

# ISIS online propaganda makes people feel nauseous but also provokes curiosity

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Research shows that ISIS atrocity videos provoke a morbid curiosity among viewers, as well as disgust, discomfort and fear.

Researchers Dr Simon Cottee and Dr Jack Cunliffe at the University of Kent found that those given access to jihadist online propaganda (JOP) often experienced a 'morbid buzz' which made many want to watch the explicit videos.

Fifty-seven per cent of those who participated in the research said they had watched an ISIS video before, beyond clips shown on TV news and in online news material.

The study, entitled Watching ISIS: How Young Adults Engage with Official English-Language ISIS Videos, involved an [online survey](#) testing audience response to clips from English-language Islamic State of Iraq and Syria videos.

Previous research on JOP has focussed on the production, content and dissemination of jihadist messages, and this research is thought to be among the first to consider the target of JOP: the audience.

Three thousand [young adults](#) of all faith backgrounds, located in Britain and North America, took part in the survey. It launched with its own dedicated Web-domain in September 2016 and remained online until the end of March 2017.

Ninety-three per cent of respondents reported a negative attitude toward ISIS. Only 34 people (just over 1 per cent) reported a positive view of the group, with a further 177 (6 per cent) reporting a neutral view.

Of the 34 who reported a positive attitude toward ISIS, five were Muslims. Although this Muslim group -135 in total - had a higher inclination to report a positive or neutral opinion of ISIS (13 per cent compared to 7 per cent of non-Muslims) the vast majority - 113 (87 per cent) - professed a negative opinion of the group.

The online survey contained clips from four English-language ISIS videos, including the infamous *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it* (al-Furqān Media; released 16 November 2014) which featured the British citizen Mohammed Emwazi, known as 'Jihadi John'.

The researchers found that although 58 per cent of respondents reported being scared by the violence in the video - with 76 per cent saying it made them feel uncomfortable and 67 per cent sick - only 11 per cent said it bored them.

When asked if they wanted to view the video to its grisly completion, 33 per cent said yes, with 23 per cent reporting feelings of ambivalence about wanting to see this. Less than half -44 per cent - said they did not want to see the [video](#) to the end, the researchers found.

The researchers conclude that 'for the majority of respondents, while staged beheadings may be uncomfortable, scary, and sickening to watch, they nevertheless make for compelling viewing'.

Watching ISIS: How Young Adults Engage with Official English-Language ISIS Videos (Simon Cottee and Jack Cunliffe, both School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, University of Kent) is published in the journal *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*.

**More information:** Simon Cottee et al, Watching ISIS: How Young Adults Engage with Official English-Language ISIS Videos, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2018.1444955](https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1444955)

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