



University of
Southern
Queensland

**'THE RADICALISATION CASCADE' - USING
BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS TO
UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE ARE
INFLUENCED TOWARDS VIOLENT EXTREMES
BY AL-QAEDA AND ISIS**

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

The study of radicalisation towards violent extremism using behavioural economics as a framework to organise and understand influence is an emergent area of scholarship as are the effects of exposure to terrorist and violent extremist content. Existing literature has approached these challenges from multi-disciplinary viewpoints, which have all contributed to a growing body of knowledge. However, by using behavioural economics as a tool to explore these challenges together, this thesis provides a new perspective. By using open-source data and investigative techniques to map the radicalisation and recruitment trajectories of Australian violent Islamists against a choice architecture framework, this thesis explores how the influence exerted on individual and group decision-making can lead to violence. By viewing the radicalisation and recruitment process through an availability cascade lens and acknowledging that the environment is inherently participative in group settings, this thesis offers a new radicalisation model via the mapping of common decision-pathways to violent Islamists. While technology has contributed to facilitating access to terrorist and violent extremist content, the composition of the content itself must also be understood in greater depth. By observing terrorist organisations' exploitation of communications technology to deliver heuristically-laden content that leverages existing preferences and biases, influence can be exerted on susceptible individuals in ways that normalise, sanction and promote violence. While this thesis is supported by research into Australian Islamic violent extremists, the radicalisation cascade presented is ideologically agnostic and can be applied to any group-based radicalising environment. Only when we understand the decision-making frameworks prospective violent extremists are nudged into and influenced by, can we develop effective deterrence, prevention and disengagement strategies.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I Nicole Matejic declare that the Doctoral Thesis entitled *The Radicalisation Cascade - Using Behavioural Economics to understand how people are influenced to violent extremes: A new radicalisation model for understanding the radicalisation and recruitment by al-Qaeda and ISIS* has been granted Dean permission to exceed the standard word length. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Commonly used abbreviations in this thesis include:

AFFDAN	Australian Foreign Fighter and Domestic Actor Nexus
AFP	Australian Federal Police
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
FMVE	Faith Motivated Violent Extremism
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NRVE	Nationalistic and Racist Violent Extremism
OSINT	Open-source intelligence
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PMVE	Politically Motivated Violent Extremism
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
SMVE	Single Issue Motivated Violent Extremism
TVEC	Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content
WIE	White Identity Extremism

For ease of reference, the term ISIS will be used to describe both the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant throughout this thesis.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how behavioural economics can (a) be used to explain the process of radicalisation (b) provide a structure for organising knowledge around it; and (c) demonstrate how Islamist extremists have adopted and abused concepts such as 'availability cascades' and 'nudges' to radicalise and recruit individuals towards extreme violence. By understanding the choice architecture frameworks Islamist terrorist organisations have and continue to use to attract susceptible individuals; academia, and those in professional practice, such as those involved in the prevention and countering violent extremism spaces, will have a new means of organising information and understanding the choices terrorists and those radicalising towards violent extremes make, and why.

The analysis provided in this thesis is based on a significant, almost decade-long open-source investigation into Australian violent Islamists and their radicalisation trajectories. This thesis, with a grounding in behavioural choice theory as well as a contemporary understanding of online influence via terrorist and violent extremist content (TVEC), seeks to demonstrate how availability entrepreneurs (terrorist recruiters and facilitators) coerce susceptible individuals into forms of belief and behaviours that are destructive too themselves and others. Through an exploration of the research via case studies, and qualitative and quantitative analysis, this thesis offers a new framework for organising the often-large amounts of information that is available when researching radicalisation pathways.

1.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter is organised in the following way. Section 1.2 provides a brief overview of the author's professional practice expertise and academic background. Section 1.3 explores the purpose of the thesis in the context

of the Doctor of Professional Studies program and the objectives it set out to achieve. Section 1.4 outlines the definitions of terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism. Section 1.5 discusses the significance of the thesis as it relates to both professional practice and scholarship. Section 1.6 provides a general overview of the body of work. Section 1.7 details the insights the research has produced and how that influences scholarship in this emergent area of study. Section 1.8 provides a conclusion to this chapter.

1.1 About the Author

The author of this thesis, Nicole Matejic, is an internationally recognised and trusted authority on navigating national security challenges in environments of converged risk and threat. A regular instructor and guest speaker for NATO, Nicole is highly regarded for her work in distilling how groups influence the radicalisation and recruitment of followers towards violent extremism and terrorism. Nicole's in-depth understanding of how terrorist organisations deploy information and psychological operations in unconventional warfare is based on over fifteen years of professional practice, fieldwork, and research.

Highly regarded for her ability to distil complexity, Nicole has a background in law enforcement, intelligence, and civil-military environments. Her work in the areas of preventing and countering extremism online has seen her lead capability development and strategic work with Governments around the world.

Nicole holds a Master's Degree in Policing Leadership and Management; a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies and Photojournalism (with a sub-major in Multi-Media), and numerous emergency management and professional certifications.

Nicole is currently a Non-Resident Fellow at the United States Marine Corps University's Brute Krulak Center for Innovation and Future Warfare; and an Adjunct Lecturer in the School of Terrorism and National Security at Charles Sturt University in Australia. She has lectured at some of Australia's leading Universities and several colleges and universities in the United States of America.

Nicole's first book 'Social Media Rules of Engagement' was published by Wiley in 2015.

1.3 Objectives of this Thesis

Radicalisation is most often researched through the lenses of terrorism studies, criminology, psychology, political violence, and religious studies. Each of these disciplines offers a long and varied history of exploring radicalisation and extremism; and the factors that contribute to it. Increasingly, scholars are taking a multidisciplinary approach to better understand radicalisation. This is particularly relevant to professional practitioners working in the Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) environment, as it delivers meaningful intervention opportunities to disengage and deter those radicalising to prevent violence from occurring. This thesis not only seeks to explore the theory underpinning the behavioural economics of 'The Radicalisation Cascade' and contribute to original knowledge; but also, do so in a way that enables those working in the P/CVE environments with ways to understand the radicalisation trajectory and optimise their points of intervention. It is for these reasons that this thesis is both scholarly multidisciplinary and operationally multifaceted. From a P/CVE practitioner's perspective, academic knowledge can be hard to access, difficult to digest and often, challenging to operationalise. This thesis has therefore purposefully kept both audiences – academia and professional practice – in mind.

The research questions this thesis, therefore, seeks to address are:

1. What characteristics (if any) of behavioural economics, such as nudges, choice architecture and availability cascades, can be observed as part of the radicalisation process of Australian violent Islamists.
2. What (if any) characteristics of the radicalisation trajectory can be identified via intervention phasing (deterrence, disengagement, prevention and countering) that may provide professional practitioners with an understanding of where interventions may be most effective.

This study of the decision pathways of violent Islamist extremists not only plays an important part in explaining the radicalisation and recruitment process but also acts as a way to expose the held-out rewards used to coerce prospective violent extremists into specific behaviours and beliefs. The word 'coerced' is used purposefully, as will become evident in the chapters that follow this introduction. Presented alongside observations of how the Internet and social media are abused to influence individuals in ways that are harmful to them and others, The Radicalisation Cascade demonstrates how potent influence can be when it is underpinned by ideological fanaticism, disingenuously disguised within religious master narratives while concurrently being marketed at prospective violent Islamists in ways that are like mainstream commercial advertising. By stepping through the theoretical elements of behavioural economics that underpin successful nudging and then applying this in the context of violent Islamist extremism, this thesis maps the standardised radicalisation and recruitment model that has been consistently used over the past two decades by both (at least) al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

This thesis also offers a model of 'The Radicalisation Cascade' which depicts the process, tiers and underlying behavioural economics elements

contained at each level of radicalisation. This artefact operationalises academic knowledge in an accessible way for P/CVE practitioners, policymakers, law enforcement and intelligence agencies. The Radicalisation Cascade model provides practitioners with the ability to both understand the radicalisation and recruitment processes being applied to an individual, while concurrently identifying optimal intervention points for disengagement opportunities.

1.4 Definitions

The following sections set out the definitions that have been adopted for use within this thesis. While Australian Government definitions have been adopted for the purposes of this thesis because of the underlying research's need to have clear judicial classifications for study inclusion or exclusion, it must be noted that these definitions do not share an academic consensus. Therefore, a short review of each definition will be discussed.

1.4.1 Defining Terrorism

In Australia, terrorism is defined at law as "an act or threat that is intended to advance a political, ideological or religious cause; and coerce or intimidate an Australian or foreign government or the public (or section of the public including foreign public)." The conduct defined within Australian law stipulates that for it to be considered terrorism it must meet the aforementioned definitions and "causes serious physical harm to a person or serious damage to property; causes death or endangers a person's life; creates a serious risk to the health and safety of the public (or section of the public), or seriously interferes, disrupts or destroys: an electronic information, telecommunications or financial system; or an electronic system used for the delivery of essential government services, used for or by an essential public utility or transport system" (Australian Government, 2023).

While this definition is useful for the purposes of this thesis given it is a work-based research project, it must be acknowledged that government definitions, as pointed out by Crenshaw (2017) are implicitly influenced by political, economic, and social considerations. Crenshaw (2017) also states that the difficulties in defining terrorism extend to the enemy themselves and the impact this has on responders and policymakers (Crenshaw & Lafree, 2017, p.99-100). Concurrent with government definitions, a single, universally adopted definition of terrorism also continues to be debated amongst scholars. In fact, definitions previously adopted have evolved over time in response to the changing face of terrorism and the ways in which it is being studied. The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland, home of the Global Terrorism Database, acknowledges the evolution of the definition of the term in response to changing times and states that while certain broad elements of terrorism, such as the intentional use of violence, are broadly agreed upon in academic circles, there are a myriad of other factors that keep a singular definition from being agreed upon. Factors that the START Consortium suggest have found their way into defining contemporary terrorism, such as whether the victims of terrorism must be non-combatants or whether terrorism requires political motive, continue to be debated (University of Maryland, 2018). Bruce Hoffman, a scholar of significant note in the field of terrorism, agrees and explains that the evolving definition of terrorism is because terrorism itself continued to change so frequently over the past two hundred years (Hoffman, 2006, p.3). In his paper 'The Staircase to Terrorism' Moghaddam (2005) concurs with both Hoffman's and the GTD's definition of Terrorism, adding that terrorism influences decision-making and behavioural change (Moghaddam, 2005). Lutz and Lutz (2005) provide a similar historical timeline and argue that "different types of terrorism occur in distinctive time periods" further extrapolating the influence time and societies have on defining terrorism (Lutz & Lutz, 2005). Coolseat (2017) suggests that

history is the missing link in understanding and defining terrorism and points out that “Martha Crenshaw has often warned against the danger of rejecting the accumulated knowledge of terrorism” (Coolsaet, 2017).

Conversely, scholars such as Ramsay (2015) are more critical, arguing that terrorism “should not be defined, because the concept of terrorism arrived at by the definitional debate obfuscates rather than clarifies its meaning in situations which it is actually put to use.” Ramsay (2015) further argues that the terrorism has already been defined and “the question is rather whether there is any possibility of determining a meaningful consensus” (Ramsay, 2015). Most significantly perhaps, is Hoffman’s (2006) analysis of the evolution of the definition of terrorism in the face of the concurrent evolution of radicalisation. Hoffman (2006) notes that terrorism is “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change. All terrorist acts involve violence or the threat of violence. Terrorism is specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack... terrorism is designed to create power where there is none or consolidate power where there is very little. Through the publicity generated by their violence, terrorists seek to obtain the leverage, influence, and power they otherwise lack to effect political change on either a local or international scale” (Hoffman, 2006, p. 40-41).

Also of note in the context of this thesis, particularly as TVEC is explored in future chapters is the public perception of what does and does not constitute terrorism. According to Audi (2009) a disconnect exists between formal legal definitions and the public’s folk intuition of what terrorism is (Audi, 2009). Public debate following instances of extreme violence often also grapples with the question of whether or not an event should be classified as terrorism (Huff & Kertzer, 2018). While public debate doesn’t directly inform academic or legal definitions of terrorism, it does have consequences for the media, policy makers and governments. The

classification of an event as an act of terrorism directly relates to how any surviving terrorists are prosecuted (Huff & Kertzer, 2018). The classification of an act of violence as terrorism also has normative implications for public awareness and opinion (Powell, 2011) – which is the source of further debate, particularly regarding Islamist extremism versus other types of violent extremism, where the label is not consistently applied. Drawing from the example of a group of White armed ranchers seizing the offices of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service complex in Oregon in 2016 (in protest of the federal Government’s policies on grazing and land rights) and the media’s lack of use of the word ‘terrorism’ in response (Huff & Kertzer, 2018), the double standard was aptly summarised by Twitter commentator Cenk Uygur who tweeted: “Let’s be clear: If Muslims had seized a federal building, they’d all be dead now. #whiteprivilege #OregonUnderAttack” (Uygur, 2016).

1.4.2 Defining Radicalisation

The Australian Government defines radicalisation in its ‘Living Safe Together’ countering violent extremism resources as occurring “when a person’s thinking and behaviour becomes significantly different from how most members of their society and community view social issues and participate politically... As a person radicalises, they may begin to seek to significantly change the nature of society and government. However, if someone decides that using fear, terror or violence is justified to achieve ideological, political or social change – this is violent extremism” (Australian Government, n.d).

Like terrorism, universal consensus on the definition of radicalisation continues to be debated as has the term association with ‘extremism’. Malthaner (2017) notes that various academic literature reviews have concluded that the term ‘radicalisation’ has been broadly used in very often vague and poorly defined ways. Malthaner (2017) also points out that what

is seen as 'radical' very much depends on the person making that assessment, and what their notion of normal, moderate or mainstream is (Malthaner, 2017). He further explains that over the past decade the use of the term 'radicalisation' has become commonplace as an "analytical paradigm" to interpret and explain contemporary political violence through the lens of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq (Malthaner, 2017). Jensen et al (2018) concur, stating that attempts to settle on a definition are inherently flawed as researchers to date "...conceiving of radicalisation in terms of complex pathways... continue to treat the phenomena as one that can be understood through the development of simple linear process models or through identification of small sets of cognitive, emotional and behavioural traits that are believed to be common to extremists." Jensen et al (2018) state that using traditional research methods fails to account for the many and varied trajectories to radicalisation, and contributes to the promulgation of erroneous and misleading profiles on the topic (Jensen et al., 2018). Hafez and Mullins (2015) agree with Jensen et al's (2018) assessment and contend that the usage of the metaphor 'a process' in regard to radicalisation should be abandoned based on the fact that many scholars "describe the phenomena of radicalisation even as they acknowledge that a salient description of this presumed process remains elusive" (Hafez & Mullins, 2015).

While a consensus on the lack of ability to define the term appears unanimous, other academics are proposing definitions for adoption. Bötticher (2017) proposes a definition, noting the evolution of the meaning of the word over the past two centuries, suggesting both a definition and key distinctions between radicalism and extremism. While her 10-point list of key distinctions between radicalism and extremism goes to great lengths to separate the two terms as differing phenomena, she concludes that attempting to redefine the definitions of frequently used concepts without any political inference from an academic viewpoint is futile. Bötticher (2017) further states that by taking a political view, radicalism "can be

situated at the edges of the democratic consensus while extremism lies outside.” Further, she suggests the links between radicalism and terrorism are much weaker than those between extremism and terrorism (Bötticher, 2017). Social scientist Sophia Moksalenko and social psychologist Clark McCauley have published a considerable body of work together on the topic. Their definition is particular to political radicalisation, and is predicated on the “changes in beliefs, feelings and actions in the direction of increased support for one side of a political conflict” (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2014). Their distinction of political versus other types of radicalisation – such as single-issue or white-identity motivated, for example– is reflective of the milestones in radicalisation research they have identified in the time since the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States of America (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Malthaner (2017) concurs with their scoping of the types of radicalisation and “reshaping” of research on the topic in the years following September 11, 2001. Malthaner (2017) points out that this “shift in perspective did not go unchallenged” and that the emergence of radicalisation studies questioned “the notion of radicalisation as primarily a cognitive and ideological process” while calling for “greater attention to be given to the meso-level of radical movements and milieus and the role of the wider societal and political environment.” Malthaner (2017) proposes evolving the concept as a paradigm within “the context of broader sociological research on political violence” (Malthaner, 2017).

Perhaps one of the earliest radicalisation models of this century comes from psychologist and academic Fathali M. Moghaddam whose 2005 ‘Staircase to Terrorism’ model conceptualises the radicalisation trajectory as a psychological process akin to climbing a staircase, whereby each upward step is an escalation in action and commitment to violence: “The staircase leads to higher and higher floors, and whether someone remains on a particular floor depends on the doors and spaces that person imagines to be open to them on that floor ... As individuals climb the staircase, they see fewer and fewer choices, until the only possible outcome is the destruction

of others, or oneself or both.” These evolving academic definitions or models are however not reflective of the policy definitions governments employ at a practical level in addressing the problem. As Moghaddam (2005) states “the current policy of focusing on individuals already at the top of the staircase brings only short-term gains” and “the best long-term policy against terrorism is prevention, which is made possible by nourishing contextualised democracy on the ground floor” (Moghaddam, 2005).

Representing a disconnect between academia and professional practice, it is worthy of note that government definitions of radicalisation are nearly always tightly bound to terrorism. Schmid (2013) argues that the popularity of the term has no direct correlation to the definition and “it has become a political shibboleth despite its lack of precision” (Schmid, 2013). Further, organisations working in the field such as the United Arab Emirate’s based Hedayah whose vision is to decrease “the risk of radicalisation leading to violent extremism” through the delivery of training programs, research, and analysis, defines radicalisation in two separate ways:

1. Violent radicalisation – being “the process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly violent and extreme political, social, cultural and religious ideologies;” and
2. Violent self-radicalisation- “when someone comes to adopt increasingly violent and extreme political, sociological, cultural and religious ideologies without necessarily being approached by a member of any violent extremist group, although they may have been influenced by that group’s ideology” (Hedayah, 2019).

1.4.3 Defining Violent Extremism

The Australian Government, noting that there is no single universally agreed upon definition of ‘violent extremism,’ describes it as “the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This includes terrorism and other forms of

politically motivated and communal violence. All forms of violent extremism seeks change through fear and intimidation rather than through peaceful means. If a person or group decides that fear, terror and violence are justified to achieve ideological, political or social change, and then acts accordingly, this is violent extremism" (Australian Government, 2015).

While this definition is useful for the purposes of this thesis given it is a work-based research project, it must be acknowledged that like terrorism and radicalisation, a universally accepted definition remains elusive. Striegher (2015) acknowledges this stating that violent extremism is often used interchangeably with terrorism and that attempting to define it "remains an evolving concept." Striegher (2015) further points out that "though extremism is a predominant feature of terrorist behaviour, it is an ideology or viewpoint that does not necessarily reach the threshold for an act of terrorism." Referring to law enforcement and intelligence practitioners' adoption and use of the term 'violent extremism' Striegher (2015) suggests it would be more accurate to decouple the ideology from violent extremism to ensure "the ideology is isolated from the act" to avoid confusion (Streigher, 2015). Bak et al (2019) concur, observing that 'violent extremism' is used in a way that is framed to suggest it should be self-evident. Bak et al (2019) note that this choice of language in the absence of a broadly agreed-upon definition "raises questions about whether subjective perceptions wind up influencing the responses and interventions currently designed to address the phenomena" and that this leads to attempts to design solutions in the P/CVE space before the problem is properly defined (Bak et al, 2019). Another point of view is provided by the United Nations (2017) which believes the term should be defined through its difference to extremism: the latter being non-violent even though the individual or group seeks to achieve the same types of socio-political change. Perhaps most importantly, the United Nations note that there exists a transitional phase between non-violent and violent extremism, "such as individuals who materially support kinetic activities

without engaging in violence” – which complicates definitions further (United Nations, 2017).

1.5 Significance of the Thesis

Radicalisation is a complicated topic. This thesis is significant because it provides both scholars and P/CVE practitioners with a new framework to organise knowledge. The objectives this thesis set out to achieve have resulted in several conclusions, the significance of which – to both knowledge and professional practice – are as follows:

- The application of availability cascades and nudges, and their impacts on message influence within violent Islamist radicalisation and recruitment contexts, are novel and present a new way of understanding pathways into Islamist violent extremism. Underpinned by behavioural economics theory and analysed within the context of a recruitment manual published by al-Qaeda and later adopted by ISIS, viewing radicalisation and recruitment pathways through the lens of an availability cascade provides a deep insight into not only how nudges are delivered and perpetuated but also how in-groups can serve as compliance moderators and TVEC is used as a tool of influence.
- Taking the knowledge of how availability cascades are used and applying that understanding to the online and social media environments inherent in the cyber-caliphate also provides a new way of understanding how and why particular content and messaging types are pervasively influential among target audiences. Availability cascades are particularly suited to in-group settings where beliefs and behaviours are moderated because of their self-perpetuating nature. That is, to be successful, availability cascades must have continued investment from those dwelling within them. The participatory nature of the availability cascade is particularly pertinent to faith-based (and other) forms of extremism because it gives rising plausibility to the

beliefs and behaviours that the group's leadership seeks to promote. The more investment in the cascade, the more those within it are influenced by it.

- The identification of violent Islamist recruiters as availability entrepreneurs within the cascade goes some way to explaining their purpose beyond merely attracting prospective recruits. Not only is their role to attract individuals into the radicalising environment, but they must also assess an individual's probability for successful radicalisation by making assumptions about their overall persuasibility. Given the recruiter's own instructions to treat prospective violent Islamists as sunk costs from early in the radicalisation cascade, their initial assessment of those they choose to pursue must therefore represent a bias towards low-risk yet high-yield outcomes. Because radicalisation is not a certainty, the recruitment process is subject to risk and uncertainty. Further, the duality of decision-making – both from the recruiter and the prospective violent Islamist – demonstrates a coercive interplay where the recruiter as an availability entrepreneur attempts to influence the prospective violent Islamist to gauge their reactions and compatibility with their radicalising environment. This risk-averse approach by the recruiter has been designed to protect them from making poor choices, however, due to the radicalising environment quickly transitioning candidates into sunk costs, the reality is that recruiters' successes will be varied. This may go some way to explaining why not every individual onboarded into a radicalisation cascade shares the same outcomes. While some will radicalise into violent extremists, and fewer still into terrorists, the majority will not. Dispersed throughout the in-group and/or terrorist cell environments across a spectrum of engagement and disengagement; radicalised individuals will peak within the cascade at their level of highest-tier achievement. They may maintain this level of engagement, move to

a higher tier or disengage and remain ideologically supportive or disengage entirely.

- The correlation between availability cascades and the online environment in an influence context is significant. Availability entrepreneurs, akin to online influencers, must control a prospective violent Islamist's public discourse by manipulating their information environments to their advantage. Without the recruiter's ability to control the prospective violent Islamist's information environment, and if necessary, trigger an availability cascade, The Radicalisation Cascade cannot form a stable environment of influence around them. Without that stable availability cascade, the recruiter's ability to exert coercive control is disrupted leaving prospective violent Islamists open to influence from other sources and disengagement (or defection to other groups) as a result.
- Understanding the interplay between availability cascades, coercive information control and the online environment also adds another layer to the role of the recruiter: that of the bestower of rewards. Prospective violent Islamists who respond favourably to the radicalising environment (even if they do not realise initially that they are in it) are offered a range of held-out rewards as incentives to progress through the cascade. From being given access to the in-group to attaining notoriety within it; to the significance generated by creating and sharing radicalising TVEC; to the held-out rewards of the afterlife upon martyrdom – particularly if the violent Islamist has successfully delivered video or live streamed content as part of their attack, there are various ways significance is bestowed within the availability cascade. This is because the available cascade, by design, creates a situation whereby those within it contribute to its perpetual motion by consistently reinvesting in the information and reputational frames within it; learning from the information shared and and behaviour of others.

There is limited existing literature that explores these aspects of availability cascades or that applies them directly to a radicalisation context. While there is a lot of literature that deals with each element of the radicalisation and recruitment process in isolation, particularly as it applies to the theory within each separate academic discipline, models of decision-making under risk have focused on terrorist acts rather than the pathways that led to those people becoming terrorists in the first place. This is problematic from a professional practice standpoint. While there will always be a need for law enforcement and intelligence agencies to thwart terrorist plots and make just-in-time interventions, perpetually operating in this space is risky because not all plots will be discovered and not all attacks stopped. Further, it creates an over-dependence on detection capabilities at the just--in-time, pre-attack end of the radicalisation and recruitment spectrum rather than upstream, ahead of time, where meaningful diversion or disengagement has a higher chance of success. The challenges of radicalising towards violent extremism cannot be solved by arrests or imprisonment. In fact, these measures – while at times necessary to protect public safety – have been shown to fuel in-group grievances, propelling others onto the radicalisation trajectory.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

As a multidisciplinary body of work, this thesis has been structured to take the reader on a journey through the relevant theory of each discipline before culminating in the chapters that are the focus of this research. This thesis explores radicalisation against the post 9/11 backdrop of increasingly accessible Internet connectivity, technological advances and communications technology. Terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS have exploited these advances by using them to promote their propaganda of the deed and make global citizens unwilling witnesses of their terrorist attacks, while concurrently radicalising and recruiting supporters. The research presented in this thesis outlines how behavioural economics

models of choice architecture, availability cascades and nudges – together with TVEC and the marketing strategies that underpin it – helps us identify and understand the radicalisation techniques that extremist groups use. As a result of this research, a model detailing how availability cascades are employed to radicalise and recruit violent Islamists has been constructed to demonstrate the decision-making behaviours among prospective recruits and the nudges that are used to propel them along the radicalisation trajectory.

Chapter 2 of this thesis considers the existing literature available on terrorist choice and radicalisation. It is important to acknowledge at the outset of this review that the volume of literature available across all relevant disciplines is too vast for any single chapter. For this reason, the literature surveyed has been selected based on its broad acceptance within academia and the contributions made to the overall knowledge of this multidisciplinary work-based research project.

The literature reviewed as part of this chapter have been organised into the following sections: Radicalisation to Violence; The role of Ideology in Contemporary extreme Islamist Radicalisation; How Information Communications Technology have facilitated and contributed to Contemporary Violent Extremism; The role Content Marketing plays in Online Influence, specifically TVEC; and How Behavioural Economics can help make sense of the way individuals are Influenced towards Radicalisation. Multidisciplinary research that furthers scholarly understanding of the way behavioural economics can help structure information about the radicalisation process will become increasingly important as web 3.0 and the metaverse environments immerse susceptible individuals in not only content-infused environments, but also sensory-based virtual and augmented reality constructs.

Chapter 3 of this thesis outlines the methodology used to conduct the research. Leveraging open-source intelligence (OSINT) investigative techniques to collate, sift and analyse data; this thesis employed both automated data collection techniques and manual coding to build a hybrid spreadsheet database that enabled social network analysis and behavioural pathways to be explored in both qualitative and quantitative ways. This mixed-methods research approach enabled a deeper level of psychographic information to be collated and analysed alongside comparable datasets on Australian violent Islamists.

One of the key benefits of taking this research approach is that it enabled the creation of an artefact – ‘The Radicalisation Cascade’ model. That the research was informed by open-source information was particularly useful given the inherent nature of national security-based investigations and legal proceedings existing outside of the public sphere. OSINT was possible because of the sheer volume of propaganda and evidence ISIS, and to a lesser degree al-Qaeda disseminated themselves (with intent) into the public domain. By way of their strategic use of propaganda of the deed as an influence tool (both for recruiting purposes and to terrorise the public) their desire to project legitimacy surfaced a volume of content that would have remained out of public view in previous conflicts. Together with the general democratisation of information and the resulting evolution of news media and citizen publishing opportunities, ISIS forced law enforcement and intelligence agencies to deal with public-domain content – OSINT – in ways they had perhaps been hesitant to in the past. The result of this shift enabled this research to be conducted via passive monitoring and precluded the need for access to classified information or incarcerated individuals. That the results of this research have proven to be of continued benefit to Police Forces in Australia, and that the methodology has been replicated by other academics, has contributed to the overall acceptance of OSINT as a reliable source of information.

Because of the way the research was mapped, the radicalisation and recruitment trajectories of the individuals studied could be extrapolated in a systematic way. When compared with the radicalisation and recruitment playbook authored by al-Qaeda and later adopted by ISIS (which will be discussed at length in Chapter 5) this enabled a clear comparison across research subject timelines, behavioural attributes, influence vectors, and decision-making pathways.

Chapter 4 this thesis considers the origins of nudge theory and its connection to the way in which we can use it to understand and provide a framework for the way that violent Islamists radicalise and recruit susceptible individuals. Resting on decision-making models that draw upon applications of expected utility theory, prospect theory and availability cascades, this chapter explores how these theories are applied on and offline. As a structure to understand violent Islamist decision-making, nudges enable terrorist recruiters and facilitators to maximise their payoffs while reducing the risks associated with the radicalising and recruitment environment. The way choices are presented to the prospective violent Islamist are also explored, alongside a coercive framework that actively diminishes a prospective violent Islamist's libertarian paternalism.

This chapter also looks at the way in which nudges have been woven into TVEC to deal with issues of rational choice, in-group behavioural social conditioning and information agenda setting and framing. That TVEC plays roles in both online (Internet enabled) and offline environments, while not unlike other information repositories or distribution systems, is distinct in its often-strategic use of low-tech (such as USB memory sticks) in attempts to avoid law enforcement or intelligence agency interception and hold out extreme content as a reward for true believers. With nudges already built into the consumer content marketing ecosystem, prospective violent Islamists and non-Islamists alike have already been primed to broadly receive and respond to consuming information in this manner. This acts as

a perpetual nudge builder: when presented with nudges online, users who do not engage or take the desired action teach the algorithm (via artificial intelligence or machine learning) how to make better nudges. This results in a perpetual state of evolution in content production and dissemination as it not only serves its intended purposes (radicalisation, recruitment, propaganda, incitement, and terror) but also feeds a habitual need online users have to satiate their content consumption routines.

With radicalisation leading to engaged recruitment the desired payoff in nudging Islamists on pathways to violence, this chapter also deals with the radicalising environment in so far as it is coercive. By exploring the incentives presented to prospective violent Islamists, default biases and in-group norms can be observed, particularly as they are built in ways that coerce susceptible individuals into binary decision-making pathways that alter their environment to the degree where the illusion of individual freewill and agency remains but is (at least at first) unknowingly divested to the recruiter and/or in-group norms.

In Chapter 5 'The Radicalisation Cascade' is presented drawing on decision-making theory while taking a deeper dive into the use of availability cascades in on and offline radicalisation. This chapter also serves to illustrate how information and knowledge can be structured to map radicalising environments. Drawing from source material published and used by al-Qaeda and ISIS, this chapter brings together work from behavioural economics and terrorism studies in a way that enables radicalisation pathways to be explored through choice architecture and availability cascade frameworks. To do this, the chapter outlines the radicalisation process of Islamic extremists through six tiers: (1) Pre-suasion: the way prospective violent Islamists are primed for radicalisation before they embark on that pathway while concurrently, recruiters determine if the prospective violent Islamist is worthy of investment; (2) Sense-Making: deals with the content immersion process and the

prospective violent Islamist's reaction to it, while assessing their risk to the terrorist cell; (3) Mainstreaming Extremism: which shifts the prospective violent Islamist from a prospect theory frame to an expected utility frame to create in-group bonds and encourage behaviours which positively reinforce reward seeking. This tier also establishes religious doctrine and routines; (4) Threshold: takes the prospective violent Islamist up to (but not over) the point from radicalisation to active recruitment. Shifting from an informational frame to a reputational frame within the availability cascade and consolidating expected terrorist choice, significance-seeking behaviours are also highlighted; (5) Stronghold: moves the violent Islamist into a stage of active recruitment towards planning for an act of terrorism. Placing value on significance-seeking behaviours at this tier enables recruiters to hold out rewards (both tangible and metaphysical) which influence recruits towards an action bias; and (6) Violence: the final tier of The Radicalisation Cascade that fulfils the radicalisation process by committing – or failing to commit – an act of terrorism. The held-out reward of martyrdom and/or bestowal of significance is also explored at this tier as is the role TVEC plays in moving violent Islamists from content consumers to content (propaganda) creators.

Chapter 6 explores the contemporary practice of terrorists using content marketing tactics as both conduits for radicalisation and recruitment as well as propaganda. The dual-payload nature of content marketing by terrorist organisations is investigated, as are the limitations faced by researchers due to the countermeasures big tech companies employ to moderate TVEC online. By taking a deep dive into the elements of ISIS and al-Qaeda's content marketing to date, including the publication of detailed magazines and videos, this chapter highlights the benefits terrorist organisations reap by exploiting and abusing open-access information communications technology. Ostensibly, the adoption of content marketing techniques mirrors that seen in the commercial environment and is only as

sophisticated as terrorists are able to manipulate message delivery and amplification while circumventing content moderation countermeasures.

The extent of the online environment's ability to radicalise susceptible individuals is explored in this chapter, as it remains a contested topic within academia. That the Internet is used as a conduit of and acts as a cyber library for TVEC used in radicalisation is broadly accepted, but the degree of influence these content libraries hold outside of any peer-to-peer or interpersonal parallel influences (on or offline) remains debated. There is evidence that the more extreme the content, the harder it is to obtain, requiring some interpersonal or group relationship to facilitate access. This observation is supported via the research conducted as part of this thesis where the sharing or accessibility of extremely violent content, for example, was often held out as a reward to prospective violent Islamists by recruiters and in-groups. By retaining some control over their access to TVEC, recruiters can gauge reactions and frame violence as a legitimate means of political and religious resistance. This provision of context therefore enables the recruiter to direct the prospective violent Islamist further into radicalising activities and worldviews.

It is clear from the first-person accounts available that the consumption of TVEC also has the additional effects of both (a) energising and exciting violent Islamists before terrorist attacks and (b) demonstrating the levels of significance they could achieve should they successfully martyr themselves or conduct an attack of some magnitude. While these outcomes might appear incidental to the overall production and consumption of TVEC, they serve as a proof point of success for violent Islamists – one that will outlive them and leave a legacy for others to follow. This is an important distinction to make because it shapes the way violent Islamists seek significance through the emulation of prior TVEC and normalises terrorism in ways that overcome the natural physiological inhibitory mechanisms designed to preserve one's life.

Chapter 7 explores the case studies of Australian ISIS violent Islamists who were observed to have been strongly influenced by TVEC. From Melbourne's propagandist Neil PRAKASH; to 19-year-old Abdul Numan HAIDER, who was shot dead by Police after attacking them with a knife in Melbourne's Endeavour Hills; to Sydney's Alo-Brigit NAMOA and her husband Sameh BAYDA who plotted for BAYDA to commit a suicide mission on new year's eve, each of these violent Islamists – along with a range of personal histories – have well documented accounts of their consumption and/or production of TVEC.

By applying the six-tier framework of 'The Radicalisation Cascade' to each respective case study, shared radicalisation patterns and interactions with TVEC can be observed. While there is no single 'profile' of a violent Islamist, when case studies are viewed through the framework of an availability cascade, we can build a picture of a collective decision-making pathway towards terrorism. Further, it builds a picture of how recruiters systematically influence their prospective violent Islamists. Whether by physical receipt of the recruitment handbook published by al-Qaeda and then revised and adopted by ISIS, or by repeating the process that was exerted on them during their radicalisation; recruiters display a pattern of behaviour that is consistent in its coercion and nudging techniques. By viewing case studies through the lens of an availability cascade, multidisciplinary contributions also become clearer. By exploring case studies in this way, we can identify how recruiters prey on a prospect's heuristics to increase the likelihood of decision-making in their favour.

That online and social media feature so heavily within the radicalisation pathways of each case study, yet do not represent the totality of their radicalisation is an important observation to note. In each case peers, religiously extreme clerics, or other individuals with influence, contributed to their respective radicalisation.

Chapter 8 concludes this thesis by presenting the artefact – ‘The Radicalisation Cascade’ – discussing the results of the research and providing an analysis of the key contributions to knowledge the thesis makes. A brief section addressing how the ‘The Radicalisation Cascade’ can be applied to P/CVE challenges is also included in this chapter. The model also outlines at which tiers deterrence, disengagement, prevention and countering activities could be most effective. The chapter concludes with a section on suggested further research.

1.7 Summary of Main Contributions

This thesis has focused on delivering original knowledge that is relevant and presents value to those working in the professional practice areas of policing, law enforcement, intelligence, military operations and allied social services. Further, the contribution of a decision-making and coercive influence structural framework via the artefact ‘The Radicalisation Cascade’ acts as a decision-sense-making tool to enable non-academic stakeholders to operationalise the information they have in ways that are systematic and reproducible. While this is the primary contribution of this thesis, others must also be noted.

The secondary contribution this thesis offers is that it builds on the emergent work of other scholars in this area of multidisciplinary study and applies behavioural economics theory to national security challenges in a novel way. While the correlation between behavioural economics and terrorist decision-making has been well made, the application of these same theories to the radicalisation process has not. Beyond the benefits to professional practice, it is hoped that this work will contribute to furthering our understanding of these phenomena and generate further scholarship in the field.

The third contribution this thesis makes is the presentation of case studies that construct a picture of the systematic way in which Islamist terrorist organisations radicalise and recruit. This provides those in professional practice with the knowledge to build a picture of what decision and influence pathways make a terrorist.

The fourth and final contribution this thesis makes is that the application of behavioural economics frameworks provides a new way to understand the radicalisation process. This results in two outcomes: (a) the ability for professional practitioners to better understand those they are investigating, and (b) providing a strategic framework for decision-makers to prioritise potential terrorist suspects for investigation or intervention. By understanding the interplays occurring at a micro-level, professional practitioners can build a view of the overall process being exerted on multiple individuals (for example, from the same radically extreme cleric) which in turn results in more informed, evidence based, decision-making. Building a broader understanding of the types of influence being exerted on prospective violent Islamists as well as the coercive nudges employed enables behaviours and actions to be better understood and therefore risks to be better assessed. Together with other information held by law enforcement and intelligence agencies, this may lead to more accurate, timely and legislatively robust outcomes that disrupt plots and prevent terrorist attacks. The Radicalisatino Cascade model also enables the identification of key opportunities for meaningful intervention to walk back extremists from violent intent.

1.8 Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to demonstrate how nudges were being employed by violent Islamists in a recruitment and radicalisation environment. To do this a multidisciplinary mixed methods research approach was taken to capture both the qualitative nature of the evidence

available and derive quantitative statistics to detect psychographic patterns of behaviour. A range of behavioural economics theory approaches, together with terrorism studies, psychology and communications scholarship, were considered as part of a holistic view of the environment in which contemporary radicalisation takes place and prospers.

The ability for static grievances to be spun anew against a backdrop of technological and communications evolution demonstrates the capacity and ability terrorist organisations have to quickly adapt to exploit new ways of reaching and developing rapport with those formerly outside or on the periphery of their sphere of influence. That terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS have recognised the interplay between content marketing and influence – as well as their ability to navigate platform countermeasures to continue to disseminate their propaganda and tether held-out rewards to perceived social media status– is a significant advance in operational capability.

What is clear from this work-based research and resultant model is that the process of radicalisation can be understood through an availability cascade lens, which also provides a structural framework for which to organise information to better understand the decision-making, behaviours and coercive interplay occurring. As a study based in professional practice-led, real-world challenges, this thesis contributes a new perspective and way of thinking about the types of influence exerted in a radicalising environment.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the literature as it relates to the violent Islamist process of radicalisation. This includes contributions from terrorism studies, behavioural economics, psychology, religious studies, communications, social and online media. Radicalisation, like terrorism studies, is a highly studied topic as is the role of the influence of the Internet and social media. The definitions of radicalisation and terrorism are highly contested by academics, while national security practitioners and Governments also attempt to define the terms alongside legislation and social norms for more practical reasons.

What is missing from the contemporary scholarship is an in-depth analysis of how influence is exerted through choice architecture and 'nudges', particularly within TVEC, and what effect they have on susceptible individuals. This unique area of study is significant because it provides real-world insights that can inform policy-making, intervention actions, disengagement, and deradicalisation programs. By better understanding how terrorist organisations influence individuals into committing acts of extreme violence, we can develop broader strategies to prevent or counter those influences with a view to disengaging extremists long before they commit acts of violence. While this field of study is emergent, we can draw from a multidisciplinary body of work to understand how these elements of radicalisation work together to influence and propel susceptible individuals towards violent extremism.

2.1 Overview

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 2.2 explores some of the literature on radicalising towards violence and is followed by a look at other approaches to understanding and modelling radicalisation in Section 2.3. Section 2.4 looks at the role ideology plays in contemporary violent Islamist

radicalisation. Section 2.5 considers how advances in information communications technologies have contributed to contemporary violent extremism. Section 2.6 explores the role content marketing plays in online influence and TVEC. Section 2.7 considers how behavioural economics can help make sense of the way susceptible individuals can be radicalised by understanding purpose models of decision-making, expected value, expected utility theory, and prospect theory. Section 2.8 concludes this chapter.

2.2 Radicalisation to Violence

Katja Theodorakis aptly remarks in the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's 2022 Counterterrorism Yearbook "with two decades of the war on terror behind us, we're at an opportune time for some deeper thinking about where we're at in the counterterrorism journey" (Theodorakis, 2022). In Australia, that counterterrorism journey has included enacting some 82 anti-terror laws since 2001 (Mc Garrity & Blackburn, 2019) yet Australia's Director-General of ASIO noted in his 2022 annual threat assessment that the organisation continues to see "an increase in the radicalisation of young Australians" (particularly minors) drawn towards radicalising environments by recruiters deploying tactics that include channelled "attention, flattery, friendship, bullying and manipulation." Further, the Director-General reported recruiters - who are often minors themselves - "deliberately desensitise their targets, gradually exposing them to more extreme and more violent propaganda, until the most graphic material imaginable was normalised" (ASIO, 2022).

While we still don't fully understand why people take their beliefs to extremes and see violence as the only remedy to their grievances, scholars - from a variety of disciplines - are contributing to a growing body of knowledge around the process of radicalisation. Several models of note have been published, the four most commonly encountered within

professional practice – The Staircase to Terrorism; The Two Pyramids Model; The Three 3s of Radicalisation; and The 3N Theory of Radicalisation- will be briefly outlined in the following sub-sections.

2.2.1 The Staircase to Terrorism

Psychologist Fathali M. Moghaddam's 'Staircase to Terrorism' (2005) is arguably one of the most widely accepted models for understanding the process individuals undertake on their journey towards extreme violence. Moghaddam (2005), using the metaphor of climbing a staircase, explains that there are six levels available to individuals: (1) The Ground Floor, where they interpret their material conditions; (2) The First Floor, where they conceptualise perceived options to fight unfair treatment; (3) The Second Floor, where the displacement of aggression occurs; (4) The Third Floor, where moral engagement is conceived against the backdrop of some kind of struggle to remedy their grievances; (5) The Fourth Floor, where the individual solidifies their categorical thinking about the perceived legitimacy of their terrorist organisation; and (6) The Fifth Floor, where the individual sidesteps any inhibitory mechanisms to commit an act of terrorism (Moghaddam, 2005).

2.2.2 The Two Pyramid Model

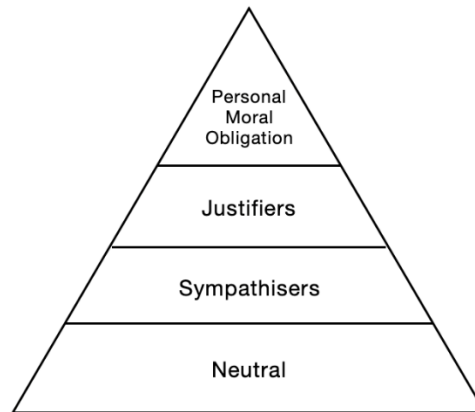
In response to concerns raised by scholars about the then current thinking on radicalisation, McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017) offered a Two-Pyramid model: the Opinion Pyramid and the Action Pyramid.

2.2.2.1 The Opinion Pyramid

McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017) describe the 'Opinion Pyramid' as having four sections: at the base of the pyramid are individuals who are neutral to a political cause; moving upward to the next section of the pyramid are "those who believe in the cause but who do not justify violence" which can

also be considered “sympathisers”; moving upward again, are those who “justify violence in defence of the cause” also considered “justifiers”; while at the top of the pyramid are those who “feel a personal moral obligation to take up violence in defence of the cause” (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017). A pictorial representation of the Opinion Pyramid is shown here:

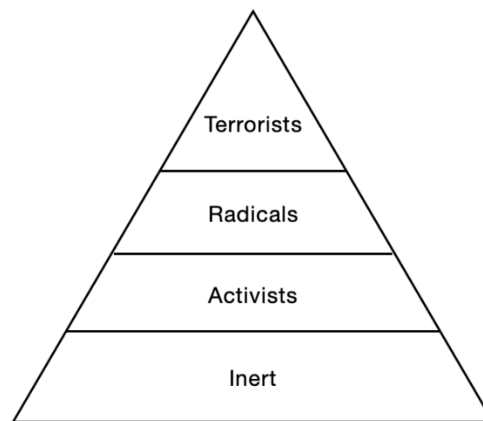
Figure 1: The Opinion Pyramid (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017).



2.2.2.2 The Action Pyramid

McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017) describe the ‘Action Pyramid’ as also having four sections: at the base of the pyramid are those who “are doing nothing for a political group or cause” and who can be considered “inert”; one section higher in the pyramid are those who are “engaged in legal political action” also considered “activists”; while one section higher again are those “engaged in illegal action for the cause” referred to as “radicals”; while at the top of the pyramid are those “engaged in illegal action that targets civilians” or “terrorists” (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017). A pictorial representation of the Action Pyramid is shown here:

Figure 2: The Action Pyramid (McCauley & Moskalkenko, 2017).



While McCauley and Moskalkenko (2017) acknowledge that the 2-Pyramid Model best describes individuals joining and within groups, they point out that the challenges the model poses to understanding the radicalisation of lone-wolf terrorists may be better understood by exploring their earlier work which offers a “disconnected-disordered and caring-compelled” view whereby the individual exhibits “five common characteristics: a grievance, a planful rather than impulsive attack, weak social ties, mental health problems, and experience with weapons outside the military.” McCauley and Moskalkenko (2017) conclude that the “disconnected-disordered” view of lone-wolf attackers is consistent with their 2-Pyramids Model because it includes elements such as (but not limited to) radical ideas and grievances being precursors to violence (McCauley & Moskalkenko, 2017).

2.2.1.1 The Three Pathways -3P – model of Violent Extremism

Khalil’s (2017) ‘The Three Pathways (3P) Model of Violent Extremism’ was developed as a framework for those working in the P/CVE environment due to what Kahlil (2017) contends is the oversimplification of thinking about radicalisation such as Moghaddam’s (2005) Staircase to Terrorism and McCauley and Moskalkenko’s (2017) pyramids. Khalil (2017) argues that these models do not adequately capture the journey diversity among

radicalising individuals. Khalil (2017) is also clear that the 3P model is intended to contribute to both scholarly knowledge and professional practice to “provide a lens through which policymakers can ask the right questions about their current and future preventative countermeasures” (Khalil, 2017).

Khalil’s (2017) 3P model considers the categories of actors (extremists, supporters of extremism and contributors to violence) in the context of three identified pathways:

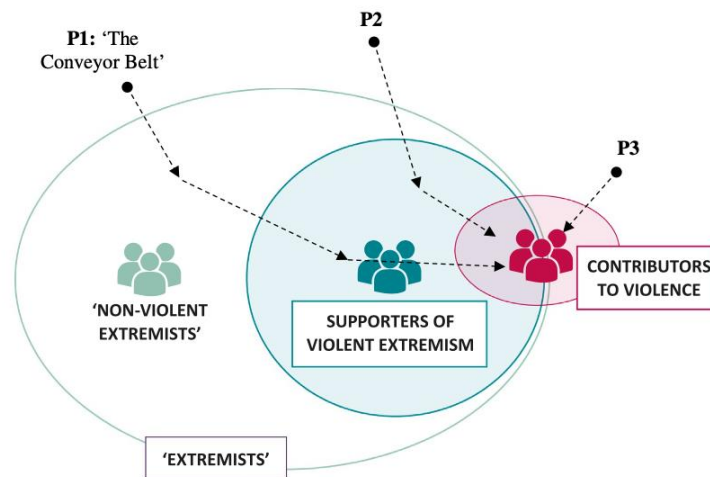
Pathway 1 (P1) - “the conveyor belt thesis” referring to a pathway of “(a) being non-extreme, to (b) non-violent extremism, to (c) supporter of violence, and finally (d) contributor to violence.”

