



## New Media Users' Awareness of Online Inflammatory and Mobilisation Methods for Radical and Extreme Activities

**Mokhtar Elareshi**, Communication and Media College, Al Ain University, Al Ain, UAE, [mokhtar.elareshi@aau.ac.ae](mailto:mokhtar.elareshi@aau.ac.ae)  
**Mohammed Habes**, Faculty of Mass Communication, Radio & TV Department, Yarmouk University-Jordan, [mohammad.habes@yu.edu.jo](mailto:mohammad.habes@yu.edu.jo)  
**RiadhJeljeli**, Communication and Media College, Al Ain University, Al Ain, UAE, [riadh.jeljeli@aau.ac.ae](mailto:riadh.jeljeli@aau.ac.ae)  
**Abdul-Karim Ziani**, Mass Communication and PR Department, Ahlia University, Manama, Bahrain, [aziani@ahlia.edu.bh](mailto:aziani@ahlia.edu.bh)

**Abstract:** Terrorism attacks and its mobilisation have increased in the new media era. The later have become particularly important platforms for such radical and extreme activities. It has somehow become difficult for governmental bodies to control such content (video, photos, voice) in fact extremists / terrorist groups have "heavily" depended / used these New media platforms to spread extremism, incitement, recruitment, and propaganda. Based on a survey method (344 respondents), the study aimed at examining Saudi new media users' awareness and reaction to online inflammatory and mobilisation methods to better understand the power of new media. Findings revealed that respondents were highly aware of online inflammatory content, and were affected by such content, especially those related to conflicts between different Islamic sects' (e.g., Sunni/Shiite) followers. The complex relationship makes it difficult to draw simple policy implications, but it does offer insight into the role of new media play in terrorist activities.

**Keywords:** Inflammatory content; Terrorism; Cyber jihad; Online recruitment; Social media; Online incitement

### I. INTRODUCTION

For a quiet long time, the Middle East region has witnessed ongoing conflicts, disputes and wars such as in Palestine, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, which effects the whole region including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) due to its spatial proximity. Furthermore, there are already intellectual, ideological and political divisions in the region which puts these countries in an unenviable position led some radical groups e.g., al-Qaeda and later the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to claim legitimate state and attempt to control some parts of these countries (Ali et al., 2021; Gunaratna, 2016; Kell, 2018; Kinney et al., 2018; Weimann, 2014) by force and propaganda. Such radical or extremist groups use the new modern technologies to engage and encourage others to join them by attempting to recruit and influence many, and creating wedge, hatred and segregation e.g., between Sunnis and Shiites in the region (Al-Saud, 2020). In relation to the KSA, such extremist hope is apparently to discredit the Saudi state, religious leaders and accuse them of hypocrisy as Al-Saud (Al-Saud, 2020; D. N. Tahat et al., 2020) state by targeting and driving the young adults away from their state and influence them. Ayman al-Zawahiri (al-Qaeda leader) (al-Zawahiri, 1995) stated that "it is time for the Muslim youth to be free of those hollow resonant names, which persisted in the hypocrisy of the tawaghit [tyrants] until they became an object of ridicule on the tongues of friends and foes. It is time for those youths to come around the informed and truthful scholars, who are suffering and are being afflicted for the sake of their religion".

The intellectual and security challenges facing KSA have increased especially after the spread of social media and the unrest that has afflicted some GCC region since 2011 such as war in terrorism in Yemen 2015, ongoing conflict in Iraq and Syria and the 2017 KSA-Qatar diplomatic, which has effected the Arabs' perceptions including young adults towards their governments (AlMaawi, 2016; Tahat et al., 2020) In response to such claim, the Saudi government realised that the existing security system was not sufficient enough to tackle the role of radical ideas and ideologies (Alharith & Samak, 2018). For example, since early 2000s, 32 ISIS-related incidents occurred in KSA with some officially claimed by ISIS leaving a trail of 44 civilians, 35 security officers and five foreigners dead as stated by Al-Saud (Al-Saud, 2020). In July 2016 (29<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan) one suicide bombing took place in Medina, which killed 4 security officers and 5 were wounded. The Saudi government further stated that in 2016 around 2000 foreign fighters from KSA joined various terrorist groups happened in Syria and elsewhere in the MENA.

To protect the youths, the KSA has launched several media, educational, social, political and economic programmes that aimed at educating the citizens as well as addressing the youths' matters and concerns regarding their future (e.g., #SaudiVision2030), especially after the proliferation of online recruitment by

extremist organisations (e.g., ISIS). In this regard, the Saudi Ministry of Interior recently has worked to promote and counsel locals that make a considerable number of radical people renounce their attitudes towards internal and external matters and make repentance. This study aims to examine whether Saudi online users are aware of incitement methods and online inflammatory mobilisation used by online radical groups, and their perceptions of new media content via social media platforms.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Terrorism and radicalism

