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# ISIL

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*Defeating ISIL on the modern battlefield.*

MVP BRIEFING  
FEBRUARY 2016

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# WELCOME

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We are in a room of industry and sector experts from tech, media, entertainment, brand and civil society. This group is gathered because ISIS isn't just a military enemy; they have proven to be a formidable foe in the communications and culture space.

Today's goal is to start CONVERSATION and ACTION around a key question:

**In light of a force that brilliantly manipulates media, technology and culture, how can we counteract and jam their efforts?**

# KEY INSIGHTS

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## **KEY INSIGHT**

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*ISIL treats the information battlefield as seriously  
as the physical battlefield.*

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## KEY INSIGHT

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*ISIL has built an extraordinary and charismatic **brand**. It leverages **strength** and **warmth** to recruit followers to its cause, guiding them towards radicalization at every step of the recruiting process.*

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## KEY INSIGHT

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*You can't fight propaganda with propaganda.  
The United States isn't going to "out-propaganda" ISIL,  
but with a **partner-first orientation** we can change the  
context of the conversation.*

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## KEY INSIGHT

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*Data science and metrics are critical  
to understanding the battlefield and measuring impact.*

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## KEY INSIGHT

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*Our advantages — good people, ideas, global cultural influence, technology and global reach — are numerous.*

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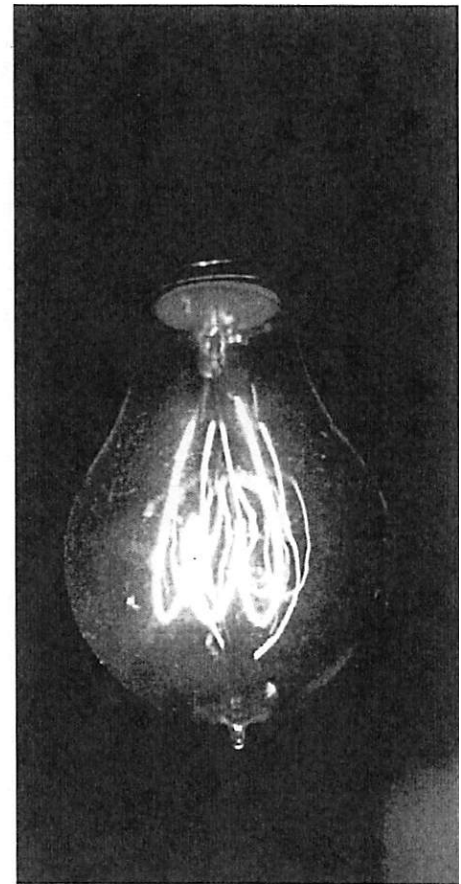


# **BREAKING ISIL'S BRAND**

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**ISIL is a strong, modern, sophisticated brand.**

To break it, we first have to understand it.



## **BRAND ≠ ADVERTISING**

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*We're using the word "brand" in the holistic sense. Brand in this context means an organization that is rooted by purpose and all of its activity drives against that purpose.*

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## **ISIL BRAND ≠ TWITTER**

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*Twitter is a very strong lever for ISIL, but it's not the only one. ISIL's strength comes from much wider array of media and activity.*

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## **ISIL BRAND ≠ BEHEADING VIDEOS**

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*Beheading videos are only a fraction of the content that ISIL releases.  
They serve a specific purpose of riling up the West and driving awareness.*

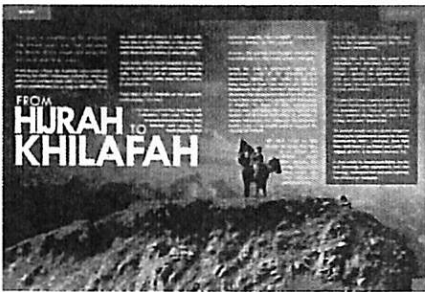
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# EXAMINING ISIL'S BRAND

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- Overall attraction of ISIL's brand
- Audiences
- Brand architecture
- Consumer journey

# ISIL'S BRAND IS MULTI-FACETED AND USER FRIENDLY



**U.S. Central Command  
Twitter Account Hacked,  
Possibly by ISIS**



(Image produced by ISIS supporters)

# **A CHARISMATIC BRAND WITH AN AGILE UNDERPINNING**

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## **ISIL LEVERAGES PRIMAL ATTRACTION**