Pathway 2 (P2) – caveats that “non-violent extremism does not provide a stepping stone” to violence. Khalil (2017) points out that this is an important distinction to make in comparison to P1, as the “adoption of extreme values and support for violence in pursuit of such ideals occurs simultaneously.” Khalil (2017) notes that this is not a coincidence, but rather the product of individuals “accepting doctrines that promote both.”

Pathway 3 (P3) – addresses individuals who “become involved in the creation of violence not because they support its ostensible objectives, but rather because they are coerced and are provided material incentives, seek adventure, belonging or status” (Khalil, 2017).

Khalil (2017) points out that each pathway is not equal in size or scope, as depicted by the following diagram:

Figure 3: The Three Pathways Model (graphic sourced from RUSI journal August/September 2017).



Khalil (2017) further clarifies that the model does not “offer evidence about the frequency of which these pathways are travelled,” makes “no assumptions regarding linearity,” or “about timelines” or the speed at which an individual may radicalise towards violence.

2.2.4 The 3N Theory of Radicalisation

Webber and Kruglanski (2017) in their Chapter ‘Psychological Factors in Radicalisation: A 3N Approach’ in The Handbook of the Criminology of Terrorism propose that the motivation behind what drives a “normal” person towards violent extremism can be understood via three N’s:

- (1) “the needs or motivation of the individual”
- (2) “the ideological narratives of the culture in which the individual is embedded;” and
- (3) “the dynamic interplay of group pressure and social influence that occurs within the individual’s social network.”

Within each N, several factors are identified.

- (1) Needs

While the “motivation to earn significance is not dominant at all times” Webber & Kruglanski (2017) note that the “triggering (of) the quest for significance forms part of the Needs portion

of their model. This is further broken down into conditions that can trigger this need by (a) the loss of significance; (b) the threat of loss of significance; and (c) significance gain.

Further components of the Needs component of Webber and Kruglanski's (2017) model include: "uncertainty and the need for cognitive closure;" an in-group orienting "collectivist shift" in an individual's sense of belonging; and the "sacred values" held by the individual and/or group (Webber and Kruglanski, 2017).

(2) Narratives

Ideology plays a significant role in the building and maintaining of narratives conducive to the radicalisation process. Webber and Kruglanski (2017) build on their 'Needs' component by explaining that culture and religion can trigger that initial need for significance. This is because, within cultures and religions, there are limited options for adherents to choose from to attain significance. For example, "one could follow the culturally prescribed pathways towards earning an education, landing a high-paying job, carving out their life with a significant other, becoming a famous musician, or earning notoriety as a serial killer or terrorist." The latter is particularly pertinent as Webber and Kruglanski (2017) observe that "terrorism-justifying ideology... remains a viable option for those highly committed few if it is presented as a legitimate and effective means for achieving significance" (Webber and Kruglanski, 2017).

(3) Networks (group dynamics)

"The final component of the N-trilogy" is the importance of networks (or group dynamics) in maintaining the radicalising individuals' forward motion. "Maintaining faith in these

ideologies, as with all belief systems, requires consensual validation" (Webber and Kruglanski, 2017).

Webber and Kruglanski (2017) acknowledge there is still much work to be done to fully understand the radicalisation process, noting that in a professional practice context "theoretical ideas" need to be fully explored before any process reversal (deradicalisation) can be realistically considered (Webber and Kruglanski, 2017).

2.3 Other approaches to understanding and modelling radicalisation

As a general observation of the four models most referenced in professional practice and explored in section 2.2.2, it is worth noting that three have been constructed in part or whole from those with expertise in psychology while the other, Khalil's 3P model, is derived from professional practice. While the exact reasons for this are unclear, psychological scholarship has an extensive history of engaging in the criminology and terrorism studies disciplines which makes considering radicalisation as a phenomenon a logical extension of their interest in behavioural modelling. From a professional practice standpoint, the ease with which these types of behavioural models can be understood may have also contributed to their popularity. This is by no means a criticism of any of these useful models, in fact, the use of analogies such as a staircase, 3 Ns, 3Ps and pyramids, for example, makes the communication of complex ideas simpler and easier to operationalise.

Behavioural economists and scientists have also contributed to knowledge in the field of radicalisation by way of looking at decision-making in a range of contexts. Gill et al (2018) argue that a recent shift in the literature toward understanding the rationality of tactical decision-making has occurred. Gill et al (2018) explore variances in the terrorist planning

process, the ways in which risk is gauged (subjectively and objectively) and what deterrence factors influence disengagement (Gill et al., 2018). Holbrook (2019) looks at the themes of extremist media and content consumed by those radicalising before committing attacks (Holbrook, 2019). Lindekilde et al (2019) build on existing scholarly work to conclude that while lone-actor terrorism is still a “relatively rare occurrence” despite a recent statistical increase, leakage in the individual’s radicalising behaviours and attack preparation phases, such as lone-actors being “highly likely to tell others of their convictions and intentions”¹ could prove useful to law enforcement and intelligence agencies (Lindekilde et al., 2019).

Social scientist Daniel Karell and PhD student Michael Freedman in their paper “Rhetoric’s of Radicalism” conclude that their study highlights an overlooked aspect of radicalisation- that it is “often conceived as an outward facing attack” when everyday radicalisation is “ahistorical, personal and local”(Karell & Freedman, 2019). Sociologist Staller (2019) argues that the best source of information on radicalisation comes from terrorists themselves, and therefore qualitative research will prove invaluable in this field of study. Staller (2019) further argues that social workers are perhaps “better equipped to disarm radicals than any other profession” because they have a much deeper knowledge of the “systems that fail youth” (root causes of radicalisation and terrorism) leaving them susceptible to the radical recruiter in the first place (Staller, 2019).

Gøtzsche-Astrup and Lindekilde (2019) explore historic and new findings in relation to the mental health of extremists, arguing that there is a significant advantage to taking a “dimensional perspective of mental illness to the study of terrorism and radicalisation” as it avoids “exceptionalising

¹ Such as 2018 Christchurch Mosque Terrorist Brendan Tarrant; 2018 Pittsburgh Synagogue Terrorist Robert Gregory Bowers; 2019 El Paso Walmart Terrorist Patrick Wood Crusius; and 2019 Poway Synagogue Terrorist John Timothy Earnest.

mental illness as a factor in violent radicalisation.” Their paper forms a critical review of psychiatry and behavioural science and the many different protocols used by medical and mental health professionals to categorise radical individuals. Gøtzsche-Astrup and Lindekilde (2019) conclude that “we must avoid a situation where individuals with normal functioning and deviant behaviour (i.e., the criminal) are only treated as matters for the police, individuals with abnormal functioning only receive attention from the mental health care system, and cases of non-clinical but maladaptive functioning remain within the domain of the social services” (Gøtzsche-Astrup & Lindekilde, 2019). Trip et al (2019) agree, stating that the results of their study into ‘Irrational beliefs and personality traits as psychological mechanisms underlying the adolescent’s extremist mind-set’ “do not support the hypothesis that irrational beliefs are psychological mechanisms that make people vulnerable to extremism.” Further, Trip et al (2019) conclude that radical belief cannot be predicted nor is there a single global profile that fits such behaviour (Trip, Marian, et al., 2019). Rahman (2018) agrees, stating that from a psychiatric point of view “extreme overvalued beliefs” form a core part of the radicalising environment which is distinct from “delusions and obsessions” and other forms of psychosis. Rahman (2018), acknowledging that the term was first defined by Carl Wernicke, states an extremely overvalued belief be “one that is shared by others in a person’s cultural, religious, or subcultural group. The belief is often relished, amplified, and defended by the possessor of the belief.” Rahman (2018) notes that “the belief grows more dominant over time, more refined and more resistant to challenge. The individual has an intense emotional commitment to the belief and may carry out violent behaviour in its service.” Rahman (2018) observes that this type of overvalued extreme belief can be observed in behaviours such as “mass suicides, cults, terrorism and online radicalisation” (Rahman, 2018).

2.4 The role of Ideology in Contemporary Extreme Islamist Radicalisation

At the core of Islamist extremism is violent jihad which has experienced a contemporary renaissance. As a concept central to the worldviews of both al-Qaeda and ISIS, Creswell and Haykel (2017) explain that while the idea of armed struggle in the name of Islam is not new, what has changed in this violent jihad-renaissance is the level of extreme violence espoused. According to Creswell and Haykel (2017) Islamic theologians paid violent jihad little attention up until the twentieth century, as most considered the militant obligations of traditional 'jihad' a scriptural relic – however it is now being used by violent Islamist groups to tether the concept of Muslim identity with FMVE and PMVE. Subsequently, contemporary extremist discourse focuses on violent jihad as a compulsory spiritual and political obligation for Muslims. The extremists' view of jihad in this manner provides followers with a justification for extreme violence by legitimising grievances against particular out-groups (Creswell & Haykel, 2017).

Hofmann and Dawson (2014) also note how this renaissance has changed the way violent Islamists interpret scripture identifying the role of "central theological authority" in how the reinterpretation of jihad has manifested among violent Islamists. While observing "charismatic authority" as a key quality for radical clerics to influence their followers to commit acts of extreme violence, Hofmann and Dawson (2014) also note the role the Sunni tradition has in enabling such a permissive theological environment to exist. Clerical authority in the Sunni tradition divests religious authority to "Imams, Muftis and other religious scholars who act as interpreters of Qur'anic divine law." This enables those with more extreme views an unchallenged space in which to share their views with others because a Sunni leader's influence is based on "the leader's scholarly reputation and character." As Hofmann and Dawson (2014) conclude, this leads to situations where "charisma" acts as an influence multiplier simply because

they are effective communicators and can draw a group of people together in ways that boost their social value (Hofmann & Dawson, 2014).

As already discussed, Kruglanski et al's (2014) work on significance quest theory, how individuals – and the groups that influence them – seek to attain or regain significance can be tied to their cultural and ideological beliefs. The interplay between significance quest theory and sacred values is therefore ideologically relevant. Sacred values, as defined by Sheikh et al (2012) are a person's unshakable way of thinking about a thing or collection of things; that specifically values a particular preference in decision-making about that thing, and so it follows that sacred values are linked to individual or group feelings of significance (Jasko et al., 2017; Sheikh et al., 2012). Sheikh et al (2012) also recognise that religiosity and sacredness are not synonymous, although they are often presumed to be, and in fact, it is the influence on decision-making that the sacred value has (once value has been applied) that defines the phenomena (Sheikh et al., 2012). For example in a violent Islamist context, sacredness is exclusively defined as religious, with martyrdom expressly forbidden in the Qur'an and yet actively promoted in extreme in-groups as a sacred value justified in response to perceived threats against Islam (Alderdice, 2009).²

ISIS, through their Dabiq magazine series, repeatedly placed heavy emphasis on a return to the sacred past by referring to Islamic scholars of ancient times along with quotes from the Qur'an and Hadith (Arabic: the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). The interpretations of these cited inclusions within the magazines are used to justify everything from domestic slavery, sexual slavery (ISIS, 2015e) (ISIS, 2016a), leadership (ISIS, 2014f) and the religious duty of emigration (ISIS, 2015c)" (Duderija, 2018).

² Refer also Sheikh et al (2012) who explain that in a religious context, sacred values are seen as accumulated in-group beliefs that are endorsed via religious ritual, used as a primer for religious indoctrination and consequently frame threats to the in-group (perceived or real) as threats to personal and group significance (Sheikh et al., 2012).

From a violent Islamist perspective, the overvaluation of an extreme ideological idea can be observed through the example of master narratives. The power of historical master narratives born anew is an influential resource for defining contemporary violent Islamist ideology according to Halverson et al (2011) in their book 'Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism.' Halverson et al (2011) state that master "narratives are essential to understanding Islamist extremism in the war of ideas" and the book's authors outline 12 specific master narratives Islamic extremists use to radicalise, recruit, and motivate. While many of these 12 master narratives will be unfamiliar to those not culturally or academically conversant with Islamic historical and religious literature, others such as "The Infidel Invaders", "Crusaders"³ and the "Seventy-Two Virgins" will be (Halverson et al., 2011).⁴ Boutz et al (2018) further demonstrate the use of master narratives by ISIS via the use of Hadith (Arabic: words or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) that "focus solely on hadith-related violence." In doing so ISIS leverage "tradition and innovation" to "reframe historical events in a specific, contemporary context"(Boutz et al., 2018).

Master narratives are not, however, unique to Islam. All master narratives have the same utility and are repeated within the context of their ideology.⁵ For example, the Third Reich employed a series of antisemitic master narratives in its attempt to justify the extermination of Jewish people. Key conspiracy theories were manufactured on historical stories such as the Jews being responsible for the death of Jesus, Jews practising blood libel, ritual murder and cannibalism; Jews poisoning wells during the Middle Ages, and general depictions of Jews as greedy and obsessed with money

³ See also Furlow & Goddall (2011) who explain that the Crusades, for example, have one narrative to a Western Audience while having a polar opposite narrative to a Muslim Arab audience, the latter viewed as a symbol of "Western aggression and hatred of Islam" (Furlow & Goddall Jr, 2011).

⁴ Refer also Melki and Jabado (2016) who identify that ISIS frequently use master "colonial" narratives to "manipulate grievances and sensationalize symbolic victories" (Melki & Jabado, 2016).

⁵ Refer also Jananashvili et al (2018) who note that "Master narrative(s), unlike a personal life story, doesn't belong to any person and represents a culturally shaped generalised story" that reflects the ideology of the organisation to which it belongs, allowing followers to use the themes, content and ideas of the culture to construct their own identity and life stories within (Jananashvili et al., 2018).

(Ranta, 2017). Far Right movements also share common master narratives around Odinism, Nazism, white supremacy, race wars, accelerationism,⁶ and Jewish conspiracy (Durham, 2003).⁷ Antisemitic narratives such as holocaust denial, and Zionistic influence over the world's Governments and Banks; are well-known and commonplace amongst contemporary right-wing groups (Nathan, 2017).⁸

Although written in 2006 long before the advent of ISIS, Hegghammer (2006) proposed that the invasion and occupation of Iraq influenced the ideological development of the global violent Islamist movement. Proposing a five-point view of contemporary violent Islamist ideology, Hegghammer (2006) identifies these as:

1. The leadership, who often held mythical status amongst followers.
2. The religious scholars also referred to as the 'jihad shykhs'.
3. The strategic thinkers.
4. The active militant organisations; and
5. The grassroots radicals.

The timing of the paper aside, Hegghammer's (2006) five-point view of contemporary violent Islamist ideology is just as applicable to ISIS today as the groups that existed when it was published because contemporary extremist groups continue to aim to unite 'true believers' against, for example, the 'Jewish-Crusader alliance.' This single-enemy point of view serves to unite otherwise geographically disparate followers (and in some cases non-Muslims or new Muslims) as well as the diaspora. Further, successive wars and occupations in the Middle East created "new and powerful symbols of Muslim suffering" and fueled the "jihad strategic crossroads in the overall struggle between Muslims and the Crusaders"

⁶ Refer Matejic (2019) *Apocalypse Near? A brief primer on Accelerationism* (Matejic, 2019).

⁷ Refer also Tetrault (2019) who notes the addition of gender in core right-wing belief, particularly the dominance of masculinity. Additionally, Tetrault (2019) lists immigration, protection of the Western and White way of life and subculture violence as common themes among right-wing groups (Tetrault, 2019).

⁸ Refer also Moghaddam (2018) that reviews the effects of Nazism/Fascism in both its original Germanic form and contemporary interpretations (Moghaddam, 2018, Chapter 2).

narrative (Hegghammer, 2006). The later narrative is significant as it forms the basis of much of ISIS's theologically based strategic content marketing as will be explored in future chapters. It is worthy of note that this same narrative underpins the contemporary ideological battle between Muslim denominations, making the modern terrorists' battlefield one of Muslim against infidel (non-believers) as well as Muslim against Muslim (wrong-believers). This is a point that ISIS goes to great lengths to make in an eight-page monologue at the outset of their first magazine issue of Rumiyaah (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2016a) and in other editions, including: "O Ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (Arabic: disbelief) and hypocrisy – the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin (Arabic) everywhere, and the camp of the Jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews" Amirul-Mu' minin (ISIS, 2014f).

2.5 How Information Communications Technologies have facilitated and contributed to Contemporary Violent Islamist Extremism

Since the September 11 attacks in 2001, the radicalisation and recruitment of violently extreme Islamists have progressively shifted from predominantly offline, peer-to-peer based activities to a hybrid online/offline model (Valentini et al., 2020). This shift towards using technology to assist in the radicalisation process, as well as to plan and commit terrorist attacks, was observed early in the century. O'Rourke noted in his 2006 research that violent Islamist extremism benefited significantly from "advances in communications technology." The result was infrastructure that supported the "dispersed nature of recruiting and communication" while concurrently providing a platform for terrorist groups to "promote their ideologies and activities on a world stage... with minimal

cost" (O'Rourke, 2006). While O'Rourke's (2006) observations were made some 6 years before social media was first adopted by Islamic extremists⁹ as a conduit in their technological arsenal, Nissen's (2015) more recent work shares similar historical sentiments. Extending a view of "pervasive media technology and the democratisation of this technology" Nissen (2015) also adds the benefits experienced by groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS include: "digital mass participation", the "mobilisation of multiple audiences globally", and the information coverage of both the physical and online environments. Nissen (2015) also observed that broadly, the characteristics of social media that are so attractive to extremist groups are also what makes online social networks popular in mainstream society: they are pervasive, ubiquitous, instantaneous, interactive, socially specific and sticky (socially signaling the value of information via peers, rather than elites) (Nissen, 2015, p.32-33 and 37-38). Wright et al (2016) also identify technology as "an enabling condition of jihadism." Where terrorist organisations prior to 1970 experienced "advances in transportation and communication" the twenty-first century brought with it a "huge leap through social media" that has acted as a force multiplier in generating momentum, projecting capability and legitimacy (Wright et al., 2016).

Advances in technology along with its increasing affordability and accessibility have also democratised a traditionally earned media¹⁰ environment. The Internet and social media have provided a range of spaces for individuals to congregate in shared interest echo chambers openly or in virtual anonymity (Rudner, 2017). This has enabled terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, to expand into the open information domain, operating in decentralised, fluid, and highly dynamic networks that have resulted in their dominance (for a time) within information silos, such

⁹ Al Shabaab were the first Islamic extremist group to adopt social media in a strategic way in 2012 (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2012).

¹⁰ "Earned Media" refers to the published coverage of an enterprise, cause or person's message by a credible third party, such as a journalist, blogger, trade analyst or industry influencer (as defined by PRA Public Relations definition, 2018).

as social media platforms like Twitter and Telegram. This has resulted in an operationally significant advantage—at the recruitment, radicalisation and tactical levels—that exploits the rigid legislative and technological weaknesses, state-structured law enforcement and military forces operate within (Cahyani et al., 2018; Rudner, 2017).

A contested area of scholarship has been whether technology and social media together represent a radicalising environment in and of itself. Wanless and Berk (2017) note in their research on the participatory nature of the online environment, that “digital technologies enable the quick creation of echo chambers or filter bubbles, in part through algorithms that sort information.” With social media companies biased towards monetising popular content, at least initially, over user safety, algorithms were designed to “provide users with content” recommendations the platform thinks is wanted.” However, as Wanless and Berk (2017) point out, algorithms can be gamed in at least two ways: (1) by “hyperlinking and seeding content” and (2) by creating “botnets and automated posting” schedules (Wanless & Berk, 2017). In a study of YouTube’s recommender algorithm “directing users to ISIS related content” Murthy (2021) found that the platform had been “instrumental” to the group’s ability to disseminate not only “recruitment videos” but also content that fed the international media’s appetite for TVEC. Producing videos that “blend the cause of an Islamic caliphate with humanised depictions of their fighters” and “short bite-sized videos of content featuring fighters feeding their cats, ISIS tailor-made content they believed would do well on YouTube.” Murthy’s (2021) findings indicated that ISIS’s “radical videos” were “incorporated into the platforms recommender algorithm.” Noting from a qualitative perspective that ISIS did not have a large volume of videos on YouTube, Murthy (2021) observed that the content ISIS posted on the platform was particularly violent and extreme in nature (Murthy, 2021). At a tactical level, Winter’s (2017) research into the strategy behind ISIS’s media offensive pre-empts the findings of both Murthy (2021) and Wanless

and Berk (2017). Winter (2017) describes a “coherent narrative that is at once positive and alternative; comprehensive, rejection-based counter speech operations; and the occasional launching of carefully calibrated media ‘projectiles.’ Propaganda production and dissemination is at times considered to be even more important than military jihad” (Winter, 2017).

Other scholars disagree. Valentini et al (2020) argue that radicalisation is better described as taking place in “onlife: hybrid environments” because “information communication technologies do not restrict radicalisation patterns.” Defining ‘onlife’ as “a process that unfolds online, and offline, simultaneously” the authors argue that singling out the contextual conduits of where radicalisation takes place tends to negate the interplay that occurs between the on and offline spaces in the majority of radicalisation case studies (Valentini et al., 2020). Mills et al (2019) also recognise the enabling environment online and social media provides in support of radicalisation. Noting that the online environment “fosters connections” and supports a range of organisational functions, Mills et al (2019) refer to social learning as a prominent feature of the radicalisation process regardless of whether it is on or offline (Mills et al., 2019). Torres-Soriano (2021) observed that there are “barriers to entry” for those seeking to engage with terrorist organisations online, and this has resulted in “different levels of mobilisation in cyberspace.” From technological proficiency (or lack thereof) to entry to “exclusive virtual communities” Torres-Soriano (2019) concludes that access to the online terrorist environment “is distributed unevenly” and that online activism for a terrorist group does not always translate to online or offline action. Further, Torres-Soriano (2019) notes that the ‘ISIS-effect’ – whereby periods of high-tempo propaganda dissemination occurred at the height of the conflict has since diminished significantly– has also led to a decline in “mobilisation” as the group fractured and was defeated in the physical theatre of war. While this decline can also be attributed to growing deployment of TVEC countermeasures by social media companies, causing terrorist groups to

migrate to other online spaces, the relative inaccessibility of those new spaces has also made engagement and influence more difficult (Torres-Soriano, 2021).

A less explored aspect of technology and its online influence has been the way it intersects with violent Islamist communities' interpretation of it within extreme religious conservatism. While adopting technology has been a visible and effective way to engage the global violent Islamist community, terrorist organisations appear sensitive to the way it may influence their fighters' perception of the realities of conflict. For example, in the first issue of Inspire (2010), al-Qaeda spreads disinformation regarding the role technology played in a failed attack. Praising 'Underwear Bomber' Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab– who planned to blow up an aircraft in the United States of America– the Inspire article states that “he managed to penetrate all devices, modern advanced technology and security” to board the plane and commit his–attack (AQAP, 2010). However, law enforcement public statements reveal that Abdulmutallab's attack failed when the bomb he had assembled inside his underpants only caught fire instead of exploding. Passengers and crew aboard the aircraft quickly subdued him, put the fire out, and he immediately confessed he had a bomb in his pants (Enforcement, 2012). While it can be argued that his ability to bypass all security measures to board the plane was a success, the way al-Qaeda framed their article suggested that even technology cannot stop their violent Islamists. By 2011 however, al-Qaeda was dealing with issues around the use of technology and Sharia Law. In the fifth edition of Inspire (2011) Shaykh Anwar al-Awlaki was hosting video question and answer sessions as well as writing for Inspire magazine. Navigating the permitted uses of technology, al-Awlaki (2011) wrote in Inspire “in al-Qaeda we do not hate the West for their technology inventions and such. We only hate the West for their foreign policies upon the Islamic world.” He then goes on to outline a range of political grievances before concluding that one of the reasons al-Qaeda hate the West is because their media “subjugates”

Muslims (AQAP, 2011). By 2013, al-Qaeda's advice had shifted towards building resilience against a range of technologies, such as military hardware. In al-Qaeda's (2013) 'Lone Mujahid Pocketbook' they advise followers not to be fooled by the West's superior technology, as "simple weapons are just as terrorizing and destructive" (AQAP, 2013). This approach to technology underestimated its value in non-military contexts.

In contrast, ISIS's approach to technology was to denigrate the West's reliance on it and reiterate religious superiority. An early edition of Dabiq states that the West's "underestimation of ISIS is due to a materialist analysis believing that power is in weaponry and technology, forgetting that true power relies on the creed of the tawhid (Arabic: the oneness of God)." Elsewhere in the same edition of Dabiq, ISIS promote its technological prowess as "having been very adept at deploying technology and social media to increase its global profile and attract tens of thousands of fighters" (ISIS, 2014d). Less than a year later, ISIS appear to be concerned about counternarratives as they conflate the technology of the West with conspiracy theories that have "become an excuse to abandon jihad." The Dabiq article then goes on to suggest that Allah is behind all the conspiracy theories – such as the September 11 attack being carried out by Americans themselves – and that devout fighters will find that Allah exposes the real conspiracy theories while removing doubt from the hearts of violent Islamists (ISIS, 2015e). This tight agenda-setting and framing of the information followers consume – or are incidentally exposed to outside of the controlled information environment of radicalisation - is consistent with the way both al-Qaeda and ISIS radicalise and recruit followers. In al-Qaeda's 'A Course in the Art of Recruiting' (2010) which was later adopted by ISIS, the flow of information from recruiter to prospective violent Islamists was tightly controlled (Al Qa'idy, 2010; Fishman & Warius, 2009). This will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

2.6 The role Content Marketing plays in Online Influence: Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content (TVEC)

A common misconception surrounding terrorism and radicalisation is that 'social media' or the 'internet' is the thing doing the radicalising to the individual. Academic evidence countering this notion¹¹ continually demonstrates that this assumption is incorrect, and yet the narrative prevails, particularly in mainstream media reporting where platform influence is mistaken for content influence. To fully understand how social media has evolved to be such a powerful facilitative tool, we must first understand both the origins of content marketing and the technological aspects of social media. While Chapter 6 will explore TVEC with greater nuance, it is important to set out the origins of content marketing as a practice to fully understand how it can be used to influence prospectively violent Islamists.

Content marketing is not a new phenomenon. From John Deere's magazine 'The Furrow' which aimed to educate farmers on new technologies and how they could become more successful business owners (while selling John Deere tractors and equipment); to Jell-o who published a helpful recipe book (espousing the many uses of gelatine and Jell-o products) to the radio soap opera phenomena attributed to Sears 'World's Largest Store' -the corporate storytelling strategy that places the brand at the apex of the information expert pyramid has been around since the early 1900s (Pulizzi, 2012). El-Ansary et al (2017) explain that early scholarly work in the period from the 1910s through to 1950s aimed to define the foundations for marketing as a discipline that "provided more benefit than it cost." Key to this early success was the demonstration that "marketing was productive because it added economic value by creating utilities." The development of

¹¹ Refer Matejic (2016) – Only 2% of Australians could be attributed to being solely and only radicalised alone via social media or the internet (Matejic, 2016a); Gendron (2017) that found while a "charismatic bond" exists between online radical preachers and their audiences, and that the internet strengthens that bond – the message and the messenger are two separate elements (Gendron, 2017); and Hecker (2018) who found "the internet alone tends to be insufficient for radicalisation" (Hecker, 2018).

early academic marketing paradigms resulted in three interrelated perspectives that formalised how marketing “created utilities and added value: (1) Functions; (2) Institutions; and (3) Commodities.” El-Ansary et al (2017) explain that while ‘Functions’ focused on “buying, selling, transporting, storing, researching, and promoting”; ‘Institutions’ focused on “channels of distribution” – while ‘Commodities’ recognised the differing marketing methods required for different products and services, to capture audience segments. El-Ansary et al (2017) assert that this early marketing paradigm didn’t change until the late 1950s to late 1960s in what is often referred to as the ‘Mad Men’ era that changed advertising – and as a result, the marketing fraternity. The ‘Mad Men’ era shifted focus from the macro to micro level at all touchpoints of the sales funnel which includes: the buyer, seller, audience, middleman, industry, and the inherent interactions between them all. By the late 1960s a systems approach to thinking about marketing had developed and techniques had been refined. From then to the present day, “social marketing” as a concept of encompassing “individuals involved in virtually any type of social exchange or human activity” broadened the discipline further. El-Ansary et al (2017) note that while criticisms of profiteering were a cause of concern at the time, studies around social psychology continued to refine marketing as a discipline interwoven with the transactional exchanges that mirrored those that occurred in real life. Further, El-Ansary et al (2017) identified marketing management as a distinct school of thought resulting from this changing paradigm (El-Ansary et al., 2017).

During the development of marketing as a discipline of its own, barriers to entry existed for those wanting to leverage its ability to create utilities and increase profits. Access to publications was limited to those who had the budget or who could interest a journalist in the product or service with a unique story angle. Since the widespread adoption of social media, these barriers to entry have all but gone. While traditional publications (even online) still provide a great deal of legitimacy for many products and

services, marketers no longer need to vie for the attention of trade journalists to spruik a product or service. The ability to self-publish and amplify stories as content is easy and relatively cost-effective (Pulizzi, 2012).

When considering how we got from John Deere tractors to Jell-O recipes to marketing terrorist ideology, an understanding of concurrent history is relevant. Zeitzoff (2017) states that “communication technology advances do not happen in a vacuum. Rather they are correlated with advances in military technology and changes in the economy more generally.” For example, Zeitzoff (2017) observes that the interwar period following World War I (1918 to 1939) saw an increased air power mobility, including the development of radar systems and radio, which went on to become a tool for mass communication. In the aftermath of World War II (in the lead-up to the Mad Men era) advances in communications technology increased resulting in advances in computing power and eventually, decades later in 1973, the development of the Internet in its most basic form (Zeitzoff, 2017).

It should be noted that nation-state-backed propaganda was undergoing an evolution of its own at the same time, also arising from within the military. Ingram (2016) in his ‘A Brief History of Propaganda During Conflict’ traces early propaganda back to the Ancient Mesopotamian Empire where oration played a large role in “glorifying the gods and revelling in military victories” to a largely illiterate society. If we fast forward through time note that in Ancient Greece the works of Plato and Aristotle both grapple with the concepts of censorship and persuasion; Alexander the Great’s propaganda strategy that had his enemies believing he was at one with the Gods; to the early Christians whose proselytising resulted in the creation of martyrs; to the Crusades; to “Gutenberg’s printing press in the mid-1400s” – we can observe one evolution after another as communication technologies evolve and with it, the human desire to

influence others for strategic effect. In the 1900s alone, World War I gave propagandists an opportunity to leverage communication methods not previously used before (but mirroring civil society) such as the widespread use of pamphlets and posters – including via air-drop. Also, the swift cutting of the underwater telegraph cable left Germany isolated and reliant on their allies for information support while the British launched 'The War Pictorial' which was published in ten languages, featuring stories and imagery "intended to polarise international opinion in favour of the British." World War II again upped the propaganda stakes with Hitler -solidifying his admiration of the British's propaganda efforts in Mein Kampf, using it to benefit both the rise of his political party and the permeation of propaganda in "every aspect of German life using all available means of communication" thereafter. Understanding that propaganda went beyond words, Hitler used symbolism and iconography to potent effect. Ingram (2016) chronicles the Nazis' use of films to ensure the German people rallied around their government. Ultimately Ingram (2016) notes, propaganda was a key contributing factor in Germany's defeat – the British and Americans had played a "multi-theatre" information war over the long-term executing sophisticated, "multi-dimensional" deception operations that created direct effects on Nazi decision-making and therefore military outcomes. Ingram (2016) noted that "atrocities propaganda was also a key feature in both Allied and Axis efforts." Ingram (2016) goes on to case study propaganda during the Cold War between Russia and the United States against a backdrop of the first home computers, video recorders and mainstream television news. By the time of 9/11, the battle for hearts and minds was being fought via cable news television – a tactic redeployed after successive Gulf Wars, a developing world wide web and a slogan that remains actively repeated today– 'The War on Terror' (Ingram, 2016).

The influence that the Internet and social media enables terrorist organisations to exert is a growing area of scholarship. Distinct from the online environment existing to support radicalising activities, the 'how' of

why online influence is so pervasive is a newer area of focus which has centered on the extremely violent content produced by terrorist organisations, and the effect that content has had on the radicalisation process. Noting the “scarcity of empirical research” Hassan et al (2018) found by investigating links between online violent extremism and offline terrorism that “tentative evidence” supported the theory that the consumption of TVEC places individuals at higher risk of “committing violent political acts” (Hassan et al., 2018). Conway (2017) argues however that historically, advances in communications technology have proven very influential in “transforming terrorism” and that the Internet is unlikely to be any different. Conway (2017) also provides anecdotal evidence from observations of ISIS’s online activity, particularly where it was focused towards women, arguing that online ecosystems assisted “families to migrate to the caliphate” and supported the “influx of jihadi brides.” Conway (2017) argues that this type of online call-to-action works in the same way as calls directed towards men to commit terrorist attacks via content shared and amplified online (Conway, 2017). In a more recent study, Shortland et al (2022) argue that “anecdotal evidence supports that engaging with violent extremist content online facilitates the radicalisation process.” Caveating their findings by acknowledging there is “a consistent lack of empirically grounded research to prove this insight” their paper makes clear that while the majority of people exposed to TVEC do not go on to become radicalised or commit terrorist acts, TVEC’s effects on a smaller minority should not be ignored. Shortland et al (2022) conclude that among the audience for TVEC there are those who gain “pleasure from simply viewing and engaging” with it and, separately, there are those whose “engagement (with TVEC) drives a long-term motivational goal” and that judgments of risk based on an individual’s history of a consuming TVEC are incomplete without understanding their underlying motivations (Shortland et al., 2022).

Other scholars have drawn different conclusions. Frissen et al (2018) note that the Internet has been used extensively by ISIS to build “radical virtual communities intent on spreading a modified and truncated version of the Qur’an” and that this has resulted in an “unprecedented number of active supporters” for the terrorist organisation (Frissen et al., 2018). Kruglova (2020) observes that ISIS’s propaganda is infused with emotional cues to appeal to a broad range of people and that their “use of marketing techniques may allow it to present itself as an elite club, which is only open to exclusive members and thus attracts recruits who may not have had an initial inclination to extremism” (Kruglova, 2020). Khalil (2021) in a report for the Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET) surveying researchers of terrorism, political violence and radicalisation states that online and social media ecosystems “support, encourage or mobilise real-world harm” while acknowledging that “the role of technology on violent extremism is incredibly complex, multifaceted and contested” (Khalil, 2021).

Kwon et al (2017) explain that the public’s “sense-making” of terrorism in the age of digital and social media relies on two information-framing constructs. The first is “proximity” in both geographical distance and culturally alike countries. The second, “networked framing” addresses the interplay between both content creator and media organisation – both social media actors in their own right – but with narratives that shape stories in “networked environments.” Kwon et al (2017) conclude that “temporal, social and physical proximities influence audience and media institutional framing of terrorism” (Kwon et al., 2017). The identification of these two influences as, at times, correlating networks is important because it can be used to understand both the mechanics of the propaganda value of terrorism (Awan, 2017a) and the psychopathology of radicalisation (Rahman, 2018).

But not all propaganda is created equal. In fact, different types of information in the modern, digital world necessitate a deeper understanding of strategy, technology, manipulation and influence; and while there is crossover into civil society, the military is once again defining the information terrain – only this time, retrospectively.¹² The United States defines Information Operations in their 2018 primer as “a strategy for the use and management of information to pursue a competitive advantage, including both offensive and defensive operations” with the Secretary of Defence expanding on that definition to characterise it as “the integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries, while protecting our own.” Important components of Information Operations include computer networks, psychological operators, electronic warfare capability, operational security, and military deception. The distinction of the capability as the sum of its parts is important because the information in military terms is the sum of its own aggregate -individuals, organisations and systems-based typologies (Theohary, 2018). As reported by Theohary (2018) information can comprise of propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation. Further, with all these activities often taking place simultaneously, three layers of operations are employed: “(1) The physical layer, relating to command and controls systems and infrastructure; (2) The informational layer, relating to networks and systems where information is stored; and (3) the cognitive layer, relating to the minds of people who transmit and respond to information” (Theohary, 2018). In modern conflicts, all these elements form the basis of national power projection in a paradigm known in the military as DIME or Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic power projection (Theohary, 2018).

¹² While information has long been used as a weapon during conflicts, the “meteoric” rise of the ISIS’s (H. J. Ingram, 2015) cyber and informational influence capabilities caught the rest of the world off guard – from the “the United State’s Government’s sluggishness – or outright ineptitude- in fighting back on the internet” (Melki & Jabado, 2016) to “the handful of nations such as Canada and Germany who grasp the totality of the contemporary information environment”(Matejic, 2016b); ISIS heralded a new era where contemporary conflict no longer pitted nation states against each other, but “often involved transnational non-state actors waging asymmetrical warfare against states and/or against each other”(Kraidy, 2017).

As Rogers et al (2019) aptly point out, “Influence operations in the digital age are not merely propaganda with new tools” and that the art of manipulation has evolved with the “fundamental distinction between the old and the new ... (being) the difference between participatory and passive forms of information consumption”(Rogers et al., 2019). The Participatory Propaganda Model – coined by scholars Alicia Wanless and Michael Berk in 2017 “is the deliberate, and systemic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behaviour of a target audience while seeking to co-opt its members to actively engage in the spread of persuasive communications, to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist”. Wanless and Berk (2017) go on to explain the six fundamental stages of persuasive messaging: (1) a precursive hyper-targeted audience analysis; (2) the development of provocative content such as fake news, information leaks and memes; (3) the creation of online echo chambers, with specific audience targets; (4) the manipulation of search and news feeds by exploiting automated algorithms through the “hyperlinking and seeding of content” use of bots and automated posting software; (5) encouraging, or inciting, followers to action – both on and offline such to troll, dox and amplify campaigns; and (6) using traditional media to further their agenda by maximising their ability to trend – the media often pick up trending stories for no other reason than volume, manufacturing scandals and then “communing with the news” to spread a “hyper-partisan perspective” (Wanless & Berk, 2017).

Rogers et al (2019) in applying Wanless and Berk’s Participatory Propaganda model to current civil society norms note that influence isn’t about changing people’s beliefs but rather “confirming what people already believe.” Rogers et al (2019) notes further that the deviance from traditional military information operations in this respect, particularly in the psychological domain which “involves flooding people with confirmation bias for a given belief – and starving them of opportunities to question and doubt other beliefs” lead to “toxic binaries forming in organic communities

that can then be exploited by network routine” (Rogers et al., 2019). Gioe et al (2019) agree, explaining that countering digital persuasion campaigns in the social media domain “are difficult challenges whose solutions bring together interdisciplinary concepts and specialisms of network engineering, psychological operations, and information warfare. Yet even this approach is insufficient for the task” (Gioe et al., 2019).

Meanwhile, terrorist organisations are learning these strategies and co-opting them for their own purposes. Ingram (2015) identifies four major themes that ISIS have taken to new extremes to form its own information operations campaign: (1) the violence infused in its messaging – in words, pictures and videos; (2) slick production standards; (3) the volume at which it pumps out content; and (4) the role of social media in spreading and amplifying its content (Ingram, 2015). Peter Singer, co-author of *LikeWar*, (2018) paints a shocking, fuller picture: “The invasion was launched with a hashtag. In the summer of 2014, fighters of the self-declared ISIS roared into northern Iraq, armed with AK47 rifles, grenades and even swords. Their dusty pickup trucks advanced quickly across the desert. Far from keeping the operation a secret, though, these fighters made sure everyone knew about it. There was a choreographed social media campaign to promote it, organised by die-hard fans and amplified by an army of Twitter bots. They posted selfies of black-clad militants and Instagram images of convoys that looked like *Mad Max* had come to life. There was even a smartphone app, created so jihadi fans following along at home could link their social media accounts in solidarity, boosting the invaders’ messages even further. To maximise the chances that the Internet’s own algorithms would propel it to virality, the effort was organised under one telling hashtag: #AllEyesOnISIS. Soon #AllEyesOnISIS had achieved its online goal. It became the top-trending hashtag on Arabic Twitter, filling the screens of millions of users – including the defenders and residents of cities in ISIS’s sights”(Singer & Brooking, 2012, p.4-5).

What is most salient in terms of the virtual renaissance of information operations and propaganda alongside the evolution of marketing and the Internet is how modern technologies have been employed to increase its cognitive effects. Anderson and Holt (1997) in their paper 'Information Cascades in the Laboratory' identify that in economic situations, signals (such as experience or environmental influences) determine an outcome – whether that be likely or unlikely. Information cascades occur when an individual's "initial decisions coincide with the way that is optimal for each of the subsequent individuals to ignore his or her private signals and follow the established pattern"(B. L. R. Anderson & Holt, 1997). Liu et al (2016) contend that information cascades are a "special kind of herd behaviour" where "everyone does what everyone else is doing, even when their private information suggests doing something quite different" (Q. Liu et al., 2016).

This fits with Anderson and Holt's (1997) theory because information cascades "can result from rational inferences that others' decisions are based on information that dominates one's own signal." Further, Anderson and Holt (1997) identified that in the event of a "reverse cascade" decision-makers "observe private signals that indicate the incorrect state, and a large number of followers may join the resulting pattern of 'mistakes' despite the fact that their private signals are more likely to indicate the correct state"(Anderson & Holt, 1997).

If we move from offline decision-making to online decision-making and its influences, we can further observe how content is strategically cascaded through social media. Rafailidis et al (2014) observed that "information cascades take place in a social network by following a viral fashion, having users being influenced by the actions of their social contacts and adopting their choices." Rafailidis et al (2014) noted that the spread of influence itself was also viral in nature and exhibited cascading features (Rafailidis et al., 2014). As previously mentioned, Singer and Brooking (2018) identified that ISIS created a smartphone App which "jihadi fans following along at

home” could connect their social media to amplify the group’s content under the #AllEyesOnISIS hashtag (Singer & Brooking, 2018, p. 4-5). This app was just the start of ISIS’s focus on apps as a mechanism of influence: they have released many apps since, most notably ‘The Dawn of Glad Tidings’ smartphone app in 2015 which streamed “videos of beheadings and speeches from terrorist leaders;”¹³ and in 2016 a children’s app which taught Arabic writing and words through nasheeds (Arabic: translation: acapella songs). The lyrics contained violent Islamist references and terminology. The first words taught on the app were “tank”, “gun” and “rocket.”¹⁴ With no academic literature yet available on these apps, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of the information cascades inherent within them, suffice to assume that in line with the group’s historical modus operandi, the apps would replicate similar cascades to create strategic effects. While ‘The Dawn of Glad Tidings’ app was a propaganda and content amplifier, creating information cascade effects outside of the ISIS echo chamber, the children’s app was focused on those growing up inside the regime or diaspora. Regardless, the effect of cascading and amplifying their propaganda via social networks created temporal cognitive effects in both willing and unwilling audiences.

Bandura (2001) contends that the mass media has such an influential role in society that “understanding the psychosocial mechanisms through which symbolic communication influences human thought, affect and action is of considerable import.” Although written before social media became mainstream, Bandura’s (2001) explanation of how mass communication affects the population remains relevant: “People cannot be much influenced by observed events if they do not remember them... Retention involves an active process of transforming and restructuring information conveyed by modelled events into rules and conceptions for memory representation.” Further, Bandura (2001) identifies that “televised representations of social

¹³ As reported in The Sunday Times on 7 December 2015.

¹⁴ As reported in Business Insider 13 May 2016.

realities reflect ideological bents” and “heavy exposure to these symbolic worlds may eventually make the televised images appear to be the authentic state of human affairs” (Bandura, 2001). Howie (2015) reflects these findings some fifteen years later in his work on ‘Witnessing Terrorism’ describing television as an “eyewitness” conduit that validates information heard or read about in a particularly influential way. In the case of terrorism Howie (2015) explains that given “terrorism depends on near and distant witnesses for its success as a tactic of message-sending and manipulation of target audiences” we are led to rely on our least accurate primary sensory system – vision, and when combined with social media, results in a “technological feast of visual stimulation that provides for unregulated gluttony” or a visual assault. In becoming witnesses to “the visual horrors of personalised violence” when terrorism fills our media spaces, Howie (2015) explains that we “inhibit, stall and delay” the memory from vanishing, giving the content a longer than is usual cognitive lifespan (Howie, 2015). Sachar and Khullar (2017) support this finding by observing the clustering effect social media has due to the algorithms behind it serving you more of what you like, ostensibly keeping you cognitively content in an information echo chamber. Sachar and Khullar (2017) explain that data “tools play a vital role in boosting and performing a predictive analysis of large data sets ... helping improve business strategies and boom the profits “ in relation to the user and network interplay (Sachar & Khullar, 2017).¹⁵

Farwell (2014) aptly points out that ISIS were not the first violent extremists to use social media and employ content marketing techniques to “drive home its message.” Farwell (2014) lists Lashkar-e-Taiba’s effective use of Google Maps satellite imagery for its 2008 attacks in Mumbai and Al Shabaab’s use of Twitter in Nairobi in 2013, as two of the

¹⁵ Refer also Campedelli et al (2019) that studied the characteristics of terrorist networks online via a complex network approach. Campedelli et al (2019) found that latent clusters of terror groups display behavioural and ideological characteristics in clusters (Campedelli et al., 2019).

pre-emptive signals that terrorist organisations were paying attention to the democratisation of online technologies. Farwell (2014) acknowledges that ISIS, however, has demonstrated a distinct strategy and sophisticated level of use of social media that has not been seen before. This strategy goes beyond propaganda of the deed value communications by employing persuasion as part of its arsenal. ISIS's "communication strategy aims to persuade all Muslims that battling to restore the Caliphate is a religious duty; ... that the group is an agent of change, the true apostle of a sovereign faith; a champion of its own perverse notions of social justice and a collection of avengers bent on settling accounts for the perceived sufferings of others" (Farwell, 2014). Royal Danish Defence College scholar Thomas Elkjer Nissen (2015) agrees noting ISIS's ability to influence "perceptions and behaviours" of prospective violent Islamists, Muslims and the public alike. Nissen (2015) suggests that their behaviour should be viewed as social constructivism¹⁶ to fully understand the "effects-based" approach ISIS have employed (Nissen, 2015).

Concurrent with the cognitive assault and propaganda-laden content we are served by terrorist organisations, the Internet and social media themselves can be seen as a "noxious market" where "money (is) being made or requested for things cultural norms dictate should not be for sale" (Braun & Eklund, 2019). While many do not ordinarily view their news feeds or social channels as noxious, understanding the interplay between technology and its human inputs results in a deeper awareness of how the technological ecosystem has resulted in a fractured information environment. Braun and Eklund (2019) describe contemporary advertising technology firms as programmatic service providers that incentivises popular content. That is, regardless of the quality or substance of the content, if it is popular, it will be repackaged and re-served to audiences to

¹⁶ Social constructivism, defined by Berkeley the University of California, as "The level of potential development is the level at which learning takes place. It comprises cognitive structures that are still in the process of maturing but which can only mature under the guidance of or in collaboration with others" (University of California Berkeley, 2019).

maximise profits. It is important to understand that profits are not usually derived from the content itself, but rather from the associated advertising that is placed adjacent to or part of the web page, social network or even embedded within a video. Braun and Eklund (2019) contend therefore that a noxious market has formed around online and social media, whereby the desire to monetise content at all costs has had the by-product of monetising and amplifying content that is fake, degenerate in nature or otherwise part of a broader “information disorder” across the environment (Braun & Eklund, 2019).