Perhaps ISIS is one of the most well-known organisations, established in 2014 that has introduced a threat of unprecedented magnitude to in the Arab world (Gunaratna, 2016; Mahood & Rane, 2017) due to its savviness in exploiting ITC and digital media platforms (Al-Rawi, 2018; Awan, 2017; Gunaratna, 2016). Such body is quite different from their predecessors (for example, al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Algeria, the Houthis in Yemen, etc.) as they target Muslims and non-Muslims in Arab, non-Arab and Muslim countries, especially post Arab uprisings 2011 (Awan, 2017; Baele et al., 2019; Singer & Brooking, 2015). Recently, they have carried out numerous terrorist operations in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and even seeks attacks in KSA itself (mentioned above) to take control of Islam's two holiest shrines in Medina and Mecca. This is as stated by ISIS who believes to overthrowing the House of Saud and attack the country e.g., in Najed and Hejaz provinces (Gunaratna, 2016). In doing so, the extremist thought is no longer confined to sabotage operations on the material property of the state, it is even amounted to salve and kill innocent children, elders and women (Muslims and non-Muslims) and to physical torture or mutilation of corpses (Byron, 2015).

Therefore, the GCC region (including KSA) lives in tension and instability as a result of these malicious plots who proofed they are very smart in using ITC in their communications, engagement and recruitment process (Macdonald et al., 2018). These radical groups impose serious challenges to ordinary people as digital media now allows them to widely outreach with extremist and radical ideas, especially those targeting the youths (Al Serhan & Elareshi, 2019; Awan, 2017; Macdonald et al., 2018). Such use comes in a time when there are (in KSA) lacks strategic programmes that aim to educate and alert young and local citizens about a such threat. It is noteworthy that these digital media and smart device platforms started to adopt radical ideas which spread hatred and aggression to others (Al-Rawi, 2019; Awan, 2017; Singer & Brooking, 2015). Thus, the KSA security authorities are working closely with other alliances in the GCC and elsewhere to combat these threats and challenges on digital media platforms.

In fact, the incitement and new media polarisation for terrorist operations has become one of the most serious and complex problems faced by the security and government bodies (Awan, 2017; Fainberg, 2017; Kinney et al., 2018; Sampathkumar, 2017). Given their threats on individuals and societies, security forces use pre-emptive strikes to identify extremist and radical groups and to thwart their sabotage operations, given the fact that KSA was found to be the most common located place for ISIS, with 27 per cent supporters in the world after Syria and Iraq (Berger & Morgan, 2015). For example, in the digital media era, the authorities face some challenges including:

- The spread of religious misconceptions on the Internet leading to terrorist acts / violence. The ideological intolerance and religious extremism are considered among the most concepts used by extremist groups as they attempt to pump large amounts of new media (mis)information in different languages related to ideological intolerance inciting. It allows the extremist to commit crimes and assassinations, and engaging them in direct fighting with the authorities and security agencies (Al-Saud, 2020; Macdonald et al., 2018). This is why the security authorities are endeavouring to sort out and track the sources of this information in cooperation with internal and external stakeholders and agencies.
- The intellectual and religious nothingness "gap". This happens when someone lacks of information and tries to find sources to fill that gap, especially nowadays it easier than ever to access huge information and content on the Internet. Such information may change / deviate people's intellectual and religious path. Perhaps the incident occurred at Frankfurt Airport, which killed two US causalities and injured others was committed by a perpetrator who drew his information from social media, especially YouTube and Facebook, as stated by Weimann (Weimann, 2014).
- In Muslim's perceptive, the Internet might be seen as a tool that has perhaps helped the spread of evil actions and sins, especially across social media platforms. It has become one of the challenges facing the community. For example, such platforms might be considered to be behind the spread of different actions that might not fit or respect the Saudi local culture e.g., gender mixing, pornography, dissemination of images, false and fake information that carries non-peaceful orientations. Such actions have resulted in the disintegration and conflict among groups within the same society (Elbasir et al., 2020; Shu et al., 2017; Silverman & Singer-Vine, 2016).

- Social openness and the absence of local values, especially those related to foreign cultures (e.g., westernism or globalisation) that perhaps are not in line with for example the local Islamic values. Such new media content presents a kind of challenge facing local societies, where the type of life is different from one society to another. Online users are more absorb to new media content from outside their local culture. This includes the spread of immoral content, propaganda, promotes different ideological ideas on a large scale.

## 2.2. New media propaganda and persuasion

In the past few years, terrorist and radical groups in the MENA have effectively used new media and other platforms and the Internet to manage the narrative of the ongoing warzone in Syria and Iraq (Al-Rawi, 2019; Alnaser et al., 2020; Awan, 2017; Macdonald et al., 2018) have also borrowed propaganda tactics and used thousands of new media users and sources to push out their stories in a novel way, which makes it much harder to counter (Gunaratna, 2016; Melchior, 2014). Unsurprisingly, this again highlights the power of social media platforms post-Arab uprisings 2011 (Karolak, 2013; Naughton, 2017; Sreberny, 2015) and its use in different aspects such as education, communication (Yunus, 2013), entertainment (Elareshi & Ziani, 2019), misinformation (Melchior, 2014; Sadiku et al., 2018), empowerment (Abubakar et al., 2017), online mobilisation (Al-Rawi, 2018, 2019; Tank, 2012), propaganda and recruitment (Awan, 2017; Mahood & Rane, 2017; Habes, et al, 2020)