*ISIL presents itself via the classic charismatic blend of strength and warmth.*

## **ISIL LEVERAGES DIGITAL MENTALITY**

*Organization defined by decentralization and agility.*



# A CHARISMATIC BRAND WITH AN AGILE UNDERPINNING

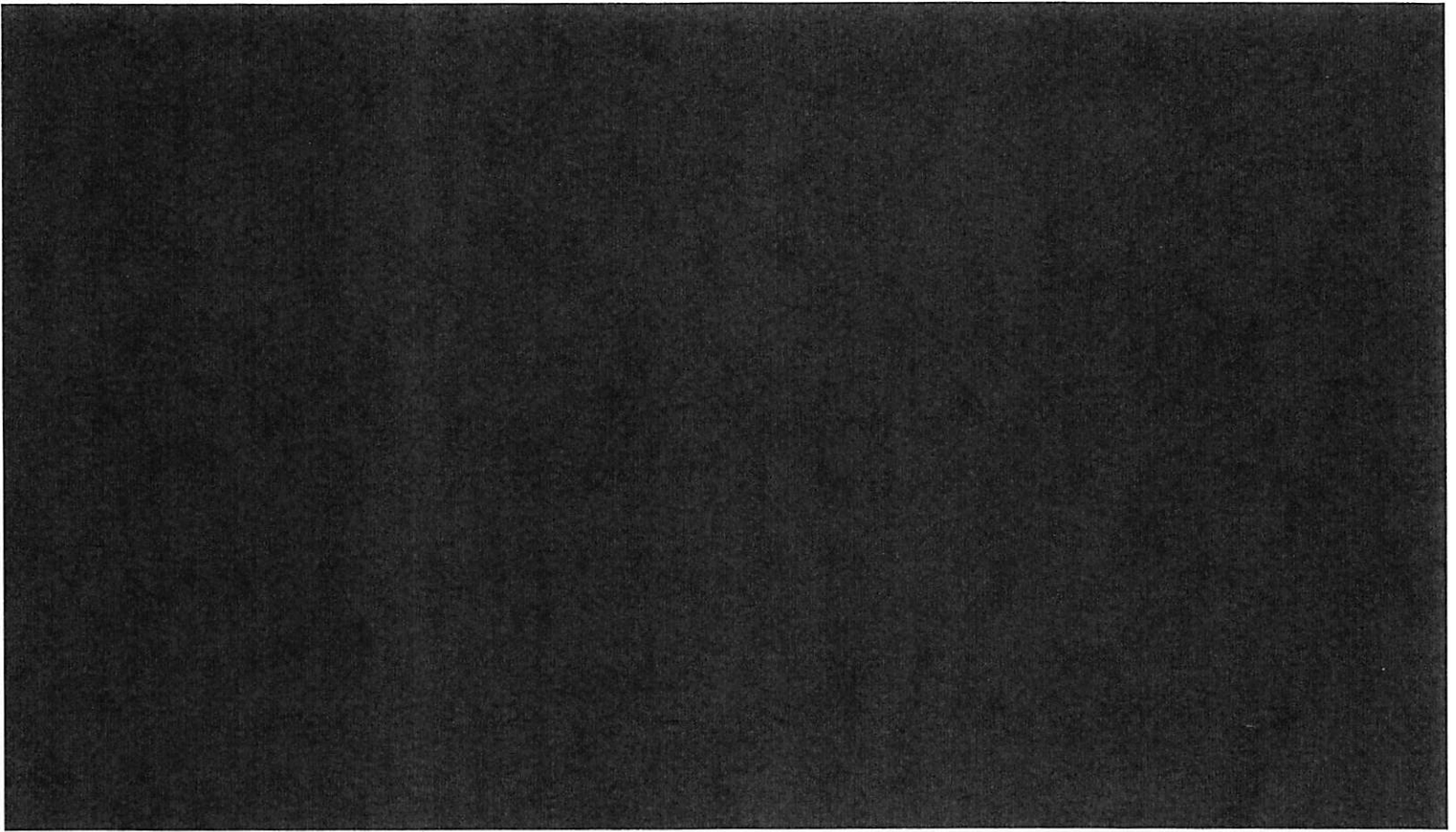
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## ISIL LEVERAGES PRIMAL ATTRACTION

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## ISIL LEVERAGES DIGITAL MENTALITY

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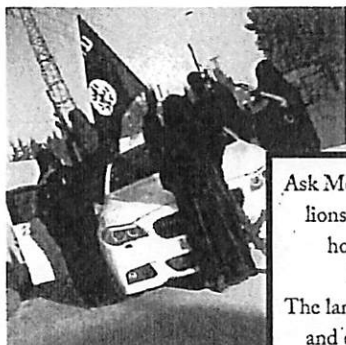


# THE CHARISMA EQUATION: STRENGTH AND WARMTH

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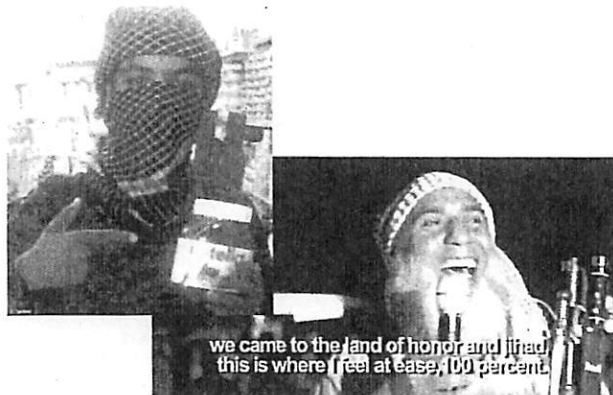
Charisma experts argue that compelling leaders, brands and communications project equal parts **strength** and **warmth**. ISIL is a master of this combination and use it to tap into the primal desire on the part of its eventual recruits to belong.

## STRENGTH



Ask Mosul, city of Islam, about the lions—  
how their fierce struggle brought liberation.  
The land of glory has shed its humiliation and defeat  
and put on the raiment of splendor.

