to build a worldwide brand that may endure despite its present reduced state, at least until a more compelling narrative is set forth that can discredit their story (Warrick, 2018a).

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## Charles Taylor's Critique of Technopoly

By Laura Trujillo-Liñán\*

*We live in a society absorbed by the media. The individual loses himself by interacting with society and its members through technology. Neil Postman critiqued this kind of society by creating a new concept: Technopoly, showing the hegemony of the media in society. Similar critiques have been made by philosophers such as Charles Taylor, who explains the alienation of the individual from moral principles in this technopoly. Man has been unconsciously manipulated by the media ruled by the State. Released from natural laws, man depends on the media to frame his reality, his values, his norms. The individual loses the meaning of everything around him, and this makes him the center of the universe and considers himself "the measure of all things." The aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of technology in man from the perspective of philosophical anthropology and Charles Taylor's works in the Ethics of Authenticity and Neil Postman's Technopoly. We will analyze how man has tried to find his freedom and this search has chained him to technology and media. Man's scope of reality is shaped by these means. That is to say, man has lost his freedom while looking for it. He is no longer able to think or to speak his own words. Rather it is the media that think and speak through him.*

**Keywords:** Taylor, ethics, technology, Postman, Modernity.

### Introduction

Technology has developed vertiginously in the last forty years. New tools are created to help man interact with the world, reach his goals or simply make his daily tasks easier. Man has thrived to adapt himself to his biosphere. World is our environment where man must survive, solve his needs and reach his goals. Man accomplish these by creating tools and technology. The world is a place for man and man is a being for the world, therefore, man requires certain rules to put him certain limits to his actions so that the world will not be destroyed by man or man by man himself.

It is in this way that Ethics arises, as natural principles that allow us to value the action of man as good or bad towards the world and towards himself. These rules of action, if broken, would lead man to chaos and destruction of himself, we would speak of a man without limits, a being that develops without rules in a world that is not his but has been given to him, in which there are natural, unconventional rules that must be followed for the good of all. In this paper I intend to show the criticism made by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor<sup>1</sup> and the American communication theorist Neil Postman,<sup>2</sup> who show

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Taylor, in full Charles Margrave Taylor (born November 5, 1931, Montreal, Quebec, Canada), Canadian philosopher known for his examination of the modern self. He produced a large body of work that is remarkable for its range—both for the number of areas and issues it addresses as well as for the breadth of scholarship it draws upon. His writings have been translated into a host of

the path that man has taken through technological progress and his respective departure from the ethical norms that guide him to his good.

### Overviewing Charles Taylor's Critique of Modernity

The media have always been important for man's development. Since the beginning of man, he has used technology to face obstacles to survive and have a better life. Man has also used technology to broad his scope and hand in both knowledge and traditions to the following generations. Technology is the greatest connector, and man has connected to the world by media. Through these new tools and technology man has dominated nature, extending his senses through it. Marshall McLuhan (2009) sustains that these media provoke a loss in man, for the dependency of the action man executes and the media he requires for this. This dependency has taken man to lose himself gradually, giving technology a greater extent of importance. Man shaped the technology and then technology shapes man. Charles Taylor restates this critique, as we will see later. We must say this trend is observed in the beginning of man.

To prove the latter, I will start with a story to show the importance of the individual before the media surrounding him. This story has been used by Neil Postman in his book *Technopoly*. It is the platonic myth about the beginning of writing as explained in the *Phaedrus*:

It is said that Theuth was the first human to discover the number, calculus, geometry, astronomy and above all writing. In that time, a great king named Thamus lived in a city of the Upper Egypt; to him came Theuth, who showed him his arts and claimed that they should be made widely known to Egyptians. But King Thamus inquired into the use of each of the arts and, as Theuth went through them, he expressed approval or disapproval to each one. But when it came to writing, Theuth declared to the king: Here is an accomplishment my lord the King, which will improve both the wisdom and the memory of the Egyptians, as it has been invented as a remedy (*pharmakon*) of both memory and wisdom. Thamus replied: "...you, who are the father of writing, have out of fondness for your off-spring attributed to it quite the opposite of its real

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Western and non-Western languages. Taylor was raised in a bilingual bicultural family with an English-speaking Protestant father and a Francophone Roman Catholic mother. After completing an undergraduate degree in history (1952) at McGill University in his native Montreal, Taylor earned a second bachelor's degree in politics, philosophy, and economics (1955) at Balliol College at the University of Oxford. He was awarded a doctorate in philosophy at Oxford in 1961. Most of Taylor's academic career was spent at McGill and Oxford; at the latter institution he held the Chichele Professorship of Social and Political Theory. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Taylor>. Accessed 12/04/2019.

<sup>2</sup>Neil Postman (1931–2003) was an American critic and educator. He wrote seventeen books. His most famous (and controversial) was *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, a screed against television and how it turns everything into banal entertainment – including education and news. Just imagine FOX News during an election cycle and you'll get the idea. His interests were all over the place. He wrote on the disappearance of childhood, reforming public education, postmodernism, semantics and linguistics, and technopolies. He also wrote essays and lectured about lots of other things that you can find here if you scroll down long enough. He was a professor of media ecology at New York University and died in 2003. <http://neilpostman.org/>. Accessed 12/04/2019.

function. Those who acquire it will cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful, they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of by their own internal resources" (Yunis, 2011, pp. 274c-275a).

Technology has been important for men since it was made. It is useful for mankind development and eases our lives in many ways, but it has never been more important than today, as we live in a society worried about media, and considers media as ends and not as means. We think the media can solve the problems we face, we have enhanced and promoted the use of technology to a metaphysical level, that is, media has become the aim of the human life. As Postman stated:

"What problem does the information solve?" the answer is usually "How to generate, store, and distribute more information, more conveniently, at greater speeds than ever before." This is the elevation of information to a metaphysical status: information as both the means and end of human creativity (1933, p. 61).

This is the reason why my purpose in this paper is to show the importance of media in men's behavior, the way individuals have modified their Ethics from being sustained by nature to one whose only principles are individualism and instrumental reason that is pragmatism.

Today, men have a new value and this is a medium not a message. As Postman declared, people are looking for a new aim and this is guided by the values technopoly shows; so this is an end with no end.

But this is not a new situation; it has been a process developed in time. We are living a new age, in which men are eternally unsatisfied, and this is what Taylor calls "The Malaise of Modernity" (1994, p. 25).

As civilization develops, people experiment diverse losses or declines, the first Malaise of Modernity, according to Charles Taylor, is individualism and even though at present it may seem as the most important achievement in modern society, it has caused us many problems, as it is because of this principle, that it is considered that people have the right to choose anything by themselves under their own rules, to decide what beliefs to follow, as they seek to determine their lives without the rules upon which their ancestors did not have control, they forget any ethical mindset because they are sure they are in control. And so, law has acknowledged these rights and has turned them into values to protect. There are no more sacred principles rooted by our ancestors for us to follow, today the only principle is freedom to choose the convenient according to my circumstances. There are neither chains nor moral norms graven in the past; the only lasting thing in time is the individual. In accordance to Taylor:

The change in the meaning of the word "identity" –people now talk of "my identity," "your identity," of "respecting identity" and so on– is very interesting. I think it's something to do with what I define as the ethic of authenticity, which is widely taken up during the Romantic period. It's the idea that everyone has their own way of being human (2016).

Today, we consider we have reached our freedom at the precise moment we escape from past moral standards. We think so because in the past, according to Taylor, people thought they belonged to a major order; man was not the beginning nor end, there used to be something or someone higher, a cosmic order where human beings occupied a place they belonged to, just besides angels, celestial bodies and the irrational beings we share the world with. This hierarchy, this order, was reflected in human society. The elderly used to be the most important in ancient world, today roles have swapped.

Taylor has called this discredit of values: the malaise of the world, because the world has already lost part of its magic (1994, p. 39).

Here it is where we find the second Malaise of Modernity, the loss of sense of the world and its rules, there is not a clear basis for my behavior because, it is the man who puts the rules, the new rules. This malaise is due to the prevalence of reason as superior to any previous order, able to judge based on reality, to determine any hierarchy in accordance with its interests. However, it seems reason was not always important for man, it was after several events in history that man put reason at the top. Luciano Floridi<sup>3</sup> points out, in his *Four Revolutions* (2014), man has had to grasp the idea that his rationality is his most important faculty, through it, man is capable to elevate himself above all beings, therefore man dominates and configure nature for his convenience. Three relevant facts in history have marked this vision. The first one or, the first revolution as Floridi names it, was with Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), he claimed the planets moved around the sun, contrary to the past beliefs about the Earth as the center of the Universe. This affirmation makes people to think about their position in the Universe because before Copernicus everybody thought the Earth was the center, so were the people. Historically, this discovery marked the general thought of the people of the Middle Age, because science showed them the minor value they had in their position as well the position of the Earth in front to other planets. We were no longer the center of the Universe but, at least, we have something else, we are humans, the highest and smart creature in Earth thanks to reason. Then, after this first revolution, humanity lost their faith in the external world and believed in their intelligence. We lost our center or maybe we had to change it. In this age, also Descartes (1596–1650), spoke about the importance of our mind to know the world and the primacy of it in front of the world. The famous phrase: "Cogito ergo sum" (I think therefore I am) original from St. Agustin but famous with Descartes, express the importance of the mind versus the world. With this theory, it happened what was called the "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy because then, the center of everything was the human mind.

The second stage or revolution was Charles Darwin's (1809–1882), with the publication of his *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or*

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<sup>3</sup>Luciano Floridi is a professor of Philosophy and Ethics of Information at Oxford University, member of the Oxford Internet Institute; Fellow of St Cross College. He is a member of Google's Advisory Council which considers issues of free speech and privacy, and the right to be forgotten. He has also served as chairman of the European Commission's expert group on the impact of information and communication technologies on European society. <http://www.ox.ac.uk/news-and-events/find-an-expert/professor-luciano-floridi>. Accessed 01/04/2019.



*the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. Here, Darwin showed how the different life species had evolved through time to become a new specie. Of course this study showed the fragility of men, after this revolution there are a lot of questions to make as, Where do we come from?, Where do we go?, Who are we really?, in this stage, we were no longer the center of the species, men was only an evolved specie. This idea changed the way we saw humanity because we were no more an advanced animal by nature, but we are only evolution species. Although, not everybody has accepted this theory until now, many people have changed the way to see themselves, because it looks like everyone in the origin are the same, animals, alive beings, and nature is in charge to define the form or essence of each being in accordance to their adaptation to the world. It is also interesting to look back to the theories that emerge in this age, one of them was the feminism, the idea that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state. Also, Existentialism, with Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), claims the importance of the subject in himself, his life and his individual actions. In fact, Kierkegaard criticized the universal theories versus the study for each human being because we were not a whole but an individual life with specific necessities.

All of these theories could give us an idea about the affection in man because this second revolution and the importance of our thinking in front of our nature. The reflection and the possibility to generate new ideas became the most important thing in this age.

The third revolution became with Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), for him, men have an unconscious and a conscious mind, we regularly repress feelings and thoughts, so sometimes we think we are something we are not.

We also find in Freud some ideas of Schopenhauer and, mainly, Nietzsche about the glorification of the vital thing against the rational, the concepts of libido and sublimation, etc.

What we called ours I (affirms G. Groddeck) is conducted passively in the life and that, instead of to live, "we are lived" by unknown and invincible powers. All we have undergone sometimes this sensation (Freud, Torres, & Tognola, 2006).

Thereafter, in accordance to Freud, the proper feature of man is not the rational but the irrational. His definitive being is in darkness and the unconscious-ness. His true nature consists of that deep substrate, unattainable for the reason.

The unconscious is psychic the truly real thing: its internal nature is not known to us as the reality of the outside world and it is given to us by the testimony of our consciousness as incomplete as the outside world by our sensorial organs (Freud, 1986, pp. 616-617).