The fact that contemporary terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda (Novenario, 2016), ISIS (Awan, 2017b) and Al Shabaab (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2012) have exploited the Internet and social media to radicalise, recruit and wage information warfare is of no strategic surprise. While al-Qaeda was arguably the earliest adopter of the then-new but quickly maturing Internet, proclaiming it as “a great medium for spreading the call of Jihad, following the news of the mujahideen (Arabic: Islamic warriors)” and outlining its strategic purpose of “spreading rumours and writing statements that instigate people against the enemy (Rudner, 2017)”; contrary to popular belief it was Al Shabaab, not ISIS, who was the first to meaningfully exploit social media (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2012). Consistent with al-Qaeda’s identification of the importance of establishing alternatives to mainstream media,¹⁷ in their report ‘Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al Shabaab’s Western Media Strategy’ for the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) Meleagrou-Hitchens et al (2012) detail the group’s strategy to “provide alternative narratives to its target audiences.”¹⁸ The late al-Qaeda preacher Anwar al-Awlaki had earlier encouraged followers to build a world-wide-web of Jihad and become “Internet mujahideen” (Rudner, 2017)– a call to action repeated by ISIS in

¹⁷ Refer also O’Rourke (2006) who concurs and identifies several examples of Islamist terrorist groups challenging mainstream (western) media to influence policy in particular countries (O’Rourke, 2006).

¹⁸ Refer also Farwell (2014) who also identifies Al Shabaab’s early use of Twitter as well as Lashkar-e-Taiba’s highly effective use of Google Earth in preparation for its 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India (Farwell, 2014).

2015 and again in 2016 with the publication of a motivational guide entitled "Media Operative You Are a Mujahid, Too" (Winter, 2017). Hughes et al (2017) go as far as to describe ISIS's violent Islamists as "virtual entrepreneurs" who expertly use cyberspace to plot, encourage, facilitate and more (Hughes & Meleagrou-Hitchens, 2017).

The sophistication at which both al-Qaeda and ISIS have organised their online armies is not however limited to chat rooms and narrative delivery (Rudner, 2017). ISIS in particular, quickly became extensively networked in the contemporary media environment. In adopting social media as a primary broadcast channel, it had unfettered access to a virtually unlimited, interconnected, inexpensive and globally influential method of communication. Their ability to harness the operational security benefits of anonymity, together with the active exploitation of technological advancements in automation and algorithmic content aggregation demonstrate near-total information environment domination (Nissen, 2015 p. 35-37).¹⁹ Further, ISIS' dexterity in pushing "news frames up the cascading network through the synchronised use of terrorism and a sophisticated branding²⁰ and social media marketing strategy²¹ built on a dual message that simultaneously deters perceived opponents and attracts potential supporters" enabled single payloads of content to have multiple effects (Melki & Jabado, 2016) across the areas of "psychological warfare, publicity, propaganda, fundraising, recruitment, networking, sharing information and planning" (Awan, 2017).²²

¹⁹ Refer also Laskshmanan (2017) who suggests that those not invested in content produced by ISIS are terrorised by it, largely due to media industry workforce change (from traditional print to online/hybrid business models) that had led to "lazy journalism" (Lakshmanan, 2017).

²⁰ Refer also Hegghammer (2017) who articulates in detail the visual details chosen by ISIS (Hegghammer, 2017, p. 82-107).

²¹ Refer also Mozes and Weimann (2010) who deconstructs Hamas' successful use of e-marking strategies since 1998/1999 (Mozes & Weimann, 2010).

²² See also Andersen and Sandberg (2018) who agree that ISIS, through their publication Dabiq, engineered content to have a "collective action framing" effect, that is the purposeful inclusion of meaning-making narratives within pieces of content that lead receptive audience members to identify with the collective utopia being promoted (J. C. Andersen & Sandberg, 2018).

Social media, however, is not the magical panacea it has often been portrayed to be in the radicalisation process. The United Nations 2017 report into Youth and Violent Extremism on social media makes it clear that “while the Internet may play a facilitating role, it not established that there is a causative link between it and radicalisation towards extremism, violent radicalisation, or the commission of actual acts of extreme violence” (S raphin Alava, Divina Frau-Meigs, 2017). Archetti (2015) agrees, explaining that “technologies such as the Internet” cannot be held responsible for radicalising individuals because “radicalisation is temporal” and dependent on a range of factors (Archetti, 2015). Rekawek et al (2019) concur, identifying a range of pathways to radicalisation that occurs outside of the social media and Internet environment, such as an individual’s involvement in or exposure to criminal activities, exposure to prison life, family networks and Mosque associates (Rekawek et al., 2019). Rather than being a blunt tool for radicalisation, however, social media and the Internet have been proven to be largely facilitative enablers. Providing greater opportunities for radicalisation does not, however, equate to a dependency on social media or the Internet to do the radicalising (Gill et al., 2017)

Harris-Hogan and Barelle (2020) observed that “jihadist networks began to emerge in Australia around the turn of the millennium.” It is noteworthy that “the first man to be arrested on terrorism (or related) charges in Australia was a Muslim convert – Jack Roche” who had ties to groups both Indonesia and Afghanistan. Harris-Hogan and Barelle (2020) go on to state that “waves” of jihadism in Australia followed this first instance between the years 2000 and 2004; with a second wave occurring between 2005 and June 2014; and a third wave being observed between July 2014 and 2016 (Harris-Hogan & Barrelle, 2020). Zammit (2011) agrees, noting that against a backdrop of the Cold War and advancements in global communications technologies, a new space was created “for different narratives about the nature of international order” among extremists.

Zammit (2011) also observed that up until the 9/11 attacks in the United States “the jihadist movement held ideological appeal for a small number of Australian Muslims” and of those with extreme views, their ability to exert influence was limited as their jihadist connections were of a small scale (Zammit, 2011).

What is perhaps obvious when you read ISIS’s own publications, yet is often overlooked by journalists in the West, in their reporting of terrorist attacks focused on the ‘far enemy,’ is that Muslims remained overwhelmingly the target of this kind of propaganda. In his book, ‘Jihad Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge’ Coolsaet (2017) identifies that the violent Islamist ‘Us vs Them narrative’ is not primarily targeted at the West. “Rhetoric presenting ‘Islamic’ terrorism as a deadly threat to Western civilization and values obfuscated the very basic reality that citizens in Muslim majority countries bear by far the largest share of the burden of terrorist attacks in the name of Islam.” He goes on to explain “The vast majority of victims of al-Qaeda and other violent Islamist groups have been and still are Muslims” (Coolsaet, 2017).

2.7 How Behavioural Economics can help make sense of the way individuals are Influenced towards Radicalisation

How and why do would-be violent Islamists radicalise? What systems of choice architecture are engineered into contemporary extreme Islamist recruitment activities? And how does online and social media validate extremist ideology? To understand choice and choice architecture we can draw on behavioural economics theory that demonstrates purpose-built decision frameworks that are, by design, engineered to facilitate the prospective recruit’s trajectory towards a spectrum of extremist and/or violent extremist outcomes.

Drawing together a lot of behavioural economics ideas to illustrate how people can be influenced in certain directions, for positive and negative reasons, 'Nudge' – the term coined by authors of the seminal book of the same name, Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein (2009) – is "any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviours in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives" (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). Based on libertarian paternalism, another term coined and defined by Thaler and Sunstein (2003) as "an approach that preserves freedom of choice but that authorises both private and public institutions to steer people in directions that will promote their welfare," 'nudging' as it has colloquially become known has established itself as part of the "emerging science of choice." It is important to note that Thaler and Sunstein (2009) argue that "types of paternalism should be acceptable even to those who most embrace freedom of choice" because no coercion is involved (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009).

In 'Nudge' (2009) Thaler and Sunstein demonstrate through a range of examples how 'nudging' can prove useful in encouraging people to choose more favourable outcomes for themselves. For example: in the context of a school cafeteria, simply rearranging the placement of food items (as is done in supermarkets to achieve sales) school children were influenced by small changes that increased or decreased the consumption of certain foods by twenty-five per cent. Importantly, Thaler and Sunstein (2009) note that rearranging the cafeteria "does not force a particular diet on anyone" but results in better, healthy outcomes for some of the school students. While much of this relies on defaults – or what happens when the decision-maker does nothing – nudges generally assist people to make better choices because the human brain isn't necessarily wired to sort and evaluate options well, particularly those that present risk and those that don't provide an instant outcome. Thaler and Sunstein (2009) explain in detail how these cognitive machinations impact decision-making through

personal biases, being influenced by framing and peer pressure; and/or being overconfident in risk evaluation and taking. As a result, nudges can be viewed as needed “for decisions that are difficult and rare, for which people do not get prompt feedback, and when they have trouble translating aspects of the situation into terms that they can easily understand” (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009).

Choice architecture is therefore the organisation of the context in which decisions can be made, with the designer of that environment referred to as a ‘choice architect.’ Fundamentally, “there are many parallels between choice architecture and more traditional forms of architecture, a crucial parallel is that there is no such thing as a neutral design” (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). While this may lead to assumptions being made that choice architects always design, frame or present choices in a way that will always benefit the chooser, this is not always the case. In the context of online privacy, for example, Adjerid et al (2019) explain that social networks routinely present users with trade-offs when they exert autonomy around online privacy. The result is that “consumers choosing more restrictive data settings may do so at the expense of valuable online services” such as the inability to use certain features in an app or piece of software (Adjerid et al., 2019). Lavi (2018) also points out that just as nudges can be used for good, they can also be used for ‘evil’. Using the example of “online intermediary liability – namely, website operators that offer platforms for users to create their own content such as review websites, blogs, discussion forums and social networks” Lavi (2018) argues that because technological design is engineered to shape and organise the online space, the choices made by web designers, programmers and marketing departments influence the end user. On a social network this choice architecture encourages users to “generate and disseminate content.” Lavi (2018) refers to these touchpoints as resulting in “evil nudges” that impact and influence Internet user behaviour via network bad faith actions. Lavi (2018) in his argument that nudges should be a

recognised “as part of tort law” advocates for a better understanding of digital nudging, and the negative influences caused by evil nudges (Lavi, 2018).

Of course, we cannot assume that all nudges – good or evil-- are successful. Sunstein addresses this in his 2017 paper ‘Nudges that Fail’ and explains that there are two reasons for this: (1) the decision maker exerts strong preferences based on pre-existing conditions and (2) counter-nudges are encountered during the decision-making process that transmutes the efforts of the initial choice architect/s. Sunstein (2017) further concedes that other reasons nudges fail include (1) the nudge confuses the target audience; (2) short-term effects lack appeal or desirable outcomes; (3) rare cases of “nudge reactance” appear; (4) poorly formed and executive choice architecture design; and (5) the resulting outcome of some nudges is counterproductive, providing no net effect. Sunstein (2017) provides three solutions to poorly designed or executed systems of choice architecture: “(1) do nothing; (2) nudge better – or differently; and (3) fortify the effects of the nudge, perhaps through counter-counter nudges, or perhaps through incentives, mandates or bans” (Sunstein, 2017).

Cass Sunstein in his book ‘Going to Extremes’ (2009) acknowledges that radicalisation is the product of an “exceedingly wide range of social puzzles... the idea of groupthink and social cascades.” Sunstein further notes that the “key to extremism in all its forms, involves the exchange of information.” Perhaps most importantly in the context of this thesis, Sunstein identifies the role of groups and group polarisation toward a common theme – in the case of Islamic extremists this is often grievance based, and the group acts as an echo chamber in-person and online (Sunstein, 2009). Statistically within Australia, it has been proven that the overwhelming majority of Islamic extremists are radicalised in person

through either family or peer networks (Matejic, 2016a)²³ and of the 44 individuals radicalised and arrested between the years 2000 and June 2014 only one could be accurately categorised a lone-actor. Further, for the time period June 2014 to 2016, approximately 80% of those radicalised were acting as part of a group (Harris-Hogan & Barrelle, 2018a)^{24,25}.

International investigations also reflect Australian experiences. In Belgium, which has experienced the highest per-capita rate of foreign fighters joining ISIS than any other European country, radicalisation and recruitment was conducted through “extensive informal networks of family and friends” as well as social media (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2015). In the United Kingdom, approximately 850 of its citizens have been identified as compelled to leave Britain to fight for “jihadist organisations in Iraq and Syria” with Britons “comprising one of the largest foreign elements within ISIS’s ranks” (Counter Extremism Project, 2019). In Canada, more than 190 citizens had travelled to participate in foreign fighter activities by the end of 2017 (Counter Extremism Project, 2018b). Radicalising agents found in a study in the Canadian context that as well as social media led trajectories to Islamic extremism, family members, friend groups, radical clerics and terrorist recruits also played roles in influencing the individual violent Islamist (Bastug et al., 2018). That ISIS has been observed to translate messages into languages such as English, Finnish, Indonesian, Moroccan, Belgian and more locally nuanced English for South African audiences for example, further demonstrates the strategic intent of the organisation to use its online content to reach broader audiences (Aly et al., 2017).

With evidence pointing to peer-to-peer or personal network-led radicalisation, understanding how those groups facilitate the process is

²³ Refer also (Harris-Hogan & Zammit, 2014).

²⁴ Refer also (Zammit, 2011b).

²⁵ Refer also (Harris-Hogan & Barrelle, 2018a).

important. Tsintsadze-Maass et al (2014) agree with Sunstein's definition of terrorist groupthink and expands it to incorporate group decision-making: "terrorist organisations are not just collections of separate individuals, they are functioning units that exert strong pressures on their members and hold out powerful rewards" (Tsintsadze-Maass & Maass, 2014). In the case of ISIS, for example, powerful rewards can include the provision of money and accommodation on making hijrah (migrating to ISIS) (ISIS, 2014a), the granting of redemption from past sins through violent jihad (Basra et al., 2016) and receiving rewards in the afterlife (Kydd et al., 2006).

Groups also impact their members' decision-making processes. "Terrorists make cost-benefit decisions in much the same way as ordinary criminals" do (Gill et al., 2018) and that decision-making occurs across individual, group and movement contexts (Miller, 2013). The degree to which personal autonomy and freedom of choice are fundamental to traditional views of choice architecture (C. Mills, 2015) can just as equally be seen to be prevalent in group-led settings, particularly when shared grievances and other points of commonality exist (Sunstein, 2009 p.258). Moghaddam explains in his 'Staircase to Terrorism' model that "as individuals climb the staircase, they see fewer and fewer choices, until the only possible outcome is the destruction of others, or oneself, or both (Moghaddam, 2005a)."

The correlation between group behaviour, social psychology and their impact on decision-making has been well studied. Thaler and Sunstein in their book 2009 'Nudge' conclude that "social pressures nudge people to accept some pretty odd conclusions – and those conclusions might well affect their behaviour" (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009, p. 162). While personal choice is regarded as a fundamental aspect of libertarian paternalism in decision-making and certainly the definition of a nudge states that it must be "easy and cheap to avoid" to retain personal autonomy (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009, p.22) group influences can be observed to apply a high

degree of influence on the individual to conform with their in-group – a term which Sunstein (2009) refers to as group polarisation. Sunstein (2009) further articulates his definition of group polarisation as being particularly evident in instances of political extremism, and in other situations such as cults and extremist groups that separate their members from the rest of society. The outcome of such group polarisation is the information echo chamber created within and around the in-group results in a permissive environment where nothing can disturb the process of radicalisation (Sunstein, 2009). This methodology has been adopted extensively by Salafi Jihadist groups such as ISIS which published a handbook for recruiters that specifically outlines the “sequences” needed to be taken to ensure a prospective recruit turns into an active member (Al Qa’idy, 2010).

2.7.1 Purpose Models of Decision-Making

People make decisions all the time within models constructed to encourage particular outcomes. Most of those decisions are unremarkable, even autonomic, while other decisions have far-reaching consequences to both the individual and those around them-- as is the case when considering radicalisation and violent extremism. Whether a decision is rational and logical or based on belief and preferences; forms the foundation for the study of judgement and choice (D. Kahneman & Tversky, 1984).²⁶ In the context of this thesis, which is concerned with the decisions made by violently extreme individuals and groups, and the way those choices are presented in a coercive construct, understanding how, why and what influences the decision-making of violent extremists is being investigated.

Caplan (2006) argues that while terrorism is often believed to be committed by “irrational” people this is not usually the case. Caplan’s (2006) study found that among terrorists there are differences between “standard choice models and the real world” because of “the popularity of irrational political

²⁶ Refer also Gradinaru (2014) who explores rationality in some depth (Gradinaru, 2014).

and religious belief.” Further, Caplan (2006) concluded that due to the cost of irrational belief leading “people to embrace highly improbable conclusions,” propaganda is likely to be able to successfully influence those whose belief systems are preference based; and that while the rational choice model fits, that fit is somewhat “imperfect.” Caplan (2006) suggests that a Beckarian²⁷ view of economic crime models should be given due consideration before standard assumptions are adopted or discounted (Caplan, 2006). Likewise, Schneider et al (2015) agree with Caplan’s (2006) findings that most terrorists are “more or less rational” and that rational-choice models are the “workhorse” of economic explorations of terrorism. Schneider et al (2015) further investigate economic models through a calculus of terrorist cost benefits, opportunity costs and the ability of counterterrorism practitioners to influence or vary benefit costs; and conclude that these models are sound but disregard key elements of the dynamic interplay between terrorism and counterterrorism (Schneider et al., 2015). Miller (2013) in examining terrorist decision-making in the context of deterrence, identifies that rationality of choice is influenced by levels of decision-making – that is, within cells, groups, organisations, or movements. Miller (2013) states that while individual terrorists may display rational choice behaviour, groups (often with competing interests or involving multiple decision-makers) do not. Further, Miller (2013) identifies that even when behaving rationally, a lack of group cohesion causing factions to arise leads to differing levels of ‘rationality’ being observed. The more decentralised a group is, the less rational its decisions become (Miller, 2013).

Frey and Luechinger (2002) agree that terrorists are rational actors but argue that there are “superior strategies for deterrence” that are based on a “benevolence system” that produces positive outcomes such as incentives

²⁷ Refer Becker (2007) in which the economic approach to crime and punishment is analysed to understand the effect differing punishments have on the behaviour of the population (fiscal and physical disincentives to criminal behaviour) as opposed to the cost of legislating, regulating and policing the population to detect crime and convict offenders (G. S. Becker, 2007).

(such as a higher personal income from peaceful occupations) in contrast to the broadly adopted deterrence system by Governments in the Western world. Frey and Luechinger (2002) believe that by raising the opportunity costs to terrorists (that is the “utility they could gain by not engaging in terrorism”) and presenting them with alternatives (such as better employment or educational opportunities) the result is a reduction in the overall likelihood that an individual will engage in terrorism. Frey and Luechinger (2002) acknowledge that their model presents a completely different approach to traditional deterrence-based counterterrorism models, but contend that a “rational choice approach offers a wider range of anti-terrorism policies.” Further, Frey and Luechinger (2002) suggest that while benevolent approaches to counterterrorism are unlikely to be adopted due to socio-political factors, benevolent models should be viewed as part of a broad suite of counterterrorism activities, particularly in circumstances where “the deterrence strategy has failed” (Frey & Luechinger, 2003).²⁸

McCormick (2003) looks back further in history to model terrorist decision-making, identifying radical German publicist Karl Heinzen’s work against a backdrop of a then recently released Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and a revolutionary Europe in 1848 and 1849. While the irony of a radical defining radical choice theory is not lost on the author of this thesis, that his premise is based on the immorality of killing (murder) is of note given the link previously-cited scholars have highlighted between terrorism and criminality.²⁹ McCormick (2003) notes that Heinzen’s conclusion-- that killing should be regarded as science – given the inequity faced by those of moral standing on the topic in comparison to a violent enemy that had no

²⁸ Refer also Anderton and Carter (2005) who using Frey and Luechinger’s model (2002), conclude that “rational choice theory can be useful to the study of other issues of terrorism.” Anderton & Carter (2005) also point out that scholars and scientists should remain mindful “that the substitution principle is formally derived from the underlying model of constrained utility maximisation” (as in the case, for example, of substituting a poor wage with a higher one) and that Slutsky’s equation is particularly important when analysing the changes made in response to increasing the costs of “one activity” over another (Anderton & Carter, 2005).

²⁹ Refer also Gill et al (2018) who also identify that terrorists make “decisions in much the same way as ordinary criminals (Gill et al., 2018).

qualms about murdering opponents, paved the way for other “radical thinkers” and “anarchists” to develop concepts we still use today such as ‘propaganda of the deed’ (attributed to Carlo Pisane, circa 1850s). As a result of this study, “two competing philosophies developed... that continue to define terrorist behaviour to this day.” The first is rationalism, and the second was that terrorism was an act of “redemptive destruction” via individual expression referred to as “expressionists.” McCormick (2003) further goes on to identify that terrorist decision-making is defined by strategic, organisational, and psychological frames that all contribute to the influence terrorist of choice.³⁰ McCormick (2003) concludes that “terrorist decision-making processes vary widely” and that “non-rational considerations can and do regularly influence the choices terrorist groups make.” This results in a far more complex psychosocial model that takes into consideration applied frames to ultimately develop a baseline and then a “customised model of group decision-making” (McCormick, 2003).

2.7.2 Expected Value and Expected Utility Theory

Expected value in decision-making refers to the “benefit-calculated,” often in monetary terms, whereby the choice made relies on information about some, usually small, economic factors. Expected utility theory “seeks to overcome the restrictions” with respect to the expected value and “in calculating the optimum alternative, the subject considers the usefulness” rather than the “value” of each choice (Gradinaru, 2014).

Fishburn (1989) in his explanation of Von Neumann and Morgenstern’s (1947) work describes how expected utility theory can be used to determine the best choice by following a relatively simple procedure. For a

³⁰ Refer also Moghaddam (2005) who states that “ultimately terrorism is a moral problem with psychological underpinnings (Moghaddam, 2005a); and Loza (2007) whose in taking a Middle Eastern perspective states that other influences in Islamic Terrorism “rests upon more than religion... based on current and historical cultural experiences... political and racial conflicts... and historical relationships between the Islamic World and the West. It (the justification for terrorism) is maintained through several ideologies (and) environmental pressures...” (Loza, 2007).

risky prospect: (1) convert each possible outcome to a utility number by feeding it through a utility function; (2) weigh (multiply) each resulting utility number by the probability that the outcome will occur; (3) add up all of the weighted utility numbers to find the expected utility for that risky prospect; (4) do this for all the alternative risky prospects; and (5) the one with the highest expected utility is the prescribed choice. This process can be formally expressed as:

$$\text{Expected Utility} = \sum_{i=1}^n u(x_i)p_i$$

There are many permissible utility functions, each with different behavioural interpretations (specifically with regard to risk preference). These include quadratic, power, exponential and logarithmic utility functions. These are permissible because they agree with the axioms underlying the theory (i.e. they don't break any of the rules of the system) (Fishburn, 1989). Kahneman and Tversky (1979) also express this as "decision-making under risk can be viewed as a choice between prospects or gambles" (Daniel Kahneman & Tversky, 1979).

In the context of terrorist decision-making, expected value and expected utility theory can be observed for example, in attacks that are geared for maximum propaganda of the deed value. Pohl (2015) presents a clear link between terrorist choice and resulting media coverage, explaining that "by treating the opportunities, choices and outcomes within a framework of risk and reward, some of the fundamental trade-offs that confront terrorists seeking to obtain media coverage are derived" (Pohl, 2015).

In their paper "Jihad Against Palestinians? The Herostratos Syndrome and the Paradox of Targeting European Jews" Azam and Ferrero (2017) highlight another aspect of risk and reward that on the surface challenges rational choice theory but in fact proves how adaptable terrorist

organisations such as ISIS are in using rational pathways to radicalise and recruit individuals. In seeking to explain irrational behaviour such as “brainwashing and radicalisation” Azam and Ferrero (2017) argue that Herostratos Syndrome – which has been “known for more than two millennia and refers to killers and arsonists who perpetrate odious attacks for the sake of self-glorification” – are in fact part of a “rational strategy... leveraging Herostratos Syndrome” to offer speculative radicals and new recruits a fast track to global infamy via acts of extreme violence, which are amplified through the groups own media production and dissemination capabilities. While their paper looks specifically at the costs and benefits of Muslims attacking Jews living in the diaspora (and the seemingly counterproductive outcomes this has on Palestinian strategies to ensure Israel remains a place of insecurity to drive outbound Jewish migration to the West) Azam and Ferrero (2017) conclude that it is “perfectly obvious” that “perfectly rational agents can have very weird preferences.” Perhaps most importantly, Azam and Ferrero (2017) articulate the birth of a rational choice model that has given rise to “hybrid killers whose motivations can encompass pure Herostratos syndrome.” This correlation is significant because it has been observed in recent Right Wing terrorist attacks on both Jewish³¹ and Muslim³² targets; where “the quest for notoriety at all costs is the basic motive” resulting in the next Herostratic Killer being inspired by

³¹ Such as in the cases of the 2018 Pittsburgh Synagogue, USA, terrorist attack (terrorist Robert Bowers posted to right-wing social network Gab “HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in” before he entered the Synagogue killing 11 and injuring 7. Bowers’ Gab profile stated “Jews are the children of Satan” and displayed other white supremacist material (Ohlheiser & Shapira, 2018)); the 2019 PoWay Synagogue, USA, terrorist attack (terrorist John T. Earnest had published a manifesto around the time of the attack, specifically stating that he began planning his attack after the massacre by Brenton Tarrant in New Zealand (Davis, 2019a)); and the 2019 Halle, Germany Synagogue terrorist attack (terrorist Stephen Balliet tried unsuccessfully to shoot his way into a Synagogue on Yom Kippur), killing two non-Jewish people nearby with his homemade, 3D printed weapons and improved explosive devices (Balliet, 2019). Of particular note, PoWay terrorist John Earnest stated in his manifesto that he had been inspired by Tarrant’s attack in New Zealand (Davis, 2019a); and Halle terrorist Stephen Balliet’s attack was livestreamed like Christchurch terrorist Brenton Tarrant’s attack (Gonzalez, 2019).

³² Such as in the case of the 2018 Christchurch, New Zealand attack (Brenton Tarrant livestreamed his massacre on Facebook – killing 51 people and injuring 49 inside two Mosques as they worshipped (Tarrant, 2019)). Of particular note, Christchurch terrorist Brenton Tarrant in his manifesto cited a range of Right Wing individuals that inspired his attack including Norway terrorist Anders Breivik as well as Luca Traini, Dylann Roof, Anton Lundin Pettersson and Darren Osbourne (Davis, 2019a).

yet trying to “get away from the crowd of his peers” in a game of abhorrent one-upmanship (Azam & Ferrero, 2017).³³

2.7.3 Prospect Theory

The 1979 brainchild of Israeli psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, Prospect Theory demonstrates that “in laboratory settings, people systematically violate the predictions of expected utility theory, economists’ workhorse model of decision-making under risk” (Barberis, 2012). Kahneman and Tversky (1979) argue in their seminal paper that utility theory “is not an adequate descriptive model” for choices under risk. In their descriptive model, Kahneman and Tversky (1992) stated that the prospect value for a risky prospect can be determined in the following way: (1) separate the possible outcomes into gains and losses based on their position relative to the reference point; (2) transform the probabilities into decision weights using a probability weighting function; (3) weight the gains by multiplying them by their decision weights; (4) weight the losses by multiplying them by their decision weights and a loss aversion parameter; (5) sum of all the weighted gains and losses to find the prospect value for the risky prospect; (6) the risky prospect with the highest prospect value will be chosen by the prospect theory decision-maker. This process can be expressed formally as:

$$V = \sum v(\Delta x_i) \pi(p_i)$$
$$v(\Delta x) = \begin{cases} v(\Delta x)^\alpha & \Delta x \geq 0 \\ -\lambda(-\Delta x)^\beta & \Delta x < 0 \end{cases}$$

This is the analogue of the expected utility equation (above). The probability weighting functions for gains and losses are:

³³ Such as in the case of the ElPaso Texas, USA, terrorist (Patrick Wood Crusius posted on 8chan approximately 19 minutes before his attack “Fuck this is going to be so shit, but I can’t wait any longer. Do you part and spread this brothers! Of course, only spread it if the attack is successful... ”attached to the post was a manifesto (Davis, 2019b)).

Of particular note, ElPaso terrorist Patrick Wood Crusius in his manifesto states that he was inspired by Brenton Tarrant’s Christchurch massacre (Davis, 2019b).

$$\pi_i = \begin{cases} \pi_i^- = w^-(p_1 + \dots + p_i) - w^-(p_1 + \dots + p_{i-1}) & \Delta x < 0 \\ \pi_i^+ = w^+(p_i + \dots + p_N) - w^+(p_{i+1} + \dots + p_N) & \Delta x \geq 0 \end{cases}$$

$$:= \begin{cases} w^+(p) := \frac{(p)^\gamma}{(p^\gamma + (1-p)^\gamma)^{1/\gamma}} & \Delta x \geq 0 \\ w^-(p) := \frac{(p)^\delta}{(p^\delta + (1-p)^\delta)^{1/\delta}} & \Delta x < 0 \end{cases}$$

The values of the parameters are determined experimentally (Tversky and Kahneman, 1992). The first set of terms in brackets simply articulates that cumulative probabilities are used, not discrete probabilities. Using the latter can introduce violations of stochastic dominance- something that was only recognised following the publication of the first, 1979 version, of prospect theory. The prospect theory framework says that in ordering risk prospects the decision-maker will:

- Assess outcomes (x_s) as gains or losses against a reference point, not absolutely.
- Be risk averse in the domain of gains.
- Be risk seeking in the domain of losses, due to loss aversion.
- Exhibit diminishing sensitivity to changes in outcomes further from the reference point.
- All of these features are summed up in the famous S-shaped utility function.

(Barberis, 2012; Daniel Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; H. Levy & Wiener, 2013; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992)

Tversky and Kahneman (1992) built upon their 1979 work in prospect theory with a new version called "Cumulative prospect theory" in 1992 (Tversky & Kahneman, 1992) in part because critics of their earlier work identified issues with the original 1979 theory, "especially the potential for

preference orderings to violate stochastic dominance.” The result – cumulative prospect theory, “transforms cumulative rather than individual probabilities and ensures that stochastic dominance is satisfied” (Phillips & Pohl, 2014). The revision Tversky and Kahneman (1992) published demonstrated that “choice under certainty exhibits some of the main characteristics observed in choice under risk” while risky prospect decisions are weighted differently. While the updated theory retains “the major features of prospect theory,” the introduction of a mathematical way to represent decision weights in a “two-part cumulative” framework “relaxes some descriptively inappropriate constraints of expected utility theory.” Tversky and Kahneman (1992) conclude that “prospect theory departs from the tradition that assumes the rationality of economic agents” and that this should be taken as descriptive rather than normative in theory. Tversky and Kahneman (1992) further clarify their view by pointing to the evidence they have gathered which “indicates that human choices are orderly, although not always rational” (Tversky & Kahneman, 1992).

In the context of terrorism, prospect theory is a useful model because it accounts for both individual decisions and environmental conditions (Du Bois, 2017). However, there is limited literature applying prospect theory to terrorism (or radicalisation) available. The exception is the work of Phillips and Pohl who have used the theory to study terrorist choice across a range of attack preferences (Phillips & Pohl, 2012a, 2014, 2017). Phillips and Pohl (2014) acknowledge that the “economic analysis of terrorist behaviour has only occasionally drawn upon prospect theory concepts” (Phillips & Pohl, 2014) and they cite the work of Becker (1968), Erlich (1973), Butler (2007), Intriligator (2010) as well as the updated work of Tversky and Kahneman (1992) as key contributors to this growing field of study. Accordingly, this section of the literature review will concentrate on these contributions.

Becker's (1968) paper 'Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach' explores illegal behaviour through a lens of economic analysis. Becker (1968) considers the cost of crime, damages (in the context of damage to society), the policing and judicial costs of apprehending and convicting offenders, the supply of offences (variety of possible crimes) and punishments; before setting optimal model conditions (and risk aversions) to behavioural relations, fines, and private expenditure against crime. Becker (1968) concludes that economics, having already been proven to handle resource allocation challenges, can be applied to combat illegal behaviour with similar frameworks. Becker (1968) argues that crime displays "certain unique" aspects that "enrich economic analysis" while punishments scale from costs to individual/society through to monetary/non-monetary models. Becker (1968) states that degrees of uncertainty exists around some of these features (such as what the precise amount of monetary damages should be for a particular crime) due to differing views and opinions on matters of public policy rather than economic modelling (Becker, 1968).

Ehrlich's (1978) paper 'Participation in Illegitimate Activities: A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation' indexes crime data of the era within the United States. Considering the relationship between crime and law enforcement and "offence and defence;" Ehrlich (1978) explores behaviour under uncertainty, preferences, and the impact of deterrents. What is interesting about Ehrlich's (1978) findings in comparison with the terrorism and radicalisation data available today is that repeat offenders display a variety of characteristics, which may be the result of opportunities available (both legitimate and illegitimate) rather than any unique motivation. Further, by "presenting the offender's decision problem as one of an optimal allocation of resources under uncertainty ... rather than as a choice between two mutually exclusive activities," Ehrlich's model can predict the direction and magnitude of how particular offenders respond to changes in choice-based opportunities (Ehrlich, 1973). Further, Ehrlich's (1978) model can be

observed in radical disengagement studies such as Hogan (2009) who suggests that the psychological transformation of radicals moving away from extremist belief can be “taking place against a backdrop of vulnerability... stress, crisis and trauma” and that “disillusionment with the individual’s current persona or identity – and an attempt to identify and locate an alternative, more satisfactory role... trigger factors that facilitate final decisions to leave...” (Horgan, 2009). If we view Horgan’s (2009) observations of disengagement through Ehrlich’s (1978) model, we can see the individual making choices under uncertainty that optimally allocates their resources for future benefit. Further, Horgan’s (2009) observations of radicals disengaging but not deradicalising, fit Ehrlich’s (1978) model because the individual is not choosing between mutually exclusive options³⁴ (Ehrlich, 1973; Horgan, 2009).

Butler (2007) in his paper ‘Prospect Theory and Coercive Bargaining’ presents a model based on Tversky and Kahneman’s “value function, and existing probability weighting function” together with Fearon’s model of bargaining.³⁵ Butler’s (2007) model “demonstrates the difference between expected value and prospect theory when applied to strategic interaction.” Further, Butler (2007) considers different bargaining problems, analysing four key reference points: “(1) power-based equity, (2) equity, (3) variants of the status-quo, and (4) extreme I-want-it-all” orientated outcomes. Butler’s (2007) “integration of prospect theory assumptions into the strategic logic of game theory,” along with his observations on how differing behaviour is observed when the aforementioned reference points are incorporated (Butler, 2007) can be understood in a terrorism and radicalisation context when group decision-making is influenced or occurs. For example, in a biographical study of terrorists Pfundmair (2019) notes

³⁴ Refer Horgan (2009) regarding the difference between disengaging and deradicalizing – Horgan states that an individual can retain extremist beliefs but disengage from action. Subsequently, those who both disengage AND deradicalise reject both extremist belief and action (Horgan, 2009).

³⁵ Refer Fearon (1995) whose article “provides a clear statement of what a rationalist explanation for war is” and further, “characterises the full set of rationalist explanations that are both theoretically coherent and empirically plausible”(Fearon, 1995).

that when an individual feels threatened by ostracism from an in-group there is an overlap with “motivations for terroristic radicalisation” pointing to the role ostracism plays in the radicalisation process (Pfundmair, 2019). If we correlate Pfundmair’s (2019) statement with the model Butler (2007) presents, taking for instance his key reference points of “power-based equity” and “extreme I-want-it-all” outcomes, we can observe that terrorist in-groups seeking to influence an individual’s commitment to the group can exert real, perceived, or threatened ostracism as a means of coercive compliance. Tsintsadze-Maass and Maass (2014) describe this phenomenon within terrorist groups as responsive to both “external pressures and internal interactions” that “exert strong pressures on their members and hold out powerful rewards.” Tsintsadze-Maass and Maass (2014) argue that strategic logic along with two rational processes are the basis on which groups choose terrorism or divert to another course of action to achieve their goals, particularly within groups with limited means and those whose members have already experienced the effectiveness of violently extreme acts (Tsintsadze-Maass & Maass, 2014). Hegghammer (2013) argues that terrorists recruit from a cost-discriminating position, with trustworthiness – or as Hegghammer coins it a “trust game”- the delineating factor. The reason for this Hegghammer (2013) states is because the stakes are high – the threat of infiltration is real and the cost of attracting low-quality recruits high. This recruitment equation presents uncertainty to recruiters Hegghammer (2013) explains, so “they will look for signs that are too costly for mimics to fake, but affordable for the genuinely trustworthy”. Hegghammer’s (2013) identification of this dilemma in terrorist recruiters fits neatly across all four of Butler’s (2007) bargaining problem reference points, as the recruiter seeks to achieve all four through strategic interaction while holding true to Tversky and Kahneman’s (1979) expected value, maximising utility and risky prospects (Butler, 2007; Hegghammer, 2013; Daniel Kahneman & Tversky, 1979).

Itriligator (2010) argues that the “most valuable approach to defeating terrorism” is to deny “resources to the terrorists.” Itriligator (2010) states that by looking at the problem through the lens of two actors-- terrorists and antiterrorists-- both “economic agents” who seek to maximise their utility function while managing their respective constraints. Itriligator (2010) explains that in maximising utility, terrorists create a demand for the equipment and resources they need to achieve their objective. Likewise and concurrently, Itriligator (2010) explains, antiterrorists are doing the same thing with similar resources to counter the threat, resulting in an “interaction between terrorists and antiterrorists as economic agents with equilibrium prices and quantities” which has a conventional supply and demand model (Itriligator, 2010). In their weekly newspaper, Al Naba, ISIS (2019) go to great lengths to coach adherents in maximising utility while minimising risk. In Issue 188 of Al Naba ISIS (2019), for example, in an article entitled ‘Take Precautions, Traps on the Path of Jihad’-- mirroring Hegghammer’s (2013) “trust game” observations warns “a Muslim must not trust one who is not trust-worthy among the ignorant, even when he presents credible proof” and “a Muslim should do his utmost to have the best and safest routes to reach his goal.” ISIS (2019) further instructs followers to avoid becoming “easy prey” to the many “lurking intelligence agencies... thieves... mischievous (scholastic) hijackers of faith... the miserable and corrupt” on their path to violent jihad (Al Naba, 2019) in a clear approximation of their use as economic agents of value to the group, while recognising the counter-actions of the global coalition in attempting to thwart would-be jihadists militarily, financially and ideologically.

Tversky and Kahneman’s (1984) paper ‘Choices, Values and Frames’ looks at how cognition and psychophysical factors influence judgement and decision-making in risky and riskless contexts. Tversky and Kahneman (1984) observe at the outset of their paper that the study of decision-making is broad across academia, often found outside of the economics fraternity in disciplines such as “mathematics, statistics, political science,

sociology and psychology.” Tversky and Kahneman’s (1984) study considers both normative and descriptive decisions; as well as analysing the “nature of rationality and the logic of decision-making” which they identify as a point of tension. In defining what constitutes a ‘Risky Choice’ Tversky and Kahneman (1984) state that there are choices made under risk without “advance knowledge” of the choice’s “consequences” but with an acceptance of a range of possible outcomes. Tversky and Kahneman (1984) further define the difference between a risky choice and a gamble as the difference between a sure thing and the unknown. A gamble may have “higher or equal expectations” than those choosing a risk they can generally predict the outcome of, but because people do not always make decisions on this basis in the real world, external factors can frame the question in a variety of ways that influence the decision makers choice. Tversky and Kahneman (1984) conclude that two distinctions are formed because of their analysis of decision theory: “(a) experienced value, the degree of pleasure or pain, satisfaction or anguish in the actual experience of an outcome; and (b) decision value, the contribution of an anticipated outcome to the overall attractiveness or aversiveness of an option in a choice.” Because Tversky and Kahneman (1984) have identified “experience values” and “decision values” as separate utilities (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984), we can anticipate similar factors that contribute to decision-making in a prospective violent Islamist during the radicalisation and recruitment process. For example, experiential and decision values are infused within ISIS’s use of agenda setting and framing about the spiritual esteem of being a part of the formation of a Caliphate. In Issue 3 of their magazine Dabiq, ISIS (2014) establishes its legitimacy and spiritual supremacy by framing actions as quasi-prophetic: “It (ISIS) fights to defend the Muslims, liberate their lands... while simultaneously seeking to guide and nurture those under its authority and ensure both their religious and social needs are met. For what good is liberating a city only to leave its inhabitants steeped in misguidance and misery, suffering from ignorance and disunity, and disconnected from the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of

His Messenger.” Alongside this declaration are pictures used as proof points of spiritual purity such as the destruction of items that are forbidden like tobacco, group repentance sessions, the distribution of money and the provision of theological education to male children. Further, ISIS (2014) provides experiential assurance for those readers considering joining the physical Caliphate by alleviating some of the rational concerns associated with this gamble: “So do not say to yourself, I will never succeed in my hijrah (Arabic translation: pilgrimage). Most of those who have tried, have successfully reached the Khilāfah (Arabic translation: Caliphate)... Allah brought them safely to the Khilāfah ... Do not say to yourself, I might get arrested. That fear is unsure and the obligation of hijrah is certain. It is not correct to nullify what is certain with what is unsure (as has been stated by Shaykh ‘Abdullah ‘Azzam in some of his speeches and writings)... Do not worry about money or accommodations for yourself and your family. There are plenty of homes and resources to cover you...” (ISIS, 2014a).

While Tversky and Kahneman (1984) make the distinction between experience and decision values, ISIS uses them in tandem to allay rational fear and encourage decision-making that is conducive to its objectives. As the United Kingdom’s General Intelligence and Security Services (2016) circular on “Life with ISIS: A myth unravelled” aptly states, the reality of the situation on the ground is significantly different to what is portrayed in magazines like Dabiq: “The majority of those who make the journey, therefore, think they have a realistic picture of the life awaiting them. For many, however, the true situation comes as a shock. What dismays Western jihadists, in particular, is everyday life in a war zone. It is hard living in constant fear of bombing raids. The poor food, substandard housing and inadequate medical services are also a tough challenge...”(General Intelligence and Security Service, 2016). The potency with which the propaganda produced by ISIS can frame risky choices and gambles as ‘safe bets’ is a terrifying testament to their ability to cultivate and project attractive experiences and decision values. Tversky and

Kahneman (1984) identify this within the context of their study as “the framing of outcomes (that) often induces decision values that have no counterpart in actual experience” (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984).

This deployment of engineered choice architecture can also be observed via the Probability Neglect cognitive bias. Sunstein (2003) in his paper ‘Terrorism and Probability Neglect’ looks at this environment from the perspective of civil society, where a fear of terrorism is excessive in relation to “low-probability risks of catastrophe.” Sunstein (2003) identifies at the outset that terrorists work with three fear points: (1) “in the face of ignorance, people assess probabilities through the use of various heuristics, most notably the availability heuristic ... for example in the aftermath of a terrorist attack, and for a period thereafter, that act is likely to be both available and salient, and thus make people think another such act is likely whether or not it is in fact;” (2) that people fear what is unfamiliar to them or is beyond their control creating disparities in reactions to risk, for example “it is to be expected that an act of terrorism will cause large changes in private and public behaviour, even if the magnitude of the risk does not justify those changes – and even if statistically equivalent risks occasion little or no concern;” and (3) when people’s emotions are engaged (such as via social media)³⁶ they are focused on the bad outcome and are therefore “inattentive to the fact that it is unlikely to occur.” Sunstein (2003)’s core argument in this paper that the “probability of harm will be neglected when people’s emotions are activated” (Sunstein, 2003) is consistent with what we know about the ways in which social media interacts with human cognition.

Meshi et al (2015) explain that social media provides people with ways to fulfil their neural social drives that satisfy basic human social needs. Meshi

³⁶ Refer Awan (2017) who concludes that “online hate is being used by groups such as ISIS for a variety of reasons such as recruitment and propaganda (Awan, 2017b); and Morris (2016) who identifies how children using the internet can be indoctrinated – via smartphone or computer – and are ill equipped to deal with the emotions they experience as a result of viewing abhorrent materiel (Morris, 2016).

et al (2015) identify three key domains in this regard: "(1) social cognition – such as mentalising; (2) self-referential cognition; and (3) social reward processing." If we consider the first aspect, mentalising, this aspect of social media encourages us to "think about the mental states and motivations of other users." The regions of the brain activated during this process enable the thoughts and behaviours arising from our consumption of content online to manifest outwardly. With respect to the second element, self-referential cognition, social media encourages us to think a lot about ourselves and prompts us to share those thoughts "provoking further self-referential thought." Third and lastly, and arguably the most important aspect of social media neurology in relation to this thesis, is the social media neural reward network. That is "social media provides users with a consistent supply of social rewards" which activate our brain's reward centre, creating positive feelings and emotions. This reward centre is also what keeps us returning to social media, in an addictive cycle, for more social rewards. While this aspect of social reward can be viewed as prosocial in on and offline contexts, it also activates the part of the brain that compares "one's own obtained rewards and another person's, rather than the absolute of one's own reward." While Meshi et al (2015) acknowledge that neuroscientific research in relation to social media is still in its infancy, they posit that future research will have to contend with questions such as how hours of social media consumption daily affect humans, particularly children and adolescents (Meshi et al., 2015).³⁷ Trevor Pippins (2018) in reviewing a 2017 study of smartphone users puts the interplay between social media and users more bluntly in his assessment of its impact on humans: "social media is crack (cocaine) and your smartphone is a pipe"(Pippins, 2018). As previously discussed in this chapter, the linkages between Herostratic terrorism and the role social media plays in creating notoriety, are also evident. If for example the Columbine school shooting "has become a cultural script for many subsequent rampage shootings"

³⁷ Refer also Howard et al (2019) who "propose a theoretical model and analytical framework capable of helping us better understand the neurocognitive process of digital radicalisation" (Howard et al., 2019).

(Azam & Ferrero, 2017) just as the Christchurch manifesto has inspired other Right Wing terrorist acts,³⁸ as Azam & Ferrero (2017) point out in the context of Columbine “the body count exists primarily as a method of generating media attention... this reveals the fundamental motive of post-Columbine killers: killing for notoriety” (Azam & Ferrero, 2017).³⁹

If we return to Sunstein’s (2003) work with the knowledge that social media has an addictive utility that is designed to engage and provoke user’s emotions, we can understand the full extent of probability neglect in relation to acts of terrorism: that is “if a terrorist attack is easy to visualise, large-scale changes in thought and behaviour are to be expected even if the statistical risk is lower.” Sunstein (2009) further correlates this behaviour with “public overreaction to highly publicised, low-probability risks” and the manner in which Government could or should treat the risks (Sunstein, 2003). If we flip Sunstein’s (2003) perspective to view it not from civil society looking at a threat but as a terrorist organisation looking at an opportunity, we can observe correlations with his three fear points: (1) the availability heuristic; (2) people fear what is unfamiliar to them or beyond their control; and (3) when people’s emotions are engaged they are focused on the bad outcome, even if it is unlikely to occur (Sunstein, 2003)– and methods of recruitment and radicalisation.

If we look at the availability heuristic ISIS, for example through its media organisation and publications, serves up content that short-cuts the receptive violent Islamist to evaluate their information or decision through the examples it provides. In his ‘Course in the Art of Recruiting’ al-Qaeda recruiter Abu Amru Al Qa’idy (2010) provides those trying to recruit others with not only a step-by-step how-to guide (including descriptive

³⁸ Such as El Paso terrorist Patrick Wood Crusius; German man Stephan Balliet who attacked a Synagogue in Halle, Germany on Yom Kippur in 2019; and the Buffalo terrorist Payton S. Gendron who attacked African Americans at a supermarket in New York State (United States of America) in 2022.