## WARMTH



we came to the land of honor and jihad  
this is where I feel at ease, 100 percent.

# A CHARISMATIC BRAND WITH AN AGILE UNDERPINNING

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## ISIL LEVERAGES PRIMAL ATTRACTION

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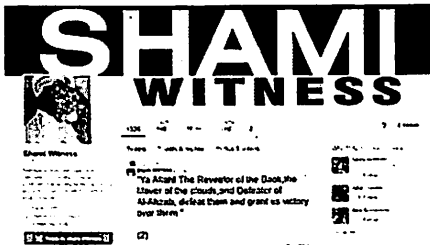
## ISIL LEVERAGES DIGITAL MENTALITY

*Organization defined by decentralization and agility.*

# THE DIGITAL MENTALITY: DECENTRALIZATION AND AGILITY

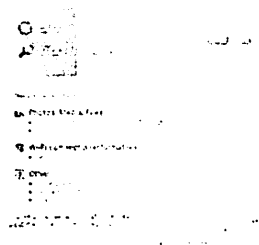
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## DECENTRALIZATION



ISIL's propaganda dissemination relies on a group of self-appointed volunteers who have no formal relationship with the group.

## AGILITY



ISIL launched an app that automatically posts to users' Twitter accounts, coordinating up to 40 thousand tweets in a day to push its content to the top of trending virality.

ISIL also uses hashtags to focus-group branding concepts, manufacturing grassroots initiatives and measuring traction and response to guide messaging decisions.



### **WHY IS ISIL RESONATING?**

ISIL communicates in methods, patterns and content that is native to a modern audience.

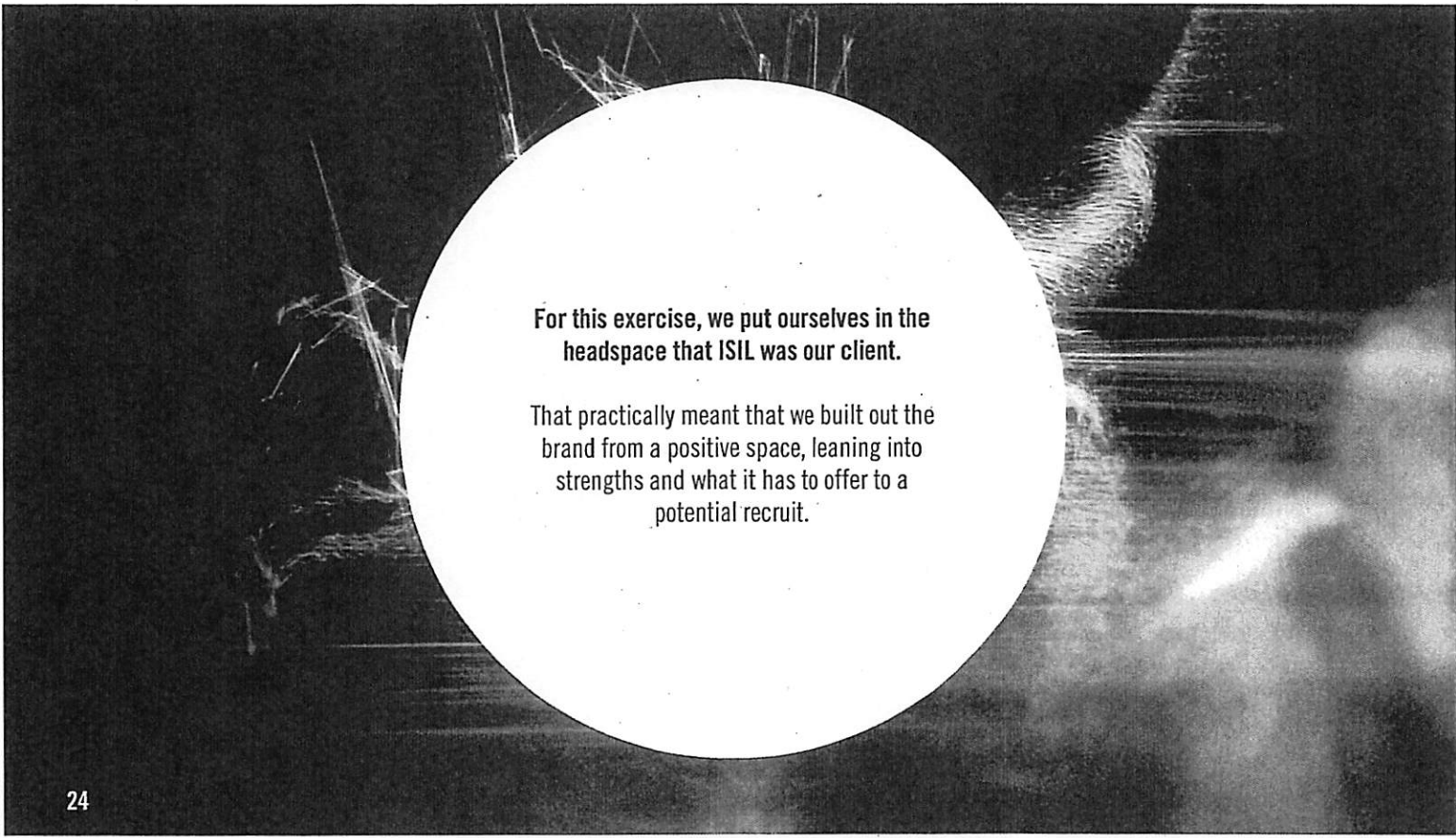
ISIL appeals to the primal needs to have a purpose in life, hope and the need to belong.