That nature does not ascend to its total accomplishment through the elevation of the rational plane. The reason is, in fact, the consequence to have executed violence to or to have repressed the natural instinct. The perfection consists of maintaining the natural thing - that Freud identifies with instinctive and the

unconscious, the irrational. The reflective reason does not dominate the nature, but forces and corrupts it.

So, as we can see, after this third revolution, the mind, the rationality is not as good as we thought. Because it seems that to be irrational or more animal is better than acting rationally. Then, where is the right position for the human being now? We have some choices to make, be irrational animals and let our instincts to act (and maybe we will be more humans) or act rationally, to put limits in our instincts (and then we will be less human).

Nevertheless, we have thought and this is a special condition of men and we are the only being capable of reasoning, maybe this function is not clear for us but at least we are the only animals which can have smart thinking. "Whenever a task required some intelligent thinking, we were the best by far, and could only compete with each other" (Floridi, 2014, p. 91).

These important facts, in accordance with Floridi, have forced man to elevate his rational faculty over reality, for this, man considers himself superior to everything on Earth. This has derived into what Taylor calls *The Instrumental Reason*, useful to calculate the most cost-effective solution of means to a given end. Maximum efficiency, the best cost/output ratio is its measure of success (1994, p. 40). We want everything fast, perfect and free. Everything is means to an end, and it all starts in the first stage where tools have a higher value than men. If the end is efficiency, performance, then the end is the medium and not the message. Hannah Arendt agrees to this preeminence of the means, as she affirms: "The reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they are produced" (1959, p. 83).

Finally, the third Malaise of Modernity arrives to the world based on the Instrumental Reason, for this we lose our freedom. Man desperately tries to live by society, influenced by pragmatism, utility and economy. The most important thing is not man himself, from an Aristotelian point of view with a virtuous life. New criteria arise, productivity, efficiency and pleasure even stepping on others. Taylor sustains that man has got rid of traditions; he has left his ancestors behind. Man is God by reason, he is the only to write the rules of the world, guided by subjectivism and pragmatism. Society is focused only on consumerism; importance is to have, not to be. If every man owns himself and feels capable to face any challenge through his rational faculty, it is also possible for him to establish new moral rules or avoid all of them. The only rule to follow is what Modernity commands. This is an issue Neil Postman brings out in his *Technopoly* (1933).

### **The Malaise of Modernity is *Technopoly***

Man has created society in accordance with his needs, these are superfluous, practical. Man wants to favor industrial development, to improve economy, to have a "better" life. Sirens of society sing strongly to allure them to relativism, consumerism, totalitarianism, hedonism and pragmatism. Postman warns about this, man has created his *Technopoly* and this has become a state of culture, which

is also, a state of mind just as Postman (1933, p. 71) declares. It consists in the deification of technology, opposite to the human race, which means that the culture seeks its authorization in technology, finds its satisfactions in technology, and takes its orders from technology. For Postman, technology is now the value's foundation, because a lot of people do what the media mandates to do. So morality reverts to a new god who comes from us, because we create technology and are enslaved by it. The development of a new device, computer, has generated unexpected changes in education "The schools teach their children to operate computerized systems instead of teaching things that are more valuable to children" (1933, p. 11). Maybe that is the reason why in 1982 the Time Magazine called the computer "Man of the Year." This was the first time the individual was put aside from the same society. The reason looks simple: the computer is the first media machine serving as a mode of production (you can make stuff), means of distribution (you can upload stuff to the network), a site of reception (you can download stuff and interact with it), and locus of praise and critique (you can talk about the stuff you have downloaded or uploaded) (Lunenfeld, 2011, p. xiii). This is what we have done.

Today, we have arrived to the limit of the media, the Artificial Intelligence the medium of the media because, we can do through this technology almost everything we want, as it name say it, it is an intelligent medium which can be "almost" like a man, it can interact with other people, look like a human being, memorize a lot of information in just seconds, analyze thousands of data, get faster results, etc. This new technology has put aside the man again placing technology in the first place. Likewise, Floridi explains we have given so much power to the technology, it is changing what we are and the way we see the world. When a new media is developed, we see the world in a different perspective. For example, before the arrival of the printing press, we paid more attention to what we saw, after it; we look more at the visual, because we are able to read. With the arrival of the computer, nowadays we can paste and cut text, search for anything that interests us in unimaginable times before the arrival of it. Reality is more accessible to us and at the same time, more distant as we will see. This stage is what Floridi calls the fourth revolution, where the computer can make intelligent statements as the human and can "liberate us" from some intellectual work. With this, he states, "We have been forced to abandon a position that we thought was unique: to use our intelligence" (Floridi, 2014, p. 93). In this case, what should the man do now? If our activities can be replaced so, which is our special condition that makes us better than other being in the world? It looks like our place in the world is to be "informational organisms" (Floridi, 2014, p. 93), because, we are connected each other consuming and producing information. Our value has to be with our place in the internet, "if we are not in the net, therefore we do not exist," "I tweet, and therefore I am." We like to share everything. As social beings, we tend to be part of communities and now they are not necessarily physical but virtual. Also,

We are increasingly delegating or outsourcing to artificial agents our memories, decisions, routine tasks, and other activities in ways that will be progressively integrated with us (Floridi, 2014, p. 94).

This is putting us aside because we are making us more dependent of the media for any activity we do. It is impressive how many times we use our media. This is the Technopoly. Not only computer have put men aside, but also mobile devices. "A recent study by Deloitte found people in the United States check his smartphone 46 times per day in average that number varies depending on users' age group. Those between the ages of 18 and 24 look at their phones more often, with an average of 74 checks per day. Americans in the 25–34 age bracket look at their devices 50 times per day, and those between 35 and 44 do so 35 times each day" (Eadicicco, 2015). What does it mean? Our media now are more part of our nature, we are in a *Media Ecology* era where the media are exceeding human beings.

Also, technology limits and permeates everything that surrounds us, our creation has turned against us to give us its rules, which are not always ethical since, technological development often demands the sacrifice of a few by millions and the question is: where are we going? What should guide us and where? In accordance to Postman (1933, p. 13-14):

This is what Marshall McLuhan meant by his famous aphorism "The medium is the message." This is what Marx meant when he said, "Technology discloses man's mode of dealing with nature" and creates the "conditions of intercourse" by which we relate to each other. It is what Wittgenstein meant when, in referring to our most fundamental technology, he said that language is not merely a vehicle of thought but also the driver. And it is what Thamus wished the inventor Theuth to see. This is, in short, an ancient and persistent piece of wisdom, perhaps most simply expressed in the old adage that, to a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Without being too literal, we may extend the truism: To a man with a pencil, everything looks like a list. To a man with a camera, everything looks like an image. To a man with a computer, everything looks like data. And to a man with a grade sheet, everything looks like a number.

Both Media and Technology is our creation, through them we express ourselves, our feelings, our arguments, our information. But they also shape us, therefore we lose freedom because we are framed by media and technology. We wanted to free ourselves through technology and it has put ourselves into a cage, a media cage.

By putting our traditions, our ancestors, our moral values aside, man configures himself before the world, but his image is not clear, it has no ends, and dangerously there is no return.

We have arrived, according to Postman, to a Technocracy, where man no longer commands, it is technology transforming what we call civilization. We have reached what Tocqueville named "the illness of work." This has alienated us and has put a false idea of progress in our minds. Technocracy gave us the idea of progress, and of necessity loosened our bonds with tradition - whether political or spiritual. Technocracy filled the air with the promise of new freedoms and new forms of social organization.

The Malaise of Modernity is what Neil Postman calls Technopoly. Here man has created media and these have taken him to lose himself, lose his freedom. You can only be free if you own yourself. This "freedom" man has

found in technology is a ghost framed by moral values and ends established by technology and media. Postman has a very clear position about this. Real freedom shows itself when man searches for his best version, strives to live by virtues, to search for the common good. To be more rational and less animal as the theory of Charles Taylor, who makes it very clear that the end of man corresponds to a virtuous life in the Aristotelian way, man must give his place to man as a priority in the world and secondly his creations, technology, progress, etc. Likewise, nature marks us with very clear rules of acting, we must "be" in the world and for the world, because somehow we have the capacity to transform what surrounds us but up to certain limits, we must not go beyond, because we are in danger of destroying not only the world but also ourselves.

If the physical world is most important, it looks like, we have lost the metaphysical references over which we have founded human order, then technology has emerged as the ground of human action. The principles that construct the basis of our behavior are subjectivism and the media that in some way affect our actions without us noticing.

### **Conclusion**

As we continue to shape ourselves according to the tools we use, to the ideals others had and we adopted, then we really continue being attached to certain chains. However, it is not possible to separate ourselves from everything and shape ourselves from solipsism. We are social animals, and what we do is to seek the truth and good from dialogue, as Socrates did in the olden days. Little by little, with the instrumental reason's influx, we have lost the notion of who we are and where we are headed. We are inserted in a golden cage that we ourselves have built from fake ideals of a few. For Taylor, Van Leeuwen B., and Van Leeuwen F. (2003), the rejection of mediation implied the rejection of both the social hierarchy and the role of the sacred in society (namely as an external point of contact with God). Cities are places made more for machines than for individuals, every day we find ourselves with less places to talk and think peacefully. Every day there are more Malls, in which people meet, but not to chat, but to shop and so once more this prioritizes media, this means things over people, even over ourselves. We need to understand that we can only find ourselves in the gaze of the other, we can get to know each other stepping out of subjectivity that chains us under our own prejudice, so we need an objective vision of what I am, what I do, and this can only be given to me by someone like me. We can also go to bars or other places of entertainment, in which the aim is different as the one we really need, because there the aim is to prioritize the pleasure over rationality, and this is what our society prioritizes.

Technology, the media that Floridi presents us, shows us a new vision of man, where we have lost sight of our end, our route. Since modernity, we have focused on man himself but in an individualistic sense, in an egocentric sense, we seek the best for one in spite of others and this idea has reached our time in which, as we

mentioned earlier, our creation, technology is the one that has the power over man. If we can develop more a technology we do it, not because it is necessary for the good of man, necessarily, but because, we can do it. The power of man becomes an idea that marks the direction where, but at the same time, there is no clear course, there is no moral, an ethic that sees man as the center, does not seek his happiness or a life according to virtue but, the possibility of reaching everything without measure. Already Aristotle in the fourth century BC announced the difficulty of man to achieve his ultimate goal, his happiness, there are many paths to vice and one for virtue, and that path is unique, the right measure in action and passion, the one that is not exceeded, the only one that can take us towards a clear goal and according to human nature, towards happiness. Separating ourselves from this path will only lead us to follow other routes created by man himself, by his self-centeredness, towards a world of isolated and lost beings in his world.

However, not everything is lost, as human beings; we have the necessity to develop in a society, to create better conditions for our life to become better human beings. But, this task has been so difficult because we have not been able to distinguish what is better or worse, our intelligence fails us or we fail to our intelligence. We are trying to make a world with better conditions, with more accurate tools and at the same time, we are losing ourselves because we underestimate our imperfect nature to pursuit technology's perfection. This is a call to take care about what we are doing with our tools and what they are doing with us. The purpose of an ethical person is to warn people about the media and their effects in human nature because the "Medium is the Message" and it shapes and controls the scale and form of human associations and works (McLuhan, 2009, p. 32). As Marshall McLuhan (2009, p. 46) said, media shape our consciousness and experience. We are building ourselves through the media we use and we are losing our capacities when we use an extension. We have to take care about the world we live in because we are transforming our nature to a more technological humanity.

We have to say also, that the media is very useful for us, but as the myth of Teuth and Thamus says, it also brings us adverse situations. So it is our duty as rational beings to set ourselves free, but not from the world and its rules, because we are part of the world and from it we have rules. But we are limited beings enabled to choose that, which is best for us, that is, the objective good. However, we have to consider that being free means to rebuild the conditions of our own existence, when we can dominate the things that dominate us (Taylor, 1994, p. 128). We do not have to get rid of media; instead, we have to know how to use them, to achieve the aim to which they were created for. We need to have a clear vision of what we are and what we are looking for, and for that, we have to know ourselves better so; we can identify our needs to distinguish the utility of media.