For example, evidence suggested that al-Qaeda group was quickly embraced and used technologies and multimedia to its own values and to build its support base by recruiting new radical sympathisers and those estimated 4500 websites to spread its messages (Guadagno et al., 2010; Habes et al., 2020). Nowhere such extremist groups provide audio, and video games and chatrooms session (including email lists), videotapes and other means of persuasion (Al-Rawi, 2018; Guadagno et al., 2010). As these means and materials target global supporters and sympathisers (Berger, 2017), therefore they are usually written and translated into different languages e.g., Arabic, English and French etc. as Guadagno et al., (Guadagno et al., 2010) indicate. Such method (new media tools e.g., videos, voice, text, pictures) is seen as extremely effective in persuading and transforming many ordinary new media users into obedient agents to carry out different sinful actions including violence as mentioned by Lankford (Lankford, 2009). Awan (Awan, 2017) indicate that the UK authorities in 2014 removed more than 15,000 items of jihadist propaganda including an online video known as “there’s no life without jihad”.

Furthermore, the new media influence / recruitment seems to follow Milgrams’ (Milgram, 1974) idea and evident of how people change under some conditions of obedience to authority by identifying some factors that predict how someone “will enter the agentic state and follow the orders”(Guadagno et al., 2010). Milgram (Milgram, 1974) state several critical factors and conditions that would be very relevant to our world nowadays including childhood (e.g., family, school, community); recognising rewards for obeying orders by the agent; the perception of legitimise an authority figure; and the voluntarily expression to join such group. Guadagno et al., (Guadagno et al., 2010) further emphasis that since radical groups or organisations cannot lead anyone into fully committed terrorist operatives immediately, they use some online ‘social influence’ (e.g., new media platforms) techniques to induce and join their organisations. Moreover, Guadagno et al., (Guadagno et al., 2010) proposes very interesting model (see Table 1) on the process of online recruitment and persuasion used by radical / extremist groups. They highlight five stages and four strategies to lead someone from initial request to final commitment (Guadagno et al., 2010).

**Table 1. Model of online terrorist recruitment progression** (Guadagno et al., 2010)

Behaviour	Social identity process	Self-perception process	Computer-mediated communication (CMC) factors
Initial request: Invitation for recruit to visit website.	Social identity as a member of terrorist group is not salient to the recruit.	Recruit perceives him/herself as an ordinary individual.	Initial request can be made face-to-face, via CMC, or through religious magazine, journal, or flyers.
Initial commitment: Recruit visits website, just to look around.	Social identity as a member of the terrorist group is made salient as the recruit explores the website. The group is portrayed as an exclusive ingroup with a virtuous mission. The recruit begins to identify with the group.	Recruit perceives him/herself as someone willing to learn about the terrorist group from the source	Commitment is anonymous, at a safe distance, with time/pace controlled, and no complications from nonverbal cues.

Escalating commitment: Recruit expresses desire for more info/access through site "membership" or login codes; it's granted. Access and info are provided.	Social identity as a member of terrorist group becomes more salient as the recruit begins to support the group and see him/herself as a member of the ingroup with shared religious and political beliefs.	Recruit perceives him/herself as a new member of an important online community that supports the political agenda of the terrorist group.	Commitment is primarily anonymous, based on login usernames & aliases. Communication is still at a safe distance, with time/pace controlled, and no complications from nonverbal cues.
Escalating commitment: Recruit proves loyalty by posting in online forums, disseminating radical propaganda, videos, etc.	Social identity as a member of the terrorist group becomes more salient and important to the recruit as he or she becomes a terrorist sympathiser. Internalisation of the group's beliefs starts to occur.	Recruit perceives him/herself as a full-fledged terrorist sympathiser who supports the group's larger mission.	Desire for anonymity within ingroup dissipates. Anonymity remains as protection from the outgroup. Communication is still at a safe distance, with time/pace controlled, and no complications from nonverbal cues.
Final commitment: Recruit meets face-to-face with other terrorists, engages in group prayers, foreign travel, and training exercises.	Social identity as a member of the terrorist group is most salient and important, as recruit becomes established member of the terrorist ingroup and fully internalises group's beliefs.	Recruit perceives him/herself as a full-fledged terrorist group member, willing to carry out violence on command to meet organisational goals.	Anonymity remains as temporary protection from the outgroup. Recruit gives up control of own behaviour to authoritative terrorist leaders.