**This combo of modern behavior + primal desires is the perfect 21st Century brand cocktail.**

*This combination of strength and warmth bears itself out when constructing the brand*

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**For this exercise, we put ourselves in the  
headspace that ISIL was our client.**

That practically meant that we built out the  
brand from a positive space, leaning into  
strengths and what it has to offer to a  
potential recruit.



# THE TARGET AUDIENCES

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**GLOBAL MEDIA**

**COUNTRY**

**COMMUNITY**

**FAMILY / FRIENDS**

**INDIVIDUAL**

# A NOTE ON RECENT US ISIL SUPPORTERS

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71 individuals have been charged with ISIL-related activities since March 2014.

The average age is 26.

86% are male.

Their activities were located in 21 states.

51% traveled or attempted to travel abroad.

27% were involved in plots to carry out attacks on U.S. soil.

40% of the cases involve recent converts to Islam.

**In America, this issue isn't just about Muslim youth.**

**Hunch: ISIL attracts disaffected youth who are drawn to the strength, the sense of adventure and purpose that ISIL promises.**

# ISIL: A BRAND OF STRENGTH AND WARMTH

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## OVERALL BRAND NARRATIVE

We are establishing the Caliphate, a.k.a. Muslim Utopia

**WHO WE'RE FOR**  
True Believers

**WHO WE'RE AGAINST**  
"Them" — Assad & the West

**PERSONALITY**  
Strong, Passionate, Supportive

**KEY BEHAVIOR**  
Adaptive, Agile

**KEY BEHAVIOR**  
Guide & Support

**KEY BEHAVIOR**  
Bold, victorious moves

**SPIRITUAL BENEFIT**  
Access to Paradise

**EMOTIONAL BENEFIT**  
The thrill of having a place to belong

**FUNCTIONAL BENEFIT**  
The ability to live in a pure, thriving society

**KEY ACTION**  
Inspire Muslims

**KEY ACTION**  
Define and protect the teachings

**KEY ACTION**  
Push out / conquer enemies

**KEY ACTION**  
Establish, fund & run the merciful utopia

**KEY NARRATIVE**  
We are strong

**KEY NARRATIVE**  
You will have a place in the world

**KEY NARRATIVE**  
We are building a pure Muslim state

**KEY NARRATIVE**  
Save Sunnis from genocide

# HOW ISIL RECRUITS PEOPLE TO THEIR CAUSE

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Primary **GOALS** of a potential recruit

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How a potential recruit **FEELS** at this stage

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What a potential recruit **THINKS** at this stage

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What a potential recruit is **DOING** at this stage

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28 What ISIL **DOES**

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# HOW ISIL RECRUITS PEOPLE TO THEIR CAUSE

<p><b>Primary <small>ACTIVE STATE</small> of a potential recruit</b></p>	<p><b>PHASE ONE A DISAFFECTED AND EMPATHETIC STATE OF BEING</b></p>
<p><b>How a potential recruit <small>FEELS</small> at this stage</b></p>	<p>Alienation, disenfranchisement, isolation, resentment and boredom</p>
<p><b>What a potential recruit at this stage</b></p>	<p>I have no real home, no purpose, my life feels directionless</p>
<p><b>What a potential recruit is at this stage</b></p>	<p>Searching for identity, role models, meaning, belonging, adventure</p>
<p><b>29 What ISIL DOES</b></p>	<p>Leverages a "less than perfect" cultural context</p>

# HOW ISIL RECRUITS PEOPLE TO THEIR CAUSE

Primary ACTION / STATE of a potential recruit	PHASE ONE A DISAFFECTED AND EMPATHETIC STATE OF BEING	PHASE TWO REPEATED EXPOSURE VIA NEWS MEDIA KEEPS ISIL TOP OF MIND
How a potential recruit FEELS at this stage	Alienation, disenfranchisement, isolation, resentment and boredom	Curious, slightly thrilled by the extremeness of their actions
What a potential recruit THINKS at this stage	I have no real home, no purpose, my life feels directionless	These guys aren't going anywhere, in fact, they seem pretty powerful
What a potential recruit is DOING at this stage	Searching for identity, role models, meaning, belonging, adventure	Paying attention to media, discussing ISIL, understanding ISIL
30 What ISIL DOES	Leverages a "less than perfect" cultural context	Creates content primed for Western attention