We have to recover the rules we have forgotten, those which enable us to live our humanity fully. It is very important for us to be free from the golden cage in which we are imprisoned.

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## **Producing Opinion and Building the Agenda on TV Discussion Programs during the State of Emergency in Turkey**

*By Can Ertuna\**

*The most common prime-time program format on mainstream TV news channels in Turkey is discussion programs that tend to last for several hours. This study, conducted in the aftermath of the coup attempt on July 15, 2016, when the country was in a state of emergency, examines the role of these programs in shaping public opinion by analyzing which agenda is being reproduced by media professionals and media experts. By adapting both qualitative and quantitative research tools, this study advances the following conclusions: 1) Journalists working in mainstream news channels and experts invited to programs on these channels are confined to an agenda set by government officials, and discuss issues within the framework set by those officials. 2) Despite the low ratings of such programs, the owners of these media outlets, with little or no bargaining power in the face of official authority following the state of emergency, are obliged to operate within the red lines drawn by government as the only option to securing the longer-term interests of their businesses in other sectors. 3) Under these constraints, some major topics that are in the public interest are either totally ignored or given little coverage.*

**Keywords:** Mainstream media, state of emergency, TV discussion programs, agenda setting, framing.

### **Introduction**

Political developments in Turkey in the last three years not only transformed the lives of its citizens, but also changed the media landscape dramatically. The most significant events in this tumultuous period were the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016 during which more than 250 people were killed and hundreds were injured, and the state of emergency declared five days later. The state of emergency empowered the government to run the country via emergency decree and was extended seven times on each occasion for a period of three months. It lasted for nearly two years and came to an end on July 17, 2018, a week before Tayyip Erdoğan won sweeping executive powers in presidential elections. A purge conducted in the coup attempt's immediate aftermath targeting those involved later turned into a massive crackdown. The soldiers and those public servants involved in the planning and execution of the attempt from among the followers of US-based cleric Fethullah Gülen, who allegedly masterminded the attempt were arrested immediately. However, with the state of emergency in effect, the purge also targeted left-wing and Kurdish opposition groups in later stages. According to a report, in the first year of the state of emergency, the authorities took legal action

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against more than 169.000 people and more than 130.000 people were removed from public sector jobs by emergency decrees<sup>1</sup>.

As witnesses to one of the most dramatic events in modern Turkish history, the public tuned in to TV news channels in order to keep up with the ever-changing political agenda as the tanks rolled out onto the streets and a massive purge got underway following the failed attempt. In Turkey, despite the increasing popularity of on-line platforms and social media as news sources, the number one news source is still television according to the 2018 Digital News Report by the Reuters Institute. A study by Balta, Paker and Çelik (2016, p. 9) shows that 65% of the population in Turkey learned about the July 15 coup attempt from television. Furthermore, the 24-hour news coverage of TV channels in Turkey still has a "spill-over" effect on internet news websites, with both TV stations and the "mainstream" websites owned by the same media groups. These platforms also serve to set the agenda for the following day's newspapers. It is not only news stories, but also opinion pieces are served extensively to the public through these mediums as is elsewhere. Employing expert opinion to give substance to current events news has been one of the mainstays of TV journalism in Turkey, as it has been in many other parts of the world. Furthermore, current affairs and TV panel discussion programs, which are designed to provide audiences with different perspectives on major topics, have been one of the most popular program formats for news channels. These programs, expected to serve as a pseudo-public space where different points of view and rhetoric collide, also serve as a space for the (re)production of the hegemonic rhetoric.

In countries such as Turkey, where the government's grip on the media is tightening each day, agenda-setting is usually expected to be unidirectional, as Iyengar and Simon (1993, p. 367) demonstrate. That is, news coverage (and program content in this case) affects levels of public concern, and not vice versa. However, the extent of the influence exercised by this official agenda-building and the censorship and self-censorship mechanisms employed by major privately held media companies are still worth exploring. In the main, it could further require a more detailed understanding of the rapid changes which have occurred in the media sphere in a country, which has increasingly been undergoing a political shift away from liberal democracy. This paper aims to explore the level of autonomy of media professionals and its main actor(s) in framing issues and in creating the agenda of the TV news discussion programs in the first months following the imposition of emergency rule. The operation of this agenda-building process is also explored in order to understand the degree of self-censorship and/or of government interference at work. After briefly analyzing the media landscape and describing the relationship between the political, economic and journalistic fields in Turkey in the wake of the coup attempt and state of emergency, the article will focus on the production of TV news discussion programs. With insights provided by the professionals producing these programs and other data, this study will demonstrate censorship and auto censorship practices in agenda-building. The article will also show how, despite minor differences and some "pockets of

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<sup>1</sup>BBC Turkish (July 19, 2018). OHAL Sona Erdi: İki Yıllık Sürecin Bilançosu, Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-44799489>.

resistance", the mainstream media lines up behind the hegemonic rhetoric of those in power as journalistic ideals are set aside in times of crisis.

## **Literature Review**

### **Setting the Agenda, Drawing the Red Lines, Framing the Issue**

Despite the ever-increasing power of alternative news sources available in the social media sphere, traditional mass media coverage is still vital for a "problem" to be considered a public issue (Dearing and Rogers, 1996, p. 2). However, gatekeepers mediate this coverage and not everyone is welcome to participate. In setting the public agenda, media eliminate a significant chunk of topics and carefully pick the small number of issues that (will) come to public attention (McCombs, 1997; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). As Raymond Williams argues (2003, p. 45), although television broadened the forms of public argument and discussion compared to earlier media forms, there have been various restrictions placed on the full range of arguments, with the general exclusion of opposition and minority views. Despite the decreasing levels of trust in main news sources and the ever-increasing power of social media and citizen journalism, Iyengar and Simon's argument (1993, p. 367) is still relevant today, and it is still the mass media that possess the power to set the agenda and not the public in general, although social media platforms' influence in empowering ordinary citizens to promote their agenda is growing. Political leaders are active participants in agenda-setting and without any legitimation by the actors in the political field; topics are excluded from the agenda of news outlets (Cobb & Elder, 1971; Tuchman, 1978; Berkowitz, 1987). As Pierre Bourdieu makes clear the symbolic power of authorities, through their monopoly of legitimate information, to shape the agenda is on a par with that exercised via their possession of the means of economic pressure (1998, p. 69). From this critical perspective, the mainstream media can be regarded as amplifying an agenda that has already been developed, rather than as acting as the "fourth estate." However, despite the very limited role attributed to the media in agenda setting, Gadi Wolfsfeld's approach, which sees the media play a role not in creating "political waves", but in determining the scale and the power of such "waves", is also insightful (Wolfsfeld, 2005, p. 227). Macroscopic and critical approaches have been criticized by researchers studying news ethnography, who argue that, the "differentiated ecology of news provision" should be analyzed more broadly (Cottle, 2000, p. 31). Furthermore, special emphasis has also been placed on understanding the role of non-governmental actors in the agenda-setting process, especially in liberal democracies. For Mathes and Pfetsch (1991, p. 34), apart from events that have an actual news value, it is also the interest/lobby groups that shape the opinion of journalists first and then the agenda itself. However, in countries like Turkey, in which the political actors enhance their hegemony, by consolidating not only executive, but also legislative and jurisdictive power, especially in times of crisis such as in a post-coup period or during emergency rule, the agenda-setting influence of interest groups ceases

dramatically. In addition, one can expect to see opposition arguments muted and multiplicity ignored in "the newsroom" in those periods.

Agenda-setting theory has also been consolidated with studies of "priming" and "framing" (Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw, 2004, p. 258). In the case of TV discussion programs, these two research areas reveal not only the hegemony over what will be discussed, but also how things will be discussed. Therefore, the framing of these issues is as critical as the selection of "experts". Nimmo and Combs (1992, p. 20) attribute great importance to experts and claim that they act as the "fifth estate", next to the executive, judiciary and legislative branches as well as the media as the fourth. However, in building the agenda and framing topics, they collaborate with politicians and media professionals, who possess the power to either include or exclude them. Robert Entman (1993, p. 55) defines framing as "selecting some aspects of reality and making them more salient in a text". Therefore, frames are the imprints of power in news texts and they play a major role in the exertion of political power. As such, in this collective act of framing, it is important to examine how one issue is framed as well as whose agenda it is. Stuart Hall (1978, p. 55) argues that the mass media play the role of a consensus builder when mapping the events "into the frameworks of meaning and interpretation", that is, everyone subscribes to a broader, basic framework of argument despite the differences of outlook, disagreement, argument and opposition. Therefore, it is important to identify the power of the government in countries such as Turkey in not only setting the agenda, but also determining the frame(s) in which topics will be discussed. It is not only the selection of topics, but also the framing of issues that is produced in this circuit of consensus-building in times of crisis.

### **Media-Power Relations and the Ownership of Mainstream News Channels in Turkey**

Unlike newspapers, which have been owned by non-state actors for a very long time, the private ownership of TV channels in Turkey dates back to the early 1990's, more than 20 years after the first nationwide TV broadcasts began. As the state monopoly ended, private TV stations opened within a short period of time, one after another. Just before the millennium, TV news channels also emerged. However, private ownership cannot be considered a guarantee of pluralism. As De Mateo demonstrates (1989, p. 216), even in Spain during the Franco era, 54% of the press was owned by the private sector. However, tight restrictions in the market allow only those business owners, who are acceptable to the government to publish newspapers. "The game" does not attract business people for short-term gains only. Indeed, they usually invest to shape the political environment of the markets in which they operate (McNair, 2003, p. 78). Such success means long-term financial rewards despite the short-term monetary losses.

The role the media play in contributing to social change increases in parallel to the extent and progress of division among political elites (Schudson, 2002, p. 253). At a time when officials are at odds with each other, the media amplifies these disagreements in unpredictable ways. However, one could argue that the

reverse could be the case in a situation where a certain leader, political party, faction etc. acquires excessive power. As Tayyip Erdoğan enhanced his position after consecutive election victories and politically motivated large-scale judicial purges, which were later blamed on loyal Gülen-sect-affiliated bureaucrats at different levels of government, his influence and that of the Justice and Development Party also increased in the media. This has been a three-fold process: 1) the taking over of media companies enabling "friendly" capital owners with cheap credit options from state-owned banks to buy news outlets, formerly owned by business people, whom the government considers hostile to their interests. 2) The creation of new media groups/companies owned by loyal businessmen; establishing new TV channels, newspapers, websites etc. 3) control of those that remain via a carrot and stick policy. This entails the application of political and economic pressure on those outlets, which frequently give voice to the opposition and dissidents, and the rewarding of loyal companies with vast amounts of advertising from state-run banks, government-controlled companies etc. An additional benefit is the provision of easy access to government, and military officials, bureaucrats and even prosecutors, who act as the primary sources of news in Turkish mainstream media. Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 48) argue that the concentration of capital in the hands of a few in the media sector results in increased government control over the media. This analysis applies to Turkey and therefore, media outlets are usually used as bargaining chips not only for businessmen, who are running businesses in different sectors, but also for those in power, who aspire to control the media. Moreover, as a single political actor consolidates his/her power, fewer concessions are made to "persuade" these business owners. In Turkey, by 2016, the five largest media groups (Doğan, Çalık, Doğuş, Ciner, & Çukurova) were owned by those, who had already invested in various sectors such as energy, mining, finance, construction etc. (Sözeri, 2014, p. 76). A study by Turkish Bianet and German "Reporter Ohne Grenzen" detailed the ownership of Turkish media in April 2016 just before the coup attempt. By that date, there were 2.371 newspapers, 734 radio stations and 108 TV channels in Turkey. However, the study noted that 40% of the Turkish audience followed outlets owned by only eight different media groups, five of which were listed above.