### 2.3. New media social interaction

Research on new media social influence suggests that people generally would similarly respond to computer-mediated communication (CMC) influence appeals as they do to other forms of media with some extent differences (Madianou, 2014) such as face-to-face interaction. Guadagno et al., (Guadagno et al., 2010) state that there are several motivations for why online recruitment of terrorist sympathisers seem to be calibrated for success. For example, literature on new media social influence and social identity in CMC context suggests that the online recruitment of such organisations will be more successful because it offers four elements as McKenna and Bargh (McKenna & Bargh, 2000) state. These are anonymity; physical appearance; physical distance online; great time and pace of interaction control. Based on the above discussion, the study examines the awareness of online KSA users of incitement methods and online inflammatory mobilization, and their perceptions of online content via social media platforms. The study, therefore, underpins with the following questions:

**RQ1:** How KSA new media users feel and react to some radical new media content?

**RQ2:** To what extent they were aware of the inflammatory methods and online mobilisation processes used in KSA?

**RQ3:** How well do they identified the inflammatory and non-inflammatory content on such platforms?

## III. METHOD

### 3.1. Participants

The study targeted a random sample of new media users who lives in the KSA and who indicated they are regularly access and use social media platforms, especially young adults in both genders, and in different demographic characteristics with age ranged from 18 years old and above. In doing so, the study reached its respondents via contacting a number of civil society organisations especially universities to promoting the survey and encouraging participation. To capture a random sample of new media users, respondents were recruited by 1) getting permission from local authorities to do so, with Research Ethical Code of Conduct was obtained; and 2) organisations were further requested to send the survey-link to their staff or people, with remainder to participant. (Alhumaid et al., 2020; Salloum et al., 2019) The data were conducted between March-October 2017 and it took less than 15 minutes to complete. Table 2 summarises the demographic sample, with a total of 344 respondents was gathered (328 were Saudis and 16 participants from other nationalities e.g., 4 Yemenis, 4 Egyptians, 3 Kuwaitis, 2 Bahrainis, 1 Jordanian, 1 Syrian and 1 Algerian).

**Table 2.** The sociodemographic features

Item	No.	%	Item	No.	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Sectarian</b>		
Male	236	68.6	Sunni	338	98.3
Female	108	31.4	Shiite	6	1.7
<b>Marital Status</b>			<b>Education</b>		
Single	274	79.7	Secondary / High school	113	32.8
Married	58	16.9	University	192	55.8
Engaged	8	2.3	Post-university (MA/PhD)	37	10.8
Divorced	4	1.2	Others	2	0.6
<b>Occupation</b>			<b>Ethnic Origins</b>		
Student	274	79.7	Bedouin	192	55.8
Employee	59	17.2	Urban	99	28.8
Jobseeker	10	2.9	Non-tribal urban	49	14.2
Retired	1	0.3	Others	4	1.2
<b>Monthly income (in SR)</b>			<b>Age</b>		
No income	112	32.6	<20	173	50.3
<3000	158	45.9	21-25	101	29.4
3001-5000	11	3.2	26-30	24	7.0
5001-10000	32	9.3	31-35	24	7.0
10001-15000	24	7.0	36-40	16	4.7
>15000	7	2.0	41-45	4	1.2
			>46	2	0.6

### 3.2. The questionnaire and measurement

The questionnaire was designed and written in Arabic – the official language - and were sent through an online system (surveyMonkey.com). It consisted of three sections of close-ended response, multi-response items and statements. Before proceeding, bear in mind that because the data were gathered through online, the generalisability and the findings of this paper are only limited to our participants. Nevertheless, given the time, cost and local culture in terms of reaching out women, have perhaps provided a reasonable cross-section with 344 responses.

For the purpose of this paper, the analysis of questions is based on the following aspect: a) focused on the demographic variables (Table 2). b) asked three questions: Q1 was about feeling / reaction related to new media content via social media platforms, with 16 statements measured on a seven-point scale (1= feeling very satisfied and 7=denounce the content) (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.544) ; Q2 was about the awareness of identifying inflammatory / non-inflammatory content on social media, with a list of nine items measured on a five-point Likert scale (1= very provocative and 5= not provocative at all) (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.903); and Q3 asked about the most prevalent inflammatory content measured on a nine-point scale (1= highly spread and 9= not prevalent at all).

The validity of the survey was reviewed and ensured to be linguistical clear. In order to examine the extent of statistically significant differences among demographic variables, the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical coefficient was adopted, using cross-tabulation (crosstab) via SPSS software 26.0 version. The whole row data are available upon request.

## IV. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Attitude and reaction to inflammatory content

In response to RQ1, Saudi users' attitude and react to some information regarding radical ideas and content on social (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Participants' attitude / reaction to some media content information (%)

When the content contains . . .	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. conflicts between Islamic trends and doctrines within the same homeland.	1.5	72.7	13.4	2.0	0.6	9.6	0.3
2. atheistic beliefs and ideas.	1.2	0.3	37.8	45.1	3.5	1.2	11.0

3.	extremist beliefs and ideas.	0.9	43.0	45.9	4.1	0.3	5.8	0.0
4.	concerts news.	9.6	20.6	7.3	1.2	18.9	42.4	0.0
5.	mixing between men and women in work and public places.	10.8	25.9	14.8	3.2	2.6	42.7	0.0
6.	high costs, poverty and unemployment.	3.8	56.1	25.3	3.8	1.7	9.3	0.0
7.	lack of freedom / expression in views.	7.6	43.6	27.9	5.2	0.3	15.1	0.3
8.	a space of freedom / expression for those who disagree with me.	48.8	8.4	6.4	2.6	9.6	24.1	0.0
9.	Muslim persecution around the world.	2.6	21.8	49.1	22.7	1.2	2.6	0.0
10.	Jerusalem issue and its aggression.	3.8	28.2	35.2	25.6	0.6	6.7	0.0
11.	political weakness of Muslims.	0.6	48.8	34.6	7.8	0.9	7.3	0.0
12.	persecution of Sunnis.	2.0	38.7	42.7	10.2	0.3	5.8	0.3
13.	persecution of Shiite.	12.8	32.3	13.7	0.3	3.8	37.2	0.0
14.	persecution of Islamic political parties.	2.9	36.6	17.2	3.2	0.9	39.0	0.3
15.	imperative of confrontation with non-Muslims in the future.	9.0	22.4	6.7	2.6	10.2	49.1	0.0
16.	possibility of an Islamic caliphate.	13.7	14.8	14.5	2.3	9.9	44.5	0.3