# HOW ISIL RECRUITS PEOPLE TO THEIR CAUSE

Primary <b>ADDITIONAL STATE</b> of a potential recruit	<b>PHASE ONE</b> A DISAFFECTED AND EMPATHETIC STATE OF BEING	<b>PHASE TWO</b> REPEATED EXPOSURE VIA NEWS MEDIA KEEPS ISIL TOP OF MIND	<b>PHASE THREE</b> GET CURIOUS, LOG ON AND DISCOVER A NUANCED ONLINE PRESENCE
<b>How a potential recruit</b> <b>FEELS</b> at this stage	Alienation, disenfranchisement, isolation, resentment and boredom	Curious, slightly thrilled by the extremeness of their actions	Curiosity, identification, alignment, thrill, rebellion
<b>What a potential recruit</b> <b>THINKS</b> at this stage	I have no real home, no purpose, my life feels directionless	These guys aren't going anywhere, in fact, they seem pretty powerful	This is intriguing, exciting. ISIL is misunderstood. My POV matters
<b>What a potential recruit is</b> <b>DOING</b> at this stage	Searching for identity, role models, meaning, belonging, adventure	Paying attention to media, discussing ISIL, understanding ISIL	Consuming content, aligning ISIL with their sense of self, beginning to share & disseminate
<b>31 What ISIL DOES</b>	Leverages a "less than perfect" cultural context	Creates content primed for Western attention	Creates a multi-layered aspirational narrative

# HOW ISIL RECRUITS PEOPLE TO THEIR CAUSE

Primary Activity / State of a potential recruit	PHASE ONE A DISAFFECTED AND EMPATHETIC STATE OF BEING	PHASE TWO REPEATED EXPOSURE VIA NEWS MEDIA KEEPS ISIL TOP OF MIND	PHASE THREE GET CURIOUS, LOG ON AND DISCOVER A NUANCED ONLINE PRESENCE	PHASE FOUR THROUGH INTENSE 1:1 INTERACTION, GETS CONVERTED TO ISIL CAUSE
How a potential recruit feels at this stage	Alienation, disenfranchisement, isolation, resentment and boredom	Curious, slightly thrilled by the extremeness of their actions	Curiosity, identification, alignment, thrill, rebellion	Belonging, power, solidarity, special, elite, defensive, cognitive dissonance
What a potential recruit thinks at this stage	I have no real home, no purpose, my life feels directionless	These guys aren't going anywhere, in fact, they seem pretty powerful	This is intriguing, exciting. ISIL is misunderstood. My POV matters	It's us vs. the world, I've found my true home, my calling, my purpose — and I must act
What a potential recruit is doing at this stage	Searching for identity, role models, meaning, belonging, adventure	Paying attention to media, discussing ISIL, understanding ISIL	Consuming content, aligning ISIL with their sense of self, beginning to share & disseminate	Actively sharing content, proselytizing, and/or getting ready to go to ISIL territory
32 What ISIL DOES	Leverages a "less than perfect" cultural context	Creates content primed for Western attention	Creates a multi-layered aspirational narrative	Close the deal with extremely personal attention



# OVERALL COUNTER STRATEGIES TO TAKE ON EACH PHASE

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PHASE ONE  
A DISAFFECTED  
AND EMPATHETIC  
STATE OF BEING

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**Empower a strong pro-Muslim  
creative and community culture**

Primarily via civil society  
(culture, music, entertainment,  
programs, hackathons, etc.)  
create positive Muslim voices  
and opportunities in society

## BOOST MUSLIM PRESENCE, ARTS AND CULTURE

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This is largest swath of activity as it includes shifting a sub-culture's place in the larger culture.

In this bucket, the audiences are culture at large as well as Muslims within US culture. **Can we normalize being Muslim in the US?**