The three mainstream news channels, analyzed in this study were all owned by different business owners, who also had investments in other sectors. NTV, founded in 1996, the oldest of the three and a pioneer of private 24-hour news channel outlets in Turkey, is owned by the Doğuş Business Group, which also ran businesses in finance, the automotive industry, construction, tourism, and energy sectors as well as restaurant chains both in and outside of Turkey. By 2016, this group owned six other TV channels, various websites, radio stations and magazines. Habertürk TV, established in 2001, was taken over by an investor, Turgay Ciner, in 2007. Ciner Group ran businesses in mining, energy, chemicals, maritime, tourism and trade. Their media branch owned two other TV channels, a national newspaper, a printing company and a production company. CNN Türk, founded by Doğan Media Group and Turner International in 1999, was owned by Turkey's largest media group Doğan Group at the time of the study. Doğan Group

was operating in energy, retail, the automotive industry, marketing, tourism, finance and real estate as well as TV broadcasting. It also owned a media group, radio stations, websites, printing houses and was one of the two largest newspaper distributors in the country. In March 2018, the owner of the group, Aydın Doğan, who had been severely criticized many times in the past by Erdoğan and was hit by a 2.5 billion dollar tax fine, sold his media assets to another group, Demirören, for a price that was reportedly quite lower than the actual prices according to various commentators. The owner of the Demirören Group was allegedly one half of a leaked telephone conversation with Tayyip Erdoğan, in which he tearfully promised to take measures in relation to a news story published in his paper *Milliyet*, which Erdoğan, Prime Minister at the time, was immensely critical of. This takeover by the Demirören Group made it the largest in the Turkish media sector<sup>2</sup>.

### Methodology

The study's findings are based on fieldwork conducted in the first months after the declaration of the state of emergency. Although the state of emergency was declared in July 2016, the research period selected was late autumn as October usually marks the beginning of the new broadcast season after the summer break for most of the Turkish TV channels, and by the end of that month, all season-long programs were scheduled and program formats finalized. In order to draw a general picture of the structure of the journalistic field in Turkey during this period, qualitative research methods were also employed in this study, with the research consisting of three main pillars. First, all of the prime-time discussion programs on the three mainstream Turkish news channels, namely; NTV, CNN Türk and Habertürk were analyzed in the two-week period between October 24, 2016 and November 4, 2016. Overall, 27 different programs, lasting some 78 hours over this period were analyzed with regard to the variety of experts invited and their agendas, compared to those of President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Yıldırım in the same period. Both are the founders of the AK Party (the Justice and Development Party), which has ruled Turkey since 2002. Erdoğan has been the most influential figure in the party ever since, and Yıldırım was the prime minister of that period appointed by Erdoğan. Second, the themes and sub-themes of Erdoğan and Yıldırım's speeches were classified via content analysis and coded by the author into separate topics. The agendas of the various programs were examined by measuring the time spent on each topic in these discussions. The two clusters of data were then compared to determine similarities and differences. Third, with a view to complementing the quantitative analysis, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted during the same period with 24 people, including editors, producers, guest coordinators and presenters of these programs as well as

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<sup>2</sup>Kadri Gürsel (2018, p. 14), a prominent Turkish journalist, who had served a 11-month prison term during the period, 2016-17, argues that this acquisition marks the end of "mainstream" media in Turkey. Gürsel, who previously had worked for both the Doğan and Demirören media groups asserts that, by orchestrating this takeover, the government had gained full control of the media.

TV experts of different backgrounds. However, since many of them asked not to be named, only their positions are mentioned in the article.

This research differs from many classical agenda-setting studies such as the well-known 1972 Chapel Hill study by McCombs and Shaw, in which the emphasis is on measuring the influence of news media on the public agenda by polling a sample of people. Furthermore, emphasis was placed on understanding the extent of political influence over the media's agenda-setting role. In this study, the primary focus is on the testimonies of the media employees interviewed. However, in addition to this, comprehensive research conducted by Kadir Has University about ordinary people's agenda in the same period is also introduced to examine the effects of the media agenda on that of the public. An examination of a previous period would also serve to usefully determine the extent of the transformation in the media sphere. However, since the rating system, used to measure the success and/or impact of TV programs had changed before this study was undertaken, and no other study on a similar topic was available, a comparative approach could not be employed.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The State of the Media in Turkey in the Wake of the Coup Attempt**

The pressure on the media sector, which had been under the influence of the government, as noted above, increased considerably following the coup attempt and during the state of emergency. According to a report by the T24 news website, within the first six months of the state of emergency, 16 TV channels, 24 radio stations, 19 periodicals and 29 publishing houses were shut by statutory decree, only 19 of which were later to be reopened by further decrees. However, it was not only media outlets that were associated with the Gülen movement that were affected; many left-wing and Kurdish outlets were shut as well. In the decree, such media outlets were described as being "associated, or in contact with, terrorist organizations or groups and organizations, which are considered by the National Security Council as acting against the national security of the State". According to a report by the Committee to Protect Journalists, in that period, Turkey accounted for a third of the journalists jailed in the world with at least 81 journalists imprisoned. Journalists faced anti-state charges such as "plotting a coup", "propagandizing for an illegal organization", "being a member of an illegal organization" etc. Further, banning the coverage of specific events has been another restriction on press freedom in Turkey. According to data by the Radio Television Supreme Council of Turkey, in 2016 alone, a broadcasting ban was applied to 40 different events. According to the Turkish Journalists Association, 14 of these bans concerned large-scale events such as social unrest, a terror attack etc. In another report by the same association, more than 10.000 media employees lost their jobs that year due to the closure of their media outlets.

### TV News Discussion Programs on Turkish News Channels

As noted, according to various studies, TV is still the main source of news for people in Turkey. During the period of this research, its sphere of influence grew even wider. However, despite this, owners do not invest heavily in good quality reporting, but rather try to maximize profit by decreasing newsroom costs. As Jacobs and Townsley (2011, p. 5) make clear, in the US, the general trend is for media owners to reduce reporter numbers, which has also resulted in a decreasing number of investigative news stories. A similar trend is evident in Turkey, but one that is more effective, as government pressure on news outlets makes owners reluctant to invest in investigative journalism and high quality journalism. Competition, among the TV news channels ceases and the executive directors of those channels fill airtime with cheaper program formats, one of which is discussion programs. The owners of news channels in Turkey do not consider news media itself to a profitable short-term business investment. The decreasing space for investigative pieces means a widening space of opinion, not necessarily in diversity though, but in volume. The result is an increase in broadcast hours for TV discussion programs, in which experts, or "fast thinkers", as Bourdieu likes to call them (1998, p. 28), discuss and argue about current social and political issues. One program director interviewed on October 25, 2016 said; *"Such programs are so cheap. You had already invested in studios, employees etc. The only extra cost would be to cover the travel expenses of a guest you invite from outside (from İstanbul). Other than this, any other program format costs more. You cannot find a four-hour documentary, but you can make people discuss something for four, or even five hours!"*

News channels have the highest rating scores in times of crisis. However, on ordinary days, normally, rating scores are on a par with "primetime TV channels", which broadcast TV serials, talent contests, sports, quiz shows etc. Table 1 below shows this difference between October 24, 2016 and November 4, 2016 during the prime time slot (8-11 PM). These scores, which were gathered from ratings companies and from news channels that work with them, are based on the total percentage of viewers, representing people from all different social and economic strata in society.

The data presented in Table 1 show the lower ratings of discussion programs compared to other program formats just as in many different parts of the world and in different media systems. Furthermore, it is understood that these discussion programs rarely affect the news channels' ratings positively. The low cost of these programs is one benefit for the station owners. However, the real stake in the game is to sustain the balance of power with influential actors of the political field, as these programs and the invited experts serve as agenda-building and framing tools because of what is and is not said. Apart from CNN Türk, which had a wider list of participants representing wider proportions of society during the time of the study, NTV and Habertürk discussion programs had lower ratings than their total



ratings in a day<sup>3</sup>. This means such programs do not contribute positively to the overall performance of the channel. However, as one program director interviewed on October 25, 2016 says, with the selection of guest speakers, these channels "set the very sentences people tend to use the next day". Another program editor from another TV channel interviewed on October 28, 2016 says "... The rating score would be similar to that of Baby TV, but the impact of the rhetoric should be considered. After all, people care about what is being said on news TV".

**Table 1. Rating Scores of Discussion Programs and other TV Program Formats**

	<b>NTV</b>	<b>CNN Türk</b>	<b>Habertürk</b>	<b>"Prime Time" 1</b>	<b>"Prime Time" 2</b>	<b>"Prime Time" 3</b>
24.10.2016	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>0.38</b>	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>1.55</b>	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>1.13</b>	TV Serial (Show Tv) <b>7.95</b>	TV Serial (Atv) <b>6.9</b>	Talent Show (Tv 8) <b>4.56</b>
25.10.2016	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>0.53</b>	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>1.74</b>	Interview <b>0.74</b>	TV Serial (Atv) <b>8.90</b>	TV Serial (Star Tv) <b>6.72</b>	TV Serial (Kanal D) <b>4.05</b>
26.10.2016	Discussion Prog. . <b>0.41</b>	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>1.58</b>	Discussion Prog. 2 <b>0.65</b>	TV Serial (TRT) <b>11.19</b>	TV Serial (Fox Tv) <b>5.88</b>	TV Serial (Star Tv) <b>5.32</b>
27.10.2016	Discussion Prog. 3 <b>0.49</b>	Discussion Prog. 2 <b>1.68</b>	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>0.89</b>	TV Serial (Star Tv) <b>6.07</b>	TV Serial (Kanal D) <b>5.73</b>	TV Serial (Show Tv) <b>4.06</b>
28.10.2016	Discussion Prog. 2 <b>0.36</b>	Discussion Prog. 2 <b>2.33</b>	Documentary <b>0.47</b>	TV Serial (Kanal D) <b>7.97</b>	TV Serial (Star Tv) <b>5.52</b>	Comedy Prog. (Show Tv) <b>4.99</b>
31.10.2016	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>0.45</b>	Exclusive Interview <b>4.11</b>	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>1.04</b>	TV Serial (Show Tv) <b>8.09</b>	(TV Serial Atv) <b>7.16</b>	TV Serial (StarTv) <b>4.17</b>
01.11.2016	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>0.33</b>	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>2.17</b>	Interview <b>0.62</b>	Football match (TRT) <b>10.06</b>	TV Serial (Star Tv) <b>9.33</b>	TV Serial (Atv) <b>8.24</b>
02.11.2016	Discussion Prog. 2 <b>0.58</b>	Discussion Prog. 2 <b>2.48</b>	Discussion Prog. 2 <b>0.68</b>	TV Serial (TRT) <b>9.59</b>	TV Serial (Fox Tv) <b>6.21</b>	TV Serial (Star Tv): <b>5.68</b>
03.11.2016	Documentary <b>0.25</b>	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>1.48</b>	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>1.13</b>	Football match (TRT) <b>12.28</b>	TV Serial (Kanal D) <b>6.08</b>	TV Serial (Star Tv) <b>4.39</b>
4.11.2016	Discussion Prog. 4 <b>0.57</b>	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>2.17</b>	Discussion Prog. 1 <b>1.13</b>	TV Serial (Kanal D) <b>6.48</b>	TV Serial (Atv) <b>5.32</b>	TV Serial (Star Tv) <b>4.95</b>

### **The Pool of "TV Experts"**

TV discussion programs are not new in Turkey. Similar programs were broadcasted in the late 1980's on public TRT (Turkish Radio Television Corporation – the only TV company then). However, whether on TRT or on the subsequent first private TV channels, the frequency of such programs was usually once or twice a week. But in the period analyzed, between, October 24 and November 4, 2016, that is, over the course of two weeks, 27 different discussion

<sup>3</sup>This is another significant indicator as to why there had slightly been more pressure on the CNN Türk newsroom compared to other channels that resulted in the sale of the media group to a pro-government businessman.