³⁹ Refer also Andersen and Sandberg (2018) who identify “Excitement seeking, stardom and popular culture” as incentives used to promote the ‘jihadi-cool’ subculture. “The so-called jihadi cool creates a seductive subculture, attracting young people to participate in global Islamist terrorism because it is considered cool and exciting... to be part of a counterculture to Western mainstream society” (J. C. Andersen & Sandberg, 2018).

assessment rubric templates to track a prospective recruits progress) but also direct them to support literature and videos: “Make sure to get pamphlets which are sold in the bookstores, especially the ones that discuss Paradise and the Hellfire, and dying with a good end and a bad end (Husn al Khatima and Su al Khatima).. those books of Sheikh Khalid Abu Shady... I recommend getting books which talk about the virtues of Jihad and they mention the ahadith (Arabic translation: speech, report, account, narrative) of Jihad, the miracles of martyrdom... (Al Qa’idy, 2010).” In this way, al-Qaeda was able to indoctrinate the ignorant or convince the believer to choose to progress further along the radicalisation trajectory by presenting them with information that will readily be recalled, such as in the case of atrocity propaganda (also known as TVEC). If the candidate is invited into a social media group or online forum, the echo chamber formed around them will keep this information front-of-mind over extended periods of time.

If we consider Sunstein’s (2003) second point – “people fear what is unfamiliar to them or beyond their control” we can look to the strategies terrorist organisations use to weaponise the fractures within the societies of their enemies. For example, Andersen and Mayerl (2018) reported that the fear of terrorism in Western countries is “linked to negative attitudes towards Muslims” and that in conservative societies, higher levels of fear are present “at least partially because they are also more Islamophobic.” Andersen and Mayerl (2018) further identify that fears amongst the Muslim community include the fear of other Muslims, particularly amongst more moderate followers when considering those who hold extreme beliefs (Andersen & Mayerl, 2018). In the case of ISIS, who provide a distorted view of reality – both of their own self-reflection and how they perceive themselves to be seen by their enemies – they leverage the human brain’s predisposition to conflate their abhorrent behaviour with that of all Muslims

resulting in an outrage heuristic.⁴⁰ Sunstein in his 2009 book "Going to Extremes" states that "people who begin with a high level of outrage become still more outraged as a result of group discussion." Sunstein (2009) refers to these actions by terrorist groups as "polarisation entrepreneurs" that help to create like-minded enclaves of people" (Sunstein, 2009). Julia Ebner in her 2018 book 'The Rage: The Vicious Circle of Islamist and Far-Right Extremism' describes these polarisation entrepreneurs as 'reciprocal radicalisers' always beginning their narrative with "the dehumanisation of humans." Ebner (2018) further points out that common extremist narratives that have permeated into everyday culture: "The West is at War with Islam" and "Muslims are at War with the West" drive each other's echo chambers particularly through anti-Islamisation and anti-Immigration narratives (Ebner, 2018, p. 13-15, 60). We can see the horrific results of this clash of people's fear of matters seemingly outside of their control in recent Right-Wing attacks against Muslims. For example, the Christchurch terrorist wrote in his manifesto: "Mass immigration and the higher fertility rates of the immigrants themselves are causing this increase in population. We are experiencing an invasion on a level never seen before in history. Millions of people pouring across our borders, legally. Invited by the state and corporate entities to replace White people who have failed to reproduce..." (Tarrant, 2019).

The second-order effect of people fearing what is unknown regarding Sunstein's (2003) second point on probability neglect is that ISIS went to great lengths to normalise the abnormal for prospective recruits. For example, the fourth issue of Dabiq (2014) entitled "The Failed Crusade" goes into detail about the services available to Muslims in the Caliphate including cancer treatment for children and street cleaning services. In the fifth issue of Dabiq (2014) entitled "Remaining and Expanding" ISIS touts

⁴⁰ An Outrage Heuristic is defined as "In thinking about punishment, people use an outrage heuristic. According to this heuristic, people's punishment judgements are a product of their outrage. This heuristic may produce reasonable results much of the time, but in some cases, it seems to lead to systematic errors – at least if we are willing to embrace weak consequentialism"(Sunstein, 2004).

its new currency “to disentangle the Ummah from the corrupt, interest-based global financial system”(ISIS, 2014c). The ninth issue of Dabiq (2015e) includes a section on healthcare in the Caliphate, listing in detail how many different types of surgeries have been performed per month⁴¹ and what the organisation is doing to prepare for the needs of the future. Australian violent Islamist and medical doctor Tareq Kamleh⁴² appears in one photograph alongside neonatal intensive care incubators. Issue nine also features a section on the legitimisation of sexual slavery, written by women in ISIS (ISIS, 2014, 2014c, 2015e).

Finally, if we consider Sunstein’s (2003) third point – “when people’s emotions are engaged, they are focused on the bad outcome, even if it is unlikely to occur” we can observe that ISIS’s framing of this ‘outcome’ is not what you might expect. While Western thought considers death a suboptimal outcome of any military action, Salafi jihadi’s see self-sacrifice as noble, and a guarantee of obtaining the heavenly rewards of martyrdom. Hoffman (2006) explains that “an important additional motivation ... was the promise that, should he himself perish in the course of carrying out his attack, he would ascend immediately to a glorious heaven” and that in fact “it was the mujahedeen’s desire for martyrdom that was the unique (combative) advantage” (Hoffman, 2006). ISIS’s veneration of dead martyrs in every issue of their publications as well as online tributes engage violent jihadis’ emotions to potent effect – martyrdom is something to aspire to even if the individuals’ apprehension towards death could be

⁴¹ Refer Issue 9 of Dabiq (2015) page 25, in which a table quantifies the types of medical services rendered to residents within a month: 6,711 outpatients treated; 4,289 emergency patients attended to; 15,688 laboratory tests conducted; 2,384 minor x-rays performed; 442 dialysis sessions performed; 233 physiotherapy sessions conducted; 170 children admitted to hospital, 1,511 blood donations received; 140 general surgeries performed; 261 bone surgeries performed; 18 urinary surgeries performed; 15 nerve surgeries performed; 3 ear surgeries performed; 47 surgeries for gynaecological reasons; 16 emergency surgeries; 576 births recorded; 445 audiometric tests performed; 11 brain stem scans conducted and 400 ultrasound examinations performed (ISIS, 2015e, p. 25).

⁴² Tareq Kamleh left Australia in late 2014. Born to German and Palestinian parents, Kamleh had previously worked as a paediatric registrar in public hospitals in Adelaide, Perth and Mackay. Completing his medical degree at the University of Adelaide, Kamleh was described by fellow students as a “womaniser” who drank alcohol. Kamleh reportedly married while in the Caliphate, becoming a step-father to a toddler daughter and having a son of his own. Using the alias ‘Abu Yousef al-Australie’ Kamleh is reported to have died during the final battle of Raqqa on 8 June 2018. Kamleh had been charged in absentia by Australian authorities for his participation in the ISIS terrorist organisation. Kamleh had become a notable propagandist, appearing in many photographs and videos before his apparent death (Kamleh, 2015; Staff Writers, 2015c, 2015b, 2015d).

considered a 'bad outcome' (Dabiq 2014-2016; Alfano, Higgins, & Levernier, 2018; Howie, 2015).

2.8 Conclusion

The radicalisation process for all forms of violent extremism remains unclear. According to Ayanian and Ikg (2018) Western societies "are a long way from understanding – still less preventing – radicalisation." Making the observation that "no single discipline on its own successfully maps the complexity of radicalisation" Ayanian and Ikg (2019) acknowledge that this is due to the varying radicalising pathways and influences on individuals (Ayanian & Ikg, 2019). This view is widely accepted within academia. Kruglanski et al (2019) acknowledge the contribution social scientists have made in attempting to "explain the phenomena" from "different vantage points," while noting these types of studies are often incomplete due to the lack of consideration of other disciplines (Kruglanski et al., 2019). Schils and Verhage (2017) also acknowledge that "the why and how" of what draws people into violent extremist groups "remains very difficult to study" primarily because of the challenges academics face in accessing violent extremists willing to share their personal experiences (Schils & Verhage, 2017; Shortland et al., 2022). In one area however, scholars agree: online and social media have irrevocably changed the way radicalisation occurs (Conway, 2017; Hassan et al., 2018; Hoffman, 2006, p.197; O'Rourke, 2007; Quiggle, 2016).

In chapters four and five, the connection between Nudge, radicalisation, terrorism, and online activity will be explored drawing together the concepts covered in this literature survey. By deconstructing ISIS's own recruitment handbook in a later chapter, an update of a document originally produced and disseminated by al-Qaeda, clear models of choice architecture engineered to facilitate prospective recruits on a radical trajectory towards extreme violence will be demonstrated. What is

particularly salient in this source document, and the correlating content library that continues to be built is the sophisticated level at which ISIS both understood the importance of influencing others and how well they were able to adapt to the opportunities the internet afforded. Further, beyond its recruitment goals, ISIS understood the influence of its content presented in other online battlefields, such as the ability to inflict terror online ensuring millions of citizens outside the military area of operation were involuntary witnesses of violent extremism.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology and rationale for the development, construction and sifting of the dataset contained in the Australian Foreign Fighters and Domestic Actors Nexus (AFFDAN) database and the resultant radicalisation cascade. This chapter will also outline how the data was collected, coded, and organised to display a range of data fields that enabled radicalisation pathways to be determined and explored in a nudge and availability cascade environment. By organising information in this way, we can use behavioural economics as a framework to understand the multi-disciplinary interplay occurring.

The objective of the research was to explore the choice-architecture and nudges built around individuals by terrorist recruiters and organisations to encourage their radicalisation and recruitment towards supporting or committing acts of extreme violence. The radicalisation and recruitment methods used have been discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, with associated case studies explored in Chapter 8. The research conducted, paired with existing academic literature and models of Islamic violent extremism, demonstrates that recruiters make use of choice architecture pathways and nudges that identify low-cost high-yield prospects while actively screening out prospects that are high-cost low-yield. That the same indoctrination methods have been used with little change over the past twenty years – spanning conflicts from both al-Qaeda and ISIS– is not surprising given violent Salafist’s tendency towards repetition in their religious practices and enduring focus on redemptive extreme violence. The changes observed over this period reflect real-world advancements in communications technologies and connectivity. Adapting their practices to exploit the benefits of the Internet, social media, encrypted communications and online TVEC libraries, ISIS capitalised on the

frameworks built by al-Qaeda over a decade earlier. This transition from video cassette tapes and voice recordings being copied and delivered to media outlets; to becoming a production house and broadcaster resulted in a range of immediate payoffs. From the ability to seed their TVEC throughout the Internet, to gaming social media algorithms and increasing the news media's coverage of their propaganda of the deed, the media attention garnered by ISIS (as a terrorist organisation distributing and amplifying TVEC) remains unsurpassed and continues to be emulated by other malicious and bad actors around the world.

This chapter covers in detail how the research that supports this thesis was conducted, organised and analysed. Based on existing real-world challenges this chapter demonstrates how working at the leading edge of professional practice can develop original knowledge that contributes to the operational environment.

3.2 Open-Source Intelligence and Investigations

The democratisation of information has been a by-product of the evolution of the Internet, social media, and online archival process. As a result, open-source intelligence (OSINT) and investigations have become increasingly useful in delivering both unique insights, and analysis that may otherwise be held by governments outside of academic and public view. While the need for privacy, and in the case of governments the classification of information to protect national security and sovereign interests remains, with the democratisation of information in the West has come an increasing demand for transparency from those same institutions.

Within the law enforcement and intelligence communities, there has been a slow recognition of the value of open-source information holdings and an even slower adoption of OSINT as an element of tradecraft. This resistance has largely been due to organisational culture and historically rigid ways of

thinking, resulting in work practices that over-valued classified information. While the increasing availability and reducing costs of consumer access to the Internet paved the way for OSINT, it wasn't until the advent of social media, and then smartphones, that the value of open-source information was truly realised. While not replacing classified information holdings, OSINT offers law enforcement and intelligence communities access to a range of information that would have taken significant amounts of time and resources to collect otherwise. At the same time, investigative journalists, hackers, citizen reporters and violent extremists themselves, are also using OSINT to gather information for hire, sale, research, or publication.

This shift from OSINT scepticism to receptiveness has also occurred in academia. Studies and research compiled using OSINT techniques have become increasingly accepted and common, particularly in the national security context as persons of interest not only shared their lives openly online but also used the online environment to promote their ideologies and beliefs. This shift has been reflected in datasets such as the 'Global Terrorism Database' (GTD), compiled by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism which has been using a diverse set of "news media sources from around the world", machine learning, artificial and human intelligence to "facilitate the identification and organisation of news articles that contain information about terrorist attacks" since 2012 (University of Maryland, 2021a). Also, at the START consortium resides the 'Profiles of Individual Radicalisation in the United States' (PRIUS) dataset which is a "de-identified individual level" database of the "backgrounds, attributes and radicalisation processes of over 2,200 violent and non-violent extremists who adhere to far right, far left, Islamist or single-issue (SMVE) ideologies in the United States covering 1948-2018." The PRIUS dataset is "coded using entirely public sources of information" (University of Maryland, 2021c). More recently the University of Oslo's C-REX: Center for Research on Extremism has published, along with their extensive archives of violent Islamist literature, "primary data

from former extremists” including interviews (Bjørgero et al., 2021). In Australia, Matejic’s (2016) report based on the first iteration of AFFDAN (Matejic, 2016a) has been emulated by other scholars, most notably Shanahan (2019) and to a lesser extent Cherney (2021) (Cherney et al., 2020; Shanahan, 2019).

Such research made possible by OSINT, or available for OSINT-based research, has overcome many of the risks associated with primary research in the national security and terrorism environments. For example, researchers are rarely given access to terrorism judicial documentation, are often unable to conduct primary interviews with convicted terrorists. The value OSINT, therefore, presents to investigators, academics, journalists, and citizens, particularly when aggregated from multiple data sources, is immense and results in a contribution of knowledge that may otherwise be constrained. OSINT may also offer new perspectives on events and individuals or insights that may otherwise have received little notice. OSINT has also proven useful in lawfully archiving significant TVEC online (for research benefit) before it is removed by platforms and social networks.

3.3 Data Selection Parameters

The AFFDAN database was compiled from open-source information on individuals involved in violent, Salafist jihadism within or originating from Australia. The dataset spans the timeframe from the post-9/11 al-Qaeda era (early 2000’s) through to the end of 2021. This timeframe encompasses the rise and demise of ISIS as well as other proscribed and non-proscribed terrorist organisations in Australia including al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Al Shabaab, the Abu Sayyaf Group, Jemaah Islamiah, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Ahrar-al-Sham, al-Nusra Front, Fatah al-Islam, Free Syrian Army, Hizbut Tahrir, Jama’atul Mujahideen, Saraya el Asher, the Syrian National Council and Uighur violent extremism. The small number of adherents within Australia of these terrorist organisations is reflective of the factional

behaviour of groups following extreme forms of Islam and the often fracturing of larger worship groups into smaller off-shoots due to perceived ideological differences.

To qualify for inclusion into the dataset, the following criteria were applied:

- a) The individual must be an Australian citizen, permanent resident or ordinarily residing in Australia at the time of their offending (such as on a student visa or form of temporary residency); and/or
- b) The individual must have been charged and/or arrested (including having a warrant issued for their arrest in absentia) for terrorism or terrorism-related offences; and/or
- c) The individual must have been killed committing an act of terrorism within Australia and/or
- d) The individual must have been killed committing an act of terrorism overseas; and/or
- e) The individual must be, on reasonable grounds, believed to have been engaged in or are engaging in behaviours that would be categorised by the Australian Government as a 'foreign incursion offence'⁴³; and/or
- f) The individual must be reasonably believed to have radicalised towards violent Salafi jihadism in Australia.

Reasonable grounds, in the above context, is a term used at law and in professional practice to describe that the conclusions drawn from available information would lead a reasonable person (such as one fit for jury service) to also draw the same conclusions.

⁴³ Under the Australian Criminal Code, Part 5.5, it is an offence for an Australian citizen "to enter a foreign country with the intention to engage in hostile activity, unless serving in or with the armed forces of the Government of a foreign country; prepare to enter, or for another person to enter, a foreign country with an intention to engage in hostile activity; and recruit persons or join an organisation engaged in hostile activities, or to serve in or with an armed force in a foreign country." For clarity around issues of joining the armed forces of another country – such as in the case of dual nationals fulfilling national service obligations – "The Minister of Home Affairs may permit recruitment of a person or class of persons to serve with an armed force of a foreign country if it is in the interests of the defence or international relations of Australia. It is not an offence under Part 5.5 for an Australian to join the armed forces of a foreign country." Further, "The Minister of Foreign Affairs may declare an area in a foreign country if they satisfied that a listed terrorist organisation is engaging in hostile activity in that area" (Government of Australia, 2021).

While 463 Australians (this includes several foreign nationals who became involved in or committed terrorism in Australia), were identified in the dataset; only 263 met the above criteria for inclusion in this study. Minors were identified as part of the above data selection (a total of 10 individuals, or 3.8% of the total number of individuals studied) but strictly only when they met the above criteria. Minors taken abroad by their families into conflict zones, born abroad in conflict zones, or who had children of their own while having no active role in the conflict, were not included in this study.

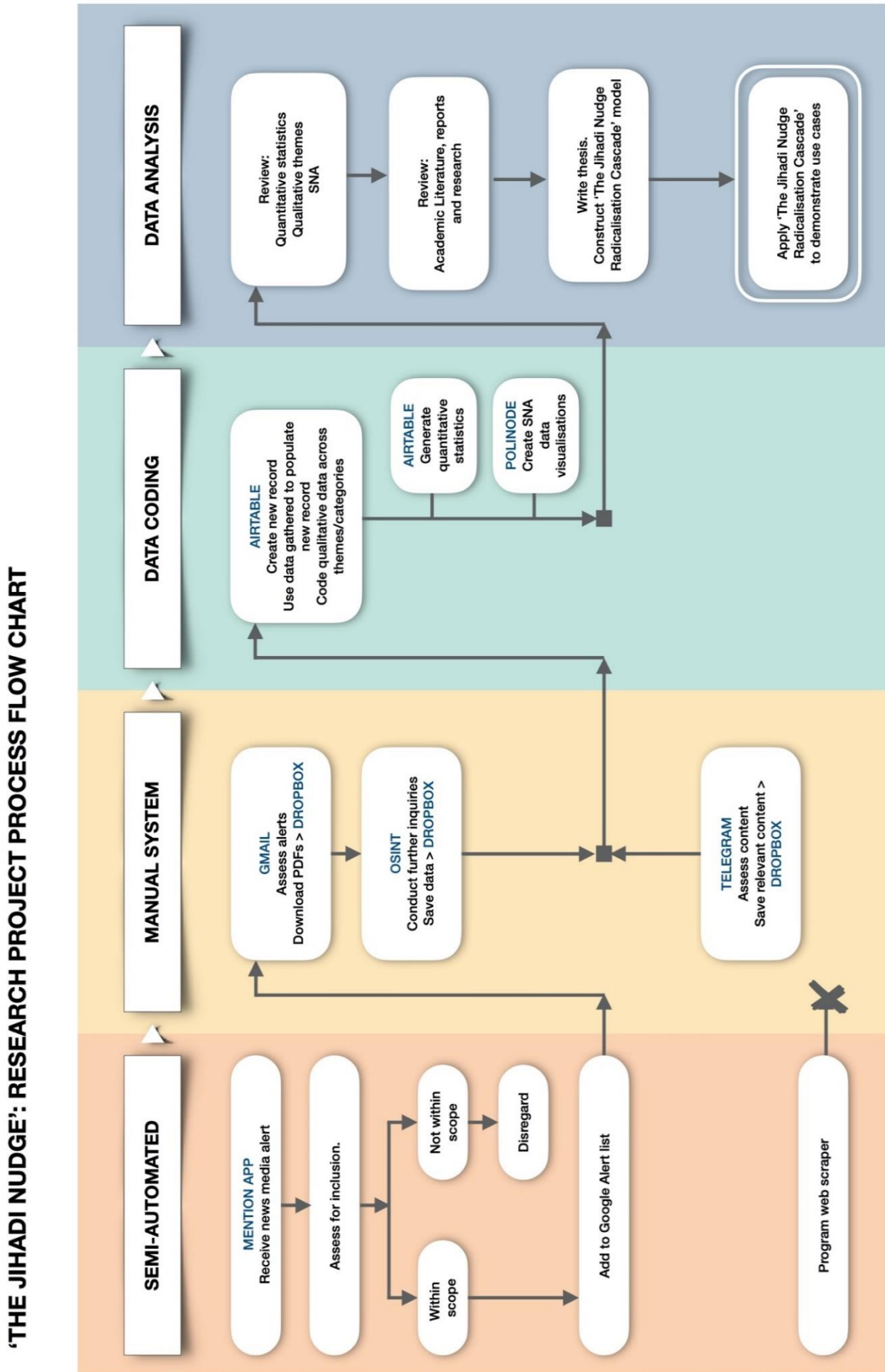
Care was taken to specifically avoid using minors in case studies and to ensure where their names had not been published in the public-domain, their information remained de-identified. Individuals identified as part of the dataset who are subject to continuing name suppression orders by a Court of Law, including suppression of the names of an offender's children, were also treated with particular care, and purposefully omitted from case-study selection.

The AFFDAN database was compiled from a range of open sources including publicly available court documents and transcripts, investigative journalism reports, academic research, social media, and other public records. No money was paid in receipt of any information, nor was information gathered from public records where the paying of fees for access was necessary.

3.4 Data Collection, Storage and Transport

Data on the cohort studied in this research project was collected from a variety of sources using both semi-automated and manual processes. The following diagram illustrates the way information was captured, organised, sifted and recorded, while the explanatory notes that follow provide additional detail on each tool's specific use in this research project.

Figure 4: A visual overview of the research and data collection process



3.4.1 Semi-Automation

To semi-automate this process web scrapers and Internet monitoring software and tools were used. Software-based tools include Mention App, Google Alerts, Gmail, Dropbox and Webscraper.io.

3.4.2 Mention App

The 'Mention' app is a French Software-as-a-Service (SAAS) web listening tool that uses Boolean queries to surface articles, social media posts, news and research on particular topics or people. Data (queries) are stored on OVHcloud, a French company that utilises Amazon Web Services for its computing power. Mention is owned by NHST Media Group AS in Norway (Mention App, 2021; OVHCloud, 2021). Data privacy, storage and security are assured under Amazon's risk processes. Amazon Web Service's accreditations include ISO 27001, SOC 1 and SOC 2, PCI Level 1, FISMA Moderate and SOX. All servers are located within the EU (Amazon Web Services, 2021; OVHCloud, 2021).

For this research project, Mention app was used to alert the researcher to terrorism raids, charges laid, and related events as-it-happened. This enabled the researcher to quickly cross-reference new data with existing information holdings and queue any new potential new additions for further investigation as more details became available.

3.4.3 Google Alerts

Google Alerts is a free notification service that Google account owners can use to alert them of search-term mentions across the Internet. The search-term functionality has minimal Boolean search capabilities, however, often delivered results of higher accuracy than Mention. As part of the Google suite of products, advanced encryption keeps data safe at rest and during

transit. Google is accredited and certified at the following ISO standards: ISO 27001 (information security management); ISO 27017 (cloud security); ISO 27018 (cloud privacy); ISO 27701 (privacy information management); SSAE16/ISAE 3402 (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants); FedRAMP (a U.S. government cloud suite); and PCI DSS (payment card industry data security standard) (Google, 2021a).

For this research project, Google Alerts were used to monitor online news reports, web articles, investigative journalism, and other information on the open-source Internet related to each Australian jihadi recorded in AFFDAN. With each record in Airtable having its own Google Alert, this enabled the researcher to quickly update records with new information (such as from court reports).

3.4.4 Gmail

Gmail is a free, secure, email client offered by Google. Gmail is encrypted (Google, 2021b) and as part of the broader Google suite of products, is compliant with the industry accrediting standards mentioned in the above section.

For this research project, Gmail was used as a data ingestion and sorting point. The email client enables similar searchability within its archives to Google search, making it easy for the researcher to sift mentions and alerts for relevance. By extracting the links from each email alert or mention, the researcher was also able to archive documents by creating PDF files and saving them to dropbox (refer below). This became increasingly important during ISIS's halcyon days, particularly as social media networks began to respond more effectively to TVEC and in many cases, took accounts down as soon as a violent Islamist's attack occurred or due to their continual breaching of the terms and conditions of the network (ostensibly because they continued to publish TVEC after being instructed not to). Additionally,

violent Islamists were swiftly de-platformed, rendering the TVEC produced deleted unless archived by other users (such as via the Internet Archives project). As a result, keeping records via PDF copies of their content became essential to avoid losing information that could inform their radicalisation trajectory.

3.4.5 Dropbox

Dropbox is a secure cloud data storage and file-sharing company that is encrypted, and data is distributed across a range of servers to enable access via desktop, web login and mobile device. Dropbox maintains compliance with industry standards including ISO 27001 and SOC 1, 2 and 3. Its regulatory compliance is best practice, including the EU-US Privacy shield, HIPPA/HITECH compliance and GDPR compliance (Dropbox, 2021).

For this research project, Dropbox was used to hold all files pertaining to the collection and analysis of PDF, imagery and video-based data, and all drafts of the thesis.

3.4.6 Web scraping: Webscraper.io

Webscraper.io is a data extraction bot that scrapes data from targeted open sources on the Internet. The tooling has integration options with Dropbox (which the researcher utilised) and the ability to automate data extraction via an API. Based in Riga, Latvia, the tool is GDPR-compliant and conforms to EU regulatory requirements (Webscraper.io, 2021).

Early in this research project during the information gathering stage, the researcher programmed a web scraper to gather data from the Internet on those identified for inclusion in AFFDAN. It quickly became evident to the researcher, however, that despite the usefulness of the results, the volume and quantity delivered each day made it impossible to organise the data in

a way that would yield results in a cost-effective and time-efficient manner. Early analysis of the information delivered by the web scraper showed significant duplication of information already known via Google Alerts and Mention, only at a much higher volume and velocity (mostly due to the high level of syndicated news media around the world). As a result of the high-rate of information duplication, the high-costs of data storage and inability to effectively organise the data the researcher made the decision to turn-off the web scraper and not utilise the data collected as a result.

3.4.6 Manual systematic processes

Due to the nature of the qualitative data being analysed, several manual processes were built so a systematic approach to data assessment and inclusion could occur. These include standardised OSINT processes, the sourcing of primary source material and the use of Telegram. While the system of information discovery, ingestion, assessment, and recording is articulated in the previous graphic, the following notes provide further detail on each element of that process.

3.4.7 OSINT

Searches for and of violent Islamist social media accounts after their arrest, the commission of a terrorist attack, capture or death was necessary as soon as possible after an attack or as the identity of a foreign fighter became public. This is because social media networks were exceptionally quick to take down the accounts of violent Islamists, particularly when they had used their account to promote TVEC or share propaganda of the deed. In numerous cases, social media content had been removed by the platform before the researcher was able to access and assess it. News media, early during the rise of ISIS, would also embed content rather than upload a photograph of it, which meant when the account was deleted, the links to content belonging to it also disappeared from public view. As the conflict in

Syria and Iraq continued, the news media improved their reporting, not only to present screen captures or copies of the content but also in anonymising it so that others could not use it to view TVEC (should the account still be active).

Of those violent Islamists remaining online, many routinely cycled through backup profiles due to the frequency at which their 'primary' accounts were suspended for content violations. Significant OSINT effort was often required to rediscover new accounts to enable research to continue. This was not always possible.

3.4.8 Primary Source Material

Primary source material – documents published by al-Qaeda and ISIS – were gathered directly from jihadist channels on Telegram, online, or where gaps in the source material were identified (such as missing issues of ISIS's Dabiq magazine) the Jihadi Document Repository at the University of Oslo. Videos published by ISIS were accessed via YouTube or groups and channels on Telegram (refer below).

For this research project, while engagement with source material was contextually valuable, given the extensive and in-depth research being conducted by scholars in the field, there was also a broad body of peer-reviewed literature available on these same TVEC artefacts. The literature available enabled the researcher to leverage the work of others, as cited throughout this thesis.

3.4.9 Telegram

Telegram is a free messaging and file sharing app that offers users the ability to partially or fully encrypt chats between two users. Channels and groups are not encrypted (Telegram, 2021). After being deplatformed from

mainstream social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter (Khalil, 2021), ISIS's online 'cyber army' migrated to Telegram not only to publish and share their TVEC but also to radicalise and recruit (Clifford & Powell, 2019; Topsfield, 2017; Valentini et al., 2020). Telegram has periodically deplatformed large numbers of ISIS users from their network (Al-Tamimi, 2019), however such actions do not seem to impact the group's ability to quickly switch to backup accounts or rebuild new accounts (Khalil, 2021).

For this research project, Telegram was used to obtain primary source publications, memes, imagery, and videos. Due to the volume and velocity of discussion around the content posted to channels and groups, and the anonymity the app affords, it was not possible for the researcher to accurately verify users suspected of being Australian without directly engaging with users (which did not occur). Due to ongoing operational security considerations, the researcher chose not to pursue direct engagement with violent Islamists via Telegram chats as a means of information discovery because it would have involved either (a) outing their real identity and intent; or (b) creating a fake Telegram account and persona to interact with them. Given the risks associated with both approaches, and the researcher's concerns around the ethical and legal nature of interacting with violent Islamists in either context, the account used was used only in an observation context only.

3.4.10 Data storage and security

In addition to the software research components already listed earlier in this section, the research project was housed in the cloud using a software tool called Airtable.

Airtable is the platform on which AFFDAN is housed and maintained. Social Network Analysis (SNA) data visualisations produced use an additional

software serviced called Polinode. Backups of both datasets are kept in Dropbox.

3.4.11 Airtable: AFFDAN

Airtable is a lowcode hybrid spreadsheet-database platform hosted in the cloud. In addition to the spreadsheet features you'd expect of a program such as Microsoft Excel, Airtable allows you to create inter-relational links between fields to better display your data. Records created in Airtable (called bases) are hosted in the cloud using 256-bit TLS encryption during data transfer and AES-256 encryption when the data is at rest. Airtable is ISO/IEC accredited (27001:2013) as an information management system and retains SOC type 2 compliance. Airtable's servers are based in the United States of America and are protected by cybersecurity and physical security measures, including strict physical access control. As servers are based the United States of America, Airtable is compliant with U.S. privacy law and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Airtable, 2021a, 2021b).

For this research project, the hybrid-spreadsheet functionality of Airtable enabled the information gathered to be parsed systematically into demographic and psychographic categories to enable effective quantitative analysis. Other Airtable fields were used to capture qualitative data (such as free text) images and graphs. The major benefit Airtable has over traditional spreadsheets is its ability to link one record with another. This enabled the researcher to link violent Islamists across fields such as 'recruited by', 'known associate of' and 'family links.' This made it easy for the researcher to identify which networks the violent Islamist belonged to, who their radicalising agents were and how they were interconnected within the broader extremist community. This ability to link records also enabled the researcher to use node-to-node data visualisation software to represent

the Australian violent Islamist community, its influencers and outliers using Polinode (refer below).

3.4.12 Polinode

Polinode is a data visualisation tool that enables an interactive analysis of data. Polinode enables SNA data visualisation representation using a range of metrics including node-inbound and outbound degrees of connectivity within communities. This is the way data was compiled to create the SNA for AFFDAN. Polinode is a Sydney, Australia-based company that uses servers in the European Union (EU) to host and analyse user data. Using Amazon Web Services (EU-west-region1) based in Ireland, the company is GDPR compliant inclusive of EU model clauses (Polinode, 2021).

For this research project, Polinode was used to demonstrate the connectivity of the Australian violent Islamist community via inbound and outbound nodes. Node strength in this context is directly representational of how many violent Islamists can be attributed to particular recruiters or availability entrepreneurs. The bigger the node, the more influence that individual has had on the radicalisation of others.

3.5 Data Coding and Analytics

Understanding the radicalisation trajectories of Australian violent Islamists in a systematic way is necessary to pinpoint the nudges and availability cascades being exerted by influencers within the community in a way that could be replicated. By identifying the commonalities and differences in radicalising pathways, particularly against known violent Islamist recruitment tactics, each individual's radicalisation cascade can be extrapolated.

3.5.1 Data Coding

Data were manually coded into an Airtable record from the source of the information. The fields that information was coded to can be found at section 3.5.2. This ensured that as many categories as possible could be completed and subsequently searched. Manual data coding was particularly valuable as in most instances, to get a robust picture of the violent Islamist established across all 88 categories, the information had to be drawn from multiple qualitative sources over time. Coding the data in this manner enabled the researcher to quickly and accurately (a) distil large amounts of information into categories that could be used for quantitative analysis; and (b) identify trends and themes among different cohorts within the community.

That Airtable enabled data to be coded in an inter-relational manner and displayed that data visually, also assisted the researcher in taking the big-data set accumulated and making it smart, digestible and easy to work with. That the AFFDAN dataset is based on a big-data, targeted OSINT sweep and aggregated via this data coding method, resulting in a richer and deeper insight into both the statistical and behavioural picture built around each individual's record. The ability to quickly find other records within AFFDAN of individuals demonstrating like, or sharing similar attributes was also of great benefit. It should be noted that the referencing software used by the researcher, Mendeley, also enabled data to be coded via tags and searched via a Google-like functionality. This enabled both academic and other source material to be interrogated for each individual, particularly in the development of case studies for this thesis.

3.5.2 Data Analysis

The analysis of the AFFDAN dataset resulted in three defined outputs: (1) quantitative statistical results drawn from the aggregation of coded

information; (2) qualitative information being distilled into the dataset to build a picture of a violent Islamist's radicalisation trajectory and (3) the behavioural attributes that evidenced a susceptibility to or compliance with nudges applied by recruiters and in-groups. To achieve this, individual profiles for each violent Islamist meeting the data selection parameters for this study were compiled across 88 different informational, demographic and psychographic attributes and variables. Each data point was hand-coded, where the data was available (and not all individuals had complete records) to ensure the source of the information was validated and cross-referenced. These attributes and variables are:

1. Full Name (or generic identifier in the case of minors)
2. Picture (if available)
3. Gender
4. Age (at time of offending)
5. Inclusion reason (convicted terrorist, jihadi bride or known Islamic extremist)
6. Police operation designation (if any and known)
7. Any known aliases
8. Status (alive, alive in custody, deceased, presumed deceased, unknown)
9. Intent (foreign, domestic, both foreign and domestic, unknown)
10. Role in terrorist attack, plot or group
11. Ideology (if clear)
12. Last known geographical location
13. Biographical notes (free text)
14. Behavioural economics notes (free text)
15. File links (where available such as copies of wikileaks or other source data)
16. Recruited by (if known)
17. Known associates
18. Recruited (if known)

19. Date of Birth (if known)
20. Marital status (if known)
21. Spouse (if known – only included if involved in violent Islamist activities)
22. Children (if known – only included if involved in violent Islamist activities)
23. Relatives/Extended family (if known – only included if involved in violent Islamist activities)
24. Last known suburb of residence
25. Last known State of residence
26. Date left Australia (for foreign fighters, when known)
27. Date returned to Australia (for foreign fighters, when known)
28. Country of birth (if known)
29. Place of birth (if known)
30. Migration to Australia (year arrived, where available)
31. Arrival status (such as student, refugee, spouse, if known)
32. Dual citizenship held (if any and known)
33. Country of dual citizenship (if held and known)
34. Was the terrorist or known Islamic extremist stripped of their Australian Citizenship? (if known)
35. If the terrorist or known Islamic extremist was stripped of their Australian Citizenship, when was it cancelled? (if known)
36. Ethic heritage (if known)
37. Current religion (if known)
38. Muslim by birth or reversion (if known)
39. Prior religion (if applicable and known)
40. Prior/current occupations (at the time of offending or prior to leaving Australia as a foreign fighter, if known)
41. Secondary School (if known)
42. University (if known)
43. Tertiary qualifications (if known)
44. Place of worship (if known)

45. Was the individual's passport cancelled by the Australian Government? (if known)
46. If the individual's passport was cancelled, on what date (if known)?
47. If deceased, date of death (if known)
48. If deceased, country of death (if known)
49. Address abroad (if known)
50. Cause of death (if known)
51. History of pre-jihadist criminality? (if known)
52. If there is a history of pre-jihadist criminality, the category of prior crime (if known)
53. Post-terrorism criminality (on parole, bail or release after time served for terrorism offences, where known)
54. If there is a history of post-terrorism criminality, the category of crimes committed (if known)
55. Was a warrant issued for their arrest (mostly applicable to foreign fighters, if known)
56. Person of interest reason (if not already clear)
57. If domestic terrorist, domestic target (if known)
58. Violence/weapons of choice (if clear)
59. On the United States No Fly List or Kill List? (Information available via WikiLeaks)
60. Does or did the terrorist hold an Australian firearms license at any time? (if known)
61. Are family links to organised crime evident?
62. Was the terrorist charged under Australian law? (if known)
63. If the terrorist was charged under Australian law, the date of their arrest (if known)
64. If the terrorist was charged under Australian law, a list of the offences they were charged with (if known)
65. If the terrorist was charged under Australian law, what was the judicial outcome? (if known)

66. If the terrorist was charged under Australian law, and found guilty, what was the sentence handed down? (if known)
67. Judicial notes (free text)
68. Parole date (if known or can be extrapolated)
69. If imprisoned, which prisons are/were they incarcerated in (if known)
70. Prison notes (free text)
71. Was the individual primarily radicalised online and/or via social media
72. Category of radicalisation (family, peer-to-peer, online, spouse, unknown)
73. If a foreign fighter, what means of transport did they use to leave Australia (Sea or Air)? (if known)
74. Airport or Port of departure (or intended departure, if known)
75. Airline or ship information (if known)
76. Route of travel to overseas destination (if known)
77. Prior application to the Australian Defence Force (including notation of overseas military service, if known)
78. Military service (free text, if known)
79. Was the terrorist or known Islamic extremist mentally unwell? (as diagnosed by a medical practitioner)
80. If the terrorist or known Islamic extremist was mentally unwell, what conditions did they suffer from? (as diagnosed by a medical practitioner)
81. Was the terrorist or known Islamic extremist a recipient of government welfare? (if known)
82. If the terrorist or known Islamic extremist was a recipient of government welfare, what kind did they receive? (if known)
83. Facebook URL/s (if known)
84. Twitter URL/s (if known)
85. Instagram URLs/ (if known)
86. Email address/s (if known)

87. Mobile phone number/s (if known)
88. Year first entered into AFFDAN

7.5.3 Mixed-Methods Research Design

Analysis of the aggregate data set was via a mixed method approach: quantitative statistical measurement of qualitative demographics and psychographics, followed by an exploration of the data using social network analysis techniques. This mixed methods approach to research design was deliberate: by taking this approach the researcher was able to glean a more holistic view of the data collected while being able to sift that data in a variety of ways to produce a range of insights.

Mixed-methods approaches to research in terrorism-related disciplines are increasingly common. Norris and Grol-Prokopczyk (2018) observed that mixed methods research in criminal justice studies is “particularly useful for studying counterterrorism investigations” because of the diverse, and often classified nature, of the subject material. The authors go on to state that by using mixed-methods approaches it is possible to compensate (to a degree) for the inherent limitations placed on researchers as a result (Norris & Grol-Prokopczyk, 2018). Vicente (2021) notes that “differential recruitment” is key to violent Islamist endeavours and by employing a mixed-methods approach to research because of its “potential to explain the complexity of network structures and processes” (Vicente, 2021) a robust evidence base can be built. O’Halloran et al (2019) notes that the interconnection between violent extremists, their content and propaganda makes it important to be able to “understand the contemporary intersection of social-media-driven terrorist communications and social influence.” Further, O’Halloran et al (2019) observe that a mixed methods approach to analytical techniques, particularly those employing “big data-based methodologies, such as SNA, data mining and other tools” are essential to the understanding of “the rise and spread of violent extremist interactions in virtual environments and about shifts in the morphology of social influence.” O’Halloran et al (2019) suggest that mixed-methods research is “poised to become an integral component of big data analytics, with the

promise of a new research paradigm for studying violent extremist discourse” (O’Halloran et al., 2019). The nature of this study – encompassing a range of data sources, aggregating, and then analysing it – while not unique in nature, is unique in its framework against the effects of nudging and the influence of availability cascades on violent extremists. Mixed-methods research design, however, is not without its limitations, and these will be discussed further at section 3.6.2.

3.5.4 Quantitative research: comparable descriptive statistics

Quantitative research is primarily concerned with the collection and analysis of data in a numerical fashion. This is useful for a range of reasons, particularly the ease with which datasets can be compared, and the data operationalised by target publics such as policymakers, law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Quantitative research results also lend themselves to contributing to knowledge and data over time, to provide an accurate and holistic picture of new and emergent trends. As Allan et al (2015) point out, many quantitative studies “focus on terrorism rather than violent extremism” (Allan et al., 2015). These include the widely referenced Global Terrorism Database (University of Maryland, 2018) and the Global Terrorism Index (University of Maryland, 2021b). Other scholars have taken a similar approach to this researcher in using a like-approach to coding qualitative data to produce descriptive statistical results. Shanahan’s (2019) work on the typology of violent Islamists in Australia is the closest available literature available to AFFDAN for comparison. Using a similar qualitative approach to producing descriptive quantitative statistics, Shanahan’s (2019) findings (Shanahan, 2019) are broadly consistent with those in AFFDAN. The United States-based PRIUS project (University of Maryland, 2021c), and its soon-to-be Australian version, also adopt similar approaches.

In the context of a mixed-methods research framework, the quantitative component performs several functions in this thesis: (1) it standardises the collection of varied data to match pre-determined fields; (2) it enables statistical data to be drawn from the dataset; (3) it enables information to be compared with like-datasets available over time and, (4); it provides the structure from which qualitative data can be explored systematically and replicated.

3.5.5 Qualitative demographics and psychographs

Qualitative research is primarily concerned with the collection and analysis of data that is harder to quantify because it is non-numerical in nature and concept, or theme based. Examples drawn from sources used to inform this thesis include photos, memes, songs, messages, videos, transcripts, court documents, investigative journalism, news reports, magazines and manuals. To study these types of content in depth, it is necessary to observe the content of each artefact. As a result, data can be drawn to inform behaviours, worldviews, pathways to radicalisation, terrorist intent and nudge influencers. This method of research isn't new to the discipline. Notable scholars such as Sagerman (as cited by Kaczkowski et al, 2018) and Kruglanski et al (2018) have developed theories based on comparative qualitative datasets. Sagerman's "bunch of guys" theory and Kruglanski et al's (2018) significance quest theory (Kaczkowski et al., 2020; Kruglanski et al., 2018b) have delivered significant contributions to knowledge in the study of contemporary violent extremism. More recently, Schmid et al's (2021) study on the research preferences of those in the broader terrorism studies discipline stated that respondents to their survey indicated that their preferred research approach or method was via "qualitative analysis (21.3%)", outpacing "empirical (14.9%), historicisation (10.6%), multi-disciplinary (10.6%), quantitative analysis (8.5%), primary interviews (6.4%), contextualisation (6.4%) and comparative analysis (6.4%)" (Schmid et al., 2021).

In the context of a mixed-methods research framework, the qualitative research approach component performs several functions in this thesis: (1) it surfaces personal attributes and information that when aggregated, present a fuller picture of violent Islamist behaviours, pathways and intent; (2) it enables information discovery to occur via the types of content violent Islamists are consuming and producing, such as TVEC; and (3) it allows for the inclusion of ways in which technology is being used (or abused) by violent extremist communities, such as via messaging and file sharing apps like Telegram.

3.5.6 Social Network Analysis

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a particularly useful tool to examine the on and offline interrelationships between individuals. Defined by Zech and Gabbay (2016) as “patterns of relations, or social structure, among actors within a defined boundary” (Zech & Gabbay, 2016) other scholars in the national security discipline have also increasingly adopted this approach. Mullins (2013) notes that SNA “holds potential, in particular, for identifying terrorist facilitators and group leaders, because measures of centrality are quantitative” (Mullins, 2013) while Perliger and Pedahzur (2011) observe that SNA analysis can also be used to “investigate how the type and intensity of ties among the group’s members and the multifunctional nature are associated with the group’s radicalisation, the emergence of common identity and ideological commitment” (Perliger & Pedahzur, 2011).

SNA was used as part of this research project because it enabled the data collected on Australian violent Islamists’ interrelationships to be visualised and explored at a granular level. Further, the software used (Polinode) was able to be programmed to highlight both individual connectivities within the SNA, and also to observe which violent Islamists were having more influence on the community in comparison to others. This proved to be a

valuable means of establishing community leadership, influence agents and common radicalisation pathways.

3.6 Limitations

There are several limitations in the research design of this study that must be acknowledged.

3.6.1 Study size

The limitation of the study size, which may be considered small, is a direct correlation to the number of active violent Islamists in the Australian population. The number of arrests, deaths and a smaller number of successful prosecutions reflect the reality of there being relatively few jihadists within wider Australian society radicalising to the point of violent extremism. To avoid a prohibitively small study size, this research project was designed to also incorporate known violent Islamists who were deemed to be actively engaged but who have not yet committed violence. Further, as this research was aimed at understanding the qualities, vulnerabilities, behaviours, influences and nudges on the radicalisation trajectory of violent Islamists, broadening the study to those going through this process enabled more data to be collected and analysed. The researcher also notes that other scholars have drawn conclusions and proposed new models on smaller sample sizes. For example, Sageman's "bunch of guys theory" is based on a study of 172 individuals (Kaczkowski et al., 2020), while Shanahan draws conclusions and offers a 'profile of an Australian jihadi' based on a study size of 194 individuals (Shanahan, 2019).

Due to ongoing national security considerations, public access to court transcripts and documents is limited regarding terrorism trials. This precludes any information being obtained via investigations conducted by Police for example. The judiciary, and the integrity of that process (and the

rights of the accused), are also factors in how much information of this nature is currently publicly available. The volume of transcripts and court documents that would ordinarily be available via public information means is significantly reduced in the case of the trial/s, sentencing, parole, and serving of control orders on suspected or convicted terrorists in Australia. Much of this documentation is classified under national security caveats and unavailable for review until the statutory period for their release passes. This is usually, if no objections on national security grounds remain, in several decades' time. Further, access to prisoners convicted of terrorism remains highly restricted by Police and Corrective Services, making obtaining interviews or statements difficult. In the case of access to prisoners, researchers must also consider the advice of law enforcement agencies regarding their safety in pursuing such requests or contact with the families of convicted terrorists. On advice, and to keep the dataset clean in terms of open or closed-source information origin, the researcher chose not to pursue these avenues of inquiry and acknowledges the limitations this presents on her research.

The primary sources referred to in this thesis are taken from the terrorist organisations' own holdings, as shared by violent Islamist communities within Australia and overseas. However, the possession of these publications and storage of repositories of content for research has raised questions of legality for academics, students, and universities. The researcher understands that as a research student, access and storage is permitted for academic purposes only.

3.6.2 Mixed methods limitations

While Norris and Grol-Prijioczyk (2019) do not note any limitations in their mixed-methods research approach, other scholars do. Vincente (2021) notes that mixed-methods approaches to research can at times, "operate without conformity to a standardized framework" which can result in an

inability for the researcher to adequately reconcile the differing techniques used (Vicente, 2021). O'Halloran et al (2019) also make note that while mixed-methods approaches are significant in their ability to deliver results, studies such as theirs are novel in the terrorism studies discipline, which itself presents challenges. These include the complexity of collecting, organising and the interrogation of data, as well as the inability of researchers to keep pace with changes in the terrorism environment. While not insurmountable, the authors suggest that "truly disciplinary, non-compartmental science, overcoming the traditional separation between humanities and the sciences" is needed to further advance this research method in terrorism-associated disciplines. (O'Halloran et al., 2019).

Mitigations have been put in place to overcome the limitations noted in this section, as best as is possible and practicable. This has included taking a systemised approach to data analysis and case studies. This approach not only makes it easier to view the data comparatively within like-sections of the thesis but also presents data in ways that already exist or are emergent from other scholars of note within the discipline. For example, the ability to compare the work of Matejic (2016) with Shanahan (2019) and the findings of this thesis contributes to a growing body of work that not only tracks like-data over time but also by type in Australia. This contributes to the building of a longitudinal picture of knowledge on the radicalisation and recruitment pathways of Australian violent Islamists across conflicts and points of technological evolution while contributing to new knowledge via the radicalisation cascade.