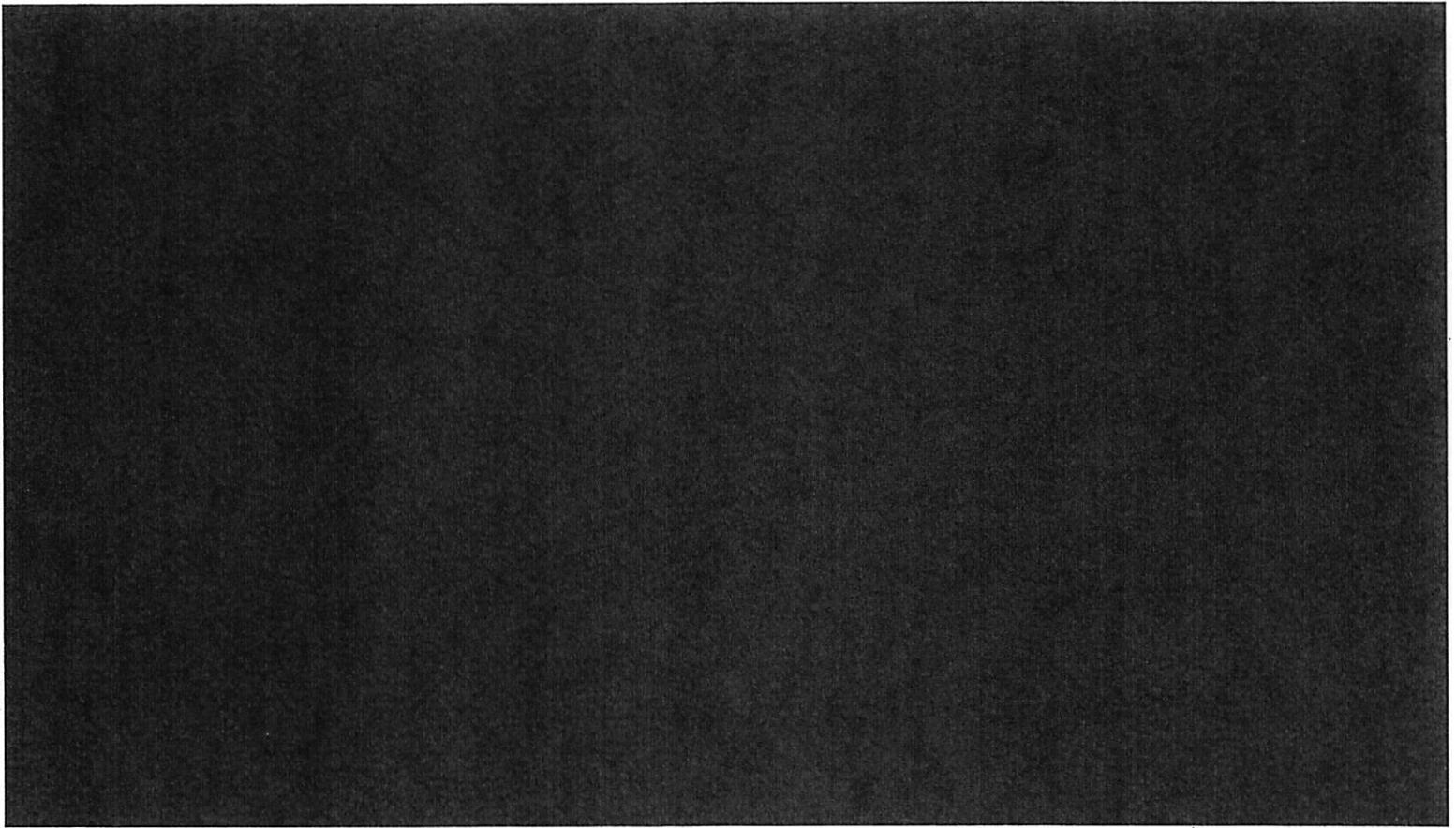
ISIL preys on a sense of alienation in Muslim youth, one that is felt by Muslims in Western countries but also felt by those who don't see a proud future in Arabic countries as well. **It can be difficult to be young and Muslim today... and ISIL leverages that.**

By elevating Muslim personalities, art and culture and supporting the creation of more mainstream, indigenous Muslim content, there is an opportunity to **give Muslim youth aspirational models and paths when they look out in the world.**



THE WORLD LOOKS BRIGHTER FOR MUSLIM YOUTH WHEN:

Jay-Z nurtures young Muslim artists  
Hollywood creates mainstream Muslim characters  
YouTube's content fund for Muslim youth takes off



# OVERALL COUNTER STRATEGIES TO TAKE ON EACH PHASE

<p>A DISAFFECTED AND EMPATHETIC STATE OF BEING</p>	<p>PHASE TWO GET TUNED IN TO ISIL VIA NEWS MEDIA THAT KEEPS ISIL TOP OF MIND</p>
<p>Empower a strong pro-Muslim creative and community culture</p> <p>Primarily via civil society (culture, music, entertainment, programs, hackathons, etc.) create positive Muslim voices and opportunities in society</p>	<p><b>Change the strength narrative</b></p> <p>Develop strategies to change the traditional and digital media dialogue and expose the realities of ISIL.</p>

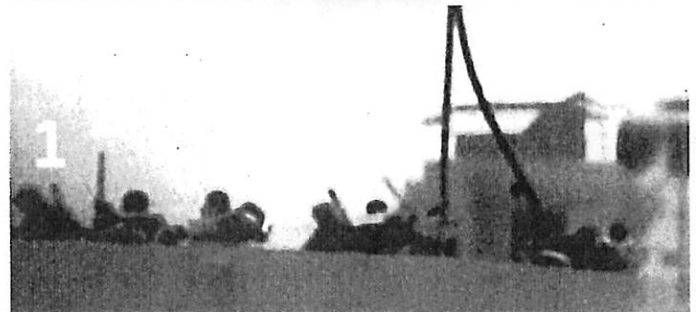
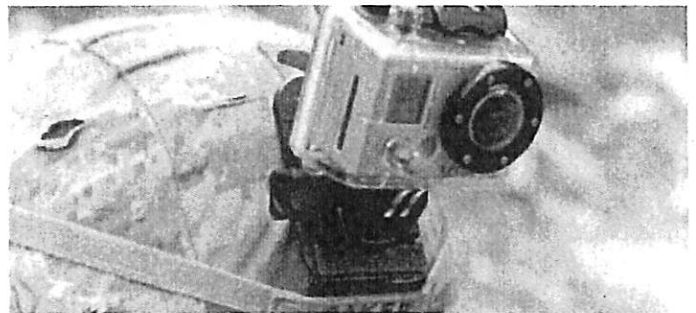
## CHANGE THE STRENGTH NARRATIVE

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Social media is important, but for ISIL **traditional media is still the “great amplifier”**. Right now, the media is serving an ISIL awareness driver, **bolstering the perspective that ISIL is a strong, winning brand** that attracts disaffected Muslims as well as those simply looking for adventure.