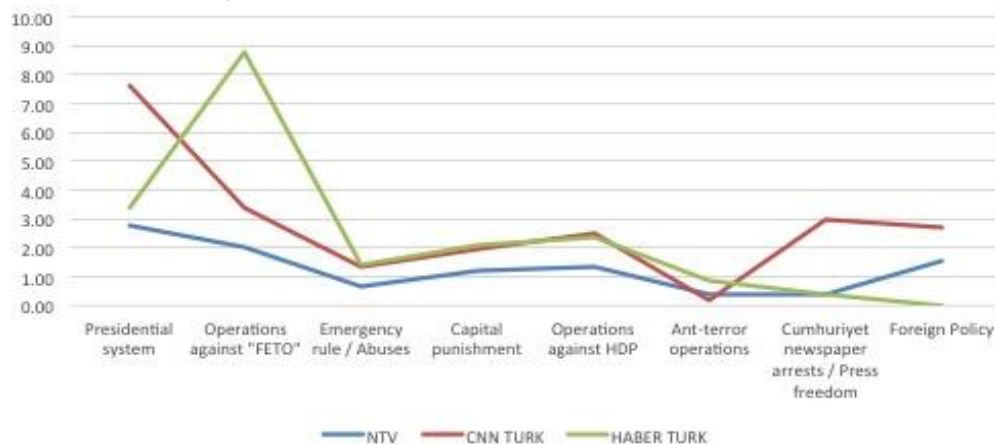
programs were broadcasted on these three channels; almost one program per weekday on every channel. In total, 77 different people (journalists, academicians, policy experts, politicians, lawyers, writers etc.) were invited to the various studios and the programs lasted for more than 78 hours.

The guest lists were designed in a way to favor official rhetoric over alternative formats. Among these 77 people, 22 were journalists – the largest group. It should also be noted that all of these journalists worked in mainstream news outlets. Journalists prefer to invite fellow journalists onto their programs because they are believed to be cognizant of the broader picture and the constraints under which they should work (Paletz & Entman, 1981, p. 20). Thirteen of these journalists were pro-government, six were critical of government policies, while three of them used neutral language on current issues. However, there are also boundaries with respect to criticism of the government. The classical "manufacturing consent" formula applies here: "Critical sources may be avoided not only because of their lesser availability and higher cost of establishing credibility, but also because primary sources may be offended and may even threaten the media using them" (Chomsky and Herman, 1988, p. 22). All of those interviewed for this research, were of the view that the different voices in Turkish society could not all be represented on these programs, although some were – a position supported even by those with allegiances to AKP. One presenter interviewed on October 14, 2016 said: *"There are so few people that I can invite. We are revolving around the same 30 or 40 people 4 days a week"*. Another presenter from a different channel interviewed on October 18 2016 said: *"Since the June 7 parliamentary elections (2015), I could not imagine inviting an HDP (People's Democratic Party – pro-Kurdish political party) member, a program criticizing the government or one in which the military is criticized. It (the guest list) changed 80%"*. Finally, a program coordinator from the third news channel interviewed on October 25, 2016 said: *"Mainstream news channels are not based on the idea that their primary mission is to fulfill the needs of people to get objective news. They are not mainly concerned with public broadcasting ethics. This is the reality. The lines are drawn by the capital that owns that channel. It is like running any other business. The frame is determined by the status quo. Sometimes it gets narrow, sometimes it gets wider"*. It was observed that TV producers and presenters considered experts, who previously had appeared on other TV channels, even rival networks to be "safe choices". On Turkish news TV screens, each program looks similar to its counterpart, as the competition between journalists subject to identical pressures homogenized the "cast", just as Bourdieu claimed (1998, p. 23). In the diagram below, the hours dedicated in each channel's panel discussion programs to major topics are shown. Other than two topics ("Operations against FETÖ<sup>4</sup>" and "Cumhuriyet Newspaper arrests") in which Haber Türk and CNN Türk diverge slightly, similar agenda traits can be observed.

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<sup>4</sup>An acronym for "Fethullah Terrorist Organisation" –a term employed by officials and the mainstream media to encompass all Gülen-linked references.

Figure 1. Hours dedicated to the Discussion of Major Topics between October 24 and November 4, 2016



### Politicians as Agenda Setters

During the state of emergency, not only lobby/interest groups, but also most CSOs, some political parties, and factions had difficulty in participating the agenda-setting process. Eight of the ten media employees of different ranks (news/program coordinator, presenter/anchor, editor, producer), who were interviewed for this study claimed that journalists themselves never set the agenda. They pointed to "the President", "Erdoğan", "politicians" and "Ankara" (the Turkish capital used by way of metonymy for "the government") as dictating the agenda to the media, mostly indirectly, thanks to their monopoly in the political field.

A presenter interviewed on October 18, 2016, claimed that they *"actually followed the agenda that has already been set by the government"*. Another presenter interviewed on October 19, 2016, said she could not recall when she was the main actor in setting the agenda of her program. She said, *"When I could interview a political leader, I would set an agenda (for other news outlets) however, we usually follow the agenda that has already been set"*. An editor interviewed on October 20, 2016 claimed that *"the agenda setter had been the (then prime minister) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, since he (the editor) started to work in the media industry"*. He said: *"Erdoğan is an expert in changing the agenda. There sometimes are other topics, but usually Erdoğan is a dominant figure"* (in setting the agenda). A producer interviewed on October 24, 2016 said that, it is always preferable for another news outlet (newspaper, TV) to cover a specific story. She said *"Then we can stand the criticism from the authorities by pointing our finger to that news outlet as the initiator"*. However, "the agenda source" cannot be every news outlet, but only some mainstream ones as another producer interviewed on October 22, 2016 put it; *"you cannot take a news report from BirGün newspaper (a left-wing opposition newspaper), which could cause trouble for the government and put it into your program's agenda, nobody is that brave"*. Another producer interviewed on that very same day also said that, for years, the mainstream media had been unwilling to break stories, which had no backing from

the government. He said, "Topics, which are not backed by strong political will cannot make it to the top of the agenda".

Figure 2. Topics mentioned by President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Yıldırım between, October 24 and November 4, 2016

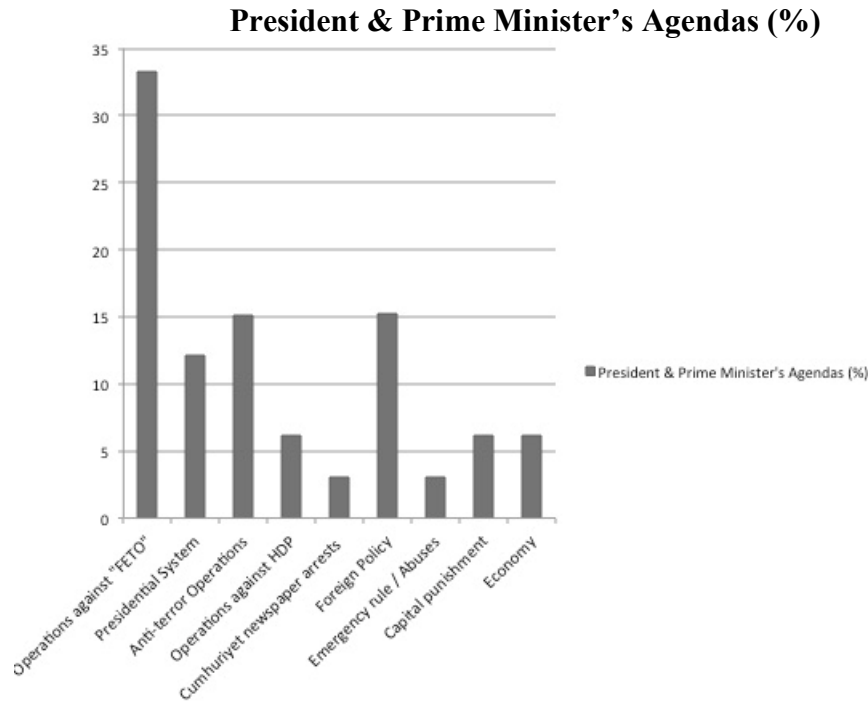
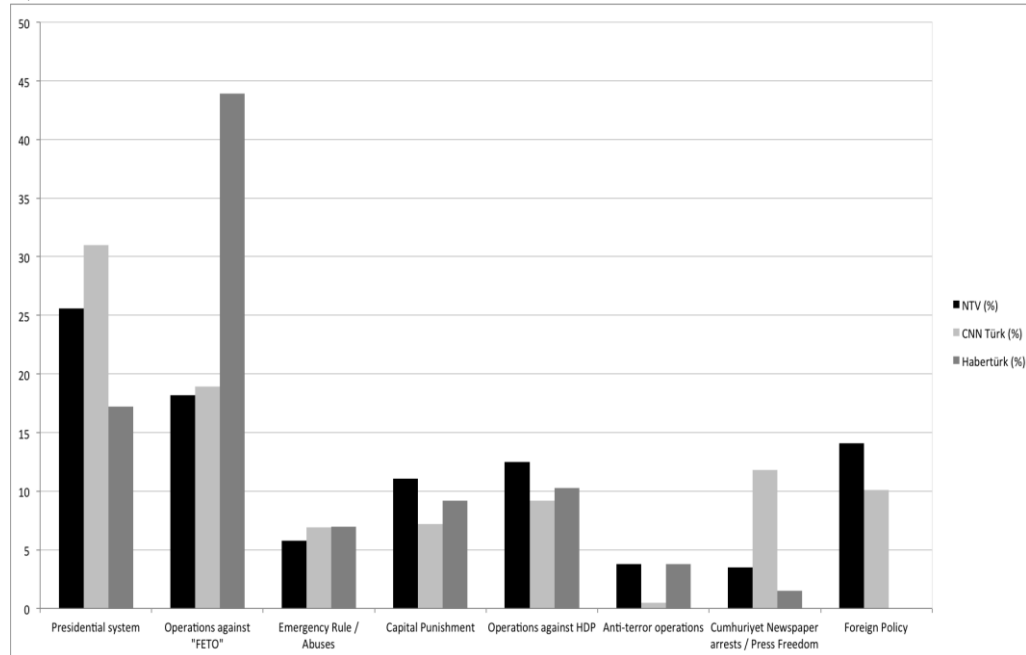


Figure 3. The Agendas of Discussion Programs between October 24 and November 4, 2016



As can be observed from the diagrams above, months after the coup attempt, the crackdown on "FETÖ" and the trials of those, who joined its ranks during the coup attempt, were still the most popular issue on the agenda. The emphasis on this topic in the speeches of President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Yıldırım constituted more than 33% of their agendas combined. Similarly, this was the second most popular topic for NTV and CNN Türk, whereas Habertürk dedicated nearly 44% of screen time to this discussion. However, in this period, which the main opposition leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, calls "a civil coup" in the wake of the military attempt, the human rights abuse claims hardly made it onto the news bulletins and discussion programs. During the period of this research alone, the co-mayors of the city of Diyarbakir, members of pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), Gültan Kışanak and Fırat Anlı, as well as the co-leaders of the same party Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ were taken into custody, later to be arrested. In the same period also, some 1.262 academicians from 77 different universities were dismissed as well as 195 army officers and petty officers. 103 teachers were detained and 193 health officials in the city of Diyarbakir were sacked. However, as noted above, the exposure given to these topics was considerably less than that afforded to the agenda of the President and Prime Minister. It is also worth noting that the subject of capital punishment, which had been very much to the fore at that point in time in the mainstream media, failed to even merit a discussion in parliament. However, emergency decrees, which resulted in the dismissal of tens of thousands of people and hundreds of arrests, were rarely discussed on these TV programs.

It has been asserted that constant alternative media coverage of counter issues makes controversial topics "spill-over" to the mainstream agenda (Mathes and Pfetsch, 1991, p. 55-56). However, during the state of emergency in Turkey, the "spill over" was quite limited, if in evidence at all, and the news channels turned a blind eye to a number of major topics that had a significant impact on the lives of people. In research conducted in December 2016 by Kadir Has University, 1.000 people in 26 different cities in Turkey were asked about "the most important problem in Turkey". According to the study, terror attacks were considered to be the most important problem (35%). This was followed by "FETÖ" (25.2%), unemployment (10.5%), the high cost of living (9.8%), human rights abuses (4.8%), the Kurdish problem (3.5%), and "the Syria crisis" (the war in neighboring Syria) (3.3%). As one can clearly see, economic issues such as unemployment and the high cost of living did not make it onto the agenda of the authorities and the mainstream media. Furthermore, when the subject of terror is usually discussed, it is with a view to framing the Kurdish issue rather than the bombing attacks of ISIS. This then serves as a pretext for the arrests of HDP leaders and MPs.