1= feeling satisfied, 2= resentful, 3= angry, 4= revenge, 5= excited, 6= not bothered and 7= denounce the content.

The majority of respondents felt “satisfied” when the content referred to ‘a space of freedom / expression for those who disagree with’ (48.8%), while they felt “resentful” when the content contained information related to ‘conflicts between Islamic trends and doctrines within the same homeland’ (72.7%), mentioned ‘living cost, poverty and unemployment’ (56.1%), ‘political weakness of Muslims’ (48.8%), ‘lack of freedom / expression in views’ (43.6%) and ‘extremist beliefs and ideas’ (43%); “angry” about the content contained ‘Muslim persecution around the world’ (49.1%) and ‘extremist beliefs and ideas’ (45.9%); or “revenge” when the content referred to ‘theistic beliefs and ideas’ (45.1%).

#### 4.1.1. Differences reported in users’ attitude / reaction to some media content information

There were some gender differences in feelings towards some statements (Table 4). For example, while females felt more “resentful” than did males when mentioning conflicts between Islamic trends and doctrines within the same homeland; mixing of women with men in work and public places mentioned “not bother”; Muslims persecution around the world persecution of Sunni sect followers “angry”; males felt “not bother” when the content included persecution of the Shiite sect followers than did females. Regarding age, significantly, those aged 46+ felt “angrier” than the others when the content contained extreme beliefs and ideas; mixing of women with men in work and public places; and the persecution of Shiite sect followers both “not bother”.

There are also statistically significant differences among respondents in terms of ethnic origins, with those lived in urban areas felt more “resentful” than the others regarding S1, S6 and S10; while urban from non-Bedouin felt “angrier” than the others regarding S2; and “not bothered” regarding S5. Bedouin felt “not bothered” more than the others regarding S4 and S15. Regarding monthly income, those with monthly income ranged between 3001-5000SR felt more “resentful” than the others regarding S1; felt “angrier” regarding S2 and felt “resentful” regarding S7; while those earned >15000 felt “not bothered” regarding S5 than the others. Those income 10000-15000 were more likely than the others to feel “angry” regarding S12. With those income (<3000) were more likely than the others to feel “not bothered” regarding S13, while those income (5001-10000) were more likely than the others to feel “resentful” regarding S14 and feel “not bothered” regarding S16. Those with Sunni sectarian affiliations felt “angrier” than those with Shiite affiliations regarding S3; while those Shiite affiliations felt more “resentful” than Sunni regarding S6 and S11. Finally, with educational level the statistical results showed that regarding S3, MA/PhD holders were more likely than the others to feel “angry” and feel “resentful” regarding S7, while secondary/high school holders felt “resentful” regarding S6 than the others. Those with university level felt “not bothered” than the others regarding S13.

#### 4.2. Awareness of identifying inflammatory / non-inflammatory content

RQ2 focused on the awareness and the ability of respondents to evaluate the inflammatory / non-inflammatory content addressed through social media platforms, with nine items associated in this regard. These items were measured on a five-point scale (1= very provocative and 5= not provocative at all) and the coefficient Alpha Cronbach test was used (90%). Table 5 summarizes the responses received by the respondents.

**Table 5. Inflammatory / non-inflammatory content on social platforms (%)**

<b>Posting content includes...</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
- Breaking the allegiance with the ruler	60.2	13.4	7.0	3.5	16.0
- Provoking controversies between Sunnis and Shiites	57.6	19.5	4.1	6.1	12.8
- Supporting the vulnerable by calling for jihad	31.1	26.2	22.7	8.7	11.3
- Figures known as "religious" criticizing what's happening in the society and describing it as corruption	20.6	29.4	27.0	11.9	11.0
- Criticizing the performance of ministries / government bodies	12.5	16.0	23.5	24.7	23.3
- Casting doubt on the future state projects	18.3	27.9	23.8	15.7	14.2
- Undocumented-negative news about the state figures	36.6	32.0	11.3	6.4	13.7
- Mocking state figures	41.9	26.5	9.3	6.4	16.0
- Making unfair comparisons with other countries and highlighting the local negative side	28.5	32.0	17.4	8.1	14.0