However, life on ground in ISIL territories is seldom idyllic. Defectors have many stories of boredom, corruption and senseless violence.

Is there an opportunity to leverage truths of the “utopia” to **discredit the strength narrative** that ISIL has crafted both in traditional media and other spaces?



# OVERALL COUNTER STRATEGIES TO TAKE ON EACH PHASE

<p>A DISAFFECTED AND EMPATHETIC STATE OF BEING</p>	<p>GET TUNED IN TO ISIL VIA NEWS MEDIA THAT KEEPS ISIL TOP OF MIND</p>	<p>GET CURIOUS, LOG ON AND DISCOVER A NUANCED AND COMPASSIONATE ONLINE PRESENCE</p>
<p>Empower a strong pro-Muslim creative and community culture</p>	<p>Change the strength narrative</p>	<p>Disrupt their digital landscape</p>
<p>Primarily via civil society (culture, music, entertainment, programs, hackathons, etc.) create positive Muslim voices and opportunities in society</p>	<p>Develop strategies to change the traditional and digital media dialogue and expose the realities of ISIL.</p>	<p>Develop smart digital strategies, counter-messages and supporting analytics to create the fuzz</p>

## ENGAGE IN DIRECT DIGITAL INTERVENTION

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No one becomes radicalized simply through discovering online videos and tweets — a key step in the process is connecting directly in a 1:1 dialogue with an extremist.

**ISIL's personal, 1:1 digital approach needs a similarly personal, 1:1 digital approach to battle it.** By engaging in direct, digital intervention via authentic third party participants, ISIL overtures can be headed off at this vulnerable moment in the recruitment journey.

**WATCHOUT:** This kind of work needs to be crafted carefully. It is not helpful to set up an atmosphere where the Muslim community is being asked to “police” their own community.

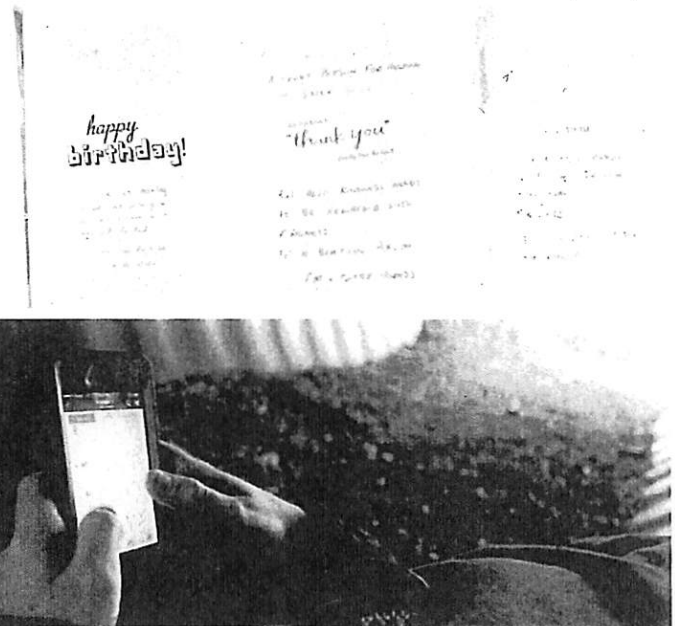


# DISRUPT ISIL'S ONLINE TACTICS

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ISIL is notorious for their savvy online efforts to disseminate information and drive recruitment.

There is a pressing need to **optimize digital anti-ISIL tactics**, such as injecting complexity and denying digital safe haven to their efforts and communication.





# OVERALL COUNTER STRATEGIES TO TAKE ON EACH PHASE

A DISAFFECTED AND EMPATHETIC STATE OF BEING	GET TUNED IN TO ISIL VIA NEWS MEDIA THAT KEEPS ISIL TOP OF MIND	GET CURIOUS, LOG ON AND DISCOVER A NUANCED AND COMPASSIONATE ONLINE PRESENCE	THROUGH INTENSE 1:1 INTERACTION, CONVERT TO THE ISIL CAUSE
<p><b>Empower a strong pro-Muslim creative and community culture</b></p> <p>Primarily via civil society (culture, music, entertainment, programs, hackathons, etc.) create positive Muslim voices and opportunities in society</p>	<p><b>Change the strength narrative</b></p> <p>Develop strategies to change the traditional and digital media dialogue and expose the realities of ISIL.</p>	<p><b>Disrupt their digital landscape</b></p> <p>Develop smart digital strategies, counter-messages and supporting analytics to create the fuzz</p>	<p><b>Anti-radicalization: empower communities to see and counter radicalization</b></p> <p>Help communities, friends, mothers, imams, teachers recognize signs of radicalization and give them support, language and tools to combat it <u>without creating a sense of deputizing a community against itself</u></p>