As the ruling elite picks certain issues via various "priming" methods, the mainstream media quickly adapts to these choices and a closed-circuit agenda-setting process begins. A presenter interviewed on October 14, 2016 stated that the agenda of the programs was formulated with reference to (official) announcements in Ankara. She said: *"I think ordinary people have no initiative in determining the agenda; I believe their agenda is quite different from ours, however, in these programs those topics are not discussed"*. One senior journalist who has been

invited onto discussion programs on these three TV channels, when interviewed on October 20, 2016 said: *"It is based on not discussing some issues. They say 'Let's discuss something, but let's not be overtly critical, let's not go into a lot of detail, but does it seem like we're discussing something? O.K. done!'"* Nearly all of these programs are like this".

### **Framing the Purge during the State of Emergency**

Ghanem (1997, p. 10) argues that a news headline is one of the essential dimensions in framing an issue. On TV, typically, news topics and headlines are placed within the lower third of the TV screen. TV editors, who are responsible for writing those headlines for the screen, are selected carefully for this task. Bourdieu (2013, p. 138) defines the ultimate censorship as a situation where, "an agent has nothing to say apart from what he is objectively authorized to say: in this case he does not even have to be his own censor because he is, in a way, censored once and for all..." All the program editors interviewed for this research stated that they had been censoring themselves in writing the captions for the screen. However, as circumstances change quickly, the red lines of the authorities also change in a very short time and sometimes it is very hard even for experienced news editors to adapt.

On November 3, 2016, leaders and some of the newly elected MPs of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) were detained in a night raid by the police. Most of the mainstream news outlets, including the TV channels analyzed here, used the headline "Terror operation against HDP". One news editor stated that he was warned and instructed (by his superiors) to use this very same headline in conjunction other outlets after he used the headline "operation against HDP". HDP, the third largest political party in the parliament was to be associated with "terror" in the period that followed. In the TV debate programs of NTV and Habertürk, the common headlines in the following days were "Terror operation against HDP". Only one anchor on CNN Türk chose to use more neutral headlines, such as: "8 HDP MPs arrested" or "Operation against HDP". The other programs presented by different journalists on the same channel however, stuck to the official rhetoric. It should also be noted that, neither a representative from HDP, nor a journalist from Cumhuriyet newspaper, which had been raided by police with some journalists being detained, later to be arrested, were invited to discuss these topics by these TV channels.

When analyzed, it is evident that both the President and the Prime Minister also used a "priming" strategy as an effective extension of agenda-setting in this period. As Iyengar and Simon (1993, p. 368) argue, priming affects "the criteria by which political leaders are judged". We see that both Erdoğan and Prime Minister Yıldırım succeeded in suppressing issues such as economic problems and human rights abuses by driving the media to more polarizing topics such as the "fight against terror" and the capital punishment draft, which has never been brought in and discussed in the parliament, but has returned to the agenda repeatedly during pre-election campaigns.

## **Conclusion**

This article has aimed to contribute to the discussion of agenda-building mechanisms in crisis periods, when governments look to consolidate their power and redefine their relationships with the media. Media companies in Turkey are considered by business groups to be safeguards for investments in other sectors and they have been instrumentalized for the acquisition (or at least the preservation) of political power, with resultant longer-term financial benefits (Adaklı, 2014, p. 18). However, as those in power have gained extraordinary juridical and judicial powers following the state of emergency, media owners lost much of their bargaining power and they became more vulnerable to pressure from officials. Under the state of emergency conditions, the mainstream media in Turkey can be portrayed not only as the subject of the symbolic violence of the hegemonic actors, but also as one of the agents of such violence. The research demonstrates that the mainstream news media have ceased to provide a free and fair platform for even the major political actors of the country to express their opinions. It was also found that the existing political rhetoric had been reproduced in lengthy TV discussion programs by journalists, academics, lawyers etc. This complied with the existing status quo and aligned with political and social positions, which were already heavily polarized. Moreover, all of the respondents (despite their different political and ideological standpoints) claimed that voices of dissent could not be heard on the mainstream media with experts in the media sector arguing that freedom of speech was at its lowest point ever. Edward Said (1996, p. 77) states that in order for someone to be promoted as an "expert", it is necessary to be certified by the proper authorities and to receive instruction in relation to what type of language to use, and what authorities to cite. With respect to Turkish mainstream journalistic practices, avoiding criticism from the authorities has become a primary (and sometimes only) concern for "gatekeepers", if not seeking the approval of authorities even in giving limited voice to opposition every time.

The major differences between the TV channels in relation to agenda-setting and the selection of experts do not occur solely because of the different attitudes held by journalists working on each channel, rather it is a manifestation of the media group owner's overall strategy for dealing with political power. The actors in this journalistic field; namely the editors, producers, presenters, have a very limited role to play. Further, the spillover effect of the agenda of alternative media to mainstream media is not zero, but quite limited. It was observed that this very limited spillover effect of alternative agenda depends on the presenters' or editors' initiative. Therefore, the ever-decreasing number of such journalists in the mainstream media further limits the already narrow scope of journalism. The TV channels analyzed for this research, exhibit minor differences in picking up different topics and guests, and this limited competition has a marginal effect on ratings. These minor differences however, serve to explain the takeover of CNN Türk by a pro-government business group in the months following completion of this research.

Both the data and in-depth interviews clearly demonstrate that agenda-setting

was strictly within the purview of politicians, and not journalists during the research period. As such, mainstream TV journalism as found on discussion programs within Turkey was (and still is) far from being a part of the "watchdog" journalism idealized in liberal media theories. Furthermore, these discussion programs are designed and presented in such a way that they operate as platforms for the reproduction of existing hegemonic positions through dominant political, ethnic, and religious rhetoric. The lack of pluralism is a threat to democracy and such programs serve to increase the polarization already dividing the society rather than healing it. The transformation for the better in the journalistic field under such circumstances is only possible after a change in the political field, not the reverse. A methodological limitation of this study -measuring audience perception of mainstream agenda-setting and framing efforts- could be addressed in future similar studies. Only then can a fuller picture of the media landscape be drawn.

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## Exploring the Credibility of Fitness Instagram Micro-Celebrities on Young British Males

By Elmira Djafarova<sup>\*</sup> & Max Thompson<sup>±</sup>

*This study explores the influence fitness micro-celebrities have on young British males. Content analysis of micro-celebrities Instagram pages and questionnaires with the followers identify the strong impact that micro-celebrities have on the purchase intentions, fitness routines and self-consciousness of young males. The Source Credibility, Attractiveness Model and Match-up Theory have been reviewed, with the focus on their relevance to the online environment. This research finds that Match-up Theory was applicable in an online environment however a number of characteristics that increase the credibility of an endorsement in traditional media did not have the same outcome on Instagram. The findings not only suggest the lack of relevance that existing celebrity endorsement models have on an online platform, but additionally identify several characteristics that play a more influential role in increasing the effectiveness and credibility of the celebrity endorsements on Instagram.*

**Keywords:** credibility models, fitness, Instagram, micro-celebrities, young males.

### Introduction

Newly identified micro-celebrities have become a key commercial marketing tool for companies. The authenticity of these individuals makes them an effective communication intermediary for organisations to disseminate information about their products and services (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

The majority of existing literature demonstrates a relationship between the usage of the social media site Facebook and body dissatisfaction among young women (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013, 2017; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Fardouly et al., 2015). Meier and Grey (2014) criticise these studies for their broadness and suggest that exposure to photographs on Facebook is associated with greater body dissatisfaction rather than general usage of the social media platform. Therefore, due to the visual nature of Instagram, it is more likely to increase the levels of body dissatisfaction among its users (Meier & Grey, 2014). Little research has been carried out on the relationship between social media usage and the influence it has on young males. Studies focus on women due to the emphasis placed on their appearance in western cultures (Carey et al., 2014). Male body image concerns have increased due to the body ideals portrayed through traditional media (Agilata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Bartlett et al., 2008; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009). Societal pressures to imitate these muscular body ideals forces young males to change their eating behaviours and exercise routines with the hope of increasing their muscle mass (Kim & Chock, 2015).

Based on the findings in the literature this study determines if the male fitness

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micro-celebrities on Instagram influence the health and fitness habits of young males in Great Britain. It verifies the impact of the Source Credibility, Attractiveness Model and Match-up Theory within the health and fitness social circle on Instagram. Previous studies testing these models focus on the effectiveness of traditional celebrities influencing their fans (Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian, 1990; Friedman & Friedman, 1978; Solomon et al., 2013; Choi & Rifon, 2012). Limited research has been carried out on the relevance and effectiveness of these theories on digital platform, which has provided accommodation for the new social media micro-celebrities (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019).

## **Literature Review**

### **Micro-Celebrities and Instagram**

Micro-celebrities are non-traditional celebrities, that come from a variety of fields including bloggers, vloggers, fitness models and "instafamous" personalities that have large amounts of followers on social media platforms (Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Wells, 2014). They are also cheaper and readily available (Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016). These characteristics have persuaded companies to engage with these personalities as they can create a more meaningful, authentic connection with their target audience as they are not subject to the process of the star-making system (Marwick, 2015; Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016). The most influential people on social media have great commercial value for companies. Compensating opinion leaders to disseminate information to their millions of followers is a proven way to guide public opinion, influence selling or stimulate demand (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Chu & Kim, 2011).

For the context of this study Instagram is chosen as 58% of millennial internet users are active on this social media site (Statista, 2016). This young audience, that accounts for the majority of Instagram's consumers, admire and emulate the good life, good looks and conspicuous consumption that these micro-celebrities promote through their Instagram pages (Khamis et al., 2017). Due to the increased activeness of millennial males and fitness influencers on Instagram (Statista, 2016; Mintel, 2016b), this social media provides a potential to understand the relationship between these two target segments.

Instagram has a user base of 800 million people and 500 million of these use the application daily (Statista, 2017a; Statista, 2017b). The magnitude of these figures provides users with the opportunity to become "Instafamous." Instafame is the condition of having an excessive number of followers on Instagram (Khamis et al., 2017).

Researches apply Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory to the social media platform as content shared on the site provides the opportunity for users to make comparisons between their self-perceptions and other users (Liu et al., 2016; Fardouly et al., 2015; Jang et al., 2016; Kim & Chock, 2015). Festinger (1954) states that individuals make social comparison to individuals with similar opinions and abilities. Wnent (2016) agrees and adds that Instafamous girls used to be "the

girl next door" and have evolved into opinion leaders due to the popularity of their posts and fan base. Followers admire these girls but still see them as peers (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). Peer-created social content is trusted more than other types of media, so these social media stars are more likely to serve as a target for appearance comparison than models or celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Isosuo, 2016). Comparisons with peers who closely match the thin-ideal bodies creates greater thoughts about dieting and body dissatisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2015).

An increase in the number of male Instagram fitness models and the promotion of athletic male bodies has created an epidemic of body-conscious young males (Mintel, 2016a). Seventeen percent of 16–24 years old agreed that seeing male models in advertising campaigns made them more conscious about their looks (Mintel, 2016b). This dissatisfaction has forced them to seek information from aspirational athletic male models, with the hope of changing their self-image to mirror that portrayed throughout social media, the audience copies the purchase and consumption of supplements (Mintel, 2017a).

### **The Fitness Industry and its Role on Social Media**

The use of micro-celebrities as a marketing communication tool has been exploited in numerous industries, the fitness and gym culture utilising it more than most (Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2016). It is one of the fastest growing industries in the world, with the UK health and fitness club market estimated to be worth £3.9 billion by 2022, up from £3.1 billion in 2017 (Mintel, 2017b). The socio-cultural trend of individuals wanting to become fitter is instigating this enormous industry growth, and having a domino effect on the consumption of gym clothing, supplements and work-outs (Mintel, 2017b; Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016).