3.6.3 OSINT

The reliability of information found in the public domain, even from primary sources, can never be fully verified. News and media reporting may be presented with the biases or political leaning of their masthead owner/s, which can affect how stories are framed and communicated. Defence

lawyers also contribute to the narratives surrounding their clients in the public domain. As will be explored in the next chapter, the case study of NAMOA is a good example of how facts can be portrayed in a way that obfuscates the offenders' true intentions and active radicalism.

Further, ISIS's social media strategy was purposefully provocative and engineered to take maximum advantage of the way social media algorithms propel content into newsfeeds and timelines. The news media's fixation with publicising ISIS's propaganda of the deed attacks added an additional dimension to this distortion of the information terrain by making their readers effective witnesses of terrorism via the broadscale embedding of video content in news pieces.

Social media platform countermeasures also limited the content produced by terrorist organisations and violent Islamists alike, often preventing content from being uploaded or by de-platforming account holders. While ISIS's violent Islamists found ways to circumvent the countermeasures put in place by mainstream social media networks, mostly by shifting their operations into more secure, decentralised apps like Telegram, the result is that researchers have an incomplete picture of open-source information holdings. To date, social networks have not kept records of the data they have removed or prevented from being uploaded on their platforms unless compelled to by law. Some work has been done to hash (give a unique computational identifier) content that is recognised globally as exceptionally harmful, but researchers have limited if any access to these types of primary source repositories.

3.7 Conclusion

While existing and emergent studies of the activities of Australian violent Islamists have focused on either the al-Qaeda (9/11) or ISIS cohorts respectively, this study took a broader view because of the enduring

influence of inter-relational linkages within the Australian Islamic extremist community. The most comparative dataset available is Shanahan's (2019) Typology of Terror which builds on much of Matejic's (2016) earlier formative work in this field. However, Shanahan's (2019) work is largely focused on the study of individuals involved with ISIS (Shanahan, 2019). Cherney et al's (2020) 'Profiles of Individual Radicalisation' (PRIA) also appears to also be comparative in nature, however, the PRIA dataset has not yet been made available to other researchers for study. Already published findings from PRIA indicate that it may offer an additional perspective into the radicalisation trajectories of Australian violent Islamists (Cherney et al., 2020).

While the research methods used in this study are not unique, the way in which they were applied by the researcher to demonstrate knowledge in an Australian context was original and has been emulated by others. This may be because mixed-methods research has become more accepted within the terrorism and violent extremism disciplines, and the way in which the author presented information in a 2016 publication was immediately useful to operational decision-makers. Further, the dataset and the way results are reported have been useful in building a conceptual model taking a behavioural economics view as opposed to a psychological, criminological, or sociological approach.

While building on the relevant and seminal work in those disciplines, the multi-disciplinary nature of professional practice is reflected in this research approach and the resulting outcomes. By using choice architecture as a framework and nudging to illustrate decision-making influence environments, the dataset supports the findings made and the conceptual model proposed.

CHAPTER 4 – NUDGE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a theoretical outline of how prospective violent Islamists are 'nudged' by Islamic extremists through the radicalisation process using online content marketing toward recruitment and violent action. This chapter references the decision-making models and theory explored in the literature review and presents treatments that draw upon applications of expected utility theory (Becker, 1968; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992) that underpin Thaler and Sunstein's 2009 book 'Nudge' (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009) with the work on terrorist choice and prospect theory of Phillips and Pohl (Phillips & Pohl, 2014, 2017). The application of these models to Islamic extremist radicalisation and recruitment where radicalisation is the key payoff and driver to successful recruitment leading to violent action represents the core contribution of this thesis.

As detailed in the literature review, existing studies that directly take a multidisciplinary approach to identify behavioural economics theory and apply it to the radicalisation process are limited. The scholarship bridging behavioural economics and terrorism is primarily the work of Phillips and Pohl (Phillips & Pohl, 2014, 2017) with emerging contributions of knowledge coming from multidisciplinary scholars across the criminology, psychology disciplines and the national security field of professional practice.

4.1 Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, the connection between Nudge, terrorism and online activity will be explored, drawing together the concepts covered in the literature review. This chapter is organised as follows: in Section 4.2 the theory that underpins Thaler and Sunstein's book 'Nudge' (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009) and the premise on which this thesis is based, is identified.

In Section 4.3 the concept of a nudge and practical examples of how they work will be explored. Section 4.4 will specifically address online nudges and how they differ from offline nudges, particularly in identifying human-led, as opposed to algorithmically engineered, nudges. Section 4.5 will look at the nudges that have been built into contemporary content marketing payloads to increase payoffs. Section 4.6 brings together the concepts of nudge and choice architecture and how choice architecture can be used and abused. Section 4.7 addresses how nudges are a part of contemporary terrorism strategies to increase payoffs and reduce risky prospects. Section 4.8 moves a step further from nudging terrorist strategy to terrorist actions as the penultimate payoff. Section 4.9 looks at nudges and terrorist online activity, and how they are framed to influence violent Islamist's decision-making. Section 4.10 concludes this chapter with a look ahead to how this foundation supports Chapter 5 – The Radicalisation Cascade.

4.2 Nudge

The word 'nudge' has become something of a colloquial buzzword since authors Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein used it as the title of their 2009 book. While seminal in bringing the concept to mainstream awareness and arguably broader application and use, nudges are neither new nor the brainchild of Thaler and Sunstein. Lending from the term however, to illustrate how individuals can be radicalised leveraging online content marketing, toward recruitment to violent action, we need to understand that Thaler and Sunstein's (2009) intent was shaped by the premise that libertarian paternalism preserves an individual's freedom of choice to make rational decisions, while concurrently allowing external influences to steer that same individual toward a particular option because it is in their best interests. Such is the case, for example, where nudges are used to encourage participation in retirement savings schemes, cultivate self-awareness regarding the health benefits of avoiding tobacco products or placing healthy food options in preferential physical locations in

supermarkets and cafeterias to reduce junk food consumption. In this manner, the nudge is viewed as a positive tool to assist individuals achieve long-term benefits (with payoffs to Governments through reduced associated support services costs) while avoiding otherwise poor decision-making that is often based on biases or cognitive heuristics (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009).

The distinction that needs to be made here in the context of radicalisation, which Thaler and Sunstein (2009) do not factor in their modelling, is that violent extremists construct both a physical and virtual environment in which a susceptible individual is nudged toward specific end-states by their influencer or recruiter. In this context, the individual believes they retain both freedom of choice and rational decision-making capability, when in reality, both are impaired by external influences whose payoffs are – to the majority of the world-- not in the individual's best interests. Islamic extremists, however, could legitimately argue that their actions are in the individuals' best interests based on their interpretation of religious and ideological scripture, where the benefit to the individual is a payoff redeemed in the spiritual afterlife.

That is not to suggest that all individuals who begin down the radicalisation pathway set before them are successfully radicalised or recruited and go on to become violent extremists – statistically, this is not the case. Rather, the nudge into a spectrum of extremism is staged to ascertain the individuals' receptiveness to new information, at which point the recruiter either continues to invest in radicalising them or strategically disengages because the individual represents a risky prospect.⁴⁴ In this example, the individual's ability to avoid the nudge preserves their freedom of choice. However, it must be acknowledged that (a) individuals may in full

⁴⁴ For example, ISIS's recruitment handbook sets out specific pathways for potential recruiters to funnel prospects through, with stages to assess their receptiveness or otherwise, at which point the prospect continues to be cultivated or the handler/recruiter disengages to avoid loss aversion.

knowledge and understanding of the circumstances still choose to participate in radicalisation and recruitment; and (b) in the opposite circumstance, where the individual is a seemingly willing participant in the radicalisation process, libertarian paternalism is abused to create a situation of harm for the individual, even if they themselves do not recognise it at the time or at any point in the future. Sunstein (2018, 2019) offers the term 'Sludge'⁴⁵ to describe the abuse of libertarian paternalism in a manner that directly or indirectly disadvantages or harms the individual (Sunstein, 2018; Sunstein 2019).

4.3 What is a Nudge?

In the simplest of terms, a nudge is the gentle pushing of someone or a group toward a decision that is in their best interests. Thaler and Sunstein's (2009) definition of a nudge is twofold in that it contains the decision-maker and the decision-making infrastructure that influences the individuals' choices. Thaler and Sunstein (2009) refer to those who design or construct choices as 'Choice Architects' with the exertion of influence through a decision framework referred to as 'Choice Architecture.' In essence, people's decisions are very much influenced by the decision environment they find themselves in. Thaler and Sunstein's (2009) definition is clear in that the nudge must have a predictable outcome while not limiting any freedom of choice toward other options. Nudges can be applied to both an individual and/or groups. The individual or group must have the freedom to disengage from the nudge at any point within the choice architecture without any significant impact on their economic incentives. In this way there is no neutral design to choice architecture – everything is constructed or framed in a way that has influence – subtle or otherwise, on a person or

⁴⁵ A 'sludge' is defined as a behavioural intervention that does not have the individual or group's best interests at heart. An example of Sludge is excessive attempts at preventing an individual from retaining autonomy over their own free-will in decision-making – such as insisting on them completing arbitrary actions, preventing them from taking an action or making it unnecessarily difficult to complete an action in an attempt to induce them into giving up or complying with the architect of the sludge. Refer 'Sludge and Ordeals' (Sunstein, 2018); and 'Sludge Audits' (Sunstein, 2019).

group's decision-making, perceptions and worldviews (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009, p.15-22).

Of course, in real life, not all choice architects comply strictly with Thaler and Sunstein's (2009) definition, favouring instead nudges that explicitly result in benefits to the choice architect (or their government, company, or organisation) over benefits to the individual or group. In matters of pricing, for example, the decoy effect is often used to nudge people to change their preferred choice by introducing a third choice that is similar enough, but less attractive. Choice architects know that human behaviour tends to fail to consider the true trade-offs when choosing between similar options, resulting in the overall costs of their choice outweighing the benefits. This can be most explicitly observed in gimmicky sale tactics that encourage you to spend more to take advantage of 'limited time offers' (scarcity bias) or 'better value for money' (sunk cost fallacy) or 'free' (zero price effect) options to nudge people into making unplanned purchases or spending more than they anticipated. In many cases, point-of-sale marketing bombards the decision-maker into a position of decision fatigue, enabling choice architects to overcome even the most nudge-resistant individuals to achieve their objectives. If you've ever been asked 'would you like fries with that' or 'would you like to upsize your meal for a dollar' after waiting in a fast-food drive-through queue with hungry children in the back of the car, the relief at just agreeing to something to have the transaction over (default bias) can be worth the extra dollar!

Choice architecture that is built specifically for groups harnesses the ways those within groups influence one another. In-group social norms collectively reinforced biases and shared world views all contribute to predictable decision outcomes. Disingenuous choice architects that have direct influence on and over groups can be particularly self-serving in the construction of choice architecture by manipulating group members' emotions, restricting available information, holding out rewards or using

other types of coercive strategies, such as ostracism, ensuring compliance. The psychological aspect of nudge manipulation – both in individuals and groups – isn't just the modus operandi of nefarious choice architects. Psychological manipulation can be used for positive effect by choice architects such as in the examples of increasing blood donations during national shortages, encouraging organ donation, reducing drink driving and instances of unsafe work practices resulting in death or disability. Some of these nudges for good causes, such as organ donation, have been adopted by Governments as default options from which individuals need to opt out if desired.

4.4 Online nudges

Online nudges are very much like their offline counterparts, only they are almost impossible to avoid. Due to their inherent programmatic structures, algorithmic dominance and user-centred design, the Internet, social networks, and mobile device apps; along with their interconnectivity with news media and other information-based digital ecosystems, form a potentially influential environment for both decision-makers and choice architects. There is no neutral ground or respite from nudges online. Consent is almost always implied by a website's or social network's terms of use, with the personal data collected in the background used to remarket products, services, ideas and information back to the user in pervasive nudges aimed at either encouraging you to complete a digital transaction (think: click, buy, sell and/or share) or think about a topic in a different way so that your next action in that particular regard can be aligned with the choice architect's intent or at least become more predictable (think: votes, subscriptions, activism, longer-term purchasing decisions and/or online habits). Remarketing tactics also extend from actions on one website to almost all other spaces online. Using eBay as an example, if say you were looking at purchasing a set of golf clubs and browsed eBay's listings, you would find the advertisements appearing on your social networks, news

media sites and search engine results also showing you golf clubs, nudging you into deciding on that purchase. Travel websites are similarly noxious, not only following you around the Internet with their advertisements but incrementally increasing the price of your researched airfare or accommodation search to induce a scarcity bias that nudges you through a sunk cost fallacy to purchase that airfare or make that accommodation reservation now before prices rise. Given all mainstream Internet browsers-- barring Tor and significantly re-engineered versions of Firefox (Ice Cat, Waterfox and Pale Moon) and Chrome (Iridium, Ungogled Chromium and Brave) default the user to open web surfing sessions where their data is harvested, choice architects are able to leverage the data collected to retarget their nudges. It can also be argued that mainstream Internet browsers form a noxious, monetised partnership with many websites to allow such potent choice architecture to be developed and deployed in the first place, enabling online nudges to leverage the same behavioural economics elements of offline nudges. Private browsing sessions, however, are only available via less than readily accessible methods of opting-in and reduce the ability for user data to be harvested from each online session.

From scarcity to decoy effects, status quo optioning and anchoring online nudges can replicate the offline choice architecture cycle while at the same time building in more precise adjustments to course correct or prompt decision-makers at any point in the online choice pathway. In a sales, marketing, and advertising context, the advantages to the choice architect are clear, with arguably mutually beneficial if not somewhat reciprocal outcomes for the buyer and the seller and/or the designer/producer and the user. What the Internet, social networks, mobile device apps and online news media do best, however, is to deliver nudges packaged up in influential content payloads. From algorithms designed to keep feeding you more of what you view, click and engage with, to third-party advanced programming interfaces (APIs) and cookies that embed themselves,

uninvited, in your Internet browser, mobile device or app to track your every online move; to the newly popular caveat of 'behavioural advertising' that purports to explain how these APIs and cookies will track your every online move and how this is a good thing for you – the avalanche of nudges built in at every click, swipe or tap of your online session is exponential.⁴⁶ The pervasive nature of online nudges capitalises on expected utility theory in a novel way: instead of dealing in absolutes with decisions that will have unknown outcomes, the online environment records every aspect of the interaction in real-time to build a better nudge that is presented at the users next click, scroll or swipe to again nudge them to arrive at a predetermined outcome. E-Commerce cart abandonment⁴⁷ nudges, for example, are timed to prompt the prospective purchaser with pop-up messages, emails or even SMS' to nudge them toward reaching the cart checkout. After longer periods of time have elapsed, over twenty-four hours for example, discounting nudge cycles begin to encourage the user back to the cart checkout to complete their purchase. Click that 'reminder' email in your inbox and you'll find an almost frictionless check-out experience, with the discount pre-applied, and the site only requires you to select a payment method and complete the transaction.

It is important to remember, however, that the outcome of a nudge does not have to be a tangible, physical item such as a purchase. An outcome can be repeated brand exposure, an idea, a new piece of information, a 'saved for later' bookmark or even a change in perception or belief. While some of these outcomes are harder to measure, many non-transactional nudges play a long game in the influence stakes. Learning from your online forays, your browser and social network, algorithmic choice architects are

⁴⁶ For a point of reference, the Author - using a Firefox browser extension called LightBeam before it became unsupported in October 2019, looked at how many API's connected to a single session browsing news.com.au. After no more than a few minutes, LightBeam had reported that over 47 websites were harvesting data from the open session including several banks, travel sites, social networks, and other entities the Author has no relationship with now nor has ever had in the past.

⁴⁷ E-Commerce cart abandonment is a term used to describe the user adding items with the intention of purchasing them into their virtual shopping cart, but for any number of reasons not completing the checkout payment process.

then able to deliver nudges that seem almost coincidental or intuitive, to make that transaction – tangible or not – occur at a later date.

4.5 Nudges in contemporary content marketing

The Internet doesn't tell you what to think, so much as nudge you toward what you should be thinking about. Content marketing is much the same. Rather than explicitly presenting a brand or individual in an overt advertisement, content marketing obfuscates to a degree the real reason for a piece of content's existence behind otherwise seemingly helpful or generic information. At times the creator of the content and the person or organisation doing the advertising are separate entities, such is the case in brand ambassadors or commercial agreements. More commonly, however, the content creator and advertiser or marketer are one and the same individual or organisation. From colour palettes to the font used, stylistic elements and composition, content marketing has evolved into a sophisticated, audience-segmented fit-for-network storytelling apparatus that focuses on conveying experiential and influential messaging that ignites a user's emotions (such as happiness, anger, envy, sadness or wanting). Professional content marketers not only build content bespoke for each separate social network or online channel; but they also build choice architecture pathways that take window shoppers to buyers, likers to remarketed audience segments and customers to raving fans. Proficient at provoking emotional responses towards particular pieces of content as a strategy, content marketing can also be abused to manufacture outrage, engineer nefarious nudges (such as scams and frauds) and spread information disorder.

Websites and social networks take content marketing so seriously that they design their user interfaces to be highly intuitive and easy to navigate toward the desired call to action. A call to action can be a sale, a click, like, share or any other action that the choice architect has constructed as the

webpages or social network's proverbial goal post. Landing or 'Home' pages are often designed as the result of extensive user testing to identify the hot-spots, or heat maps of the most popular engagement points so that visitors can be nudged in that direction accordingly. For example, savvy web designers and marketers recognise that bullet points or sparse information blocks are more efficient in communicating key messaging because people read the information in an F-type pattern, skimming versus reading the information in depth. By design, websites and social networks also optimise the nudge environment by making transactions as frictionless as possible. Online stores are an example of how layout, imagery and minimal use of text create easily navigable choice architecture pathways to the check-out cart. For example, online stores that allow users to preview items without leaving the main page and then adding these items to the cart increase the amount of window shopping a buyer can do in the least amount of clicks possible. Other choice architecture comes into play when an item is clicked on (as opposed to previewed) where like items are suggested in parallel to the product being looked at in more detail. Retailers such as Nordstrom take the on and offline customer experience even further by having sophisticated data-led choice architecture frameworks in place for registered shoppers that connect on or offline purchases with real personal shopping attendants that 'notice' what you purchased recently and helpfully suggest the same item in different colours or styles often using SMS or email in personalised follow-up nudges.

As influential choice architects, marketing and social media content creation agencies tap a wide range of data touchpoints to understand their audiences, their likes, dislikes, and online behaviours to maximise positive nudge outcomes. Once they have a profile of a target audience segment, they can then create bespoke content to reach that audience both organically and via paid promotion. Further micro-segmentation across different languages, geographies, life stages and ethnicities can occur. By leveraging customer data harvested from other online interactions (such as

web surfing or social media habits) content marketers can precisely target their prospective customers with content that appeals to them by employing anchoring biases and the bandwagon effect to move window shoppers to buyers. These forms of online choice architecture are commonly found in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry. Online marketplaces like Amazon and eBay are designed to encourage users to keep adding items to their cart before purchasing while streaming services such as Apple TV+, Stan, Amazon Prime, Hulu and Netflix hustle hard for a subscriber's initial custom before shifting into nudging new television programs or movies at them in a customer satisfaction frame.

Other content marketing strategists treat the product being sold as an adjunct to the overall customer experience being cultivated. Take for example Coca Cola, whose ability to sell the experience is well known. Online advertisements for Coca Cola nearly always show young, photogenic people in the summer sun, having a great time enjoying the beverage. 'Tastes Good' and 'Refreshing' are often words used to anchor audiences into the experience they know they can expect when drinking Coca Cola. Why do these advertisements work even when shown in winter? And why do they advertise at all given their success? The answers can be found deep in the experiential aspect of their content marketing which is focused on reinforcing feelings of enjoyment and reproducing the emotional response you have been conditioned to believe you have the moment you open a can and take a sip. How refreshing! Ahhhhh! A lifetime of Coca Cola ads across a broad range of mediums ensures you never have buyer's remorse and selective perception ensures you always view the brand as superior to and more valuable than its biggest rival – Pepsi. In this way, Coca Cola's nudges are paired with experiences that result in a peak end rule. Whether directly via content marketing payloads or by the default pairing of meal combinations with Coca Cola at major fast-food retailers, the nudge is not in the product, but in the experience.

Content marketing-laden nudges on social media have a significantly more potent impact on susceptible individuals (and groups) because of the echo chamber effect. Algorithms, already driving people into situations of cognitive comfort, can accelerate this process through the power of suggestion. Social algorithms suggest content to users based on their previous online behaviours and preferences. So, if a user consistently watches funny cat videos on YouTube or Facebook for example, they will be served up more videos that are ... of funny cats. In another example, if the user is politically inclined and likes, comments or watches a piece of content (even stopping scrolling to watch a snippet of a video will register in the social network's data pipeline) they will be served more like-content that fits their search and/or content consumption history. The curation of these echo chambers on social media by algorithms (which are periodically tinkered with by network owners) presents a combination of nudges that reinforce an individual or group's worldview through confirmation bias and availability cascades. While this may not seem like a problem at a consumer level, on issues of a more personal nature – that are tied to strong emotions and feelings about particular events or beliefs, the results can be catastrophic both on and offline.

One of the most troubling examples of such a content marketing-laden nudge (or sludge) framework that spans both on and offline belief systems is the anti-vaccination movement. Online, particularly on social media and carefully curated alternative media websites and apps, highly emotive content that presents itself as authentic scientific research, healthy-living advocacy and/or first-person witness accounts are combined with conspiracy theories to present an alarming narrative of harm from vaccinations. The nudges employed in these in-group echo chambers are so strong that they have real offline impacts, with parents refusing to vaccinate their children. Parents participating in those on and offline groups where choice-supportive biases are reinforced and perpetuate the anti-vaccination narrative celebrate conformity which then drives those people

further into like-systems of belief. It is important to point out that the misinformation in play doesn't mean the information being circulated is necessarily untrue or scientifically inaccurate. On the contrary, many sludge architects build their choice frameworks on scientific facts – just not all the facts, but rather a selection of facts that either align with or are misinterpreted to support, the sludge architect's in-group worldview. In many respects, the misinformation used in sludges is taken out of context, is disparate or used in isolation from broader statistics, findings, and studies. These powerful, emotive sludges result in a form of in-group extremism that has far-reaching implications for not only group members, but also the public. In the context of vaccination programs, that factor in and rely on herd immunity levels, these individuals and groups can then become a risk to others who do not yet have immunity, such as infants or those with underlying health conditions.

Unlike misinformation, where facts are mistakenly misinterpreted, disinformation entrepreneurs also inhabit these online spaces. Creating, sharing, and amplifying deliberately false (yet often profitable) information that has been specifically engineered to deceive people, disinformation merchants thrive on creating polarisation and out-grouping non-believers or opponents. Varying forms of extreme belief often results. Interestingly, to the in-groups under the influence of misinformation and disinformation entrepreneurs experiencing these phenomena, the definition between nudge and sludge flips, as they argue the superiority of their beliefs, interpretations of science and worldviews alongside narratives steeped in grievances of persecution and/or censorship.

4.6 Nudges, sludges, and choice architecture

Nudges often exist within complex choice architecture frameworks, across a range of pathway touchpoints, to either ensure an individual or group is moving through a decision-making process on schedule or to attempt to

course-correct those who have disengaged or deviated from expected choice architecture outcomes.

Take for example international aid organisations, such as World Vision and Save the Children, who rely heavily on donations to deliver their aid, relief, and community-building programs in impoverished nations. Compassion fade forms the central crux of their choice architecture framework for developing new leads and turning those leads into long-term sponsors. Advertisements introduce a child by name and age, their village and their hopes for the future which are always centred around Western standards of basic necessities such as education, clean drinking water and food. By giving the child a name, face and place in an impoverished community, people are led to feel compassion and that they could do something to help them – even at the ‘one-dollar-a-day is all it takes’-- level of contribution. The reason these campaigns use compassion fade so successfully, repeatedly and extensively is because depicting the individual child presents a cognitively surmountable challenge where the content consumer is left with the feeling that yes, they “can help one child,” versus the reality which - if depicted visually as a village of children and adults in need - would then have the reverse effect leaving the content consumer feeling overwhelmed and helpless to assist such a large amount of people with such a small donation.

In this example, choice architecture is built not only into the framework of the sponsorship application process – from the colour palette to the photos on the form; to the biographical postcard you receive about the child you’ll sponsor, but also in the initial content payloads that spruikers in shopping centres, stories on television commercials or questions posted via online banners engage viewers with. Take, for example, the photo of a single child, their name, their age, and their dreams for the future. Most people, even when moved by compassion for the child, can avoid such a nudge. This is why repeated exposure to these types of advertisements continues the

nudge long after you've avoided that spruiker on the street, changed television channels or scrolled elsewhere online. Once subscribed as a sponsor, with that biographical postcard of their sponsored child and sense of conveyed responsibility for that child– it is even harder still to disengage emotionally from the ongoing nudge that is a monthly sponsorship. Sponsors themselves also become compassion fade nudgers. Feeling rewarded for their altruism by the content marketing stories delivered to them by the organisation (ostensibly about their sponsored child/children), often discussing the contributions they are making with others, thereby turning word-of-mouth into peer-to-peer marketing.

While nudges can and are used for positive effect, many organisations also use 'sludges' as part of sophisticated choice architecture frameworks in ways that purposefully disadvantage the individual (or group). Sludges can often appear as little annoyances like having to complete unnecessary paperwork, having to make a call rather than lodge a request online, being put on hold for excessive periods of time, being transferred from one department within a company to another or being told the only way to complete a task is to visit a store. Often, these little annoyances follow each other one after the other leaving the individual trying to navigate the choice architecture frustrated and fatigued.

The payoff for the sludge here is the cost-benefit of the disincentive that accumulates as an individual gets more and more frustrated with trying to navigate a process that is obstructive at every turn. While some individuals persist through the sludge to achieve the outcome they set out to complete, a lack of patience and tolerance sees others disengage and abandon their journey on the choice pathway. Individuals who abandon the process are a win for the sludge choice architect as they have been successful at preventing a negative outcome for a company, such as the loss of a paying subscriber. Of course, the organisational collateral damage sludges cause to customer trust, experience and service often outweigh the initial or

short-term benefits of the sludge, leaving the organisation with long-term complainants and no repeat customers. For example, a common form of sludge found in the financial and banking industry is the choice architecture built around lines of credit type account closures (such as credit cards and other revolving credit products). In Australia alone, there are over 14,754,488 credit cards in use accruing interest of over \$29 billion dollars a month.⁴⁸ By anyone's standards, that is an exceptionally profitable business model. This is why we can find sludges built into the exit choice architecture individuals experience when wishing to close their line of credit type accounts.

Once a credit cardholder, for example, wishes to close their account, they are routinely advised by their financial institution that they will need first obtain a 'payout figure of the balance owed (that includes interest not yet paid), pay that amount in full and then wait for at least one to two billing cycles (approximately two months) before their financial institution will close the card account. While it is mathematically possible to calculate interest charges on a balance at any point in time, it is seemingly impossible when the customer wishes to close the account.

Financial institutions use sludges in this way because (a) in most cases, they don't want to lose the individual's business; (b) because they know people have direct-debits tied to their credit card which will continue due to customer oversight or laziness (extending the closure period out even further); (c) that people will forget to ring back to affect a complete account closure even after paying out the full amount, waiting the requisite amount of time and cancelling their direct debits to the card; (d) for some customers, the telephone consultants scripts – usually in a special 'closures department' is full of prompts and incentives designed to ensure the individual keeps the card as a 'backup' or 'just in case' which induces a loss

⁴⁸ Market research findings from <https://www.finder.com.au/credit-cards/credit-card-statistics>

aversion bias that sees them retain a card they don't want; and even worse, inevitably preventing those individuals with poor spending habits from breaking free of the credit cycle as the institution triggers the reward centre in their neuropsychology, returning them to regular card use once again (moral credential effect). Other places you are likely to find sludges include subscription or contract-style accounts like television streaming services, telecommunications, and Internet service providers. These organisations often deploy sludges offering deep discounts and incentives for the individual to remain with the provider for another month or nominal period of time. Insurance is another industry where sludges are used to disincentivise those making claims on their policy; a similar process exists for applying for Government welfare assistance, injury or illness compensation and veterans' entitlements.⁴⁹

While understandably, due diligence checks need to be performed to ascertain insurance or welfare entitlements, the delays on the part of the organisation together with the process of having to complete various forms and produce various documents, evidence and statements – some of which reside with third parties outside of a person's control – disincentivise the claimant going through the process resulting in decision fatigue, the acceptance of a settlement or payout that is less than contractually stipulated or at times, the abandonment of their claim altogether. The ethical dilemma here – that those seeking assistance and who are legitimately entitled to the benefits of the claims they make – are often disregarded by organisations, when in fact it is those individuals that are in most need of assistance and who are often not in a position to weather the sludge process required to access their entitlements. Tragically, in the case of some Veterans and some individuals genuinely injured or suffering from an illness seeking compensation, the sludge choice architecture framework becomes so onerous and un navigable, that they commit suicide as a result.

⁴⁹ In an Australian context over the period of at least 2015-2021.

4.7 Nudges and terrorist recruitment and radicalisation strategy

In many ways, nudges in terrorist radicalisation and recruitment strategies work in a similar way to a conventional sales funnel. If we take a simple five-step sales funnel: (1) Leads/Opportunity; (2) Sales call/Connection; (3) Follow-Up/Timing; (4) Conversion/Obstacles; and (5) Sale/Persistence/Abandonment and the example of buying a car from a dealership, we can see the nudges in play that take car yard visitor to a buyer

1) Leads or opportunities can arrive via various ways – a walk-in, an online enquiry, a cold call, a word-of-mouth recommendation, or brand loyalty. Nudges at this stage are likely to be incentive based such as an offer to come into the office for a coffee and the offer of a test drive of the vehicle. (2) Sales calls or connections are the car salesperson's attempt at building rapport with the purchaser, understanding their motives, means and the likelihood of their purchasing a vehicle. Nudges at this stage are tailored to the buyer based on the information the salesperson has gathered and are still incentive-based. They are likely to consist of tangible items of value to the buyer that will cost the seller very little. For example, need two child seats professionally fitted in the new car? No problem, we'll do it for free. That upgrade to the next model? We can do it for half the recommended retail price. Have a quote on finance? Let us match or beat the interest rate. Such social proof heuristics can play a huge part in nudging car buyers, particularly for popular makes and models. (3) Follow-up and timing are relative to the information the buyer shared with the salesperson in step 2 – for example, if they say they are purchasing as soon as possible with an insurance payout, timing is more critical to the sale than a purchaser looking for their next novated lease in two months. Timing can also be a product of the salesperson's environment with quotas to be made and time-limited manufacturer sales incentives to be capitalised on. Nudges at this stage are centred around whose time-critical priorities need to be met first – the customers' requirement for a vehicle immediately or the

salespersons' need to close the sale by a predetermined date. A confluence of both parties' requirements can often occur for mutual benefit. The nudging techniques used often follow-up calls and emails on the part of the salesperson, as the buyer has often physically left the dealership at this point. The salesperson's objective is to entice them back to the dealership by arranging a time to meet or discuss the chosen vehicle. Sludges employed by the salesperson can be feigning 'high interest from other buyers' in particular cars or introducing other economic variables into the equation such as delivery deadlines. (4) Conversion to sale or obstacles to sale are clear nudge/sludge operations. Once a lead has converted to a sale, the sale doesn't stop there with a range of additional nudges for paint protection, tinted windows and a myriad of other 'after-market' options offered, often totalling thousands of dollars in value. Conversely, in ascertaining obstacles to a sale, the salesperson must revisit both steps two and three to build further rapport and present better incentives to the buyer, particularly in competitive environments where other salespeople are also vying for that same sale. Persistence is another opportunity to nudge via steps 3 and 4 until an outcome is reached. (5) Sale/Persistence/Abandonment brings the choice architecture to a natural conclusion for a sale, the salesperson or buyer. This could result in a sale, further delay, or the abandoning of the transaction.

In a similar way, Islamist extremist recruiters and influencers step through a simplistic sales funnel when assessing a potential recruit. (1) Cultivate the lead, and validate their origins and intent. At this early stage, the recruiter or influencer nudges the prospect towards extremist content and gauges their reactions, their beliefs and their ability to conform to in-group norms. Nudging can include accompanying the prospect to prayers at the Mosque, sharing TVEC, answering questions and socialising. (2) Making personal connections with the prospective recruit and building rapport, to understand their motivations and openness to new information. Nudges at this point seek to understand the prospects' intent, interpretation of the

literature or videos provided to them and suitability for in-group introduction. Nudges such as inclusion in smaller group activities such as street Da'wah⁵⁰ and the provision of even more extreme TVEC may ensue. (3) Follow up with new prospects in a timely manner to capitalise on interest while continuing to assess for viability. Recruiters and handlers at this step assess the prospect for trustworthiness and in-group role advantages (particularly if they have special skill sets such as engineering). Nudges at this stage maintain the cadence in building rapport through the same types of activities listed in step 2. (4) Conversion to or obstacles to achieving a radicalising environment. This is the point at which the recruiter or handler onboards the individual into the radicalisation process (with or without their consent and/or knowledge) or addresses obstacles to this milestone that appear surmountable. Conversion at this point is frictionless and bestows rewards, such as introductions to in-groups, particularly leaders of note. Obstacles to radicalisation, however, require course corrective nudges that hold out incentives and rewards of meaning to the individual. This could be a sense of acceptance and belonging within the in-group, spiritual redemption⁵¹ or promises of incentives in the afterlife. (5) To close the proverbial sale, a recruiter must secure the prospect on the radicalisation pathway or abandon the prospect and end the acquaintance. In the case of an individual that has been assessed as both trustworthy and amenable to influence, they are then nudged into and through a choice architecture system that consists of pathways geared toward altering their environment to the degree where they default to the recruiter/s's desired outcome. As terrorists rely heavily on social proof heuristics, defaults and anchoring to alter an individual's information environments to exert control and model heroic organisational behaviours, this is where the sales funnel analogy concludes.

⁵⁰ Street preaching or proselytisation.

⁵¹ Such as in the case of jihad as a redemptive force to redeem oneself for past sins such as drinking alcohol, taking drugs, or other behaviours which are not accepted in Islam.

At this point, the prospective recruit's altered information environment overrides their former worldview, habitual behaviours and default biases; replacing them with new norms that are conducive to the adoption of new ways of sense-making and of seeing themselves within that new worldview. While on the surface this may seem incompatible with Thaler and Sunstein's (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009, p.21-22) definition of nudging, particularly in regards to the individual retaining free will over their decision-making, in this new environment the recruit's new norm misleads them into believing they are making choices freely. This is not the case, as the decisions individuals are making at this point align with the environmental, economic, and spiritual incentives that have been presented to them. Further, prospective recruits are anchored to key organisational norms such as the acceptance of Islamic master narratives, extremist theology, and the scriptural permissiveness of violence as a means of coercive control. Other elements of bondage may also occur, such as arranged marriages, financial support, accommodation, and employment. These situations, which are held out as positive incentives and rewards by their recruiter, deliver tangible social proof of their ability to achieve certain milestones within the in-group while concurrently placing them – knowingly or unknowingly – into situations that become harder and harder to leave.

While those outside of this paradigm will view this process as a form of coercion or an undue exertion of influence, to comprehend the choice architecture interplay we need to take the viewpoint of the recruiter or the recruit, both of which are rational actors in their perception of their environment and choice incentives. To those individuals susceptible to radicalisation, the process produces a cognitive opening pathway. To those already sympathetic to the beliefs and actions of the terrorist organisation, the radicalisation process reinforces biases already held and aligns or realigns them with incentives that deepen the echo chamber in which they now reside.

Radicalisation and recruitment choice architects deploy social proof heuristics to integrate new prospects into the organisation and to maintain degrees of control over the group entire. Degrees of control in the recruitment environment include (1) ensuring adherence to group think or herd mentality; (2) the overt emulation of other group members' behaviours and actions; (3) a continued span of control over information sources; and (4) demonstrating heroic worship-like devotion towards group leaders and martyrs. These degrees of control can be viewed with some symbiosis – both the recruiter and recruit benefit from each element – resulting in greater in-group compliance for the recruit and a continued span of organisational control for the recruiter. Further, the more the recruit assimilates into in-group norms, the easier it is for the recruiter to influence and control their decision-making.

Again, this process seems counterintuitive to Thaler and Sunstein's (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009, p.21-22) definition of nudging from an outsider's view. However, to the recruit existing in their new frictionless environment as a rational actor – the perception of individual self-determination continues to exist because their environment is closed, and confirmation bias reinforces their cognitive comfort. Further, having been anchored during the radicalisation process, the recruit's new or renewed identity maintains the semblance of self-determination because from their viewpoint, their spiritually sanctioned violent jihad is righteous and any suggestion that they are not making their own decisions or not in control of their destiny can easily be justified as and attributed to shared grievances. For example, outside attempts by friends or family to disengage the recruit could be interpreted as an attempt to subvert Allah's will (including the rewards bestowed in the afterlife) by Western Crusaders and their supporters, who are intent on continuing war against Islam.

4.8 Nudges and terrorist online strategy

Mirroring the tactics used online by advertising and marketing agencies, terrorist organisations have created sophisticated, multi-layered online spaces from which they can conduct their operations. Observations from professional practice includes the use of mainstream social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube; online information-sharing forums, boards and chats like JustPasteIt, PasteBin and the self-created PasteMaker; encrypted communications solutions such as Telegram, Tam Tam and Riot; as well as alternate web-based solutions that are constructed in decentralised, peer to peer networks that make takedown almost impossible. From these online channels and spaces, terrorist organisations can distribute their information and propaganda via content marketing payloads that have been produced specifically for their audiences.

Of particular note is the multifaceted strategy that (a) supports claims of group, political and territorial legitimacy; (b) supports radicalisation and recruitment choice architecture; (c) wages a violent media jihad; (d) acts as a propaganda of the deed (e) amplifies by providing in-group audiences with information, instructions and religious rulings followed up with nudges for compliance; and (f) terrorises those who oppose them. In this hyper-varied distribution model, content can be seeded throughout the Internet and the terrorist organisation can be confident that while some pages, sites or chats will be shut down, others will remain for members to download and share content amongst their own personal networks.

But what kinds of nudges make someone want to share TVEC? Just as herostratic⁵² terrorists like the infamy associated with violent action, those

⁵² Refer also: Jihad Against Palestinians? The Herostratos Syndrome and the Paradox of Targeting European Jews (Azam & Ferrero, 2017).

that actively share TVEC amongst in-groups and peers seek the same thrill, validation, and recognition. The nudge here precedes the content and has more to do with becoming recognised for being a source of content. In much the same way that non-believers of their age seek validation and recognition for their content on social media, terrorist in-group peers instil the same adulation and celebrate those who bring TVEC into their on and offline spaces. Just like non-believers have watch parties for mainstream movies or sports games; terrorist in-group members have watch parties for TVEC where they share notes, and critique the combatants, propagandists, and executioners.

This means that the first nudge towards viewing TVEC is both deliberate and consequential – in that the mainstream media have already shared a great deal of violent content in public spaces. Desensitisation from mainstream media sharing TVEC means that when the invitation (nudge) to view content individually or attend an on or offline watch party arrives; the individual is already primed to take the next step. Of course, not all invitations (nudges) are accepted. In a recent study Shortland et al (2022) state that of those people discovering TVEC online, most go out of their way to actively avoid it (Shortland et al., 2022). Other nudges may be delivered to exert peer pressure on the individual to watch TVEC. Those who decline or cannot stomach the extreme violence are questioned about their loyalty and commitment. This behaviour (challenging their commitment) becomes exceptionally influential in socio-economic situations where the individual has had social difficulties such as finding or keeping a job, is not popular with women, has no autonomy as an adult (is still subject to their parents' control) and/or has little financial means to support independence.

The nudge present in choice architecture in such scenarios is often led by existing in-group members who themselves experience validation and praise by bringing in new prospects, at which time they are introduced to

a recruiter and the assessment process begins. Nudges deployed at this point are centred around determining the new individuals' motives, level of knowledge of Islam and Islamic history, their political views and what information can be gleaned from their personal life. These nudges for more personal information are often conducted over informal coffees, at the mosque, in the gym, during group social outings or group prayers. These types of activities often fly under the radicalisation radar as they are seemingly ordinary, normal habits for young people. So, while society and their immediate family units have in many ways already influenced and conditioned the individual to have a certain worldview by the time they cross paths with a terrorist organisation's recruiter, and the mainstream media has desensitised them to a range of TVEC- the first nudge on the radicalisation trajectory may by normal standards be fairly benign and fit within the model of liberation paternalism that nudge theory is based.

4.9 Nudges in terrorist content marketing

The inconvenient truth of marketing is that it can be applied to any product or service with success – even extreme ideologies, violently extreme demagogues, and terrorist organisations. Content marketing – which is based on telling stories to sell goods and services, is no different. The Content Marketing Institute defines content marketing as “a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract, retain a clearly defined audience – and untimely, to drive profitable customer action.”⁵³

The effectiveness of content marketing isn't in the product being sold– it's how they are woven into everyday stories that make them relevant and memorable. Even the most boring products can be marketed exceptionally well – consider toilet paper, a product that needs no explanation but whose

⁵³ Refer 'The Content Marketing Institute:' <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/what-is-content-marketing/>

marketing nearly always includes cute Labrador puppies waddling across the screen or nicking off with a roll of toilet paper down a beautifully clean, long hallway, leaving a trail of crisp white toilet paper behind. Paint, another boring product, whose advertisements depict not only beautiful old or brand new freshly painted homes but a trusty Old English Sheepdog. And who could forget the irony of Louie the Fly who gleefully spruiks a poisonous pesticide designed to kill him?

A talking fly that spruiks bug spray is inherently more logical a confluence of concepts than equating a sheepdog with paint, so why do marketers pair seemingly, at times, odd animals with boring products? What these content marketing pieces do is fold the everyday boring product into a familiar, if not aspirational, setting that leaves you with certain emotions and product recall memories. Labrador puppies are irresistibly soft and cute, so Kleenex toilet rolls are assumed to be at least soft. The Dulux Old English Sheepdog won't paint your house for you, but Dulux is remembered as trusted hardy paint – plus the free plush toys in store (which you qualify for after a certain level of expenditure) will captivate your children adding possibly the most unavoidable nudge on the planet into the equation: three feet tall pester power. The fact you think Lewy the Fly is dirty and disgusting is great because Mortein solves that problem for you with a single can. These are all feelings – of softness, of durability or relief at having a product solve a dirty problem – that these brands bank on you recalling next time you're in the supermarket or hardware store choosing one brand or product over another.

Terrorist content marketing is no different, only it has two distinct customer bases: those who subscribe to their worldview and their enemies who do not. These two distinct customer bases also mean terrorist organisations are able to cultivate two clear but opposing feelings amongst all audiences with every piece of content: validation or terror. Weaving extreme violence into everyday life and pairing the familiar with the abhorrent is something

contemporary Islamic extremist groups have done well. Take for example the car manufacturer Toyota, which was called before the United States of America Senate to explain why so many of its vehicles were being used in ISIS's agitprop photos and videos.⁵⁴ The content doesn't scare consumers away from buying Toyotas, but it does succeed in pairing the normal with the abnormal. Terrorists have long used Pepsi glass bottles as IED containers and old Nokia mobile phones as remote detonators for similar reasons – they are readily available, practical and highly familiar objects.

What terrorist organisations succeed at doing in pairing familiar objects with exceptionally unfamiliar situations (to most people) is inducing a little bit of fear, even at a subconscious level, that makes their enemies feel just that little bit more unsafe in familiar surroundings. This is particularly strategic given contemporary Islamic extremist groups target both the near and far enemy.⁵⁵ To understand the strategic way terrorist organisations map out their content marketing in ways that reflect common creative practices and the familiarity factor, we can present each content marketing element in a table with contemporary terrorist organisation applications:

⁵⁴ Refer Lo (2016) 'Friendly fire: accounting for the stolen arsenal of ISIS'- "The Toyota Land Cruiser and Hilux have effectively become almost part of the ISIS brand... it's the vehicular equivalent of the AK-47. It's ubiquitous to insurgent warfare (Lo, 2016).

⁵⁵ Violent Islamists refer to the **near enemy** as regimes in the Middle East that do not subscribe to their brand of Islam; and the **far enemy** as particularly the United States of America but the West in general.

Table 1: Comparison of Content Marketing tactics with TVEC tactics.

Generic Content Marketing Elements	Evidenced in TVEC collateral	Examples of evidence found in TVEC examples
Strategic approach	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely political commentary/messaging • Master narrative adherence • Religious instruction/messaging • In-group validation • Out-group denigration • Consistent branding, colour scheme and format • Magazines translated into several languages • Videos are watermarked and issued from a central media agency (with subtitles in various languages)
Focus on creation	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content produced with the same look and feel of Western publications and broadcasts • Created in-the-field (raw, emotive) photographs and videos • Professional quality post-production • Consistent branding (uniforms, equipment, flags, logos) • Spokesmen from various cultures and languages used, particularly Western voices (for audience-specific propaganda purposes) • Use of nasheeds (Arabic: songs and music) as backing tracks to video production
Focus on distribution	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automated online processes • Multi-platform (on an offline) • File-sharing based (to avoid takedown) • Peer-to-peer (to avoid takedown)
... valuable content	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-role specific advice • Religious rulings on contentious issues such as slavery, sexual servitude and killing non-believers • Stories of victories and rewards • Glorified obituaries of martyrs
... relevant content	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely written rebukes to Western political offensives • Timely threats to Western leaders, alliances, and countries (directly quoting from their own public speeches, interviews, and appearances) • Celebration of attacks claimed in the West (including leveraging non-terrorism crises and emergencies and framing them as 'Allah's will')
... consistent content	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Messages/directives from the leadership • Veneration of recent martyrs • Veneration of recent arrivals to the Caliphate (particularly from the West)
To a clearly defined audience	✓+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslims in Arab Countries • Muslims in the diaspora • Gender specific articles <p>If at this point, we also include non-Muslims in the West as a second order of effect audience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sympathetic foreigners • The West (political leaders and citizens – with the aim to terrorise viewers and change military and political decision making)
Drive profitable customer action	✓-	<p>If we transpose 'profitable customer action' with 'beneficial organisational outcomes:'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romanticises violent Islamist life in gender specific ways for recruitment purposes • Assists recruiters in the radicalisation process (provides proof points, in-group validation, religious justification) • Provides a consistent worldview to organisational membership to retain members (or outwardly portray the semblance of) • Fuels Islamophobia in diaspora communities

The nudges built into this sophisticated content marketing apparatus also retain dual 'customers' – the violent Islamist and the enemy. Taking ISIS's Dabiq 2014-16 magazine series as an example – and particularly the 2015 article in Issue 9 entitled 'Slave Girls or Prostitutes? By Umm Sumayyah Al-Muhajirah'⁵⁶ we can delineate its effects on its two key audiences:

To the violent Islamist and their spouse/s:

The article, written by or from the perspective of a Caliphate wife, speaks to readers about the religious permissibility of keeping female captives as slaves for the purpose of sexual servitude. The nudge's objective here is to ensure compliance with what is a contested practice by providing clear religious evidence as to its lawfulness. Concurrently, this reinforces ISIS's version of Sharia Law by presenting the consequences of not following this practice. Non-compliance or opposition is framed as a disincentive based on feelings of fear (being labelled as an apostate, which could lead to execution) and in-group shunning.

Cultural incentives are also included in the nudge to promote celebrating the fulfilment of Sharia Law after centuries of persecution and oppression (triumph and feelings of happiness), the 'voluntary' adoption of Islam by some female slaves (again, the feelings of happiness) and the celebration of additional Muslim children born to sexual slaves (again, the feeling of happiness).