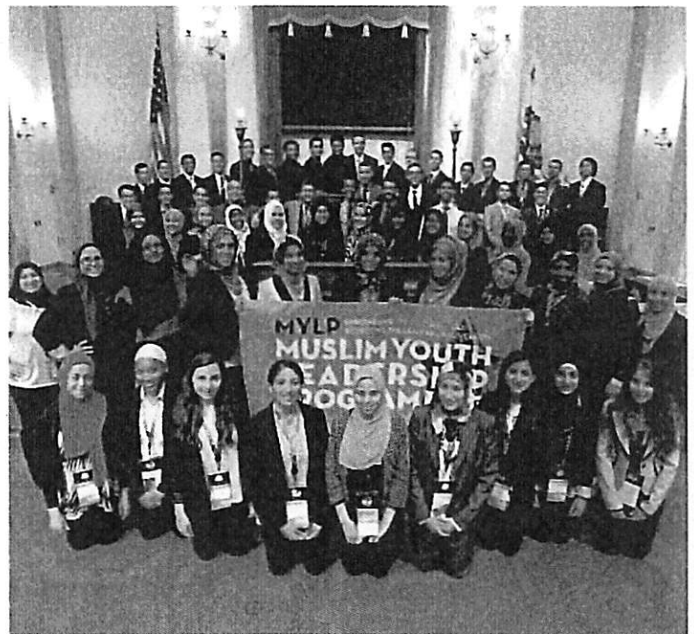
## DEVELOP COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

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Community is everything in this battle.

It is vital that **communities continue to create programs where Muslim youth feel empowered** in their day to day life. Also, Muslim communities should be empowered with the **knowledge and tools to interrupt those on the path to radicalization.**

The good news is that these community groups already exist. How can we amplify their effectiveness and efforts while letting them maintain their authentic connections to the community?



*One last note...*

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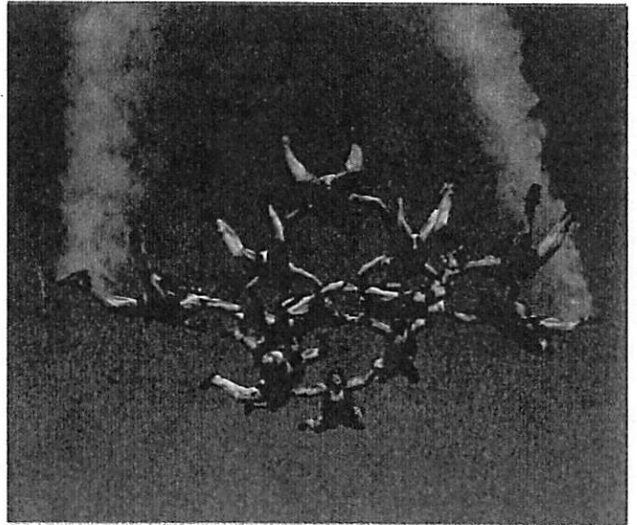
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# QUANTIFY SUCCESS AND ASSIGN CLEAR OUTCOME METRICS TO ALL INITIATIVES

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ISIL is agile, iterative and focused. Any efforts done to combat it must be as well. Every effort that gets implemented should be underpinned and driven by a **strong data approach that gets clearly communicated to allies and partners.**

- “Spock on the bridge:” technical and analytical input at a strategic level
- Empower communications and partnership teams with self-service analytics
- “Fast data” gives functional teams real-time, objective feedback and opportunity to quickly adapt



# OVERALL COUNTER STRATEGIES TO TAKE ON EACH PHASE

<p>PHASE 1</p> <p>A DISAFFECTED AND EMPATHETIC STATE OF BEING</p>	<p>PHASE 2</p> <p>GET TUNED IN TO ISIL VIA NEWS MEDIA THAT KEEPS ISIL TOP OF MIND</p>	<p>PHASE 3</p> <p>GET CURIOUS, LOG ON AND DISCOVER A NUANCED AND COMPASSIONATE ONLINE PRESENCE</p>	<p>PHASE 4</p> <p>THROUGH INTENSE 1:1 INTERACTION, CONVERT TO THE ISIL CAUSE</p>
<p><b>Empower a strong pro-Muslim creative and community culture</b></p> <p>Primarily via civil society (culture, music, entertainment, programs, hackathons, etc.) create positive Muslim voices and opportunities in society</p>	<p><b>Change the strength narrative</b></p> <p>Develop strategies to change the traditional and digital media dialogue and expose the realities of ISIL.</p>	<p><b>Disrupt their digital landscape</b></p> <p>Develop smart digital strategies, counter-messages and supporting analytics to create the fuzz</p>	<p><b>Anti-radicalization: empower communities to see and counter radicalization</b></p> <p>Help communities, friends, mothers, imams, teachers recognize signs of radicalization and give them support, language and tools to combat it <u>without creating a sense of deputizing a community against itself</u></p>

**APPROACHING TODAY**

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## **SAY HELLO**

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*You've already been divided into interdisciplinary teams at your table.*

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## **60 MINUTES TO IDEATE**

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*Spend the next hour ideating using the framework  
in the envelope on your table*

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# BREAKING THE ISIL BRAND

THE ELEVATOR PITCH (OBJECTIVE + IDEA)

TARGET

KEY TACTICS

ECOSYSTEM TO SUPPORT THE IDEA

KEY METRICS

NEXT STEPS

## **POPCORN PITCH-BACK**

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*Each team will have five minutes to pitch their idea to the broader room.*

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## **ROOM DISCUSSION**

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*We'll have a discussion around the ideas and potential next steps.*

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**LET'S GO**

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