Individuals have become fashion conscious when participating in sports or exercise, however less formal in their day to day lives (Marlowe, 2016; Armstrong, 2016; Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016). These societal changes have fashioned a demand for trend-led sports apparel, influencing the sportswear markets growth to reach a staggering \$348.51 billion in 2017 (Statista, 2017b).

Literature suggests that the millennial generation are most susceptible to this fitness and gym trend (Wells et al., 2015). Seventy-six percent of 16–24 year olds exercise at least once a week and 45% of them became healthier in 2016 (Valentine, 2017; Mintel, 2017b). Many agree that this desire for a healthy lifestyle, lean body and on-trend fitness clothing is fuelled by the content on millennials favourite social media platforms like Instagram (Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016; Mintel, 2017b). As a result of the industry growth, having an athletic body ideal with minimal body fat percentage can make you famous, as they serve as an inspirational referent to many of their followers. These followers purchase these products or copy their workout routines with the hope of attaining the same body as their inspiration (Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016). Companies competing in the health and fitness industry recognise this commercial opportunity and pay fit Instagrammers to post pictures with their products and services (Wnent, 2016).

## **Celebrity Endorsement Theories**

The use of testimonials in advertising is not a new phenomenon and abundant amounts of research has been undertaken to understand the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement (Byrne et al., 2003; Kim & Na, 2007; Erdogan, 1999; Alsmadi, 2006). Hovland et al. (1953) understanding of the credibility of an endorser led to the development of the Source Credibility Model. The Source Attractiveness Model followed later with McGuire (1985) identifying a further four characteristics that increase the effectiveness of a testimonial. Forkan (1980) investigated the similarities between the product and endorser and generated his Match-up Theory.

Over the years the testing of these models has become exhaustive on traditional celebrities and traditional media (Kamins, 1990; McDaniel, 1999; Ang & Dubelaar, 2006; Kim & Na, 2007; Amos et al., 2008; O'Mahony & Meenaghan, 1997). However, due to the novelty of organisations utilising micro-celebrities as a marketing communication technique on social media sites, limited research has been undertaken to understand the relevance of these widely accepted endorsement concepts on online platforms (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019).

Source credibility is a term commonly used to describe the reliability of an influencer's communication that will impact the receiver's acceptance of a message, typically dependant on the characteristics of the influencer (Ohanian, 1990). Hovland et al. (1953) Source Credibility model suggests that the perceived credibility of the communicator is dependent on two factors; expertness and trustworthiness. Erdogan (1999) identifies expertise as the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions. The extant literature proposes that if the influencer is perceived to be an expert then this positively impacts the audience's attitude towards the product or service being endorsed (Ohanian, 1990; Erdogan, 1999; Seiler & Kucza, 2017; Neal, 2017).

The fact that the influencer has large followership on Instagram and offers coaching plans to his followers for a fee suggests he is a fitness industry expert, which will positively influence the audience's attitude towards the product. Norton (2017) and Korotina & Jargalsaikhan (2016) suggest this increases their purchase intents. However, Neal (2017) argues that even if an endorser has enough perceived expertise of an industry to communicate valid assertions, these messages may be rejected if the audience believes the communicator has something to gain from the persuading their following.

Ohanian (1990) suggests the trust paradigm in communication is the listener's degree of confidence in the level of acceptance of the speaker and the message. Erdogan (1999) argues the level of acceptance is greater amongst the audience if the messenger shows greater levels of honesty, integrity and believability, as this is what makes an endorser trustworthy. Friedman & Friedman (1978) believe that brands should exploit celebrities with a greater sense of likability amongst their target market to advertise their products, as their findings conclude that likeability is the most important element of trust.

McGuire (1985) created the concept of the source attractiveness model to explain that the effectiveness of a message depends on the communicator's

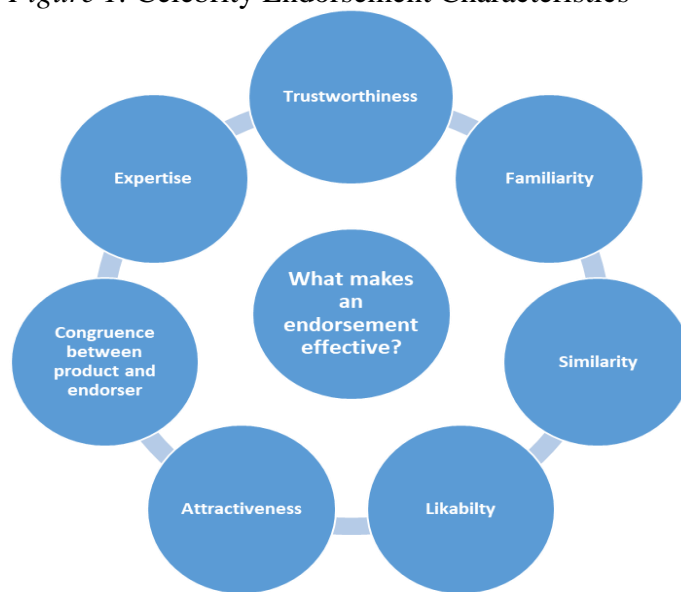
familiarity, likability, similarity and attractiveness. Hung (2014) suggest that through promoting these individualities, the likelihood of the recipient making positive associations with the brand based on their affirmative opinion of the endorser is high.

Match up theory suggests that if the greater the degree of congruence between the endorser and the product the more effective the communication is (Forkan, 1980; Erdogan, 1999; Seiler & Kucza, 2017). If the relationship lacks congruence the sense of credibility is lost. Choi & Rifon (2012) suggest that the influence of an endorsement is more influential when impacting purchase decisions if there is a match between the customer's perception of the endorser and their ideal self.

Brands competing in the health and fitness industry operationalise match up theory. There is a clear congruence between the endorser and the product but there is also likely to be a match between the physique of the endorser and the audiences desired ideal self-image (Schiffman et al., 2011; Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016).

The literature has identified 7 characteristics that celebrities need to have if their endorsement of a product or service is to be effective. Figure 1 identifies these characteristics. Their applicability to micro-celebrities on Instagram is tested in this study.

*Figure 1. Celebrity Endorsement Characteristics*



## Research Methods

The authors consider that a multiple methods research design provides scope for a richer approach to data collection whilst overcoming the weaknesses associated with using only one method. Carrying out a content analysis of Instagram and deploying surveys with young males delivers this dual data collection technique.

To understand the impact that micro-celebrities have on the health and fitness

routines of young males, the authors conducted a content analysis of the micro-celebrities' Instagram pages that communicate with their target audience. Carrying out a content analysis enabled the authors to systematically convert the social media content into quantifiable data that was then utilised to make inferences from the communication techniques of the chosen influencers (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Researchers analysed ten fitness opinion leaders who communicate with their audience through this social media site.

The influencers were chosen after meeting criteria set by the authors; they all have an active affiliation with at least one health and fitness brand, over 150,000 followers on Instagram and posted at least twice a week. Table 1 identifies the chosen influencers and their alignment with the criteria.

*Table 1.* Fitness Opinion Leaders chosen for Content Analysis

<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of Followers</b>	<b>Number of Brands Affiliated with</b>	<b>Average Amount of Weekly Posts (10 Month Average)</b>
1. Joss Mooney	346 k	17	5.2
2. Dickerson Ross	1.6 M	3	6.3
3. Simon Searles	177 k	8	3.6
4. Joe Delaney	189 k	3	5.3
5. Rykard Jenkins	318 k	5	3.8
6. Uzome Obilor	469 k	2	4.8
7. Steve Cook	1.9 M	2	5.5
8. Rob Lipsett	405 k	3	5.5
9. Christian Guzman	1 M	4	3.5
10. Lex Griffin	397 k	1	4

Each influencer was coded based on their number of followers, then each selected post was coded for sponsorship, type of post (picture or video), engagement (number of likes and comments), the content and the influencer's description.

An online random sample generator provided 5 posts from each influencer that forms the base of the analysis, which was generated from their last 100 posts. Using a random sample means that every post has an equal chance of being generated, and this allows to generalise the results to the entire population of posts published on the ten fitness opinion leaders' accounts.

The authors used self-administered questionnaires as another type of data collection. The authors distributed the questionnaires electronically through the use of Qualtrics survey software, with the rationale stemming from the positives of self-completion questionnaires identified by Sekaran & Bougie (2016) and Bryman & Bell (2015) earlier. Purposive sampling was utilised when distributing the questionnaire by the author to generate a non-probability sample which meant that zero probabilities are attached to the participants for being chosen as a subject (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A total of 100 respondents completed the questionnaire, providing a complete representation of the target audience.



## Findings and Analysis

### Content Data Analysis

A total of 50 images were coded. The data sets were examined using the SPSS frequency test to expose the occurrences of each variable. Majority of the pictures coded were organic posts (33), with the remaining 17 being organic. 40% of coded posts had between 0–14,999 likes (40%), this means the remaining 60% had greater than 15,000 likes from fans. Fifty-eight percent of the posts coded had between 0–249 comments (58%) which means that over at least 250 fans commented on 42% of the images analysed.

The authors conducted a chi-squared test to test the association between the amount of likes a micro-celebrity receives on their posts and the number of followers they have. Results show that the association is statistically significant as  $p \leq 0.005$ , therefore it can be concluded that the larger following base micro-celebrities have on Instagram the greater engagement on their posts.

Findings show that these influencers have a significant number of sponsored posts and the engagement with fans is substantial. This supports Chen et al. (2016) suggestion that companies utilise opinion leaders who have large followings as they create greater engagement with their fans which has great commercial value for companies. Therefore, the level of engagement with fans is a characteristic that increases the influence of these opinion leaders.

The content of images analysed were predominantly made up of high-quality modelling photos (30%), either shirtless (22%) or fully clothed (8%). These findings highlight that the quality of images posted is significant to the influencers, and therefore could play an important role in increasing their credibility. Therefore, these characteristics tested through the survey to see if it plays any significance in influencing young males.

Although the post with the greatest number of likes was sponsored by a brand, the cross tabulation shows that there were four organic posts that received 50,000 to 74,999 likes in comparison to 1 sponsored post. This suggests that in general users have a stronger liking to the organic posts of these health and fitness influencers.

Findings show that 63 respondents actively follow micro-celebrities on the social media site. The extant literature suggested that the millennial generation are becoming increasingly concerned about their fitness and health (Wells et al., 2015). Valentine (2017) finds that 76% of 16–24 year olds exercise at least once a week. Findings from the survey state that 96% of the sample exercise at least once a week suggesting that males may be more susceptible to the socio-cultural health and fitness trend than females.

When asked if an Instafamous individual has ever made them feel self-conscious about their self-image, the majority of respondents disagreed (75), with the remaining 25 suggesting that an image or video posted by a micro-celebrity has increased their level of self-consciousness. This supports Mintel's (2016b) findings of 17% of young males agreeing that seeing male Instagram fitness models in advertising made them more self-conscious. Twenty-nine respondents have purchased a product or service being endorsed on Instagram by a micro-

celebrity with the remaining 71 disagreeing. This suggests that this technique highlighted in the literature is effective to an extent as it increased the purchase intentions of 29% of the sample.

### **Health and Fitness Routines**

Literature suggests social media sites like Instagram have pressured their users to live healthier lifestyles (Mintel, 2017b; Norton, 2017; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). Seventy respondents said they had previously copied a work-out routine or recipe that a micro-celebrity had posted on Instagram and data suggests that 62 of these try to live healthy lifestyles as they exercise more than 3 times a week. The cross tabulation displayed highlights a clear positive relationship between the two variables, the more active you are as an individual the more likely you are to copy or take guidance from a health and fitness influencer.

The authors conducted a chi-squared test to test the association between the amount of exercise and individual does and the likelihood of them copying a micro-celebrities health and fitness routine. Results show that  $p < 0.001$ , therefore it can be concluded that individuals are more likely to copy or take guidance from an Instafamous personality if they exercise more.