To the enemy:

Broadly in a global context, whether as a war crime or religiously sanctioned, rape and sexual abuse are abhorrent. Content promoting this practice both legitimises the threat ISIS poses (particularly to women), as well as terrorising non-believers. The nudge here is based on the cultivation of a feeling and perception that ISIS are to

⁵⁶ Refer Dabiq (2015) Issue 9: 'They Plot and Allah Plots' (ISIS, 2015e, p. 44-49).

be feared and that you are not safe, no matter where in the world you are. Geographically, this type of content presents a real and imminent threat of danger to the women – particularly those in minority groups such as the Yazidis- living in areas close to the conflict and/or in villages likely to be taken by ISIS.⁵⁷ The clear nudge delivered to locals is to fear them and either flee ahead of their militants arriving or capitulate with ISIS if they remain.

The reliance on nudging particular outcomes through inducing feelings of fear or happiness is indicative of the inherent problem in marketing TVEC over the long game. Even to an otherwise desensitised audience, focusing their nudge outcomes on the successes of their acts of extreme violence (which project power and legitimacy during radicalisation and recruitment) ISIS are also able to deliver nudges that promote compliance with Sharia Law as a nation-building exercise. In this context, the product being sold is the idea of being a part of something bigger than oneself in joining the prophesised Caliphate. Once geographically located within the Caliphate, the organisation faces a different set of risky prospects that it attempts to mitigate through a range of content, including magazines such as Dabiq, which provides direct instructions, religious justifications, and models of Sharia-compliant citizenship. This second-order shift in nudging, however, becomes sludge as once an individual is fully immersed in the organisation it is nearly impossible to leave, stripping away any remaining autonomy or agency an individual retains. Even if a person wished to leave, at this point it is almost impossible due to the participatory enabling environment around them. Even just signalling a desire to leave could result in severe consequences.

⁵⁷ ISIS employs pre-attack information operations on targets to reduce local militant opposition to their arrival by sharing TVEC as a kind of testimonial of what happened to those who remained to fight them in the last village they conquered.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter introduced nudges in theory and practical settings. Observations from both the commercial environment and contemporary Islamic extremism can be seen to be comparable in both process and payoffs sought. While these two environments might seem disparate, their intents are not: to take an individual and, with the lightest touch possible, move them into a position where their decisions can be influenced to the degree where outcomes become reliably predictable, and the desired payoff is delivered. In practice, of course, this does not always work. Marketeers may not land a sale in much the same way as terrorist recruiters may not fully radicalise an individual to violently extreme ends. While these high-yield payoffs are seen as optimal, the spectrum on which individuals may dwell after being subject to influence can still present longer-term value. Today's window shopper might become tomorrow's buyer in much the same way as an ideological sympathiser might move from passive supporter to active violent extremist when the circumstances are right for them. The role content marketing plays in keeping the products, ideas and feelings conveyed front-of-mind for nudged individuals is as much of a long-game as it is an initial influencing or radicalising agent.

The role of algorithms and the amplification of strategic content works not only to support preliminary radicalising environments but longer-term environmental ideological reinforcement. While Thaler and Sunstein's (2009) *Nudge* is predicated on the idea of libertarian paternalism (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009) on and offline environments are not neutral by nature. Instead, we find competing ideas, values and interests vying for an individual's attention and commitment. This, inevitably, leads to libertarian paternalism being pushed aside in favour of sludge, such as by algorithms and content engineered to produce emotional responses, that are more likely to achieve the choice architect's desired payoffs. However, it's

important to keep in mind that whether something can be considered a nudge or sludge is a matter of perspective. A willing participant in the radicalisation process might consider nudging intuitively helpful, while an individual who has been coerced might not perceive the depth of the sludge they find themselves navigating until much later on. Similarly, extremist recruiters would present ideological and religious justifications for the use of both nudge and sludge.

This chapter sets the foundation for the next, Chapter 5 'The Radicalisation Cascade' which proposes a new way of considering how to influence inside a radicalising environment might be exerted. Behavioural economics has long been employed by the advertising and marketing fraternities to increase sales, illicit votes and change perceptions. Leveraging human cognition, psychology, and biases, often through online content marketing, to create an effect or deliver a payoff. The radicalisation process is no different, as the following chapters will examine in further detail.

CHAPTER 5: THE RADICALISATION CASCADE

5.1 Introduction

The radicalisation process outlined in The Radicalisation Cascade represents a cascade into violent extremist ideology, belief, and behaviours. Drawing on the work of Kahneman (2011); Guarino et al (2011); Adjerid et al (2019); Kuran and Sunstein (1999) together with behavioural economics theory, this chapter will outline how the radicalisation and recruitment methodology used by al-Qaeda and ISIS may deliver individuals into binary decision-making outcomes using availability cascades. The result of this process is radicalisation and recruitment into the in-group. In some cases, violent actions will follow. In others, the individual will remain radicalised yet disengaged from violent extremism, sitting on a spectrum of varying beliefs and commitments. In the context of a radicalisation cascade, a prospect (receptive or susceptible individual) must be radicalised before they can be effectively recruited.

According to Kahneman (2011), "terrorists are the most significant practitioners of the art of inducing availability cascades." Commenting on Kuran and Sunstein's (1999) research in a social context, Kahneman (2011) explains that the availability heuristic influences decision-making and judgements however so too does an idea when it is "judged by the fluency (and emotional charge) with which that idea comes to mind" (Kahneman, 2011, p.142-144). Therefore, the Islamic extremist recruiter can be understood to be an availability entrepreneur⁵⁸ – a term coined by Kuran and Sunstein (1999) to describe social agents that "trigger availability cascades likely to advance their own agendas" (Kuran & Sunstein, 1999). Kuran and Sunstein (1999) define an availability cascade

⁵⁸ Of note, ISIS has subsequently been referred to as 'Virtual entrepreneurs' with regards to their ability to weaponise social and online media (S. Hughes & Meleagrou-hitchens, 2017) as has Hezbollah (Shkolnik & Corbeil, 2019).

as a “self-reinforcing process of collective belief formation by which an expressed perception triggers a chain reaction that gives the perception of increasing plausibility through its rising availability in public (or localised) discourse. The driving mechanism involves a combination of informational and reputational motives. Individuals endorse the perception partly by learning from the apparent beliefs of others and partly by distorting their public responses in the interest of maintaining social acceptance”(Kuran & Sunstein, 1999).

While there is a general lack of first-person accounts from violently extreme recruiters and the literature available focuses on the recruit (prospect), we can extrapolate the radicalisation and recruitment methodology used from primary and secondary sources including:

- The terrorist organisations own specific publications, such as ‘A Course in the Art of Recruitment’ produced by al-Qaeda’s Abu Amru Al Qa’idy⁵⁹ in 2008 (revised in 2010), and later adopted by ISIS
- Terrorist organisations’ propaganda and recruitment narratives, including online content, newspapers, and magazines like Inspire, Rumiya, and Dabiq
- The first-person accounts of recruits, as reported in court documents and via investigative journalism; and
- The aggregate data on the attributes of recruits, which will be explored further in the case studies chapter of this thesis.

It is impossible to know for certain just how many recruiters follow the instructions Al Qa’idy provided. This could be by design given the decentralised, small cell-based type of terrorism advocated by both al-

⁵⁹ ‘A Course in the Art of Recruiting’ by Abu Amru Al Qa’idy (2008, revised in 2010) started appearing on jihadist web forums in 2009. While Al Qaeda has never authenticated the document, it has been widely recognised by scholars, intelligence analysts and researchers (both Government and private sector) as published by the terrorist organisation because of the web forums it appeared on and its fit with the organisation’s long history of publishing manuals to support their operations (Bloom, 2017; Fishman & Warius, 2009; Hegghammer, 2013). Fishman and Wairus (2009) in particular note “most al-Qa’ida handbooks... are technical and focus on issues such as weapons or online security. Abu Amru’s handbook is important because it tries to bring the organisational efficiencies of bureaucracy to individual jihadists everywhere” (Fishman & Warius, 2009).

Qaeda and ISIS. Apparent examples of the manual being implemented, particularly by ISIS, have been well documented by investigative journalists,⁶⁰ scholars,⁶¹ and can be observed in court transcripts.⁶² Additionally, Fishman and Warius (2009) contend that the production of such an instructional manual serves to support “less educated” violent Islamists and those with “less knowledge of Shari’a (Arabic: Islamic Law)” as well as to “simplify the difficult art of radicalisation for a less-skilled generation of Islamic extremist recruiters”(Fishman & Warius, 2009).

‘The Radicalisation Cascade: A Radicalisation Cascade’, comprises of the following tiers:

Tier 1:	Pre-Suasion
Tier 2:	Sense-Making
Tier 3:	Mainstreaming Extremism
Tier 4:	Threshold
Tier 5:	Stronghold
Tier 6:	Violence

The constructs and purpose of each tier will be described in detail, chronologically, as follows:

⁶⁰ Refer: Callimachi (2015) ISIS and the Lonely Young American (CALLIMACHI, 2015); Maley & Stewart (2016) Terror accused Tamim Khaja in military, police posts plot (Maley & Stewart, 2016); and Calligeros (2015) From Buddhist to jihad: Melbourne man Neil Prakash’s journey to Islamic State (Calligeros, 2015b).

⁶¹ Refer: Harris-Hogan & Barrelle (2018) Young Blood: Understanding the Emergence of a New Cohort of Australian Jihadists (Harris-Hogan & Barrelle, 2018b); Zammit (2017) The role of virtual planners in the 2015 Anac Day terror plot (Zammit, 2017); and Cherney et al (2020) Understanding youth radicalisation: an analysis of Australian data (Cherney et al., 2020).

⁶² Refer: Supreme Court of Victoria, Court of Appeal (2017) Director of Public Prosecutions (Cth) v Sevdet Besim. (DPP (Cth) v Sevdet BESIM Sentencing, 2017); Supreme Court of Victoria, R vs Atik (R vs Atik [2007]VSC 299, 2007); and Supreme Court of New South Wales, R vs Alqudsi (R v Alqudsi [2016] NSWSC 1227, 2016).

5.2 Tier 1 – Pre-Suasion

The purpose of The Radicalisation Cascade in the pre-suasion tier is twofold:

1. It acts as a primer for new messaging and significance seeking; and
2. It serves as a prospect theory led exercise in establishing if the individual is worthy of investment to the recruiter.

Coined by author and psychologist, Dr Robert Cialdini 'Pre-suasion' is a concept that explains how influence is exerted successfully "before you say a word... where seemingly insignificant visual cues and apparently unimportant details" combine to prime the individual or audience to be nudged in a particular direction. In his early research Cialdini (2016) identified that influence is based on the six principles of: reciprocity, commitment and consistency, social proof, authority, liking and scarcity. In 2016 he added a seventh principle – unity – to his definition. Pre-suasion, like persuadability, draws on the experiences of individuals to generate the desired effect: influence (Cialdini, 2016, p.7-8). Kruglanski et al (2018) identify persuadability as an element along the radicalisation trajectory, particularly in a prospect's "readiness to accept conclusions or persuasive messages ... (that may also be) contrary to their own beliefs." Kruglanski et al's (2018) observations regarding a prospect's ability to absorb messages in the frame in which they are intended- as well as the opportunity costs to the recruiter, confirm the importance of situational choice architecture as a means of influencing prospect engagement (Kruglanski et al., 2018).

Neurologically, this phase also begins building a dependence based on trust. Zak (2017) explains that oxytocin – the hormone and neuropeptide, plays a large role in building trust between an individual and a stranger: "The brain network that oxytocin activates is evolutionary old. This means

that the trust and sociality that oxytocin enables are deeply embedded into our nature” (Zak, 2017). Similarly, dopamine and cortisol can also be observed to impact decision-making and cognition to impair a prospect’s ability to think critically. Dopamine “activates certain neural pathways” in the brain’s reward centre, similar to the way illicit drugs provide a high and become addictive (Simi et al., 2017). While ordinarily seen as a nemesis to dopamine, cortisol can also be observed as having adverse impacts on decision-making.

Harms (2017) explains that stress induces cortisol responses, resulting in a decrease in cognitive flexibility. The ramifications of this may lead to prospects relying too heavily on the information they have historically been exposed to or the information they have most recently been presented with, at the expense of critical and future-oriented thinking (Harms, 2017). In these ways, pre-suasion acts as a primer for individuals. From a content marketing perspective, pre-suasion acts as both an agenda-setting tool and a framing mechanism. It is important to note that content-marketing in this sense isn’t unique to the online environment. In many respects the extremist recruiter themselves is a piece of content - relying on their charisma and ability to quickly build rapport to market themselves and their extreme ideas. This fits neatly within Cialdini’s (2009) foundation on influence – in that six “fundamental psychological principles direct human behaviour and in doing so give these tactics power: consistency, reciprocation, social proof, authority, liking and scarcity” (Cialdini, 2009).

5.2.1 An Exercise in Prospect Theory

Abu Amru Al Qa’idy (2010) whose ‘A Course in the Art of Recruiting’ is attributed to al-Qaeda’s recruitment and radicalisation strategy (later updated and adopted by ISIS) demonstrates to what lengths recruiters are led to increase their prospects, reduce their risks and successfully radicalise and recruit. It is important to note at the outset that Al Qa’idy’s (2010)

handbook promotes violence as the preferred way to enact political and religious change.

Al Qa'idy (2010) scopes at some length the parameters in which recruiters should work within to reduce risks. While these are primarily concerned with security risks, other risks identified include non-adherence to his 'sequence of da'wa' by both recruiter and prospect; while his course is tailored for non-religious people it is important that religious people are taken through the same steps as part of the vetting process; that the recruiter should avoid criticising the prospect and in fact welcome his/her views even if they are wrong in the early stages; and the recruiter should observe the prospect's behaviour in a way that doesn't separate him/her from their current lifestyle or invade their privacy. Further, Al Qa'idy (2010) instructs recruiters not to: project their own personalities onto the prospect, talk about the problems of Muslims (so as not to tip the prospect off about the radicalisation and recruitment activity), not to single the prospect out for prayers or socialisation and not to talk about al-Qaeda or Salafi jihadists – rather favouring discussions about mujahideen and resistance fighters in generalised terms (Al Qa'idy, 2010). It is worthy of note that these instructions broadly align with three of six of Cialdini's fundamental psychological influence principles: consistency, reciprocation, and liking, as the extremist recruiter seeks to build rapport.

Further in the prologue of Al Qa'idy's (2010) program, he lists hard rules on which prospects can and cannot be pursued. The non-religious Muslim is preferred due to their malleability and reliance on the extremist recruiter for Islamic knowledge. Also, an approved candidate is the Muslim who has returned to religiosity but who has yet to find a mosque community – as the extremist recruiter can fulfil the individuals needs of group belonging. Generally religious people "who are not cowards", excessively talkative, hostile to violent jihad/resistance, "stingy or a loner" – are also acceptable prospects. Muslims that convert from another sect to Salafism are

acceptable prospects, as are youths “who live far from the cities.” Those approved for further engagement but which represent a higher security risk include university students who are “in a place of isolation” for some years, however the recruiter is instructed to exercise caution because universities are “full of spies”; high-school students because they are of pure mind, however they shouldn’t be rushed (and they are unlikely to be spies) and those with un-Islamic ideas so long as they are not close-minded. Those not approved for recruitment include foundation members of other Islamic movements, who are deemed too set in their ways to change; other Salafi’s whose sects do not support violent jihad (who are perceived to be routinely put under Government surveillance); cowards – who are afraid to speak out against injustice and politics; the excessively talkative person – who are viewed as ‘know-it-all’s’ who question everything; those with hostile ideas towards the mujahedeen – such as Salafi’s who turn other Muslims over to non-Muslim authorities; stingy people – not only with their money but with their selflessness; and finally, the loner – as he/she is perceived to be unable to maintain relationships and make great changes in their life (Al Qa’idy, 2010).

As a decision framework designed to nudge the extremist recruiter in an activity of recruitment risk management and compliance as much as the prospect into radicalisation, the pre-suasion phase also sets a clear agenda and firmly frames issues critical to the movement. This forms the basis for all the on and offline content marketing framing that occurs in subsequent phases and solves the immediate issues associated with free-agent utilities that may otherwise arise from a prospect’s expected choice problems.

5.2.2 Significance seeking among Prospects, or cultivating aspiration towards significance

From these early interactions between the recruiter and prospect, the recruiter is also assessing the prospect’s motivations and sense (or lack) of

significance. This quest for significance according to Kruglanski et al (2014) can be overt, subtle, or missing entirely in a prospect. There need not be any overarching feelings of anger or inclinations towards violence (although these are certainly beneficial as we will see later in this chapter) but the recruiter at this tier of The Radicalisation Cascade is assessing the prospect's "universal human motivation" and gauging their "need for esteem, achievement, meaning, competence and control" (Kruglanski et al., 2014). In this stage of pre-suasion, the recruiter is specifically assessing the prospects' "distinction: in the social sector, when this person speaks, people listen, or he is a leader of an influential group... or he has leadership characteristics." Further, qualities such as courageousness, generosity, transparency, positivity and religious piety are valued by the recruiter; as is financial and family stability (Al Qa'idi, 2010).

These qualities are important to the recruiter because they signify either the prospects overt significance seeking history or underlying yearning for belonging, acceptance and meaning. This is particularly important as the prospect is moved through the choice architecture into in-group situations as we will see later in this chapter. For now, the prospect's capability to "love and worship the leader" (whether this be the recruiter, the terrorist organisation's figurehead or another person such as a cell leader) is critical to the recruiter pursuing them because love and worship "translates into the quest for his or her approval, which endows him with ultimate authority in matters of personal significance" (Kruglanski et al., 2014). That is, if the recruiter does not believe the prospect has the capability to be influenced toward seeking the approval of the violent Islamist cohort, or it would take too much time and effort to achieve, the prospect is perceived as too risky to proceed with.

5.2.3 Building Reciprocity

Da'wah (Arabic: to invite to Islam) as a public proselytisation method is not unique – certainly, there are many Christian sects whose activities are comparable. However, The Radicalisation Cascade's identification of da'wah as a "safe way to recruit individuals for creating (terrorist) cells... that can be done by anybody and at any time... (and) that breaks down the imaginary barriers between people" (Al Qa'idy, 2010) is a clear signal of the importance placed on building rapport with new prospects. In a dual radicalisation payload – a first tentative step for the prospect and a reinforcing information cascade for the recruiter – reciprocity is engineered to attempt to bond individuals to both ideas and each other. Al Qa'idy (2010) reinforces to the recruiter at this tier that only through proper religious devotion and practice can they succeed in their objective and violent jihad. Encouraging the development of a one-on-one relationship to enable the recruiter to facilitate the prospects introduction to religious practice in a controlled environment is specifically identified as preferable in this stage to group prayer (Al Qa'idy, 2010). If we look to the work on availability cascades by Kuran and Sunstein (1999) we can observe that in this respect, the recruiter is very much acting as an "availability entrepreneur" within a receptive segment of an "availability market" (the prospect). The recruiter triggering a cascade in this context may induce a favourable outcome due to the eventual interdependences cultivated throughout this process. Perhaps the most potent element of this availability cascade for the prospect lies in the fact that they have "little reliable information of their own" from which to base their choices in this new environment (Kuran & Sunstein, 1999). The impact this has on reciprocity at this formative stage in their radicalisation trajectory is best described by Mullins (2009) who explains that "mentors may first identify individuals... who may be susceptible to radicalisation; then 'groom' them privately and (then) in small groups until individuals begin feeding off each other's radicalisation" (Mullins, 2009).

As reciprocity depends on investment from both the recruiter and prospect, cultivating generosity is also a key element of this tier. Al Qa'idy (2010) instructs the recruiter in this regard, by detailing behaviours that are designed to endear the recruiter to the prospect and to cultivate feelings of reciprocity as the tier progresses. From avoiding judgement of the prospect to welcoming dissenting opinions; respecting the prospect's privacy and being as helpful as possible Al Qa'idy's (2010) instructions in this tier not only provide the aforementioned risk assessment framework for the recruiter to assess the prospect as being risky or not – but also increase the likelihood that a prospect will seek out engagement with the recruiter of their own accord (Al Qa'idy, 2010). Smith and Bird (2003) describe this process as “the generous individual cannot ensure that the targets of his generosity will return the favour. If sharing or generosity cannot be made contingent on reciprocation, the fundamental condition for evolutionarily stable reciprocity is absent” (Smith & Bird, 2003). Reciprocity, as a payoff, can therefore be observed as being an integral element of continued prospect viability. Further, the cost benefits of reciprocity provide the recruiter with clear payoffs regardless of if the prospect is deemed suitable for continued assessment or is discarded as a risky prospect at this point. This is because prospects who fail this stage or who are deemed too risky, serve as a mechanism to reorientate the recruiter toward other prospects where the cost of pursuit is lower, but the potential payoffs are higher. The process followed in this tier of the radicalisation trajectory is therefore of cumulative value to recruiters who continue the process with their prospect as with each tier they migrate through, they are deemed as less of a risky prospect.

5.3 Tier 2 – Sense-Making

The purpose of The Radicalisation Cascade in the Sense-Making tier is still firmly a prospect theory activity to:

1. Gauge the prospect's reactions to content as it is introduced (will the prospect make the choices the recruiter desires?)
2. Introduce faith-based knowledge and practices (establish routine, reliance, and authority) to influence behaviour; and
3. Assess the prospect's bona fides to identify any security risks to the terrorist cell.

5.3.1 Operant Conditioning

In this tier of the radicalisation case, the recruiter must begin to lay down the foundation for behavioural conformance in a rewards-based context. Shapiro and Maras (2019) describe operant conditioning in the context of social learning theory as "the process whereby the desired extremist beliefs and behaviours are acquired through a system of past and anticipatory reinforcers by internal or external sources in the environment" (Shapiro & Maras, 2019). For example, Al Qa'idy (2010) suggests to recruiters that they must become to the prospect, someone they seek out to "discuss his private affairs, his hobbies" and to help him fulfil his spiritual needs. The prospect must also be coaxed into obedience by accepting the advice and opinions given by the recruiter – and following "orders" (Al Qa'idy, 2010). By incrementally embedding himself in the prospect's life, particularly in a position of trust, the recruiter can use his channelled attention as a means of behavioural reinforcement, conditioning the prospect into displaying preferred behaviours.

Operant conditioning in this phase begins an addictive form of influence that sets up favourable conditions for behavioural and neurophysiological pathways in future radicalisation stages. This early manipulation of both behaviour and neuropsychology may go some way to explaining how

prospects find it hard to disengage from relationships with extremists, particularly when they lack a support network or structure outside of their newfound in-group. Reciprocity is again sought by the recruiter. Akin to what psychologists refer to as 'love-bombing'⁶³ the recruiter, in showering the prospect with positive attention can hold out tangible social rewards in a way that is self-perpetuating. Simi et al (2017) explain this in a neurophysiological context as "under certain conditions (e.g. strong ties, trust, high levels of commitment, long-term exposure) social environments may generate neuro-physiological changes that over time mimic addiction" (Simi et al., 2017).

5.3.2 Gauging Reactions

During this tier of the radicalisation process, the recruiter is interested in assessing how the prospect responds behaviourally to new information. By ingratiating themselves into the prospect's life, Al Qa'idy (2010) notes that in this tier of radicalisation, the recruiter should move topics of conversations towards focusing on "elements of purifying the heart" and that the goal is to "cure him (the prospect) of his negative (characteristic traits), make him love the path of obedience to Allah" and commit to a regimented prayer routine. Al Qa'idy (2010) also suggests that if negative characteristics exist, the recruiter must plan to remedy them over the long term. Al Qa'idy (2010) states that the recruiter should "be good with him (the prospect) even if he does something to harm or offend you, because everybody likes the person who does something good for them" (Al Qa'idy, 2010). While this may see counterintuitive to Western minds who are accustomed to agreeance to establish common ground, in Middle Eastern cultures debate and the challenging of ideas – particularly on topics like

⁶³ Psychologist Dale Archer (2017) defines 'love-bombing' as "an attempt to influence another person with over-the-top displays of attention and affection." In the context of building relationships this includes gifts, spending time together, conversations about the future and constant keeping in touch. Archer (2017) explains that "love bombing works because humans have a natural need to feel good about who we are and often we can't fulfil that need on our own" (Archer, 2017). Further as Simi et al (2017) identify, the dopamine rush induced in the recipient of the love-bombing creates neurophysiological pathways that trigger the brain's reward centre, which has addictive qualities (Simi et al., 2017).

religion (that again, Westerners tend to steer clear of) is commonplace. Subsequently, the positioning of the recruiter as a trusted confidant enables him to fairly-quickly ascertain if the prospect has the character traits and persuadability of a potential recruit or if the prospect should be categorised as risky and not worthy of further investment.

As with all stages of his recruitment playbook, Al Qa'idy (2010) provides a quiz at the end of each tier for the recruiter to evaluate his prospect. Assessing the prospect against questions like "Does he talk with you about his private affairs and hobbies?", "Does he ask you to help fulfil his needs after Allah?" and "Does he accept your advice and respect your opinion?" – provides direction to the recruiter about how to progress the prospect, or in the case of a poorly scoring individual, cut their losses and search for a new candidate. Scoring midway indicates further reinforcement of this stage and reassessment is necessary, while high-scoring prospects are reinforced as a "good choice" so long as a close rapport can be maintained (Al Qa'idy, 2010). The inclusion of assessments at the conclusion of each chapter in the handbook for recruiters to follow represents a choice architecture framework in and of itself that guides the recruiter through the process of decision-making under risk. The scoring used is also indicative of the existence of prospect theory modelling, as it clearly distinguishes risks from probabilities and likely outcomes. In this manner, the recruitment handbook provides a coding system for recruiters to easily gauge gains and losses while identifying risk.

5.3.3 Introducing faith-based knowledge and the power of routine

Faith and routine represent a symbiotic partnership in Islam. In the extremist context, however, this symbiosis becomes more of a toxic co-dependency as the recruiter seeks to monitor the prospects' every move, thought and action. In this way, adherence to prayers at the requisite times

– including praying together, understanding how the prospect spends their day (for example, at university, at work, or at home) and who the prospect has relationships with forms the basis for the recruiter to leverage this information to deploy corrective nudges. For example, those who aren't well established in a prayer routine are encouraged to commit to one through joint-prayer sessions, including at the mosque, through daily phone calling and the sending of religious text messages. Additionally, the performing of *du'a* (Arabic: private prayer in supplication and request) is encouraged to deepen spiritual bondage. Al Qa'idy (2010) instructs the recruiter to "make him (the prospect) adhere to his prayers on time; (but) not more than this" to avoid any cognitive overload (Al Qa'idy, 2010). Notably in this tier, routine in and of itself is a nudge.

To establish a routine, an individual must accept change, and, to maintain a routine they must believe or feel sufficiently rewarded for the effort and commitment involved. When an individual seeks to implement new routines or changes in their lives, they often start by making small adjustments that over time contribute to the desired outcome. In a radicalisation context, routine presents as a way to consolidate behavioural expectations within an ideological framework. As a choice-supportive bias, recruiters use routine to establish and maintain authority, while confirming and reinforcing ideological compliance. The establishment of a prospect's 'new' routine, as developed through tiers one to three, culminates as the recruiter frames the decision the prospect must make against a backdrop of living a fastidiously Islamic life. By framing the choice as one of devotion and commitment rather than religious zealotry, the recruiter anchors the prospect to be over-reliant on the information provided in tiers 1-3 versus other knowledge or information they may be exposed to or have gained elsewhere. In this manner, the recruiter's choice architecture framework employs an information bias to support the prospect's beliefs and eventual choices. Further, the recruiter reinforces faith and devotion in a salient way, such that even the most moderate of Muslims would recognise their new

selves on the pious end of the religiosity spectrum. By presenting 'choice' in this way, the recruiter is also able to begin passively influencing the prospect, leveraging the authority effect, while concurrently starting the process of segregating the prospect from others who are not as pious by encouraging them to "disassociate himself from such wrong-doing without hesitation"(Al Qa'idy, 2010). The incremental results of applying this choice architecture, particularly against a backdrop of religious piety and routine, further the operant conditioning taking place.

5.3.4 Ascertaining bona-fides and addressing security risks

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of this radicalisation tier is the drawing of a conclusion as to the risk profile the prospect presents to the overall terrorist cell. Al Qa'idy (2010) stresses the importance of vetting the prospect's bona fides in this stage: "you must know about his concerns, his interests, and relationships... and how he spends his complete 24 hours in a day... that he is a person who is security conscious (i.e. he is worthy of keeping secrets, trustworthy and not talkative..."(Al Qa'idy, 2010). This is consistent with ISIS's fixation on operational security (Lindekilde et al., 2019). For example, they published their own operational security manual (ISIS, 2015) and regularly reinforce operational security concepts via their newspaper Al Naba.⁶⁴ Hegghammer (2013) highlights that this risk assessment by recruiters dispels the myth that "extremist groups enlist any willing person they can put their hands on." Hegghammer (2013) further explains that the process of recruitment is dangerous for the terrorist cell or organisation as the costs of failure or discovery are high. This has resulted in recruiters taking a "careful and selective" approach to their task, "since low-quality recruits can compromise the group" (Hegghammer, 2013).

⁶⁴ Refer 'Take Precautions on the Path of Jihad' (Al Naba, 2019).

5.4 Tier 3 – Normalising Extremism

The focus of The Radicalisation Cascade in the normalising extremism tier shifts from prospect theory to expected utility theory to:

1. Strengthen or awaken the prospect's belief in extreme Islam, particularly the metaphysical aspects of faith with a focus on the rewards of Heaven and fear of the punishments of Hell
2. Cultivate a sense of insignificance via collective grievances while concurrently presenting remedies to (re)acquire significance; and Convey the social norms of the in-group to the prospect, including holding out group acceptance and belonging as a reward, and solidifying a routine.

Tier 3 of The Radicalisation Cascade is the most intensive of all phases in the radicalisation cascade. With a focus on channelling the attention of the prospect away from their life and towards the objectives of the in-group, this tier also sees the prospect introduced to channelled reputational-focused concepts within the availability cascade, in readiness for a full shift from an informational to a reputational focus in the following tier. By anchoring the prospect in both Islamic extremism and projected cultural (politicised) insignificance via collective grievances, such as Western oppression, for example, the influence of the availability cascade increases. There is a clear confluence here between Moghaddam's (2005) "ground floor" (Moghaddam, 2005) and Kuran and Sunstein's (1999) observation that "availability entrepreneurs make use of political institutions and the media to trigger cascades" in a way that "conditions people's reputational incentives" (Kuran & Sunstein, 1999). This is an important element of the overall radicalisation trajectory because it anchors the prospect's new worldview in line with the terrorist organisation's political agenda. This includes situations where the prospect remains unaware that the group they are falling in with are in fact hardened extremists. Further, the cultivation of significance-seeking motivations within the prospect against

a backdrop of heavenly recognition or hellfire failure, delivers clear payoff incentive pathways. The choice architecture framework falling in around the prospect at this point can therefore be observed to leverage heuristically led availability sense-making decisions that are coercively transforming their worldview.

5.4.1 Solidifying Belief in Extreme Islam

The use of extreme religious belief and devotion as a framework to introduce concepts that would otherwise be considered abhorrent, such as violence, acts as an insulator against cognitive dissonance. For this reason, prospects in this tier are 'awakened' in a gradual way. This normalises extreme violence as a legitimate remedy to shared grievances without appearing, at least initially, overly radical. Al Qa'idy (2010) references this transition into extreme religiosity as the awakening of "Emaan" (Arabic: faith, belief) (Al Qa'idy, 2010). Emaan (as a concept) particularly focuses on the absolute acceptance by the individual of the six articles of the Islamic faith.⁶⁵ These six articles of faith become part of this tier's master narrative, as the recruiter seeks to align behaviour with religiosity – even when the correlation is tenuous at best. By framing all good deeds as Islamic deeds via a process of opportunistic correlation and positive reinforcement, the recruiter actively employs a choice-supportive heuristic to strengthen the prospect Salafi's worldview while concurrently strengthening their own authority. In this way, the recruiter can control the prospect's awakening within the confines of the choice architecture presented. For example, this tier places a great deal of emphasis on the recruiter's ability to teach the prospect about the "desiring for" and rewards of Paradise (Heaven) while carefully balancing this with the presentation of disincentives – that the only other option available to Heaven is Hell. In his handbook,, Al Qa'idy

⁶⁵ Emaan/Iman and "The Six Pillars of Faith" in Islam: (1) Belief in the existence and oneness of Allah (God); (2) Belief in the existence of Angels; (3) Belief in the Qur'an as revealed to Muhammad, the Gospel as revealed to Jesus, the Torah as revealed to Moses and the Psalms as revealed to David; (4) Belief that Muhammad is the last of the Prophets sent by God to Earth; (5) Belief in the day of judgement – in which the righteous will be rewarded and go to paradise while those not following the Qur'an will go to hell; and (6) Belief that God's will is predetermined regardless of the good or bad that befalls the individual (Madrasat El-Quran, 2022).

(2010) reminds the recruiter that this phase of radicalisation “never ends” and that while most people have “*fitrah* (Arabic: good nature)” their spiritual knowledge must be awakened so that when they (the prospect) “face the evils of other humans and the jinn (Arabic: demons)” they do not stray from ‘Islam’, by which he means the choice architecture being presented before them. The anticipation of outside interference in the radicalisation trajectory here is notable, as is Al Qa’idy’s (2010) warning of the waning and waxing nature of faith because it directly begins the process of impinging on the freewill of the prospect under the guise of saving them from evil (“other humans and jinn”) and the trials Allah will set before him (Al Qa’idy, 2010).

This convergence of religiosity and politics; and the perceptions it cultivates among Muslims and non-Muslims alike, appears to be a point of sensitivity for Al Qa’idy (2010) who goes to great lengths to ensure those following his recruitment manual understand violent jihad as Deen or Din (Arabic: obedience to Allah) rather than fanaticism. By focusing the prospect in the performance of faith-based behaviours the recruiter is able to drive attentional bias toward deen when questions around fanaticism are expected. The prospect must “hold fast to the Qur’an and Sunnah” and when faced with criticism or questioning about their devotion, realise that “the matter doesn’t revolve around fanaticism or blind following of a specific group” (Al Qa’idy, 2010).

Cultivating this mindset in the prospect can be viewed as something of a masterstroke as it ensures the prospect believes they have seemingly rational knowledge to counter opposing views and beliefs with accuracy, legitimacy, and superiority. This also presents as a cognitive consonance event for the prospect as it reinforces the recruiter’s narrative and puts the prospect in harmony with the recruiter’s beliefs and behaviours. This harmony is something that has been cultivated in previous tiers, in a way that sets the prospect up to actively seek it all along. By consolidating the

prospect's desire for approval and acceptance the recruiter can induce a neurophysiological response by activating the brain's reward centre. Cialdini (2016) refers to this process as delivering "privileged moments" because people tend to look for confirmation of ideas rather than ways to disbelieve new information. This is particularly influential within the radicalisation cascade because the cultivation of 'privileged moments' are "the moments that we create immediately before we present an idea, proposal or recommendation so that people are attuned to that idea, recommendation or proposal before they ever encounter it." By presenting information and social rewards in this way, the prospect is led to create a mindset that is already receptive to the recruiter's messages (Cialdini, 2016, p. 73-100). This frontloading type of operant conditioning is consistent with Kuran and Sunstein's (1999) observation that availability cascades can be both cognitively deceptive and heuristically exploitative in manipulating availability campaigns (Kuran & Sunstein, 1999).

Al Qa'idy (2010) goes into some detail about how recruiters can create privileged moments for their prospects, such as by "watching the jihadi video productions and going into the jihadi forums (together)" or by holding out the reward of the recruiter's or another significant person's time and guidance. Most influentially, Al Qa'idy (2010) tells the recruiter "you should know, my dear brother, that the best way to indoctrinate these concepts is to do it in a group, and this is the opinion of the people who master this art (of recruiting)" (Al Qa'idy, 2010).

5.4.2 Cultivating Insignificance, Collective Grievances, and Presenting Redemptive Pathways

The recruiter's ability to influence the prospects' perceptions about, for example, the oppression of Muslims sets the stage not only for the adoption of shared collective grievances but more potently, for the cultivation of a desire within the prospect to remedy this situation.

To do this the recruiter must first convince the prospect that they are experiencing insignificance as a direct result of these collective grievances. This can be achieved using master narratives (which the prospect is now increasingly familiar and comfortable with) together with the recruiter's understanding of the prospect's particular personal circumstances, their motivations, and their weaknesses. In effect, the recruiter begins gaslighting⁶⁶ the prospect with the information they have already gathered on them. Then, the recruiter anchors and frames their situation within those narratives of oppression, regardless of if this is true or not. For example, issues such as conflict with parents or family members, unemployment, involuntary celibacy and/or a lack of an ability to form prosocial adult relationships can be framed as the fault and failure of Western society which is purposefully and maliciously oppressive towards Muslims. The goal of the recruiter at this point is to induce in the prospect a cognitive opening event,⁶⁷ even if they have already experienced one (or several) in their lives before they began to radicalise. Beadle (2017) explains that being exposed to a select library of TVEC, together with tight framing of events in a way that is sympathetic to the terrorist organisation's beliefs, "produces some kind of awakening or cognitive opening within an individual which will then be interpreted through the prism of a war against Islam" (Beadle, 2017). The same prism can be used to interpret events in any way that benefits the recruiter and/or terrorist organisation. McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) also identify cognitive opening events⁶⁸ as pivotal to the radicalisation process, noting that it can make individuals more open to

⁶⁶ According to Dignan (2017) gaslighting is an "elaborate and insidious technique of deception and psychological manipulation... (that) gradually undermine(s) the victim's confidence in his own ability to distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong, or reality from appearance, therefore rendering him pathologically dependant on the gaslighter in this thinking or feelings. As part of the process the victim's self-esteem is severely damaged and he becomes additionally dependant on the gaslighter for emotional support and validation" (Duignan, 2017).

⁶⁷ A cognitive opening event is described by Wiktorowicz (2005) as "the moment when an individual who faces discrimination, socioeconomic crisis, and political repression is trying to understand life events and suddenly his previously accepted beliefs are shaking and he becomes vulnerable and receptive to new ways of thinking..." (Trip, Bora, et al., 2019).

⁶⁸ It is important to note that cognitive opening events do not need to be induced by the recruiter. There are prospects who have already experienced cognitive opening events in their lives – such as the death of a parent at a young age or other event of significant calamity – that pre-dates their radicalisation. While these events may not in and of themselves prime them for radicalisation, as McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) point out, it may make them more susceptible to influence (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017).

influence and that as the prospect is in-group involved, “community support for violent action affords status to militants (which) can help motivate violence” (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). If the recruiter is unable to induce a cognitive opening event, and the prospect has not already had one that makes radicalisation conducive, the recruiter must present the prospect with alternate motivations towards adopting collective grievances and shared insignificance.

Whether a reinforcing mechanism and/or a way to induce a cognitive opening event in prospects, the introduction of TVEC as a radicalising and normalising agent at this tier is notable. Hard-core violent jihad and martyrdom content that reinforces the status of the prospect as a “companion on the path to jihad” while framing collective grievances appears in a list of TVEC that Al Qa’idy (2010) suggests recruiters use during this tier. Steeped in Master Narratives such as the crusader invaders and antisemitism, alongside religious scholarship that deal with the “perils of hell and Satan” (McLean et al., 2018) the interplay evident in TVEC between ‘who-is-to-blame’ for the insignificance of Muslims (out-groups) and how that insignificance can be addressed (in-groups) is clear. Further, in a continued effort to diminish the role of fanaticism in favour of the idea of religious duty, the representation of the ‘companions on the path to violent jihad’ narrative in TVEC as subject to harm by enemy security forces, imprisonment, torture or even death is covered with vigour to reinforce the ‘trials’ violent Islamists must endure, perpetuates a self-fulfilling prophecy. That such extreme ramifications are articulated yet framed in the warrior-scholar-martyr archetype, further anchors the prospect into the redemptive narrative because it presents them with a way that provides an easy pathway to success (heaven).

Once a recruiter has influenced a prospect into a situation where they feel the personal and collective insignificance of those grievances, the recruiter can present options to remedy their sense of anger, injustice, and

frustration. Atran (2015) notes that this may be presented in ways that offer them “exciting life projects (such as joining the Caliphate) that enable them to find a meaningful existence within society” (Atran, 2015) or as a noble cause steeped in sacred values (Sheikh et al., 2012). Kruglanski et al (2014) add that the primary driver here “is the fundamental desire to matter, to be someone, to have respect” (Kruglanski et al., 2014). The quest for meaning and respect is therefore integral to the recruiter’s ability to frame their radical agenda in personalised ways for the prospect. As Kuran and Sunstein (1999) identify, this process within an availability cascade is circular in nature: “public discourse shapes individual risk judgements, risk preferences and policy preferences; and the reshaped personal variables then transform the public discourse that contributed to their own transformations” (Kuran & Sunstein, 1999). Once inside this echo chamber, the prospect may not realise that they are being coerced towards modes of sense-making that have extreme objectives.

As a sub-theme emerging from ISIS’s interpretation of and adoption of Al Qa’idy’s (2010) recruitment manual are the concepts of enjoying the spoils of war (Arabic: Ghanimah) and violent jihad as a redemptive narrative for those who have sinned. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) identified in a 2016 report that radical recruiters were framing jihad in a “redemption narrative” to benefit from existing prison ecosystems, often resulting in the nudging of criminals towards violent jihad. Further, supporters of ISIS produced content marketing campaigns with the premise that “sometimes people with the worst pasts create the best futures” (Basra et al., 2016). This nudge from an un-Islamic life towards being a good Muslim (regardless of if the prospect is a Muslim or not) has also been observed in Street Da’wa groups where ‘fallen’ Muslims with alcohol and substance abuse issues; and/or proclivities such as using prostitutes - were sold the same redemptive narrative as a means to cleanse their lives in order to please Allah and rescue themselves from hell on judgement day.

5.4.3 Social Conditioning and the Power of Routine

The establishment of a routine under the guise of religious obedience is a constant theme in Al Qa'idi's (2010) manual. The exposure the prospect has to the in-group during this tier is significantly higher in comparison to the preceding tiers. Far from developing religious knowledge and practices, however, the recruiter's goal is to indoctrinate the prospect into patterns of accepted behaviour through social influence to exert coercive control. Moghaddam (2005) identified this tactic in his research as one of both "conformity and obedience" where the terrorist organisations, cell leader or recruiter "represents a strong authority figure" by where "nonconformity, disobedience and disloyalty receive the harshest punishments" (Moghaddam, 2005). An overt focus on obedience can also be observed recurrently in ISIS's magazines Dabiq⁶⁹ and Rumiya.⁷⁰ The establishment of a routine that is laden with religious obligations also serves to fill up the prospect's time. Not only does this exact control over their activities and behaviours, but it also serves to limit their exposure to other ideas and information. In-group, time filling activities are a mandated part of this

⁶⁹ Refer:

Dabiq (2014) issue 1, pp. 7, 28, 31 and 35 (ISIS, 2014f).
Dabiq (2014) issue 2, pp. 9 and 10 (ISIS, 2014e).
Dabiq (2014) issue 3, pp. 11 and 27 (ISIS, 2014a).
Dabiq (2014) issue 4, pp. 3,6, 10, 11 and 12 (ISIS, 2014d).
Dabiq (2014) issue 5, pp. 22 (ISIS, 2014c).
Dabiq (2014) issue 7, pp. 22, 23 and 51 (ISIS, 2014b).
Dabiq (2015) issue 8, pp. 32 and 44 (ISIS, 2015c).
Dabiq (2015) issue 9, pp. 8, 9, 13, 38 and 5 (ISIS, 2015e).
Dabiq (2015) issue 10, pp. 9, 15, 16, 21, 23, 27, 45 and 61 (ISIS, 2015d).
Dabiq (2015) issue 11, pp. 43 (ISIS, 2015a).
Dabiq (2015) issue 12, pp. 9, 10, 20, 22, 23 and 52 (ISIS, 2015b).
Dabiq (2016) issue 13, pp. 37 (ISIS, 2016c).
Dabiq (2016) issue 14, pp. 18, 19 and 66 (ISIS, 2016b).
Dabiq (2016) issue 15, pp. 5, 6, 27 and 56 (ISIS, 2016a).

⁷⁰ Refer:

Rumiya (2016) issue 1, pp. 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 29, 32 and 36 (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2016b).
Rumiya (2016) issue 2, pp. 11, 14 and 20 (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2016b).
Rumiya (2016) issue 3, pp. 7, 9, 17, 18, 20, 33 and 38 (ISIS, 2016d).
Rumiya (2016) issue 4, pp. 13, 18 and 24 (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2016c).
Rumiya (2017) issue 5, pp. 21 and 31 (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2017d).
Rumiya (2017) issue 6, pp. 22 and 31 (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2017e).
Rumiya (2017) issue 8, pp. 5, 14, 22, 31, 32 and 35 (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2017b).
Rumiya (2017) issue 9, pp. 9, 10, 15, 19, 22, 27, 28, 29, 34, 38 and 39 (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2017g).
Rumiya (2017) issue 10, pp. 25 and 38 (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2017f).
Rumiya (2017) issue 11, pp. 7, 15, 21, 26, 45, 46 and 47 (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2017h).
Rumiya (2017) issue 12, pp. 4, 8, 26, 35 and 37 (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2017c).

section of Al Qa'idy's (2010) manual by design. From visiting the mosque together and participating in street *da'wah* (Arabic: proselytisation; the sharing of specific pamphlets, books, and sermons with one another; and watching TVEC together, Al Qa'idy (2010) uses this tier as a baseline to reorient both the prospect's sense of religious superiority over others and solidify the influence of the in-group's self-regulatory environment to ensure member conformity. This leaves the prospect in a situation of coercive control. However, the prospect may or may not realise the extent to which they are under coercive control, instead believing the choice architecture presented to them represents rewards such as their newfound friends, worldviews and behaviours. Becker (2019) identifies this pattern of in-group self-regulation as part of social learning theory whereby group member "interaction can model, reinforce or punish behaviour and thus influence the probability that an individual learns and engages in the (preferred) behaviour over time." (Becker, 2019).

This tier also introduces a violation of normative nudge rules around liberal paternalism, as the radicalisation trajectory attempts to solidify co-dependencies between the recruiter and prospect that might otherwise not exist or become organically successful. Lavi (2018) refers to this aberrative phenomenon as "evil nudges." Lavi (2018) proposes that liability for these evil nudges rests within a proxy or intermediary resulting in effects on "social behaviour, network dynamics, and diffusion of information" that allow these proxies to "predict cognitive biases and social dynamics." Further, Lavi (2018) explains that these proxies employ sociotechnical systems to exert influence (Lavi, 2018). In this context, extremist recruiters can be viewed as performing a proxy function in the radicalisation process, exerting influence in similar socio-technical structures. From a jihadi nudge perspective, this approach may be understood in-part due to the Salafi worldview that everything is predestined by God – even the trials and challenges faced on the path to violent jihad; and that ultimately "jihad will rescue him (the prospect) from the horror of the Day of Judgement" (Al

Qa'idy, 2010). A 'violent jihad as the fulfilment of one's destiny' narrative is entirely convenient for Islamic extremists as it both frames a prospect's lack of decision-autonomy against an immutable metaphysical backdrop while concurrently consolidating the recruiter's position as a proxy and/or gatekeeper to accessing rewards and payoffs.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this tier on the radicalisation trajectory is the dual-nudge payload targeting both the prospect and the recruiter simultaneously which becomes apparent in the playbook. Upon evaluating the prospect's progress, the recruiter is given no option to disengage them from the process, but rather is encouraged to - "make sure you evaluate yourself with truthfulness and sincerity to Allah" (Al Qa'idy, 2010), in an effort to course-correct sub-optimal outcomes. In the first sign of a sunk-cost fallacy arising, this directive turns the failure of the prospect's compliance into a failure of the recruiter. "Are you eager to practice what you preach?" questions the manual, "Do you strive to ... doing supererogatory acts of worship like sunnah prayers, fasting on Mondays and Thursdays?"; "Do you read the Islamic pamphlets and listen to the lectures before giving them to the candidate" and "Have you reduced the amount of unbeneficial time you spend on the Internet?" the recruiter is asked (Al Qa'idy, 2010). This tactic of equating prospect failure with recruiter failure by making the assessment a judgement on both also acts to normalise the seeking of a higher, more educated authority. This signals an element of loss-aversion in Al Qa'idy's (2010) playbook, viewing both the prospect and recruiter as radicalised enough that their potential loss should be avoided. By directing a failing recruiter to seek assistance from a more knowledgeable and experienced peer, Al Qa'idy (2010) attempts to insulate both from disengagement. As Bhatt (2014) notes "there are only two authentic agents of (Salafi) history... the 'scholar' and the 'martyr'..." (Bhatt, 2014) and in cultivating absolute obedience in the prospect, and the absolute reliance on the recruiter by the in-group- absolute control of both follows.