Interestingly, most respondents highly considered that when the content is referring to breaking out with the ruler, controversies between sectarians, jihad, negative news or mocking state figures were seen as very provocative. Here there were statistically demographic differences among the respondents. For example, regarding gender when the content incites breaking allegiance with the ruler, females (63.9%) considered this content as "very provocative" than did males (58.5%),  $\chi^2= 20.564$ , df (4),  $P= .000$ ; provoking controversies between Sunnis and Shiites (females 71.3%, males 52.3%),  $\chi^2= 18.196$ , df (4),  $P= .001$ . However, when the content contains undocumented-negative news on the state figures, males (36.9%) considered this as "very provocative" more than did females (36.1%),  $\chi^2= 12.037$ , df (4),  $P= .017$ ; and mocking the state figures (males 44.1%, females 37%),  $\chi^2= 18.106$ , df (4),  $P= .001$ . Those with Sunni affiliations (37%) considered undocumented-negative news about state figures as "very provocative" compared to with Shiite affiliations (16.7%),  $\chi^2= 9.944$ , df (4),  $P= .041$ . Those of Bedouin origin (47.9%) considered mocking state figures as "very provocative" more than those of non-tribal urban (46.9%), or urban (29.3%),  $\chi^2= 25.739$ , df (12),  $P= .012$ .

#### 4.3. The most prevalent inflammatory content

RQ3 focused on how users identify the most prevalent inflammatory content on social media. The same previous nine items associated with inflammatory content were given to the respondents. Table 6 summarizes the respondents' view on each item.

**Table 6. The most prevalent inflammatory content on social platforms (%)**

<b>Posting content includes...</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
- Breaking the allegiance with the ruler	<b>31.1</b>	11.0	6.1	2.6	4.7	2.9	5.5	7.0	2.0
- Provoking controversies between Sunnis and Shiites	<b>22.7</b>	19.5	13.4	9.3	8.1	5.5	7.0	9.6	4.9
- Supporting the vulnerable by calling for jihad	3.2	<b>13.4</b>	13.1	9.0	13.1	11.3	12.5	12.5	11.9
- Figures known as "religious" criticizing what's happening in the society and describing it as corruption	5.8	10.2	14.5	<b>15.1</b>	12.2	12.5	11.9	11.3	6.4
- Criticizing the performance of ministries / government bodies	10.8	11.6	13.7	15.1	<b>16.3</b>	9.9	5.5	8.4	8.7
- Casting doubt on the future state projects	4.4	8.4	11.0	13.7	13.4	<b>16.0</b>	14.2	11.9	7.0
- Undocumented-negative news about the state figures	5.8	6.7	8.1	11.9	13.1	18.3	<b>19.9</b>	10.5	6.1
- Mocking state figures	2.6	10.2	9.3	11.0	11.9	14.0	13.1	<b>18.0</b>	9.9
- Making unfair comparisons with other countries and highlighting the local negative side	11.6	9.0	10.8	12.2	7.3	9.6	10.8	10.8	<b>18.0</b>

The most prevalent inflammatory content on social platforms seemed to be those related to breaking out with the ruler, controversies between Sunnis and Shiites and calling for jihad, with other content to be less or slightly prevalent. This result highlighted the ability of respondents to be aware of inflammatory

content on social media platforms. There were also statistically demographic differences among the respondents. For example, regarding gender females (33.3%) considered more than did males (17.8%) provoking controversies between Sunnis and Shiites was the most prevalent on social platforms,  $\chi^2=18.179$ ,  $df(8)$ ,  $P=.020$ . Sunni sectarian (33.4%) were more likely than Shiite affiliations (16.7%) considering breaking allegiance with the ruler was highly prevalent,  $\chi^2=22.045$ ,  $df(8)$ ,  $P=.005$ , whereas Shiite sectarian (16.7%) considered more than Sunnis (16.3%) criticizing of the performance of ministries and government bodies was "slightly prevalent",  $\chi^2=16.753$ ,  $df(8)$ ,  $P=.033$ . Regarding ethnic origins, those non-tribal urban (16.3%) considered calling for jihad was "highly prevalent" compared to Bedouin (13.5%), urban (11.1%),  $\chi^2=44.700$ ,  $df(24)$ ,  $P=.006$ , while those non-tribal urban (32.7%) considered mocking the state figures was "slightly prevalent" compared to urban (16.2%), Bedouin (15.1%),  $\chi^2=40.591$ ,  $df(24)$ ,  $P=.018$ .

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research has contributed to providing significant new data about the awareness of Saudi online users of inflammatory and non-inflammatory content on social media platforms in a country where prior research on this subject has been sparse. This research come at an important time when the social media is used in terrorism attacks and radical mobilization, especially by very radical and extremist groups. With regard to the awareness of content published on social platforms and online mobilization, the study found that respondents were highly aware when the content related to information on international conflicts between Islamic currents and sects (RQ2).

Their attitude was clear when they felt resentful about viewing content related to conflicts which disrupted the national unity (RQ1). This may lead to the spread of religious misconceptions that use the Internet as a favourable means as Weimann(Weimann, 2014) pointed out. Those urban-tribal females with a monthly income between 3001-5000SR were more aware for such content, which seemed to be interesting within the same community, while those Sunni-married aged 46+ with MA/Ph.D. degrees felt angrier with the content related to extreme beliefs and ideas than the others. This may have connection on the how some may use the Internet (social platforms) to widespread polarization and cyber recruitments (Al Serhan & Elareshi, 2019; Awan, 2016, 2017).