### **Source Credibility Model**

Hovland et al. (1953) identify expertise and trustworthiness as the two deciding characteristics that make a communicator effective when endorsing products or services. Hovland et al.'s (1953) thesis was developed well before the evolution of electronic word of mouth, where users can now refer to electronic media before making purchase decisions (Cheung & Lee, 2012). The authors question the relevance of these characteristics on online platforms. To test this, respondents were asked how important they felt certain characteristics of micro-celebrities were when deeming their credibility.

Majority of respondents (80%) agreed that the expertise of an individual increased their credibility when endorsing products. These findings support discussions of Hovland et al. (1953), Ohanian (1990), Erdogan (1999), Seiler & Kucza (2017) and Neal (2017). These findings also support the literature surrounding reference groups, as Escallas & Bettman (2005) and McFerran et al. (2009) which suggest that individuals seek recommendations from reference groups with perceived expertise before making informed decisions

However, a greater number of respondents disagreed (45%) rather than agreed (35%) that the trustworthiness of these online personalities makes them a credible source. This suggests that the trustworthiness of micro-celebrities does not make them a credible source, and that these characteristics are not relevant on online platforms like Instagram.

### **Source Attractiveness Model**

The relevance of McGuire's (1985) source attractiveness model characteristics

is also tested. Sixty-one respondents agreed that the attractiveness of a micro-celebrity increases their influence and credibility with 22 disagreeing: 37 agreed that the familiarity of the personalities was an influencing characteristic however a larger proportion disagreed (41): the same amount of respondents agreed that the likability increases their creditability as disagreed (40) with the remaining 20 neither agreeing or disagreeing: lastly a larger proportion of respondents agreed (36) that the similarity of the online personalities to themselves increased their creditability, and more respondents neither agreed or disagreed (33) about this characteristics than agreed (31).

Wnent (2016) suggests that organisations compensate fit and attractive micro-celebrities to endorse their products as their fans are likely to copy the consumption. The findings support Wnent (2016) as the respondents find that the attractiveness of individuals made them a more credible source. However, the significance and relevance of the remaining three characteristics of McGuire's (1985) Source Attractiveness Model on Instagram can be questioned as the level of agreement between respondents is marginal. Apart from the attractiveness, Hung (2014) proposed that promoting the individualities of the Source Attractiveness Model that the influencer holds increases the likelihood of the recipient making positive associations with the brand, findings suggest there is no clear relationship between the likability, familiarity and similarity of the endorser increasing the effectiveness of a message. The authors therefore suggest that Hung's (2014) proposal may not be relevant to micro-celebrities on Instagram.

### **New Influential Characteristics**

The content analysis highlights the extensive amount of likes and followers Instafamous individuals have on Instagram, and the significant number of high-quality images they post. Leading the authors to believe characteristics like these (that are only present on online platforms) potentially have a significant influence on the perceived credibility of an influencer. The characteristics identified by the authors that are unrelated to the models are tested to see their influential significance when defining an individual perceived credibility on these online platforms.

Findings highlight three characteristics identified from the content analysis that are only relevant to social media sites and the respondent's level of agreement that they increase the credibility of these micro-celebrities. The most significant characteristic the sample felt increased the influencer's credibility, was the high quality of posts/images as 77 agreed it increased the credibility of the influencers on Instagram with only 13 disagreeing. The majority of respondents agreed (61) that the number of followers an influencer has on Instagram also increases their credibility, with 23 disagreeing. Finally, 54 respondents agreed that the number of comments and likes on their posts increased their credibility, with 30 disagreeing and the remaining 16 neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

The authors also tested further three characteristics. From the three new characteristics tested 76 respondents agree that the perceived experience of the influencer is a characteristic that makes them a credible source with only 11

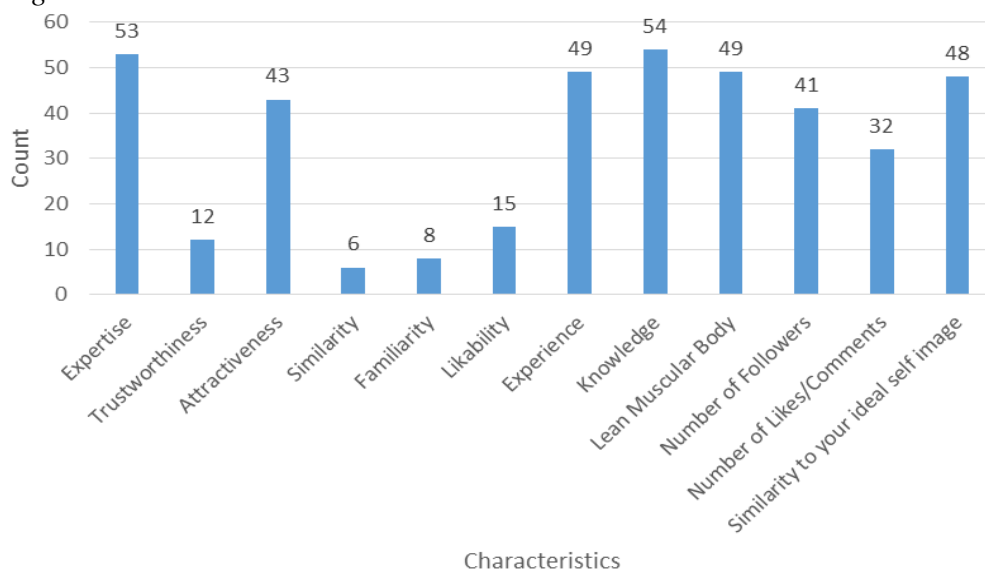
disagreeing. Half (50) of the respondents agree that their uniqueness increases their credibility with 19 disagreeing. Finally, 40 agree that the charisma of the endorser makes them a credible source, with 33 neither agreeing nor disagreeing and the remaining 27 disagreeing.

Respondents identify the experience of a micro-celebrities as a significant characteristic that increases their credibility. This is unsurprising as name date concluded that, particularly in the health and fitness industry, the influencers who acquire fame, do so due to their perceived experience which many of their audience use as guidance or inspiration. Henceforth the authors used the Spearman rank correlation coefficient to understand if there is a relationship between the activeness of respondents and whether they value the experience of an Instafamous individual. The test identifies a strong positive correlation between the two variables of 0.322 which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. It can therefore be concluded that the more active an individual is, the more important it is to them that a micro-celebrity is experienced.

Forkan (1980), Erdogan (1999) and Seiler & Kucza (2017) agree that an endorsement is more effective if there is a clear congruence between the endorser and the product. Mulchay & Parkinson (2016) suggest that the health and fitness industry have operationalised match-up theory on Instagram by using instafamous health and fitness influencers as a marketing communication tool. The authors ask the respondents if they would be more likely to purchase a health and fitness, product or service if it was being endorsed by an Instafamous health and fitness influencer. Sixty-seven agree that it would increase their purchase intentions with the remaining 33 disagreeing.

These findings support the past literature as 67 of respondents agree that they are be more likely to purchase a health and fitness product if it is endorsed by a health and fitness influencer, which supports Forkan's (1980) Match-up Theory as the high level of congruence between the endorser and the product clearly has a positive impact on the purchase intentions of the audience.

**Figure 2.** Characteristics of Micro-celebrities that Increase Purchase Intentions



Those that agreed were then asked to identify which characteristics of the micro-celebrities would influence their decision. Figure 2 shows the characteristics of the individuals and the total of respondents who agreed that it would influence their purchase intentions.

The 5 most influential characteristics as displayed in Figure 2 are: Knowledge (80.6%); Expertise (79.1%); Lean Muscular Body (73.1%); Experience (73.1%); Similarity to respondent's ideal self (71.6%).

Choi & Rifon (2012) added to Forkan's (1980) Match-up thesis, suggesting an endorsement will be more influential if there is a match between the customer's perception of the endorser and their ideal self. This is clearly supported by the findings displayed in Figure 2 as 71.6% of the 67 respondents inclined to purchase a health and fitness product if it was endorsed by a health and fitness influencer felt that the influencer's similarity to their ideal self was a characteristic that would influence this decision.

The respondents feel the influencer's lean muscular body is a more influential characteristic with 73.1% of them selecting this option. These findings reinforce Norton's (2017) suggestion that organisations who supply supplements and meal preparation services utilise individuals with a lean muscular figure to endorse their products as the audience assumes the products play a role in the attainment of their body and are thus more likely to copy this consumption.

The majority of literature investigates the use of micro-celebrities in advertising as they are a new era of famous individuals who have a strong influence on the behaviours and actions of their fans and audience (Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016; Wells, 2014; Marwick, 2015). However, interface with these individuals through online platforms is now becoming a daily occurrence, significant for the millennial generation and also the wider audience on social media (Statistia, 2016; Mintel, 2016b). This active engagement means individuals will form strong feelings and opinions towards these opinion leaders, which has been insignificantly touched on by previous research due to the novelty and significance of these micro-celebrities.

To understand the feelings that young males have towards these micro-celebrities, respondents were asked to state the reasons (if any) why they may dislike the micro celebrities on Instagram. Seventy-six respondents were in agreement that their Instagram content consists of too much product advertisement. This supports the findings of the content analysis as 34% of posts analysed were sponsored posts, and the most frequent post content in the analysis was product placement (26%).

From the 10 fitness opinion leaders analysed in the content analysis, 9 of them were affiliated with more than one brand and one of them had associations with a total of 17. It is therefore unsurprising that 66 respondents feel these individuals only post for monetary gain and is a trait the audience has a disliking towards.

The authors choice to use open ended questions based on the advantages highlighted by Saunders et al. (2016), meant that respondents were able to state potential other reasons why they may have a disliking towards Instafamous individuals that the author may have otherwise missed. One respondent suggested they had a disliking towards these personalities due to the fact it is,

*"incredibly easy to create an un-achievable body image as a result of filters and apps such as photoshop...particularly for teenage girls."*

## Conclusion

Research findings show that micro-celebrities influence the behaviours and attitudes of young males. Literature and the findings also confirm that dissatisfaction of self-image forces individuals to seek advice and copy the consumption and fitness routines of instafamous personalities. The results further identified that product endorsement from Instafamous individuals increases the purchase intentions of their audience.

The relevance of Hovland et al. (1953) and McGuire's (1985) celebrity endorsement models has been applied to traditional media and traditional celebrities, many unable to find criticisms and most concluding the significance of the 6 characteristics identified by the models and their ability to increase the effectiveness of a product endorsement. The authors' findings supported the models to an extent as the expertise and attractiveness of micro-celebrity increased their credibility. However, the findings rejected the effectiveness of the remaining characteristics identified in the endorsement models as they were significantly less relevant than the characteristics identified from the content analysis of this study.

The findings concluded that respondents would be more likely to purchase a fitness product when it is being endorsed by a fitness influencer, thus accepting the relevance of Forkan's (1980) Match-Up theory within the health and fitness industry on Instagram.

*Figure 3. Characteristics that Increase the Effectiveness and Credibility of an Endorser in an Online Environment*



Based upon the testing of the characteristics identified in the source credibility models and theories alongside new characteristics identified by the content analysis carried out by the authors. A number of the original characteristics shown in Figure 3 have been updated (see Figure 1) as the findings revealed new characteristics that are more applicable to micro-celebrities in an online context.

Findings conclude that expertise, trustworthiness and the congruence between the product and endorser are all characteristics that are applicable to both on online and offline context. However, Instagram users felt the experience, uniqueness, number of followers, quality of posts and images and number of likes and comments micro-celebrities make them a more credible source than if they were similar, likable, familiar or trustworthy.

Findings identify that the audience disliked the fact micro-celebrities are compensated to endorsing products as it increases their advertising content. The lack of trust between the audience and the endorser is an influential factor why the "trustworthiness" characteristic identified in the Source Credibility model is not relevant in an online environment.

Some of the research findings contradicted the literature, particularly in relation to the celebrity endorsement models acknowledged. The authors identified 5 new characteristics that increase the credibility and effectiveness of endorsements on Instagram. Further research could be carried out to test these characteristics on other social media sites.

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