Al Qa'idy (2010) goes to great lengths in this section of his manual to foolproof the recruiter to deliver prospects into the radicalisation cascade. Spanning some 14 pages (out of a total of 44) and inclusive of several assessments and checklists, 'The Awakening of Emaan' recruitment stage concludes by asking the recruiter if the prospect "longs to sacrifice something for the deen" and "has he begun to love Jihad and the Mujahideen" (Al Qa'idy, 2010) cementing significance seeking alongside devotion and obedience. As we will see in the following radicalisation tier, the prospect is then able to be nudged from this position into the choice architecture that provides active remedies to collective grievances at both a personal and movement level.

5.5 Tier 4 – Threshold

The purpose of The Radicalisation Cascade in the threshold tier is to:

1. Shift the prospect from the informational aspect of the availability cascade to a dominant reputational frame
2. Consolidate expected utility theory around terrorist choice
3. Solidify in-group bondage
4. Cultivate and articulate a sense of insignificance in the prospect; and
5. Provide the remedy and means to resolve that perceived insignificance.

Tier 4 of The Radicalisation Cascade takes the prospect up to, but not crossing, the point from radicalisation to recruitment (which begins in the following tier). This tier consolidates the framing of a prospect's social identity within the in-group, cultivates collective insignificance and then provides the means to retain significance via violent jihad. Within the availability cascade the focus shifts to complete reputational dominance as the prospect's sense of self is tethered to shared grievances and perceptions of oppression within the in-group settings.

5.5.1 Cascading Availability: A Shift from Informational Cascade Dominance to Reputational Dominance

Within the availability cascade, the move to a primary focus on reputational dominance over informational importance in this radicalisation tier can be seen as a means of virtue signalling whereby the influence value of an idea is merged with the influence value action holds. As Kitamura et al (2013) explain “the dilemma of making a decision for ourselves or conforming to the decision of the social group to which we belong ... can also be harmful especially if the members in the group are ignorant and allowing the few individuals with an agenda to cause a social information availability cascade.” Further, Kitamura et al (2013) identify that social in-groups are essentially aggregate agents that provide social reinforcement to prospects in binary choice settings (Kitamura et al., 2013).

As the prospect is nudged by the recruiter from a push/pull information environment of radicalisation towards active recruitment, their sense of self and place within the in-group also shifts towards how their comrades and the terrorist organisation view, accept and approve of them. Significance is bestowed as a normative function of being part of the in-group in this sense. Sunstein (2017) notes that “because people care about their reputations, they speak out, or remain silent, or engage or decline to engage in expressive activity, partly in order to preserve those reputations, even at the price of failing to say what they really think” (Sunstein, 2017). This pattern of operant conditioning by the recruiter and in-group becomes exceptionally salient at this point of the radicalisation process as the threshold from radical to recruit draws nearer. With the recruiter still acting as an availability entrepreneur, the susceptible prospect defaults to using the availability heuristic to make judgments based on the information they’ve recently been exposed to, the accepted behaviours normalised within the in-group and the way grievances have been magnified. At this point of the nudge, the prospect is acutely aware that deviance from the

path set before them, or defiance via means of opposing thought, will result in consequences affecting their reputation and subsequently their standing within the in-group. Further, due to the passage of time, the prospect may have witnessed the rejection or denigration of other prospects or group members, when they have failed to adhere to the nudge; or who may have asserted self-identity; or challenged in-group norms, further driving their reliance on the availability heuristic to make sense of their environment.

Wong and Boh (2010) discuss the influence reputation has among workplace in-groups as “facilitating an availability cascade of positive information about a manager that, in turn, increases the likelihood of nonoverlapping contacts will trust that manager” (Wong & Boh, 2010). If we view the ‘manager’ as the recruiter or even other senior members of the in-group, the correlation of the effective influence on the cascade is clear. Delaney (2017) draws a similar inference in a national security context, where “preservation instincts and some range of moral and welfare interests, at least when elected executives believe they are confronting existential threats”– because those instincts cannot be turned off, inducing an availability cascade. While Delaney (2017) may explore this from an elected United States Official point of view (Delaney, 2017) the correlation between those who believe they hold leadership responsibilities can be made just as comparatively with terrorist cell leaders who similarly believe in their purpose. This is because the reputational aspect of the availability cascade provides them with the same or perceived, level of agency that is recognised by their in-group. This threshold is clearly observed in Al Qa’idy’s (2010) recruitment manual within the concluding assessments in ‘The Planting of Concepts’ stage. “There is a difference between one who wants and one who wishes” Al Qa’idy (2010) warns – “because wishing is like impotent merchandise... preparing yourself for Jihad is in fact, knocking (on) the doors of Jihad” (Al Qa’idy, 2010).

It is at this stage that a content payload deluge occurs, with Al Qa'idy (2010) providing a lengthy list and commentary of which videos, films, books, lectures, Internet forums and so on that the recruiter should immerse the prospect in to desensitise them to extreme violence and to further 'educate' them in violent Salafi ideology. Al Qa'idy (2010) concludes this section with clear instructions: "any defect" in the assessment of the prospect at this point "means the candidate is not qualified to enter the next stage. This is the most critical stage, so you must extend time for him until you achieve the requirement"(Al Qa'idy, 2010). As was observed at tier 3, there is no option for the recruiter to disengage with the prospect at this point. Failure isn't articulated, only re-education until the prospect meets the requisite standard, again signalling to the recruiter that the prospect as a sunk cost.

Through the deliverance of the availability cascade in this tier, supported by both the recruiter's ability to deliver on and offline TVEC that reinforces master narratives, concepts and beliefs while influencing the prospect towards complete radicalisation, the recruiter can begin to frame future gains through a hyperbolic discounting bias. Nudging the prospect into another binary decision-making process, the recruiter can place value on violent jihad as a reward that can be delivered in the near-term. The use of this bias – to default to a reward that can be achieved sooner over a larger reward later, may go some way to explaining the rapid radicalisation process observed during ISIS's early campaign. This is particularly salient when the 'reward' is martyrdom now as opposed to a loss of opportunity for martyrdom or failure to obtain it, later.

5.5.2 Nudging Terrorist Choice

At this point in the radicalisation cascade, the recruiter has a certain degree of confidence in the prospect's ability to follow their nudges in an expected fashion. It, therefore, follows that the recruiter expects the prospect to

make similar decisions regarding the nudges presented in this radicalisation tier, and the active recruitment tiers that follow. The desired payoff for the recruiter and terrorist organisation at this point is the conversion of the prospect from radical to active recruit.

Most notably, the expected outcomes of nudges at this tier apply just as much to the recruiter as the prospect. Al Qa'idy (2010) explicitly defines the prospect as a sunk cost, providing no mechanism for the recruiter to withdraw the candidate or themselves from the prospect's radicalisation process. The potential for failure is framed first against the recruiter's adherence (or lack thereof) to the manual by way of a self-assessment survey that questions if the recruiter has "completed the mission correctly or not." Of the ten questions asked of the recruiter, 1 question is focused on cultivating the desire for martyrdom and violent jihad; 2 questions are focused on religious obedience; 3 questions are focused on the way information is delivered to the prospect; and 4 questions are focused on operant conditioning. The second survey focuses the recruiter on assessing the prospect which is again presented as a sunk cost. If after completing the assessment of the prospect's progress the recruiter finds that they have 'failed' they are instructed to "continue in this stage for another month. Then reevaluate him (the prospect) again"(Al Qa'idy, 2010). No instruction is given as to what the recruiter should do if the prospect delivers successive failures.

The probabilities of success in this context are as nuanced as the radicalisation process itself and are best articulated by viewing the radicalisation cascade as a spectrum of possible outcomes. Having not been immediately ruled out prior to beginning the radicalisation process, nor having failed it early in the process (at which point the recruiter is presented with a disengagement option), it can be argued that while radicalisation may have been facilitated – and perhaps recruitment is even possible, actual assignment of the prospect/recruit to acts of extreme violence

cannot proceed for a range of reasons. These could include poor physical fitness, medical issues or injuries, inability to travel to the conflict zone (such as when a government cancels the prospect's passport) or an inability or unwillingness to turn radical talk into extreme action. This explanation fits within McCauley and Moskalenko's 'Double Pyramid Model of Radicalisation' (2017) whereby the correlation between action and opinion can be seen as occurring in parallel. At the bottom of the pyramid, the prospect is neutral/inert; at the next level upward the prospect is sympathetic and/or driven to activism; near to the top of the pyramid the prospect justifies their beliefs and actions as a bona fide radical; and at the tip of the pyramid, the prospect feels a personal moral obligation and becomes a terrorist (Braddock, 2020, p.29; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). To maximise utility for any radicalisation outcome that presents value to the terrorist organisation or recruiter, and to reduce unexpected outcomes, the recruiter employs agents of influence via the delivery of successive content payload deluges. The significance of the content payload deluge over other nudges –such as inducing cognitive opening event/s, leveraging socio-economic grievances, cultivating in-group belonging, and/or significance-seeking behaviours; lies in its ability to exert influence that validates all the information that the prospect has previously been exposed to. In this sense, the delivery of a content payload deluge completes the radicalisation process entirely. It does this via (1) leveraging master Islamic narratives;⁷¹ (2) storytelling, particularly via video, social

⁷¹ On Islamic Master Narratives: Halverson et al (2011) in their book 'Master Narratives of Islamic Extremism' identify 12 key, recurrent master narratives used by Salafi extremists:

The Pharaoh: The arrogant tyrant rejects the Word of God revealed by His prophet, they tyrant is punished, and his body is preserved as a divine warning for future nations to submit to God's Will.

The Jahiliyyah: The Muslim world has regressed to a state of ignorance, barbarism, and polytheism akin to the pagan society that existed in Arabia before the coming of Islam and its leaders are apostates to be defeated by a vanguard of believers.

The Battle of Badr: Despite seemingly impossible odds, the early Muslims defeat a much larger and better equipped army of unbelievers from Mecca through the strength of their convictions and the help of God and His angels on the battlefield.

The Hypocrites: After migrating from Mecca, Islam is threatened by a nefarious group in Medina who profess to be Muslims publicly but privately do not believe and use Islam for political expediency as they await the defect of Muslims in their conflict with Mecca.

The Battle of Khaybar: Amidst a pagan siege on Medina, the early Muslims accuse Jewish tribes of breaking an alliance with them, known as the Constitution of Medina, in their conflict with the city of Mecca and punish them for treason.

The Battle of Karbala: Imam Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala teaches Shi'ite Muslims to see the world as a place where the wicked and corrupt reign and conclude that it is better to die than live under tyranny.

media and print publications of high production quality;⁷² (3) infusing visual and audio cues;⁷³ (4) framing current events against a backdrop of significance erosion;⁷⁴ and (5) promoting annihilatory jihad as a means to both paradise and significance.⁷⁵ Not only does the above content deluge delivery mechanism short-circuit the brain's reward centres to produce a positive neurophysiological response, but it weaponises other heuristics and biases. Neuroscientist Daniel Levitin explains that social media apps and

The Mahdi: In Twelver Shi'ism, the 'Hidden One' will reappear as a messianic saviour to usher in an era of justice before the Day of Judgement. In Sunni Islam, Muslims believe that a just and righteous leader will emerge at the end of time to guide the world.

The Infidel Invaders: The Crusader master narrative recounts the occupation of Muslim lands and holy places by Western Christians to exploit, subjugate, and denigrate them. Likewise, the Tatar master narrative recounts how Hulagu Khan destroyed the Muslim capital of Baghdad and executed the Caliph during the ensuing massacre. The Mongols (Tatars) later converted to Islam but ruled according to the Yasa (Mongol law) rather than Islamic law drawing their identity as Muslims into question.

Shaytan's (Arabic: Satan) Handiwork: The Qur'an warns believers that alcohol, gambling, and other vices are snares that Shaytan uses to lead people astray from Islam and send them to Hell.

1924: The founding of the secular republic of Turkey and the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 by Atatürk, who according to the Master Narrative is secretly Jewish, is part of a conspiracy by the West and the Zionists to destroy Islam and its power.

The Nakba: The establishment of the state of Israel in sacred Palestine and the loss of al-Quds (Arabic: Jerusalem) is a catastrophe, or *nakba*, for the Arab and Islamic world and must be rectified.

Seventy-Two Virgins: The Qur'anic term *hur al-ayn*, or Houris, is interpreted as dark-eyed maidens who will serve as the companions of martyrs in paradise as a reward for their righteous sacrifice in the jihad against the infidels (Arabic: *non-believers*) (Halverson et al., 2011). These narratives can be seen employed by contemporary Islamic Extremist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS, particularly in the themes of their publications, sermons and leadership speeches.

⁷² On storytelling: contemporary storytelling – encompassing on and offline conduits, particularly social media, is much more than the sharing of stories or folklore common to particular religious, ethnic or cultural groups. The manner in which contemporary extremists of all persuasions use the framework of storytelling to deliver influence is representative of a complex, sophisticated and well-planned media infrastructure. Ingram (2015) identifies - in the case of ISIS, that its use of the media to tell its stories is an "information operations" priority pillar of its insurgency that is engineered to "shape perceptions" and "polarise support." Ingram (2015) further identifies in his research that the appeal of ISIS's stories lies in its ability to "weave together appeals to pragmatic and perceptual factors" while concurrently fusing stories (narratives) with "politico-military actions in the field" to close the think-do or talk-action feedback loop (Ingram, 2015). For all intents and purposes, what ISIS says it will do, it does. Wanless and Berk (2017) describe this type of storytelling as "participatory propaganda" due to its "deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behaviour of a target audience while seeking to co-opt its members to actively engage in the spread of persuasive communications (Wanless & Berk, 2017)" at the terrorist organisations behest. Matejic (2016) identifies that this process is an information cascade akin to the same methods marketers and content cartels use to influence civilian buying behaviour (Matejic, 2016b).

⁷³ On audio and visual cues: refer Bean and Edgar (2017) "Nasheeds – battle hymns, martyrdom mourning and praise - offered a granular analysis of the discursive content of the chants... both Al Qaida and ISIS modify the nasheeds contained within their videos with digital effects including reverb, echo, delay, and filters..." (Bean & Edgar, 2017) and Zgryziewicz (2016) "Nasheeds are also part of the social narrative. Some of the nasheeds are created in video style to generate stronger feelings. Usually such products express the beauty of being Mujahedeen and the constant need to fight to protect Islam" (Zgryziewicz, 2016).

⁷⁴ On framing current events: ISIS's magazine Dabiq included a regular section dedicated to 'In the Words of the Enemy' that reported on the efforts of Nation States to defeat them. For example, Dabiq Issue 14 addresses Ban Ki-Moon's launch of a report at the United Nations (ISIS, 2016b) while Issue 13 focuses on a TIME magazine article that speaks to a new book released by Michael Morell, a former Deputy Director of the CIA (ISIS, 2016c). Campion et al (2021) also note that ISIS, monitoring an unfolding industrial sabotage crisis Australia in 2018 went on to reference it in propaganda (a disgruntled employee had inserted sewing needles into fresh strawberries before their distribution). While suggesting ISIS was behind the sabotage (it was not) propaganda distributed included images of strawberries with messages transposed across them saying "Australia, harvest time has come into your homes... in your food you will find special flavours that we have prepared for you" and "we will never allow you to enjoy the taste of what you desire" (Campion et al., 2021).

⁷⁵ On the promotion of annihilatory jihad: Bhatt (2014) describes Salafist views of violence as "unlimited destructive chaos and totalising order" noting that global destruction is transcendental (Bhatt, 2014).

the technology they are used on promote multitasking that “creates a dopamine-addiction feedback loop effectively rewarding the brain for losing focus and constantly searching for external stimulation.” Neurologist Richard Cytowic agrees, explaining that “digital devices discretely hijack our attention to the extent that you cannot perceive the world around you in its fullness” (Garfinkle, 2020). Turel et al (2018) observe that there is a growing body of scholarship that agrees that “many social media users present addiction-like symptoms that cause some impairment in other life domains.” Turel et al (2018) identify that social media addiction impacts the individual’s impulse control and sense of temporal awareness while impairing their sense of self, particularly dissociative behaviours such as sexual behaviour. Turel et al (2018) categorise these observations within two psychological processes: (1) the impairment of time perception biases via channelled attention; and (2) that same impairment occurring when people “engage in highly rewarding behaviours” that include “arousal mechanisms.” Turel et al (2018) further draw the correlation between social media addiction and what is classified as a mental disorder – “Internet gaming disorder” – in the American Psychiatric Association’s taxonomic Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) (Turel et al., 2018). This correlation, while not direct, may go some way to explaining how content payload deluges – and the social networks and technological platforms that deliver them – have addiction-like effects on some of the individuals that use them. These elements of the content payload, and more, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

5.5.3 In-Group Bondage: Acting Together

The extremist view of the in-group is something of a dual narrative framed against a backdrop of political struggle against oppression and ideological purity. The recruiter must embed the prospect into the in-group to foster the radicalisation process, while concurrently instilling the perception of the scarcity of true believers. This dual narrative serves to present in-group

membership (and acceptance) as elitist both in life but particularly so in death (martyrdom), where the rewards promised in the afterlife leverage the utopian paradise promised in many master narratives. By presenting martyrdom as a scarce, exclusive club, the recruiter can magnify the achievements of the few to negate any feelings of hesitation or isolation by in-group members: "He is a stranger, but he isn't alone... he (the prospect) must not feel lonely just because the companions (the believers) are few. He must put his trust in Allah... and Taifa Al Mansoura (the victorious group)" (Al Qa'idy, 2010). The use of the scarcity bias in this respect deploys the first inklings of the hustle to violent jihad, it's time criticalness existing in only small windows of opportunity and the perception that martyrdom is special because of the guaranteed entry to Janna (Arabic translation: Heaven) it facilitates, even to lapsed Muslims or those who would otherwise be considered unworthy of the honour (such as criminals). Martyrdom is a particularly salient reward to hold out because the judgement of success upon death by Allah, according to the Hadith,⁷⁶ is deemed to be determined not by the success of the actual violent Islamist attack itself but by the intention of the person committing the act.⁷⁷ So even those who fail in their attacks, are still perceived to reach Janna as a result. Salafi theology is unclear on whether those taken prisoner enjoy the same benefits as those martyred.

Sunstein (2009) in his book 'Going to Extremes' notes that the in-group is particularly useful in holding out these rewards because "when people find themselves in groups of like-minded types, they are especially likely to move to extremes. And when such groups include authorities who tell group members what to do, or who put them into certain social roles, very bad things happen." Further, Sunstein (2009) notes that in the case of political extremism, social segregation is a useful tool for producing polarisation –

⁷⁶ The Hadith are the words, actions and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad, as recorded by his disciples during this life. Not all Muslims believe all Hadith are divinely inspired.

⁷⁷ Hadith reference: Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, Sahih Muslim – book 020, number 4694: "It has been narrated on the authority of Anas b. Malik that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: Who seeks martyrdom with sincerity shall get its reward, though he may not achieve it."

“a good way to create an extremist group or cult of any kind is to separate members from the rest of society. The separation can occur physically or psychologically, by creating a sense of suspicion about non-members. With such separation, the information and views of those outside the group can be discredited... terrorists are made, not born” (Sunstein, 2009, p. 15, 19-20). The creation of harmony within the in-group but a sense of real and looming threat from outside the group (even from other Salafist groups) is central to the recruiter’s ability to successfully radicalise the prospect because it fuses religion and politics together in a way that completely polarises the prospect towards delivering a remedy to shared grievances.

Sheikh et al (2012) explain that the role of active religious participation in the in-group along with perceived external threats results in the group “treating preferences as sacred values... accentuating the positive relationship between participation in religious rituals and treating disputed values as sacred values” (Sheikh et al., 2012). This serves to further polarise the in-group and acts as a reciprocity bondage agent in creating a sense of prospect indebtedness to the recruiter and the cause.

Reciprocity as a bondage agent in this phase of the radicalisation trajectory leverages the prospects’ primal neuropsychology around feelings of trust, inclusion, sharing and belonging. Further, the interconnectedness reciprocity cultivates allows recruiters and those in positions of authority within the in-group to allocate tasks, establish a micro-economy (such as the hawala⁷⁸ system or managing the proceeds of crime and monetary donations), and create other systems of interconnectivity and co-dependency. It is important to note that this type of reciprocity extends to in-group behaviours. Where out-group perceived threats escalate (such as

⁷⁸ ‘Hawala’ is a traditional Arab system of transferring money via a proxy. The person wishing to send money to another person pays it to a local agent, who then contacts an agent at the destination location, who then pays the final recipient. The exchange of funds in reality (such as the movement of cash) need not occur at all, rather the system leverages the honour of the Hawala dealer and network, on a ledger basis with the promise of payment at a later date. The only payments made are by the initial sender of the money and the recipient who cashes the value out (minus a fee). Hawala is used widely in the Middle East and South Asia.

the perceived persecution of Muslims) in-group behaviours reciprocate via mutual hostility and, in some cases, result in acts of violence. Reciprocity here is also used as a tool to frame the absolute righteousness of violent jihad and the permissibility of violence against a backdrop of out-group aggression towards sacred values.

The above research also reflects professional practice, where the reinforcement of the information environment within the in-group through social proof has been observed. With out-group behaviour or actions (such as the “invasion” of Muslim lands in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria) fuelling in-group justification for their cause, in-group members look to their authority figures for guidance on how best to harness their anger to channel it into a form of violent jihad. Social proof very much ‘rallies the troops’ in a pre-conflict sense, with outcomes varying from heated debates and discussions, to using this new information as part of attack target selection, to committing acts of lesser-value violence such as graffiti or lighting fires. Hate-speech that occurs in these environments acts to dehumanise out-groups and normalise retaliatory violence. Following on from social proof, information cascades then further reinforce the prospect’s belief in the decisions they are making, preferencing the needs of the in-group over individual grievances. As information cascades are more stable forms of influence than cultivating herd or in-group behaviour, the recruiter’s ability to transition the prospect to this point signals an important stage in the radicalisation process – passively, yet coercively, nudging them from radicalising prospect to active recruitment towards violence.

5.5.4 Cultivating a Sense of Insignificance

The importance of cultivating a sense of insignificance within a prospect is a critical factor in turning them from radicalised prospect to active recruit. This point in the radicalisation trajectory is catalytic to this conversion because it establishes the conditions under which the prospect is nudged

to actively seek out ways to restore significance. The recruiter is then able to channel this significance-seeking behaviour towards choice architecture pathways that satisfies the needs of the individual while achieving the aims of the terrorist organisation.

The cultivation of insignificance relies heavily on the narratives that the prospect has already been exposed to. In this way the presentation of options to restore significance⁷⁹ at an individual and in-group level – creates the illusion of coming full circle: all that a prospect has been told at this point appears to become prophetically true. The most common forms of cultivating insignificance have the dual effect of acting as group polarisers that create a shared sense of insignificance that is both corporeal and metaphysical. For example, Islamic extremist master narratives⁸⁰ cultivate a shared sense of in-group denigration spanning centuries of Biblical and Quranic interpreted promises from God.⁸¹ Psychologist Fathali M. Moghaddam (2005) identifies many of these factors in his staircase to terrorism as part of the first, second and third floors. The first floor shapes the prospect's perceptions around the possibility the in-group and terrorist organisation will positively influence their personal situation; and meet their perceived needs for "procedural justice" against the backdrop of religiously

⁷⁹ Refer also: Kruglanski et al (2018) "often downtrodden individuals are drawn to extremism as a mechanism through which they can remedy their state of insignificance. For instance, a person could fail at an important life pursuit or experience deep humiliation" (Kruglanski et al., 2018a).

⁸⁰ As in Halverson et al (2011) who identify 12 key "master narratives" common to Islamic extremism. These include, for example, the recurrent 'Crusader' narratives that recount the historical occupation of Muslim lands by Western Christians; the establishment of the State of Israel and loss of Jerusalem as a catastrophe that must be rectified; and Muslims who pretend to believe but are only using Islam for political purposes (Halverson et al., 2011).

⁸¹ In the Old Testament, also referred to as the Jewish Tanak (which pre-dates the Qur'an by some 2500 years), God first promises a homeland for the Jewish people in Genesis 15:18-21 "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham and said "To your descendants, I give this land ..." God further confirms this promise in Genesis 26:3, 28:13, The Book of Exodus 23:31, the Book of Numbers 34:1-12 and in the Book of Deuteronomy 1:8 and 19:8-9 (*King James Bible*, n.d.). Jerusalem – as a part of the Jewish promised land, also appears in the Qur'an (and modern-day Palestine). The importance of Jerusalem to Muslims is explained in the Qur'an, however the way the scriptures are interpreted deviates significantly between mainstream Islam and extremist Islam. Muslim scholar Shaykh Professor Abdul Hadi Palazzi (2020) explains that the Qur'an "openly refers to the reinstatement of the Children of Israel in the Land before the Last Judgement (Sura 17:04)" and that the "designation of Jerusalem as an Islamic Holy place depends on al-Mi-raj, the Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad to heaven, which began from the Foundation Stone on the Temple Mount." He further explains that the issue some Muslims find with Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem, or parts of it, is that given its significance as a Muslim Holy place, being ruled in this place by non-Muslims is interpreted as a betrayal of Islam (Palazzi, 2020). For example, ISIS in their fifteenth issue of Dabiq (2016) entitled the edition 'Break the Cross' and dedicate some 63 pages of the edition to explaining why their interpretation of the Qur'an is correct, particularly as it applies to Jews and Christians; and their sovereignty over lands that should be Muslim (ISIS, 2016a, p.1-63).

based unfair treatment painted by the recruiter. The promise of significance is implicit in a prospect's improved circumstances. On the second floor of Moghaddam's (2005) staircase, the prospect's aggression is displaced to focus on the out-groups identified by the recruiter as having some bearing on the prospect's personal struggles or more broadly, as part of in-group aggression towards the West and other entities (religious or political, for example). The third floor of Moghaddam's (2005) staircase activates the prospect's sense of morality by engaging these feelings to foster a complete commitment to the terrorist groups' cause. As Moghaddam (2005) explains, the in-group position themselves here at "two levels: (a) the macro level, as the only option toward reforming society, pointing to (alleged) government repression and dictatorship as proof of their assertion; and (b) the micro level, as a 'home' for disaffected individuals... some of whom are recruited to carry out the most dangerous missions through programs that often have very fast turnaround." It is at this point that many prospects begin to "develop their parallel lives in complete isolation and secrecy" from their 'normal' communal lives (Moghaddam, 2005). It is from this step upwards on the staircase that the reward in the form of the bestowal of significance becomes tangible to the prospect.

While Al Qa'idy's recruitment manual (2010) doesn't overtly provide direction toward the ostracization of the prospect from their families, friends, or social networks in an instructional sense— although it does encourage the shunning of ties that are not as religiously devout – Al Qa'idy (2010) does address the apparent expected "loneliness" of recognising violent jihad as the only way to establish "the Laws of Allah in the land" and the divisions this may cause in ordinary life. Al Qa'idy (2010) considers the concept of being "a stranger, but not alone" as one of the exulted few true believers. It can be observed throughout Al Qa'idy's (2010) manual to this point, that in practical terms, an increasing focus on the practice of Islam (in belief and physical devotional activities) and via a deepening involvement in the in-group (Al Qa'idy, 2010) the result is that these

activities will inevitably consume much of the prospect's time and attention. Whether in-person or online or a combination of the two, the radicalisation process requires significant investment from the prospect which effectively facilitates some degree of social segregation as a default outcome.

5.5.5 Remedies to Insignificance

After successfully cultivating feelings of insignificance within the prospect, the recruiter begins to nudge them toward a choice architecture that achieves the overall objectives of the terrorist organisation. They do this by positioning themselves as one of the few people that can bestow significance upon the prospect. By leveraging an authority bias, the recruiter influences the prospect's intentions moving forward by incentivising outcomes on a spectrum of significance value. A martyrdom operation volunteer (such as a suicide bomber or a violent jihadi who plans to die by manufacturing a situation whereby Police have no option but to use lethal force to stop their attack from continuing) is far more revered and rewarded in life and death than, for example, a financier who stays in his or her country of origin and faces no danger. Martyrdom operations also hold out the additional promised reward of the significance of attaining something of a short-cut to heaven.⁸² Entering heaven, extremists argue, is not otherwise guaranteed via the living of a natural life and experiencing a natural death.⁸³ Further, death by martyrdom also brings rewards such as the sexual pleasure of 72 virgins. ISIS leveraged sex extensively as an incentive in both life and death. In ISIS's Caliphate, unmarried male recruits are "given a generous salary and a one-time marriage allowance" presenting a 'sex now' and 'sex later' value proposition. Multiple wives and

⁸² Martyrdom, as described by al-Tibyān publications (n.d.) (a global network of violent Islamic extremist sympathisers) follows the significance seeking behaviours common to radicalisation processes along with the veneration of death via jihad: "Allah has fulfilled his promise to us, and granted us dignity through Jihad, after we had been in humility. Our martyred brothers have written, with their blood – InSh'Allah, a history we can be proud of, and their blood has been spilled and flows for the sake of La Ilaha Illa Allah... So that tomorrow (in death) we can meet the Beloved Ones, Muhammad and Companions. And Oh what happiness and joy! For the one who meets his Lord, and finds him pleased with him, and that he will soon be resurrected alongside the Prophets, the Siddiqin, the martyrs and the righteous" (Al-Hafith & Al-Uyayri, n.d.)

⁸³ "Death in honour is better than life in humiliation" British-Somali Al Shaabab suicide bomber Ahmed Hussein Ahmed (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2012).

the use of sexual slaves were also rewards held out to those of high status or proven value in the organisation (Speckhard & Yayla, 2015). The provision or promise of sex as a part of the incentive package presented to achieve significance is an interesting practice in and of itself because it is intrinsically tied with marriage and/or the spoils of war.⁸⁴ As women are not afforded equal status in terrorist organisations like ISIS, and that men have absolute dominion over them, presents opportunities for social and reputational significance. This approach (using sex as an incentive) is in stark contrast to other Islamic terrorist organisations such as Hamas and Hezbollah who have long shown a preference for the use of tangible economic incentives that are only bestowed after successful martyrdom operations. For example, both organisations are known to pay families thousands of dollars in cash for the martyrdom of a child, parent or spouse of any gender for the cause (Pittel & Rübhelke, 2012).

The held-out reward of the bestowal of significance may begin with incremental attribution of significance within the in-group such as performing acts supporting violent jihad. For example “making him an Internet mujahid” to participate in *dawa* online (Al Qa’idy, 2010) or by “arousing a significance quest” in readiness for the next stage of the radicalisation cascade to follow in the esteemed footsteps of other martyrs (Al Qa’idy, 2010; Kruglanski et al., 2014). Arousing a significance quest within the prospect is clearly articulated by Al Qa’idy (2010) in his assessment criteria for prospects to progress to the next tier: active recruitment. In a section titled ‘Signs of when this stage is finished’ Al Qa’idy (2010) instructs the recruiter to look for evidence that the prospect “requests and wants Jihad” and that he prays to Allah “to facilitate the Jihad for him.” Further, the recruiter’s ability to influence the prospect's future intentions to bestow significance aligns with Al Qa’idy’s (2010) instruction

⁸⁴ Ghanimah –the spoils of war – are what is ‘permissible’ for Muslims to take from their enemies through warfighting. Ghanimah can refer to the taking of wealth or slaves by force, fraud or theft. This includes kidnapping people and children (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2017h).

to recruiters to assess prospects at each stage of the radicalisation process outlined in his manual. Al Qa'idy (2010) repeatedly and specifically instructs recruiters not to progress prospects into the next stage until they have passed the tests outlined (Al Qa'idy, 2010).

That this instruction is repeated several times, allows time for the availability cascade to effectively come full circle for the radicalising prospect. In this way Al Qa'idy (2010) positions the recruiter as both the pathway to violent jihad (availability heuristic) and the bestower of reputational significance. For example, significance arousal and seeking can be observed in the cases of Australian Foreign Fighters Jake Bilardi,⁸⁵ Tareq Kamleh,⁸⁶ and Neil Prakash.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Australian teenage lone-actor Jake Bilardi (2015) opens his personal online manifesto by venerating the terrorist accomplishments of two local martyrs – Man Haron Monis who staged a siege in the Sydney Lindt Cafe resulting in the death of himself and two of his hostages in 2014 and Abdul Numan Haider who inflicted serious injuries to two police officers by stabbing them before he was shot dead in suburban Melbourne. The second paragraph of his manifesto speaks to his disdain for the Western “Crusade against Islam” before going on to quote scripture in support of violent jihad. After some 20 more pages of similar rhetoric, drawn from his research into violent gangs, Islam and anti-Islamic sentiment plus a brief outline of his childhood, it is on page 22 of his manifesto where he describes attaining feelings of significance. Arriving in Syria and recalling a promise he had made to himself a few years earlier: “there will come a day where I will fight to overthrow the democratic system” and that on volunteering for martyrdom operations, he was waiting - dreaming - of sitting amongst other violent Islamists in heaven with Allah. Bilardi's (2015) self-guided radicalisation saw him associate significance with his ability to commit a terrorist act in support of his beliefs. This focal point is particularly obvious given he also had a plan B should authorities prevent him from travelling to join ISIS, which was an explosives-based attack in Melbourne. That Bilardi (2015) had included earlier in his manifesto a brief reference to his life in a “Melbourne working-class suburb” also demonstrates a desire to portray his ascension from a comfortable atheist life to the significance of martyrdom (Bilardi, 2015). That his act was seemingly more driven for in-group approval rather than self-glorification sets him apart from other Australian violent Islamists such as propagandist and recruiter Neil Prakash, medical doctor and propagandist Tareq Kamleh and combatant Khaled Sharrouf.

⁸⁶ Dr Tareq Kamleh left Australia in 2015 to join ISIS. In response to media reports quoting former colleagues at Australian hospitals (which documented behaviours ranging from laziness to sexual misconduct to narcissism) as well as his apparent decision to join ISIS, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) took steps to deregister him as a medical practitioner. Dr Kamleh responded to AHPRA's email enquiry regarding these matters in a letter which he self-published on his Facebook account. In this letter Kamleh attempts to address the facts, as he views them, regarding the allegations put to him. In doing so, while he attempts to portray his involvement in Syria as on purely humanitarian grounds only, he inadvertently documents a hatred for Australia – “Is it not my humanitarian duty to help these children also?!... or only kids with white skin and blue passports?!...” and that he at the very least knowingly broke Australian law in traveling to a designated warzone “I made a very well educated and calculated decision to come here...” (Kamleh, 2015). Kamleh went on to make propaganda videos encouraging other Muslims with medical qualifications to join him in Syria with ISIS. In these videos he was dressed in medical attire and in combat fatigues holding an AK-47 (Staff Writers, 2015b). The accounts of his life before radicalising in comparison to afterward signal a change in significance seeking behaviours. From a radicalisation perspective, his journey to extreme Islam after living his life as a non-practising Muslim draws significance seeking parallels. Repeatedly described by colleagues as a “having a massive ego”, “an average paediatric doctor”, “lazy” and an “attention seeking loose cannon”(Staff Writers, 2015d, 2015c, 2015b) in his pre-extremist life, his move to extreme Islamic belief and practice during 2014 can be interpreted as an attempt to prove to others just how devout and committed he was to his new found beliefs. It also communicated his sense of status within ISIS, particularly around his role as a propagandist.

⁸⁷ Neil Prakash converted from his Buddhist upbringing to Islam in 2012. His Muslim friends had planned to take him to a moderate Mosque to convert, but as their car broke down, they didn't make their intended prayer session. Subsequently, they sought out a Mosque with a later prayer session, which turned out to be that of a radical cleric. Prakash was radicalised by this cleric. Leaving for Syria in 2013, Prakash left behind a life of drug use, gang membership and family challenges. His dark complexion had made him a target for bullies, and he never finished high school. He started an automotive mechanic apprenticeship but did not complete it. Within

Along with becoming a foreign fighter as a means to achieve significance, other incentives underpin the nudges of differing choice architecture pathways. For example, women are encouraged to become jihadi brides and to have and raise many children for the Caliphate (Cook & Vale, 2018); criminals are encouraged to pursue violent jihad as a means to redeem themselves in the eyes of Allah and secure an otherwise unattainable place in heaven (Basra et al., 2016); and those conflicted about living a truly Muslim life in a Western country are provided with the utopian ideal of being amongst the most righteous of Muslims in rebuilding the Caliphate (ISIS, 2014f).⁸⁸

Bestowal of significance as a reward that is held out is not a new concept in in-group psychology. Nor it is unique to Islamic extremists. Koehler (2020) notes that “in the roots of secular martyrdom” there is a “cross-cultural tradition of the hero. The stories that make up this tradition almost always involve a confrontation with evil and the hero’s self-sacrifice to save the lives and honour of his people. With death, he becomes a martyr...” (Koehler, 2020).

This stage of the radicalisation cascade brings the prospect to the threshold of no return. If they move from Tier 4 to Tier 5, they have successfully transitioned from prospect to radicalised recruit. Once a recruit, the opportunity and means available for disengagement diminish significantly.

ISIS, however, Prakash found comradeship and bestowed significance. Quickly rising to become a propagandist for the group, he also directed recruitment and attack planning in Australia from his then Mosul stronghold. A proverbial ‘poster boy’ for ISIS capable of generating high interest from Western media, particularly in Australia, Prakash’s notoriety was extremely high up until his alleged death in an air-strike in 2016. He had not died however, and was captured by Turkish authorities attempting to cross the border from Syria into Turkey (Matejic, 2016a). Prakash’s trajectory closely aligns to Kruglanski’s Significance Quest Theory “which posits that the desire to matter and feel meaningful is a fundamental human need” (Schumpe et al., 2018). Kruglanski and Bertelsen (2020) further describes as part of her “three pillars of radicalisation” that the “question for personal significance... the desire to matter and have respect in one’s own eyes and that of significant others” is a key driver (Kruglanski & Bertelsen, 2020).

⁸⁸ Refer also Kruglanski and Bertelsen (2020) whose research has observed that the quest for personal significance is a universal motivational force that can “lend the aura of heroes or martyrs” to those seeking significance, even via “money or sex” which have a significant bestowal aspect (Kruglanski & Bertelsen, 2020).

5.6 Tier 5 – Stronghold

Tier 5 of The Radicalisation Cascade’s purpose is to:

1. Present the recruit with clear ideas, options, and pathways to achieving significance through violent jihad
2. Assist recruits plan for violent jihad; and
3. Hustle the recruit towards committing violent jihad.

Tier 5 of The Radicalisation Cascade leverages all the preceding stages to deliver the recruit into choice architecture that supports the planning and committing of an act of terrorism. These preparations could be domestic or foreign-focused, individual in nature or as part of a group. The purpose of The Radicalisation Cascade in the threshold tier is to begin to exert pressure on the recruit to demonstrate their commitment to the cause through action. This hustle to violent jihad is conveyed as an opportunity that is time sensitive to negate any potential for the recruit’s enthusiasm to wane. This tier represents the last stage in Al Qa’idy’s (2010) recruitment manual.

Al Qa’idy (2010) assumes that the radicalisation process is complete at this tier and that the recruits’ “desire to perform jihad” is well formed. Al Qa’idy (2010) introduces a secondary piece of literature at this stage, “The Global Islamic Resistance Call” by Abu Mus’ab Al Suri. Al Qa’idy (2010) refers to this particular book as having “an answer for every question you have about the next stage (the last stage)” but caveats that before reading it “you must desire and want to perform jihad but you just haven’t found a way to do it yet... everything that you must know and everything that you want to know can be found in (this book).” Al Qa’idy (2010) then moves to discuss those who want violent jihad but for whom it is “the last thing on their mind” and how recruiters can go about solving this perceived eager, but lazy, hesitation: (a) cultivating feelings of hate and anger towards “apostate governments”; (b) help the recruit to conceive ways in which they can perform their violent jihad and assure him that it is possible; and (c)

encourage the recruit to read the Islamic (extremist) rulings on the permissibility of violent jihad, personal accounts and stories. Al Qa'idy (2010) then instructs the recruiter to ensure preparations for the recruits' violent jihad are underway and that they should teach them about violent jihadi heroes, both living and those martyred. Finally, before concluding with religious supplications, Al Qa'idy (2010) reinforces that the recruiter is as obligated to help the recruit complete their violent jihad (Al Qa'idy, 2010).

Al Suri's (2005) 1,600-page book was intended as "the definitive strategic document" on historical global violent jihad and a blueprint for the future of al-Qaeda, and the violent Islamist movements that would follow it according to author and defence analyst Jim Lacey. Referred to as the "Mein Kampf" of the violent jihadi movement, the structure of the book follows familiar territory: the West's assault on Islam, the oppression of Muslims today, the permissibility of violent jihad under Sharia Law, how the Salafi - jihadist movement began, a historical account of the movement between the years 1930 to 2001, late twentieth-century violent jihad, the doctrinal foundations of the movement, "Sharia-based political decision-making of the movement" and "media and incitement in the call to resistance" (Lacey, 2008). Al Suri, according to Masoud (2013) agrees and adds that he is "particularly credited for being (al-Qaeda's) post 9/11 principal architect" and purported top-aide to Osama Bin Laden before his arrest. Masoud (2013) observes that the manifesto "invites readers to self-recruit and become independent terrorists" while delivering "heavily laden conflict triggering" content that promotes the worldview of ideologically based violence. Masoud's (2013) analysis further identifies that the content builds up "binary categorisations of in-groups and out-groups" while building a story that presents the reader with the potential to "play a leading role in that story... by actively participating in it" (Masoud, 2013).

The managed transition Al Qa'idy (2010) facilitates for the recruit into Al Suri's manifesto is heuristically laden. Starting out as a held-out reward shared with those bestowed with 'true-believer' status the book also provides further anchoring, channelled attention, and a sense of increasing violent jihad availability alongside another coming-of-full-circle cognitive event within the availability cascade. Akin to a graduation of sorts, the recruit is rewarded with information that is held out as special and scarce in privileged moments. The recruit may also experience a false sense of self-determination here, towards planning for their violent jihad. In reality, the coercive nature of the overall process has nudged the recruit to a position of co-dependency on their recruiter, who already has ideas – if not plans – about how they will fulfil their obligation of violent jihad. That Al Suri's 2005 manifesto frames the same master narratives and in-group behaviours as Al Qa'idy's 2010 manual also points to continued attempts to influence recruit decision-making using a hyperbolic discounting bias. Both documents demonstrate a clear bias for recruits to move quickly toward active violent jihad to leverage enthusiasm and avoid potential recruit decision regret.

A by-product of Al Suri's 2005 manifesto is the weight it gives to significance-seeking behaviours, elevating the recruit's social status and the bestowal of promised rewards in the afterlife. If we think of this in theatrical terms (which isn't entirely different in some respects given terrorism has been described as performative by many scholars⁸⁹) – a well-known to them director has plucked them from obscurity and given them the starring role in his latest blockbuster film. The promises of fame and fortune to come are overwhelming and almost tangible. The only thing you have to do to star in this film is to be willing to die in it and kill others in

⁸⁹ Refer Alfano et al (2018) Identifying Virtues and Values through Obituary Data-Mining (Alfano et al., 2018); Impara (2018) A Social Semiotics Analysis of Islamic State's use of Beheadings: Images of Power, Masculinity, Spectacle and Propaganda (Impara, 2018); and Mansouri et al (2017) Islamic Religiosity in the West: Belonging and Political Engagement in Multicultural Cities (Mansouri et al., 2017).

the process. Reverence by your peers as well as glory in the afterlife is sure to follow.

The potency of a leader's influence in this regard is well grounded in psychology. Kruglanski et al (2014) note that "such love and worship of the leader translates into the quest for his or her approval which endows him with the ultimate authority in matters of personal significance (Kruglanski et al., 2014). Taylor and Horgan (2001) also view behaviours such as significance-seeking as authority transmitted in a rules-based-environment. That is, they create a "behavioural contingency" that is "a response, a description of an outcome, and the identification of circumstances... that the response will produce" (Taylor & Horgan, 2001). Borum and Fein (2017) also identify status-seeking and thrill-seeking in their work on foreign fighters. Where the 'status seeker' pursues "recognition and esteem from others" the 'thrill seeker' "is attracted to... prospects of excitement, adventure and glory" (Borum & Fein, 2017). Al Suri's 2005 manifesto, by virtue of its existence as a held-out-reward, is, therefore, able to deal with lingering doubts effectively. Howard et al (2019), who explore radicalisation through the lens of neurocognition, conclude that when narratives or stories are shared in ways much like Al Suri's 2005 manifesto, they are effective at "overcoming and reducing psychological resistance to persuasion" when they evoke feelings of empathy in the recruit (Howard et al., 2019). Al Qa'idy (2010) in deferring to Al Suri's works in his recruitment manual clearly identifies this by including specific stories of the "crimes of the apostate enemies of Allah" in an effort to solidify hatred by out-grouping the enemy. Further, Al Qa'idy (2010) cautions against turning empathy into fear, directing the recruiter to channel the recruits' feelings instead into sources of motivation and anger (Al Qa'idy, 2010).

Moghaddam (2005) refers to this stage as the fourth floor on his staircase to terrorism and offers a blunter analysis: "after a person has climbed to

the fourth floor and entered the secret world of the terrorist organisation, there is little or no opportunity to exit alive.” Moghaddam (2005) explains that recruits at this stage “are pressured to conform and obey in ways that will lead to violent acts against civilians (and often against themselves)” and due to the strength of in-group bondage in previous floors on the staircase to terrorism “non-conformity, disobedience and disloyalty receive the harshest punishments.” Moghaddam (2005) also remarks on the role of significance seeking at this floor, observing that recruits with martyrdom or violent Islamist operations on the immediate horizon are “given a great deal of positive attention and treated as a kind of celebrity” (Moghaddam, 2005a).

By successfully planning for violent jihad at this tier, the recruit becomes a sunk cost, both to themselves and their recruiter. Their ongoing commitment to the in-group and the time, effort and emotional investment made up until this point make both parties adverse to the losses that would be incurred should the recruit disengage. Particularly given those losses can have serious consequences. Recruits found attempting to flee ISIS’s Caliphate, for example, were ostracised, hunted down and routinely put to death.⁹⁰ Horgan et al (2017) observed this behaviour in disengaging right-wing subjects, noting that the act of disengagement is complex and “influenced by not only the satisfaction one derives from involvement but the sunk costs incurred and alternatives available at any given moment in time.” Horgan et al (2017) further explain that variations in sunk costs, and the influence of other factors, “constrain the likelihood of exit” (Horgan et al., 2017).

⁹⁰ Refer Swenson (2018) The Influence of the Islamic State’s weaponization of Social Media on radicalisation in the United States (Swenson, 2018); Ahmadzai (2021) Dying to Live: The “Love to Death” Narrative Driving the Taliban’s Suicide Bombings (Ahmadzai, 2021); and The Radicalisation Awareness Network’s 2017 Report: Responses to Returnees: Foreign Fighters and their Families (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2017).

5.7 Tier 6 – Zero Hour

Tier 6 of The Radicalisation Cascade is a *fait accompli* – it is the commission of an act of violence.

At this point, there are only four possible outcomes for the recruit:

1. The recruit commits the act of violent extremism
2. The recruit fails to commit the act of violent extremism (such as backing out at the last minute or disengaging from imminent plans to commit violence)
3. The recruit commits the act of violent extremism and dies or is killed as a result; or
4. The recruit commits acts of violent extremism and is captured as a result.