The respondents regarded having more modern views when it comes to mixing between men and women in work / public places. Perhaps this is due to the spread of new media content showing such mix is usual in modern community. This, of course, perhaps does not help to preserve the specification of Muslim/Islam community, which is seen unacceptable as may lead to spread of pornography and outrageousness in such conservative community (Wheeler, 1998). It is acknowledged that social platforms are one of the most difficult means to control its content, which have contributed and promoting non-moral, gender mix, pornography, dissemination of images, false posts and etc. (Al-Dosary, 2014).

In terms of inflammatory and non-inflammatory content on social platforms (RQ3), respondents were able to identify the most highly provocative content such as those related to breaking out with the ruler and the controversies between Sunnis and Shiites, while undocumented-negative news about the state figures and mocking them in the eyes of Bedouin and Sunni males than Shiite females stated that such new media content resulted of the exposure to social openness and the absence of Islamic social values. This may link to the content calling for rebellion and breaking allegiance with the ruler under the pretext of protecting freedom and personal identity (most modern and western style). Finally, as with all research projects, this research comes with some inherent limitations to its design that need to be examined in respect of their implications. Further research is needed into how such group narratives adopted social media via mobile technologies to persuade and resonate with Arab and non-Arab young people anywhere. Academics should examine different social media and new media platforms used to deliver inflammatory content.

### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

There is no potential conflict of interest to report in this research.

### REFERENCES

1. Abubakar, N., Dasuki, S., & MacGranaky, A. (2017). Instrumental role of ICTs in development as freedom the contribution of ICTs to women empowerment: A capability perspective. Paper Presented at the Twenty-Third Americas Conference on Information Systems, 1–8.
2. Al-Dosary, S. (2014). MERS: Social media responsible for false info. Arab News.
3. Al-Rawi, A. (2018). Video games, terrorism, and ISIS's Jihad 3.0. Terrorism and Political Violence,

- 30(4), 740–760. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2016.1207633>
4. Al-Rawi, A. (2019). Islamic State in Iraq and Syria's standardized media and jihadist nation-state building efforts. *Communication and the Public*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057047319853323>
  5. Al-Saud, A. (2020). Deciphering IS's narrative and activities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32(3), 469–488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1378645>
  6. al-Zawahiri, A. (1995, January). Ibn Baz between reality and illusion (in Arabic). *Ilmway.Com*.
  7. Al Serhan, F., & Elareshi, M. (2019). University students' awareness of social media use and hate speech in Jordan. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 13(2), 548–563. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3709236>
  8. Alharith, A., & Samak, Y. (2018). Fighting terrorism more effectively with the aid of GIS: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia case study. *American Journal of Geographic Information System*, 7(1), 15–31.
  9. Alhumaid, K., Ali, S., Waheed, A., Zahid, E., & Habes, M. (2020). COVID-19 & Elearning : Perceptions & Attitudes Of Teachers Towards E- Learning Acceptancein The Developing Countries. *Multicultural Education*, 6(2), 100–115. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4060121>
  10. Ali, S., Qamar, A., Habes, M., & Al Adwan, M. N. (2021). Gender Discrepancies Concerning Social Media Usage and its Influences on Students Academic Performance. *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana: Revista Internacional de Filosofía Iberoamericana y Teoría Social*, 1, 321–333.
  11. AlMaawi, M. (2016). Counter-terrorism in Saudi Arabia: Narratives, practices and challenges. *University of Kent*.
  12. Alnaser, A. S., Al-Shibly, M. S., Alghizzawi, M., & Habes, M. (2020). Impacts of Social Media and Demographical Characteristics on University Admissions: Case of Jordanian Private Universities. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 17(11), 6433.
  13. Awan, I. (2016). Islamophobia on social media: A qualitative analysis of the facebook's walls of hate. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 10(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.58517>
  14. Awan, I. (2017). Cyber-extremism: ISIS and the power of social media. *Society*, 54(2), 138–149. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-017-0114-0>
  15. Baele, S. J., Bettiza, G., Boyd, K. A., & Coan, T. G. (2019). ISIS's clash of civilizations: Constructing the "West" in terrorist propaganda. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1599192>
  16. Berger, J. M. (2017). Deconstruction of identity concepts in Islamic State propaganda: A linkage-based approach to counter-terrorism strategic communications.
  17. Berger, J. M., & Morgan, J. (2015). The ISIS Twitter census defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter.
  18. Byron, T. (2015). Why do the followers of ISIS think that murdering so many people, even women and children, is the right and moral thing to do? - Quora. Quora.
  19. Elareshi, M., & Ziani, A. (2019). Digital and interactive social media among Middle East women: Empirical TAM study. *Media Watch*, 10(2), 235–250. <https://doi.org/10.15655/mw/2019/v10i2/49642>
  20. Elbasir, M., Elareshi, M., & Habes, M. (2020). The Influence of Trust, Security and Reliability of Multimedia Payment on the Adoption of EPS in Libya. *Multicultural Education*, 6(5).
  21. Fainberg, A. (2017). Spread the word: Russia social media on the service of jihad. *The International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT)*.
  22. Guadagno, R. E., Lankford, A., Muscanell, N. L., Okdie, B. M., & McCallum, D. M. (2010). Social influence in the online recruitment of terrorists and terrorist sympathizers: Implications for social psychology research. *Revue Internationale de Psychologie Sociale*, 23(1), 25–56.
  23. Gunaratna, R. (2016). Global terrorism in 2016 LOBAL. *Revista UNISCI*, 39, 133–138.
  24. Habes, M., Ali, S., Salloum, S. A., Elareshi, M., Ziani, A.-K., & Manama, B. (2020). Digital Media and Students' AP Improvement: An Empirical Investigation of Social TV. *International Conference on Innovation and Intelligence for Informatics, Computing and Technologies (3ICT) Program*.
  25. Karolak, M. (2013). Social media and the Arab Spring: Searching for emerging Identites in the Arab Gulf. *St Antony's International Review*, 9, 17.
  26. Kell, L. (2018). This is the most active country in the region on social media. *Itp.Live.Com*.
  27. Kinney, A. B., Davis, A. P., & Zhang, Y. (2018). Theming for terror: Organizational adornment in terrorist propaganda. *Poetics*, 67, 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2018.05.001>
  28. Lankford, A. (2009). *Human killing machines: Systematic indoctrination in Iran, Nazi Germany, Al Qaeda and Abu Ghraib*. Lexington Books.

29. Macdonald, S., Maravanyika, N., Nezri, D., Parry, E., & Thomas, K. (2018). Online jihadist magazines and the “religious terrorism” thesis. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 11(3), 537–550. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2018.1471098>
30. Madianou, M. (2014). Smartphones as polymedia. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(3), 667–680. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12069>
31. Mahood, S., & Rane, H. (2017). Islamist narratives in ISIS recruitment propaganda. *Journal of International Communication*, 23(1), 15–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2016.1263231>
32. McKenna, K. Y. A., & Bargh, J. A. (2000). Plan 9 from cyberspace: The implications of the Internet for personality and social psychology. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4, 57–75.
33. Melchior, J. K. (2014, October). ISIS tactics illustrate social media’s new place in modern war. *TechCrunch*.
34. Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to authority: An experimental view*. Harper & Row.
35. Mohammed Habes, Said A. SalloumMokhtar, ElareshiMokhtar Elareshi, Seyedeh Fatemeh Ghasempour Ganji, Abdulkrim Ajmi Ziani, M. E. (2020). The Influence of YouTube Videos on ELA During the COVID-19 Outbreaks in Jordan. *International Conference on E-Learning to Take Place on 6th-7th December 2020At: Bahrain, December 2020*.
36. Naughton, J. (2017, March). Facebook and Twitter could pay the price for hate speech. *The Guardian Newspwer*.
37. Sadiku, M. N. O., Eze, T. P., & Musa, S. M. (2018). Fake news and misinformation. *International Journal of Advances in Scientific Research and Engineering*, 4(5), 187–190. <https://doi.org/10.7324/IJASRE.2018.32728>
38. Salloum, S. A., Al-Emran, M., Khalaf, R., Habes, M., & Shaalan, K. (2019). An Innovative Study of E-Payment Systems Adoption in Higher Education: Theoretical Constructs and Empirical Analysis. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies*, 13(6).
39. Sampathkumar, M. (2017, June). Majority of terrorists who have attacked America are not Muslim, new study finds. *The Independent*, 1-4.
40. Shu, K., Sliva, A., Wang, S., Tang, J., & Liu, H. (2017). Fake news detection on social media: A data mining perspective. *ACM SIGKDD Explorations Newsletter*, 19(1), 22–36.
41. Silverman, C., & Singer-Vine, J. (2016). Most Americans who see fake news believe it, new survey says. *BuzzFeed*.
42. Singer, P. ., & Brooking, E. (2015). Terror on twitter: How ISIS is taking war to social media—and social media is fighting back. *Popular Science*.
43. Sreberny, A. (2015). Women’s Digital Activism in a Changing Middle East. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 47(2), 357–361. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743815000112>
44. Tahat, D. N., Tahat, K. M., & Habes, M. (2020). Jordanian Newspapers Coverage of Cyberbullying during COVID 19 Pandemic. *PalArch’s Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 17(7), 15390–15403.
45. Tahat, K. M., Habes, M., & Tahat, D. N. (2020). Towards Employing New Media in Journalism Major: A Cross Sectional Study at Yarmouk University, Jordan. *PalArch’s Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 17(7), 15404–15422.
46. Tank, T. T. (2012). Social Media - The new power of political influence. 1–16.
47. Weimann, G. (2014). *New terrorism and new media*. Wilson Center, *Communicating Unreality*.
48. Wheeler, D. L. (1998). Global culture or culture clash: New information technologies in the Islamic world a view from Kuwait. *Communication Research*, 25(4), 359–376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365098025004002>
49. Yunus, E. (2013). *The role of social media in creating political awareness and mobilizing political protests: A focus on Turkey*. (Unpublished Master’s Dissertation). Royal Institute of Technology.