For many (but not all) violent Islamist's their optimal outcome during the commission of an act of violent extremism is death. Whether that is by being collateral damage in their own attack or being killed via a proxy such as a soldier or police officer, the act of dying a martyr – they believe – affords them guaranteed entry into Heaven and all the rewards that entail alternate outcomes, such as being injured and/or captured, are broadly viewed as failures, no matter how many lives were taken in the commission of their attack or how much destruction was caused. The held-out rewards of martyrdom are not sold to recruits by recruiters as able to be carried over in time until a natural death occurs. Only death via violent jihad is presented as guaranteeing them a shortcut to glory in the afterlife (Webber et al, 2017; Al-Hafith, n.d, p.8). From professional practice observations in the field, narratives of survival, via injury and/or capture, are not marketed to violent Islamists at all, which may go some way towards explaining why Islamically inspired violent extremists committing attacks do not usually have survival or exit strategies in place. While many violent Islamists will commit the terrorist act themselves in the hope of dying as a result (or via a proxy) others may not be aware of their impending fate. This has been

observed particularly in suicide bombers where detonation of improvised explosive devices (such as those hidden in carried objects) have been conducted remotely by handlers or other combatants.

Moghaddam (2005) identifies this final stage as his fifth floor on the staircase to terrorism, a step that is defined by “the terrorist act and sidestepping inhibitory mechanisms” (Moghaddam, 2005a). Kruglanski et al (2014) also recognise the cognitive struggle to sidestep the commission of extreme violence against oneself or others: “the (suicide bomber) may believe that his or her actions serve a noble cause, yet they also run afoul of the survival instinct and of the numerous human goals that require staying alive”(Kruglanski et al., 2014). Lankford (2014) concluded in his paper ‘Precis of The Myth of Martyrdom’ that the human “hardwired survival instincts appear far stronger” than is often considered. Lankford (2014) notes that the “psychological and behavioural difference between suicide terrorists and sacrificial heroes” observed in violent jihadi martyrdom videos, for example, signals their clear intent to die during the commission of an attack or as a direct result shortly thereafter. While not entirely congruent with Kruglanski et al’s significance quest theory, Lankford (2014) also makes the connection between suicide terrorism and attention seeking, with “Internet forums, online communities, dating websites and social networking platforms especially attractive for fulfilling their needs”(in-group belonging and significance seeking) (Lankford, 2014).

While TVEC acts as a valuable signal for the achievement of the status bestowed in death, the value of life it conveys is twofold. Firstly, the violent Islamist must value their life enough to consider it of sufficient value to trade for the held-out rewards on offer. This is consistent with Muslim beliefs regarding the sanctity of all life (Ahmadzai, 2021), even amongst extremist sects although they place Muslim lives – or more specifically Islamic extremist lives – in a hierarchy above all others. Further, violent Islamists are led to believe that by dying because of their violent jihad they

will attain a place in Heaven, shortcutting conventional means of prayer, piety and religious obedience over a long-life (Al-Hafith, n.d, p.10, 37). The 'no guarantees' frame placed over living an otherwise ordinary life leads the violent Islamist into a hyperbolic discounting frame of mind. That is, it is better to take advantage of the guaranteed reward now than risk losing the chance to obtain it later (consider the trade-off of living 21 years and attaining a guaranteed place in heaven or living 99 years and potentially not reaching heaven at all – value here is not measured in years of life, only in the outcome of reaching heaven). Secondly, the value that life has for the terrorist organisation is also high, for all the religious reasons previously mentioned plus that someone willing to give their life to Allah is worthy of the highest esteem. That is, the cause is sufficiently worthwhile that the violent Islamist is willing to martyr themselves to further it. This signals to other violent Islamists that the terrorist group places exceptional value on martyrdom operations. This is further reinforced through the bestowal of significance to martyrs and their favourable treatment before death. Whether these incentives are sufficiently influential to allay last-minute hesitations before an attack is difficult to ascertain given most of the cohort that would otherwise be studied is deceased. Research arising from failed martyrs or those who abandoned their attacks at a late stage is needed to fully understand the gravitas of influence in this way.

From a behavioural viewpoint, regret theory may go some way to explaining last-minute hesitations. Zeelenberg (1999) in a study on consumer decision regret found that the "anticipation of regret can result in risk-avoiding as well as risk-seeking tendencies" (Zeelenberg, 1999). At the intersection of anticipated regret by a violent Islamist and the influence this has on their planning for acts of terrorism, Phillips and Pohl (2020) recognise the importance that regret – not remorse – can have on the decision-making process of terrorists. In the way Al Qa'idy's 2010 manual is constructed, regret receives significant channelled attention in the final section when the violent Islamist is being hustled to action. Throughout his

manual, Al Qa'idy frames information in ways that influence the prospect or recruit towards particular outcomes, the most valuable being that of the martyr. Phillips and Pohl (2020) articulate that this type of framing is "responsible for observed regret effects... a framing effect that emerges from situations where the decision-maker's attention is directed sharply towards a comparison of actions and possible-outcomes." In Al Qa'idy's 2010 manual those compared actions and possible outcomes are martyrdom or the failure to achieve it. Successful martyrs are glorified on social media and in magazines, for example. Failed martyrs, or violent Islamists who decide against martyrdom operations, are framed as having missed their chance at attaining a guaranteed place in heaven. This provides both an insight into the perceived value martyrs hold to the terrorist organisation and, separately, the perceived value guaranteed entry to heaven holds to the violent Islamist. Phillips and Pohl (2020) further recognise the value and influence content holds in this equation, remarking that "as terrorist groups become more sophisticated in their strategic production and use of online material, developing our understanding of the ways this material influences the decisions of would-be recruits" is warranted. Phillips and Pohl (2020) suggest that approaching this challenge from the perspective of decision and regret theory would be beneficial (Phillips & Pohl, 2020).

Phillips and Pohl's (2020) work on terrorist regret also demonstrates clear links to significance quest-led decision-making. Because the glorification of martyrs by terrorist organisations, and in the case of notable foreign fighters the international media, act as a held-out reward for the prospective martyr (as well as any significance their attack generates), the violent Islamist is led to compare their plan for martyrdom against the successes and failures of the martyrs that have come before them. In this way, as Phillips and Pohl (2020) observe, "the presentation of the outcomes of terrorist attacks can shape the terrorist's decision-making process by triggering a comparison of different actions." Further, Phillips and Pohl

(2020) identify that violent Islamists who “can anticipate the regret they would feel if their chosen attack method failed to be as successful and that, as a consequence, their actions were ignored by the mainstream media, terrorist publications and social networks” (Phillips & Pohl, 2020) are influenced by factors such as fame, notoriety and in-group significance. While high kill-counts occurring at landmarks or iconic infrastructure are common to violent Islamist attack preferences,⁹¹ competitiveness to beat a “kill-count” or scales of attack is far more evident in far-right, neo-Nazi and ethnonationalist terrorists (Wells & Lovett, 2019). One of the prevailing hallmarks of terrorist attacks inspired by far-right terrorists Anders Breivik⁹² and Brenton Tarrant,⁹³ for example, is that their actions and manifestos have resulted in copy-cat style mimicry⁹⁴ whereby others seek to best their perceived accomplishments. The same mimicry, regarding martyrdom operations and propaganda of deed achievements, can be observed in Islamic extremists.

Whether or not regret is sufficient an emotion to deter the violent Islamist from engaging in acts of terrorism or not – or could be a valuable tool in deradicalisation programs – is worthy of further research. What is clear is that as a sunk cost, the violent Islamist is seen in absolute terms by the recruiter: as a success or as a failure. There is evidence that recruiters

⁹¹ For example: Melbourne would-be violent Islamists Abdullah Chaarani, Ahmed Mohamed, Ibrahim Abbas and Hamza Abass conducted reconnaissance of their chosen attack sites in Melbourne: iconic co-located spaces in the central business district known for near constant mass gatherings (public transport, major traffic intersection and city square). Also, extreme preacher Abdul Nacer Brenbrika led two terrorist cells who plotted to blow up the Melbourne Cricket Ground, attack a football match and co-located train stations in 2004/05.

⁹² Anders Breivik, a Norwegian citizen and far-right extremist committed a terrorist attack killing 8 people in Oslo before moving on to Utoya island where he killed a further 69 people, many of them young adults and teenagers. His manifesto ‘2083: A European Declaration of Independence’ was widely circulated in far-right groups after his attack.

⁹³ Brenton Tarrant, an Australian citizen residing in New Zealand attacked two Christchurch mosques on 15 March 2019 killing 51 worshippers. Tarrant is a white-supremacist who holds alt-right beliefs. His manifesto ‘The Great Replacement’ directly references Anders Breivik, and has been referenced by subsequent far-right terrorists extensively since its publication shortly before he began his terrorist attacks.

⁹⁴ Refer also the terrorism inspired by Brenton Tarrant’s New Zealand attacks including: 27 April 2019: John Timothy Earnest, “shortly before he stormed a Synagogue in Poway, California” opening fire on the Jewish congregation. Earnest had written “Brenton Tarrant was a catalyst for me personally. He showed me that it could be done. And that it needed to be done;” 3 August 2019: Patrick Crusius, a “supporter of the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto” gunned down 22 people at a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas; 10 August 2019: Philip Manshaus launched a terror attack on a mosque in Norway. Manshaus posted on Endchan “Well cobbbers (friends) it’s my time, I was elected by Brenton saint Tarrant after all. We can’t let this go on.” Manshaus’ attack failed after the few worshippers left at the mosque after prayers had concluded pinned him down, removed his weapons and called Police (Staff Writers, 2019).

often anticipate the violent Islamist's survival instinct by deploying countermeasures that are not reliant on their decision-making or actions to reduce potential losses. For example, improvised explosive vests or devices may be remotely detonated away from the site of the attack or the suicide bomber may unknowingly or unwillingly be a participant in someone else's violent jihad.

5.7.1 The Act that Bestows Complete Significance

Bestowal of significance on the recruit after they have attained martyrdom upon death - is a critical signalling action for recruiters because it increases the value of significance seeking in current and prospective recruits. Hegghammer (2013) identified that "most recruitment narratives appear in martyr biographies" (Hegghammer, 2013) while Alfano et al (2018) more broadly recognised the influence obituaries had "to signal to others in the community socially-recognised aspects of the deceased's character" (Alfano et al., 2018). ISIS, al-Qaeda, Hamas⁹⁵ and Hezbollah⁹⁶ all recognise the importance of framing the obituaries of martyrs to their respective causes. al-Qaeda directly addresses issues surrounding martyrdom in some detail in six⁹⁷ of the first 14 issues of their Inspire magazine series (Droogan & Peattie, 2018). ISIS in its magazines Dabiq and Rumiya deal with the topic of martyrdom extensively. While every issue mentions martyrdom in the context of violent jihad, in Dabiq in particular, a focal point of the magazine was the obituaries with accompanying graphic pictures of the deceased's body.⁹⁸ Indirect framing of martyrdom as glorious is included in

⁹⁵ Refer: Levitt (2004) Hamas: from cradle to grave (Levitt, 2004); and Litvak (2010) "Martyrdom is Life: Jihad and Martyrdom in the Ideology of Hamas (Litvak, 2010).

⁹⁶ Refer: Bianchi (2018) Letters from Home: Hezbollah Mothers and the Culture of Martyrdom (Bianchi, 2018); and Flanigan et al (2009) Hezbollah's social jihad: Non-profits as resistance organisations (Flanigan & Abdel-Samad, 2009).

⁹⁷ Refer Inspire issues 1 entitled "May our Souls be Sacrificed For You!"; and also Issue 2, Issue 4; Issue 6; Issue 9 and Issue 14.

⁹⁸ Refer for example: [WARNING THESE CITATIONS CONTAIN IMAGES OF THE DECEASED AND THE OUTCOMES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM]- Dabiq (2015) Issue 10 pages 40-41 (ISIS, 2015d); Dabiq Issue 9 page 40 (ISIS, 2015e); Dabiq (2016) Issue 15 pages 70-72 (ISIS, 2016a) and Dabiq (2014) Issue 7 pages 46-48 (ISIS, 2014b).

stories of successful attacks, again with captions in accompanying often graphic imagery.⁹⁹

ISIS presented a highly romanticised picture of violent Islamists for both male and female prospects as a type of precursor to the final bestowal of significance in martyrdom. Finding adventure as “husband and wife” has been noted as particularly influential to young women according to research conducted by Saltman and Smith (2015). “The promise of a meaningful romance” and the glorification of marriage to a warrior (violent Islamist) – “images of a lion and a lioness are shared frequently to symbolise this union” – delivers a narrative of female empowerment against a backdrop of death and destruction. Unmarried women wishing to migrate to the Caliphate but not marry on arrival were actively discouraged from making the trip. Encouraged instead to “think fondly of the husbands they will have” and “view the deaths of their prospective husbands as an honour” act as a held-out reward for women to share in this bestowal of significance. Saltman and Smith’s (2015) report was entitled ‘Til Martyrdom do us part’ which was found as a caption on an ISIS wedding photograph posted online (Saltman & Smith, 2015).

Triggering the final stages of an availability cascade, the bestowal of significance is particularly influential because it forms part of collective in-group belief. Availability entrepreneurs are many and ready to bestow this significance when a violent Islamist achieves martyrdom in an information cascade that further reinforces the social acceptance of the act of martyrdom. By remaining such a prevailing part of the in-group’s discourse throughout the radicalisation process, but particularly towards its endpoint when overriding survival instincts become more important, each successful

⁹⁹ Refer for example: [WARNING THESE CITATIONS CONTAIN IMAGES OF THE DECEASED AND THE OUTCOMES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM]- Rumiya (2017) Issue 9 page 51 photo caption: “One should pursue shahadah (*Arabic: death by jihad*) without fear” (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2017g); Rumiya (2017) Issue 6 page 41 “Allah continues to take unto himself shuhada (*Arabic: death by jihad*) ” (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2017d); and Dabiq (2015) Issue 10 page 4 photo captions “Abu Sulayman al-Muwahidd (may Allah accept him) and Abu Yahya al-Qayraqani (may Allah accept him) (ISIS, 2015d).

martyr delivered to Allah by virtue of The Radicalisation Cascade serves to feed this never-ending availability cascade.

5.8 Conclusion

Availability cascades rarely appear randomly. Most often they are manufactured by people or groups to channel those with collective beliefs into a deeper investment and belief in the ideas, information or products being promoted. Influentially, availability cascades have the potential to make sense of complex ideas, creating easy-to-understand information that appears to be both intuitive and insightful. The resulting reputational and informational cascades that occur in this echo-chamber further legitimise those ideas and drive followers deeper into ideologies that are not always in their best interests.

The Radicalisation Cascade is a potent availability cascade largely because it is outwardly coercive in nature. What may begin like any new acquaintance or friendship, particularly those formed against the backdrop of cultural and religious familiarity, differs in that the choice architecture being delivered provides the individual with very little autonomy if they wish to retain the sense of in-group belonging and comradeship that is often quickly built up on and offline around them. The Radicalisation Cascade, by incorporating both private and public discourses, can quickly seem 'real' to those inside the nudge echo chamber. Self-perpetuating narratives feed in from external sources, such as the news and social media, which then serve as proof points for information already circulating in the cascade. The depth of control the in-group has over the prospective recruit can be significant and self-moderating in-group norms have been observed to both hold out rewards and deliver punishments. Heuristically laden TVEC drives cognitive congruence, normalising extreme violence and the romanticisation of death in pursuit of metaphysical held-out rewards. The Radicalisation Cascade

also attempts to cultivate a desire and longing for martyrdom, bestowing significance to those who can achieve this seemingly lofty ambition.

By using Al Qa'idya's 2010 recruitment manual as a framework to understand the choice architecture and nudges constructed to persuade susceptible prospects into becoming violent Islamist recruits; and then into martyrs, we can begin to make sense of violent Islamist concepts in the context of choice and decision frameworks we are already familiar with.

CHAPTER 6:

TERRORIST AND VIOLENT EXTREMIST CONTENT

6.1 Introduction

If we consider TVEC as a form of content marketing, understanding the pervasiveness of its influence on susceptible individuals is perhaps easier to comprehend. Academic scholarship on the mechanics of influence, particularly but not exclusively in marketing and advertising, already exists and this chapter will demonstrate how al-Qaeda and ISIS adopted well-established content marketing practices to sell their ideologies, instill fear and deliver extremely violent propaganda of the deed to a global audience.

When Al-Shabaab began tweeting terror on 7 December 2011¹⁰⁰ it signaled an evolution in terrorist propaganda. Terrorists no longer needed to package up their content and deliver it to media outlets in the hopes it would be broadcast, nor rely on news networks reporting on their propaganda of the deed efforts during and after an attack. On that day in 2011, Al-Shabaab became a broadcaster. With a long history of video production, Al-Shabaab's move to exploit social media saw it become the first terrorist content marketing cartel. While the traditional news media still had a role to play in amplifying their content, becoming a broadcaster gave Al-Shabaab greater control over their narrative and the ability to legitimise themselves through exerting influence in areas such as religious authority, operational capability, and ideological relevance. Al-Shabaab built their brand on what would conventionally be considered a soft power projection platform, marketing their content like Governments conduct public diplomacy, "offering real time... interpretations of events and rebuttals of critiques" (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2012; Yarchi, 2016).

¹⁰⁰ "Al-Shabaab posted its first tweet on 7 December 2011. It was in Arabic and translates to 'In the name of God the merciful'" (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2012).

Online and social media companies, naively, failed to foresee the many ways users would abuse their open-access infrastructure. From Al-Shabaab's early successes on Twitter, and building upon the historical genre of TVEC produced by al-Qaeda, ISIS went on to fully exploit the online information domain in a relatively short period of time (Melki & Jabado, 2016; Swenson, 2018). From building communities across all the major social media platforms to producing and disseminating newspapers and magazines via file-transfer and sharing online ecosystems, ISIS flooded the online information environment with TVEC (Kraidy, 2017). In turn, the mainstream news-media amplified ISIS's exploits, pushing their reach from those online ecosystems into living rooms, schools and workplaces around the world (Melki & Jabado, 2016).

The pervasiveness of ISIS's content marketing strategy was no accident. ISIS demonstrated time and again their deep understanding of social media, online influence and the interplay between social media and the news media (Farwell, 2014; Kruglova, 2020). The very algorithms designed to serve social media and web browsing users more of the content they like, engage with and share (for largely advertising and marketing purposes) had the unintended consequence of propelling TVEC across the Internet and into people's timelines (Kraidy, 2017). That the news media's over reliance on driving clicks and web traffic to their websites to sell news (driving advertising and marketing sales) was also exploited is worthy of note (Braun & Eklund, 2019a). Sharing TVEC produced by ISIS online and wrapping it around journalism, opinion pieces and expert-analysis was and continues to be exceptionally profitable for news media outlets. ISIS recognised this interplay well: as the conflict in Syria and Iraq dragged on and their newsworthiness started to wane, their content became even more violently extreme resulting in even more news media coverage (J. C. Andersen & Sandberg, 2018; Berger, 2015; Lakomy, 2017).

That the online world has become both a tool of terror (Awan, 2017a) and concurrently a vehicle of radicalisation (Koehler, 2014) is not remarkable. As Wanless and Berk (2017) point out from drawing upon a vast historical literature on influence operations (in both the military and civil spaces), modern propaganda methods are participatory. That is, both the content creator and audience become co-opted architects in persuasive communications. For example, Wanless and Berk (2017) note that “enabling target audiences to not just spread, but also create and adapt propaganda messages, appear to be more effective means of mass persuasion given people tend to find recommendations from their personal social network more credible” (Wanless & Berk, 2017). This view is agnostic to both content type and influence intention. It can and has been deployed just as easily for selling cars or influencing people to download apps (Kumar et al., 2016). If the recipient is receptive, the content marketing payload can be effective.

While there is a general academic consensus that “the Internet alone is not a cause of radicalisation, but a facilitator and a catalyzer” and that it increases the availability and accessibility of TVEC that may radicalise (Khalil, 2021) only a very small proportion of Internet users exposed to TVEC will go on to become radicalised. Research from the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (2018) found that increased usage of social media by American based violent extremists did not equate to increased success in either becoming foreign fighters or developing terrorist plots (M. Jensen et al., 2018). Fernandez et al (2019) concur, noting that the online environment’s enablement of radicalisation is tied to its supply of the support structures required for it to flourish, such as the polarisation of in and out-groups. Fernandez et al (2019) also highlight that extremism in and of itself is not considered illegal until it becomes violent (Fernandez et al., 2019).

It is important to caveat this chapter by acknowledging that what appears publicly in terms of terrorist content, particularly on social media, does not in fact give us the complete picture of what is being posted online. Many of the most popular social media companies and their big-tech counterparts, for example,¹⁰¹ actively screen files and content for online harms such as child sexual exploitation material (CSAM) and TVEC. Brian Fishman, the former Head of Facebook's Dangerous Organisations unit (which works on issues such as countering terrorism and violent extremism) explains: "Researchers cannot reliably measure how much terrorist content terrorists post online because of the confounding effect of platform countermeasures. Researchers do not see what terrorists post. Rather, they see what is left after platform countermeasures are employed. For the major platforms, this is usually a small subset of what was posted originally, and it means that there is a fundamental bias in nearly all studies of terrorist content online" (Fishman, 2019).

In addition to the active countermeasures big-tech companies deploy, researchers are also not privy to every corner of the open or dark web, nor are they well tolerated in closed-online communities. Academics¹⁰² report that even if they do discover these spaces and manage to gain entry, they are often promptly removed by group members who quickly ascertain their identities and motivations – even when using aliases and sock puppet accounts.¹⁰³ In addition to issues of access and countermeasures, the way the media reports on terrorist social media also has an impact on terrorist

¹⁰¹ The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) was formed by Google, Facebook, Twitter and Microsoft in 2017. Along with these companies, others including Mailchimp, Discord, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Pinterest, Amazon, Dropbox, Mega and LinkedIn; have all made a commitment to prevent – in so far as is possible – abuse of their platforms by terrorists and other cyber enabled criminals. Together with the Tech Against Terrorism organisation (launched by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate in 2016) these organisations share their knowledge within the tech industry and "across the private, public and civil society sectors." Specifically, these big-tech organisations have built tools that help all tech companies to better protect themselves (and by default their users) "from terrorist and violent extremist exploitation of their services" (GIFCT, 2021).

¹⁰² Authors personal note of a private-briefing from academics investigating violent extremists online and inside encrypted chat-based eco systems.

¹⁰³ A 'sock puppet account' is a false online social media or app account that is used for deception, infiltration, and information gathering purposes.

content reach and virality, propelling it further than it may have otherwise reached (Asongu et al., 2019; Zeitzoff, 2017).

6.2 What is Content Marketing?

Content marketing differs from conventional marketing by virtue of its ability to wrap value around the product, rather than sell it directly. El-Ansary et al (2017) describe marketing as solely focused on “applying the right techniques to the right customer targets to generate profitable sales” (El-Ansary et al., 2017) while Pulizzi (2012) describes content marketing as “the idea that all brands, in order to attract and retain customers, need to think and act like media companies.” Pulizzi (2012) further surmises that “we are all publishers today. There is only one thing that separates the content developed by a media company and the content developed by brands like Intel, John Deere and LEGO: How the money comes in” (Pulizzi, 2012).

The first documented example of content marketing was from the agricultural company John Deere which began publishing ‘The Furrow’ in 1895 as a “journal for the American Farmer” with the enduring goal of telling “stories that people enjoy reading and provide them with the knowledge that they can apply in their operations” (John Deere Pty Ltd, 2021). Pulizzi (2012) notes that JELL-O used the same strategy to grow its brand and drive sales in the early 1900s by giving away free recipe books to consumers. Sears followed suit in the 1920s with their “World’s Largest Store” radio show for the farming community (Pulizzi, 2012). While each brand had products to sell, their marketing offering was part of a bigger value proposition for their new, potential, or existing customers. For John Deere, it was an investment in knowledge. If the farmers who already bought and used their agricultural machinery knew how to increase their crop yields and develop better business acumen to sell those crops, they would eventually need more machinery. With John Deere becoming a

presence in their life that went beyond the tractor shed and into their living rooms and offices, the brand became part of the family and the broader farming community. For JELL-O, a then relatively new product, giving recipe books away accomplished two things: (1) it gave new customers the ability to recreate the successes they saw in stores and in magazines, at home; and (2) it developed a habit-forming purchasing behaviour that took those recipe books (and by virtue the brand and product) into kitchens large and small, establishing JELL-O as the gelatin brand of choice (Pulizzi, 2012).

Over a hundred and twenty years on, this storytelling model is still used today albeit with the advantages of online and social media (Jutkowitz, 2017, p.18-19). The barriers to entry online, to become a broadcaster, have lowered. Almost anyone, so long as they are prepared to put the time and effort into creating content, and so long as they have the means to post it online, (Du Plessis, 2017) can contribute to the information environment. While websites still feature heavily, they are no longer necessary to make a sale or engage a potential customer. Social media has evolved into an e-commerce storefront that not only delivers and amplifies brand content but serves as a one-click purchasing shop (Kumar et al., 2016).

Unlike the magazines, posters, television commercials and radio shows of years past, however, this is software that tracks a user's every move, click, like and engagement online. Akin to a consumer-surveillance program, the information harvested from your online browsing interactions, smart devices, and operating system by the content marketing presented to you – either by design, default or choice – is continuously, passively running in the background. Cookies for example, while seemingly innocent enough by name, spend their time remembering all the places you visit on the web, how long you lingered and what actions you took. This data is then on-sold to third parties including advertisers, marketers and Governments. It is not

always clear how cookie-buyers intend to use the information obtained about you (Schmeiser, 2018).

Also working away in the background using those cookies under the auspices of delivering better, more tailored web searching and viewing experiences are algorithms. Algorithms are computer programs that are designed to extract behavioural data from your online interactions so that the websites, social networks and online stores you visit can better capture your attention and channel it towards an objective (Nissen, 2015). On an online store that objective could be to entice you to buy more or prompt you to complete the check-out process. Google uses your online behaviour for a myriad of reasons from showing you more of the same type of videos you've watched on YouTube to refining your search queries so that they are more likely to yield results that appeal to you. Social media platforms aim to keep you on their platform (or in their app) by creating an echo-chamber or bubble around your content to algorithmically deliver more of the content you positively engage with and less of the content you dislike. Social media echo chambers are like finely tuned engines that aim for ultimate on-platform cognitive consonance while actively avoiding instances of cognitive dissonance (Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2020). Happy users stay on-platform, and unhappy users equate to lost data prospects. Lost data, means a loss in profitability.

While it can be argued that cookies and algorithms are designed to enhance online experiences, the value extracted by companies from consumer behaviour cannot be denied. As Shoshana Zuboff, author of the book *Surveillance Capitalism* (2015) explains, social and online media "are composed of those who sell opportunities to influence behaviour for profit and those who purchase such opportunities" (Zuboff, 2015). That social media networks are by-design programmed to make, sustain, and increase profits is significant. What is programmed to appeal to your preferences encourages transactional behaviour, which defaults you into echo chambers

that continue delivering more and more of those same nudges to encourage, sustain and increase profitability. From product purchases to video views, influencing voters and personal data collection, the advertising-technology industry has evolved into a noxious market (Braun & Eklund, 2019b) that incentivizes profit over the wellbeing of technology users. Further, Laux et al (2021) identify that online behavioural advertising technology reliant on cookies and algorithms poses “risks to consumer welfare as consumers face offer discrimination and exploitation of their cognitive errors.” When combined with the market monopoly and dominance Braun and Eklund (2019) refer to, Laux et al (2021) observed that these types of technologies “exploit consumers’ irrationalities based on their inferred cognitive make-up” and negate the decision-making autonomy ‘non-personalised’ options would retain. While not all like-users (from a data profile perspective) will make the same decisions, advertisers use of systemic trial and error in their campaigning can further refine triggers that produce the desired outcomes. Laux et al (2021) argue that advertising-technology is therefore inherently persuasive, intentionally presenting as informative and complementary to the actual product or idea being marketed with amplified effect (Laux et al., 2021).

6.2.1 Content Marketing Nudges versus Sludges¹⁰⁴

What has only recently become clearer to many online users is that given the online services they frequent are largely free – such as (but not limited to) Google, Facebook, and Twitter accounts – this makes them, or at least their behavioural data, the product. This puts something of a new spin on traditional supply and demand models of capitalism: online, users supply the information that is then used to deliver content marketing back to them, regardless of if they consent or demand it (D’Urso et al., 2017). Users are

¹⁰⁴ A sludge is the opposite of a nudge. Richard Thaler, co-author of the 2008 book ‘Nudge’ with Cass Sunstein, refers to sludge as “friction and bad intentions.” That is: sludge choice architects craft decision-making pathways in such a way, or with the application of undue influence, that the results are not in the best interests of the individual decision-maker, but the choice architect (Sunstein, 2018).

(knowingly or unknowingly) participants in advertising content marketing, for example, having already engaged with like-content before based on their recent search history or social media interactions (Wachter, 2019). Retired United States Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Cliff Gilmore suggests that in this way, the content and media people are served with is actually made to order for them (Matejic, 2016b). Consumers, for example, have a passive acceptance of advertising trying to sell them things they may not need. Aspirational marketing campaigns that sell the experience or prestige over the product are well-established and accepted (Bird, 2004). However, the advertising-technology industry has also obfuscated legitimate, clearly identifiable advertising with sponsored influencer-led user-generated content. As audiences participate and engage with sponsored content, the act of sharing or liking it often signals to a user's community their acceptance of it (unless explicated stated otherwise in a condemnatory post for example) (Jamieson, 2021).

These types of online nudges serve many purposes, such as driving profits and sales, but they also train audiences in information consumption habits, priming them for particular types and styles of communication. Priming, appearing both in psychology and communications scholarship, is the exertion of influence on target audiences or groups in such a way that impacts their perceptions and decision-making. Newell and Shanks (2014), from a psychological view, identify how "individuals can be induced to act socially or unsocially, walk faster or slower, behave more or less intelligently, or perceive accurately or inaccurately as a result of subtle priming influences of which they are unaware" (Newell & Shanks, 2014). In a communications and public relations context, priming is a frame¹⁰⁵ that affects how people think and think about things, influencing both cognition

¹⁰⁵ Hallahan (1999) defines 'framing' as a textual, psychological and socio-political construct that involves giving consumers of content marketing, advertising and other forms of communication relatable context when information is presented. For example, in crisis communications, organisations will seek to frame the incident or emergency in a particular way. Fire brigades would frame safety as time critical and stress urgency, while a corporate crisis involving negligence or a scandal would be framed in a way that tries to dilute or detract from wrongdoing (Hallahan, 1999).

and memory. The result is that when recalled, that information activates the frame to consciously or unconsciously exert influence in a particular way (Hallahan, 1999). For example, charity World Vision's corporate purpose is to alleviate poverty in third-world countries. Their cause marketing follows a set format: the introduction of the audience to a single child, some footage, and a narrative about their village and how donations could or have helped enhance their lives. Care is taken to only ever show individuals or only very small groups of people to highlight individual stories. This is by design: when people are asked to help one person, this is perceived as an achievable task in comparison to being asked to help an entire village, which can be visually and emotionally overwhelming. By choosing to frame their content marketing in a particular way, viewers of that content are influenced towards feelings of empowerment and ability—that they can make a difference in a child's life (Refuel Agency, 2021; Samu & Wymer, 2014).

The ability for audiences to be primed towards particular types and styles of content in nudge and sludge settings can also be activated by intermediaries such as the social networks themselves. Twitter requires users to share text-based thoughts in 240-character bursts with a maximum of four still images or a video of a maximum time length of two minutes and twenty seconds. All social networks have similar content-based restrictions that users must conform to (Sprout Social, 2020). Nearly all social networks offer business users and those with large audiences statistics that show them how many people viewed their content, such as at what second they tuned out of a video and the average total length of video views (Hootsuite, 2021).

Even regular users will gauge the success of their content using vanity metrics such as viewership reach, engagement and 'likes.' The result is an audience that is primed to consume information in short-bursts (Galloway, 2017). Lavi (2018) notes the impact this has on both content creators and

consumers, arguing that the resulting dynamic is born from social networks signaling to users the kinds of content they desire published on their sites. Social networks do this, according to Lavi (2018) because such nudges “motivate social dynamics and increase the likelihood of (content) crossing the threshold to dissemination (further sharing of the content). When an individual sees in their newsfeed that their friends adopted a specific type of content by liking and sharing it, the likelihood for them to cross that threshold and act in the same way increases.” Lavi (2018) refers to this as “mass interpersonal persuasion” (Lavi, 2018). Laux et al (2021) concur, adding that social networks “design how consumers are interacting with the market” in a marketplace that is “predicated on selling user attention” in what they call an “attention market” or “the attention economy.” With advertising-technology content taxonomies containing hundreds of metadata fields – from politics to heart disease to car servicing – as well as emotional signaling, that artificial intelligence then uses to gauge user feelings (such as introversion of extroversion), the result is a hyper-targeted marketplace with low user awareness of the mechanics behind the information they are served (Laux et al., 2021).

For example, Braun and Eklund (2019) describe the impact of sludge in content marketing as prisoner-like because users, advertisers and content marketers alike are forced into the same online environment by social networks. Braun and Eklund (2019) note that this practice “has had a profound impact on the incentive structure for media production and a structuring effect on the media ecosystem.” Further, Braun and Eklund (2019) argue that in creating these online structures, social networks and advertising technology firms monetise things that “cultural norms dictate should not be for sale.” Such was the case when Uber’s algorithms applied ‘peak’ or surge pricing to those in central Sydney who were trying to evacuate the area because of the Lindt Café terrorist attack in 2014 (as public transport had been shut down by Police) (Braun & Eklund, 2019a).

6.2.2 The Content Marketing Influence Nexus

The nexus between content marketing and influence (including propaganda) – concepts which aren't mutually exclusive – lies within a spectrum of accepted advertising or marketing behaviours and the types of influence that are viewed as malign. Online advertising using behavioural targeting is well accepted by consumers, for example, (Chen & Stallaert, 2014) even when user data is mined and remarketed back at them. Content appears in such a way that the online user can usually still ascertain that advertising is taking place and what action the advertiser is nudging them towards (Braun & Eklund, 2019a). Propaganda, however, “obfuscates the origins” of the content and leverages psychological cognition to make the information presented more influential to target audiences (Wanless & Berk, 2017). The political sphere is one example of how content marketing and propaganda operate in tandem, supported by a spectrum of public acceptance. Political content is accepted- if not expected – to hold propaganda value. However when malign activities underpin this activity, such as the case with Cambridge Analytica's 2018 unauthorised data harvesting program on Facebook, that social license is withdrawn (Ebner, 2020). Another example can be drawn from conflict-based propaganda. While nation-state propaganda delivered via content marketing channels is an expected and accepted part of war and public diplomacy, non-nation state use of these same tactics is viewed differently. Ingram (2016) notes that this is the result of a “shifting relationship between the political elite and the populace.” “Democracies” Ingram (2016) remarks, “may be uncomfortable with propaganda but have been historically good at it” (Ingram, 2016). Rogers et al (2019) suggest that influence in the digital age is not propaganda spun anew, but rather the evolution of manipulation as a form of exploiting audiences that were previously unreachable. Citing Wanless and Berk (2017) Rogers et al (2019) agree that the fundamental difference between old models of persuasion and the new is the way in which audience participation is engineered into content or propaganda:

“participation is a cognitive investment (and) people engage differently when they are themselves participants in the narrative... it becomes part of their lived experience” (Rogers et al., 2019).

This link between online content marketing and psychological influence is important because it speaks to the way particular audiences are targeted and why. Target audience identification is an important part of any successful online content marketing campaign. As Galloway (2017) explains, in an online environment where there is a high level of competition to appear in front of affinity or demographic groups, attention becomes the most valuable commodity. Further, “in an attention economy, attracting an audience is a prerequisite for achieving economic, social or political objectives” (Galloway, 2017).

Influential content marketing, however, is not neutral or harmless. The influence that peer groups online and offline can exert on adolescents and young adults have long been a concern for parents, researchers, psychologists, and educators. The sometimes life-long consequences of youthful risky behaviour have traditionally focused on issues with broad, societal impacts such as illicit drug use, engaging in risky sexual behaviours, underage and/or excessive drinking and involvement in crime. As technology has evolved, online harms with offline consequences have also garnered attention. From predatory online child sexual grooming, abuse and exploitation, cyberbullying and addiction to gaming; peer influences on teenage and young adult behaviour have kept pace with technology while rapidly outpacing the legislative and regulatory mechanisms that usually offer some protections (Herrero-Diz et al., 2020; Meehan & Wicks, 2020). A teenager cannot go into a shop and purchase a pornographic magazine, for example, but they can freely access hard-core and often illegal¹⁰⁶ pornography online. In decades now past, to share nude

¹⁰⁶ Considering, in countries and jurisdictions where pornography is legal, there are limitations on what types of sexual activity is considered socially permissible. For example, normative forms of sexual intercourse between

images of yourself, or others required access to a camera and either a photographic laboratory and/or photocopier. Teenagers now routinely share nudes of themselves on messaging apps. Some even sell them to strangers via online marketplaces such as Only Fans.¹⁰⁷

Incentives such as money, increases in popularity or social significance, peer and in-group acceptance may drive some adolescents and young adults towards risky and harmful behaviours. The same incentives can likewise drive other youth towards more socially accepted behaviours such as participation in sports, further education, and community-minded pursuits. Ciranka and van den Bos (2019) in their study on social influence in adolescent decision-making note that youth in these demographics often demonstrate “risky and maladaptive decisions” due to the social influence peers exert. Ciranka and van den Bos (2019) identify three verbal models that contribute to this type of influence: “social motivation, reward sensitivity and distraction.” Social motivation is of particular note given the importance of the in-group and the influence of peers. Ciranka and van den Bos (2019) observe that adolescents “demonstrating the risky behaviours or conforming to the behaviour of the peer group” do so out of a misguided sense of social values attributed to those behaviours. Reward sensitivity and distraction, in particular, are directly related to the neurodevelopment of adolescents whereby the brain’s rewards centre matures at a much quicker pace than the regions of the brain involved in moderating and controlling cognition (Ciranka & Bos, 2019). Consequently, poor impulse control and a lack of consequence-based risk management override otherwise rational decision-making processes.

consenting adults is considered legal in Australia, however acts that inflict harm on non-consenting victims – such as sexual behaviour towards and /or sex-acts that involve minors - are not (Armstrong Legal, 2021; Makela, 2021).

¹⁰⁷ Only Fans is a subscription-based platform where people can pay content creators for content they produce and like. While not only intended for sexualised content, many people including teenagers, use the platform to monetize nude and sexual content. For example, the BBC aired a documentary in 2020 called ‘Nudes4Sale’ which documented this process amongst adolescents and young adults.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/5e7dad06-c48d-4509-b3e4-6a7a2783ce30>

Meshi et al (2015) in their research on emerging neuroscience studies in social media, state that the desire to connect with others, cultivate a positive reputation and create a sense of belonging among social groups fulfil “basic biological needs, such as obtaining food and sex.” Meshi et al (2015) further observed that social media provides a platform for people to satisfy these needs via “social cognition,¹⁰⁸ self-referential cognition¹⁰⁹ and social reward processing.”¹¹⁰ Noting the similarities between on and offline behaviour, Meshi et al (2015) also point out some differences such as the falling away of social behavioural norms, the ability of demagogues to amplify their influence and an over-riding prevalence of one-side conversations (Meshi et al., 2015).

Perhaps the most salient aspect of how human cognition has been exploited online by behavioural marketers, social networks, gaming and dating apps is that the online environment is, as Wanless and Berk stated in 2017, inherently participative. To get satisfaction, the user must first invest their time and sometimes money into the content marketing they are nudged towards. Participation as a cognitive investment then brings biases such as the sunk cost fallacy, authority bias, and the cheerleader and halo effects (Wanless & Berk, 2017). Further, social media in particular drives attentional bias, telling users not what to think but what to think about. Wanless (2017) in her participatory propaganda model explains that contrary to popular belief, influence campaigns delivered online don’t seek to change minds so much as “flood them with confirmation bias” for any given belief. Concurrently, the echo chamber created online acts as a tool

¹⁰⁸ Meshi et al (2015) define social cognition as: mentalising, the ability for an individual to “think about the mental states and motivations of others.” For example, a content creator will think about how their audience will receive their content and adjust it to maximise positive receptivity. When viewing the content of others, that same individual may also think about the motivations of that content creator (Meshi et al., 2015)

¹⁰⁹ Meshi et al (2015) defines self-referential cognition as: the ability to think about oneself in a way that prompts the social media user to share those thoughts with their audience. “Broadcasting ones’ thoughts may provoke further self-referential thought” while receiving audience feedback like the number of likes, comments or how many times the content was shared, begins the process of “self-appraisal and social comparison” (Meshi et al., 2015).

¹¹⁰ Meshi et al (2015) defines social reward processing as: social media’s ability to “provide users with a consistent supply of social rewards.” Meshi et al (2015) note that this activates the reward centre in the brain. The ‘reward’ centre processes direct feedback on content produced and shared as well as comparing one’s own rewards to the perceived rewards of others online (Meshi et al., 2015).

to starve users of opportunities to receive conflicting information that may lead them to question and doubt the information they've already received and consumed (Wanless & Berk, 2017).

Online influence via content marketing also provides a compelling demonstration of the bandwagon effect in action. Social media is very much like a restaurant or café in that those stores (brand accounts or pages) which are busy and have lots of customers visibly seated attract more business than those that are empty. Busyness is interpreted as popularity and thereby perceived as a positive signal of high quality and value when compared with emptiness (Yu et al., 2020). Content-led algorithms on social media work to channel attention in this way. Content that people skip over, scroll past, or only partially consume gets demoted by the algorithm and as a result, it reaches fewer people. Meanwhile, content that is very popular gets promoted into more people's newsfeeds (Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2020; Milan, 2015). In many cases, the content itself has something to offer. It might be particularly funny or evoke emotional responses (positive and/or negative). It might represent current affairs issues and user-generated online commentary (Spohr, 2017). Or it might be truly shocking and disturbing, such as in the case of live streams of terrorist attacks (Douek, 2020). Whatever the reason for its popularity, in cases where content goes viral (is seen by almost everyone, everywhere online) or people deliberately seek it out with the intention of sharing it, content bubbles form around participative audiences (Lin et al., 2016; B. F. Liu et al., 2015; Wang & Zhu, 2019). The ramifications of participatory influence online, however, go far beyond the online checkout or viral video: "Social media platforms don't foster a nuanced understanding of world events: people follow like-minded individuals who espouse views similar to their own... there is a tendency towards group polarisation... where self-selecting groups are driven to ever more prejudiced and extreme views through regular exchange" (Winter, 2016).

6.3 Terrorist organisations' use of Content Marketing

The genesis of terrorist organisations adopting content marketing is thought to have its origins in the Afghan-Soviet war. Anne Sternersen (2017) in her chapter in Hegghammer's (2017) compilation "Jihadi Culture: The Art and Practices of Militant Islamists" notes that Islamic extremist film production was first observed during that war when "mujahidin reportedly brought video cameras to the battlefield as early as 1981." Thought to be used for documentary purposes rather than as a form of violent jihadi art or propaganda, an element of war tourism was observed by other Arabs who viewed these combatants with some skepticism, complaining about those "who filmed themselves simply so they could impress people back home." Early reactions from Afghan commanders viewed those combatants, particularly foreigner fighters, as more interested in taking videos than fighting. By 1992, however, as camcorders became smaller, more affordable, and accessible – and after observing foreign television news crews and cameramen – this changed. Foreign fighters with experience from conflicts elsewhere – such as Bosnia and Chechnya – brought with them new skills and ideas. Videos glorifying violent jihad were distributed alongside audio tapes which could often be found in extreme Islamic bookstores and mosques around the world. Abu Hudhayfa, in a letter to al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in 2000, advised him to consider following the example of the terrorist group Hamas "and film the testament of men who volunteer to carry out martyrdom operations. The videos can then be broadcast after the operation" (Hegghammer & Lahoud, 2017). By the early 2000s al-Qaeda began setting up media cells and 'content' was being purposefully created to be used as recruitment propaganda. By the time al-Qaeda decided to attack the U.S.S Cole in 2000 (a United States Navy guided-missile destroyer refueling in Yemen's Aden harbour at the time) the groups' production values had matured but technical difficulties continued. It took six months for them to release their bombing of the U.S.S Cole video with Osama bin Laden involved in both producing the video and

its approval before dissemination. As propaganda pieces and recruitment tools, videos were given directly to journalists working in Afghanistan for them to disseminate via their mainstream television networks (Hegghammer & Sternsen, 2017).

ISIS drew upon al-Qaeda's media toolkit and repurposed it for the digital age. Its content bears all the hallmarks of traditional public relations, advertising, and marketing campaigns. Agendas are set, frames are built and stories are interwoven around the product in familiar, pleasing settings (Aly et al., 2017; Hegghammer, 2017; Nissen, 2015). Winter (2017) agrees, noting that the production of content by the group is "artificially absorbed into a symbolic system" whereby ISIS's central media office "proactively nurtures and fertilises" content marketing that comprises a "cocktail of emotional, theological and ideological" ideas. Further, Winter (2017) observed that content marketing was a "potent derivation" of ISIS's media system that also serves to keep its content creators and volunteers engaged indefinitely (Winter, 2017).

More recently, with the advent of social media and as technology has become low-cost and open-access, ISIS, al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab have all developed TVEC libraries to preserve their history, but also to enable the content to be shared. In a 2021 report, scholars Ayad, Amarasingam and Alexander (2021) researched the terrorist content cache of ISIS. What they found, among the 2.2 terabytes of data and content stored in what they dubbed the 'Cloud Caliphate', was that this content repository "was only one part of a complex and dynamic pro-ISIS online ecosystem." Beyond the existence of the Cloud Caliphate itself, the researchers were able to draw conclusions that support the view that content caches "help the online contingents of the group rally in the face of setbacks"; highlighted "the roles of digital archives in fostering a shared sense of identity within an amorphous online community" including identities that are real and imagined; promoted the themes and values important to supporters of

ISIS, including what content they thought was worth preserving for future generations; and understanding “the types of content that constitute what it means to be part of the in-group.” More broadly, the research group also identified archives such as the Cloud Caliphate as a “central feature of violent extremists’ online activity”; and that violent extremists go to some lengths to preserve, “collect and share content they deem meaningful”. Somewhat inconsistent however with wider scholarly views, the Cloud Caliphate “does not serve as a virtual training camp so much as a compilation of resource-banks maintained and accessed largely by self-radicalised sympathisers” (Ayad et al., 2021).

Bastug et al (2020) found that the online environment provided radicals with “ideal enabling environments and structures” based on factors such as “grievances” but that “the general tendency in the literature is to portray online radicalisation as a facilitator in the process” rather than the catalyst. Referencing a study from the United Kingdom, Bastug et al (2020) noted that the Internet being a “facilitating tool” was observed however caveated that “drawing offline versus online distinctions may create a false dichotomy since extremists use both domains for their activities and they seamlessly move” between them (Bastug et al., 2020).

The role content marketing has in moderating in-group behaviour has also been recognised by scholars with examples of this approach found broadly throughout ISIS’s Dabiq magazines. Ingram (2016) states that, by strategic design, Dabiq “appeals to its readership via identity crisis and solution constructs that are interplayed as narratives designed to leverage powerful psychosocial forces and shape and support decision-making processes” (H. J. Ingram, 2016). Each issue contains articles that reinforce and model accepted in-group behaviours by using content that recalls glorious historical battles contrasted with image-laden articles that frame contemporary challenges while offering solutions sanctioned by the terrorist

organisation.¹¹¹ By operationalising this agenda-setting, ISIS was able to generate in-group participation with its content marketing. Anderson's (2018) observations on memory, tradition and suffering conclude that when these actions are performed in in-groups, they orient the construction of personal and shared narratives that preserve ritual, knowledge and a sense of community (Andersen & Sandberg, 2018).

Other focuses of ISIS's content marketing strategy and tactics noted by scholars researching the data in the Cloud Caliphate include their use of branding to legitimise themselves, and the use of content to promote deviant behaviour and frame collective grievances¹¹² against a backdrop of promoted solutions. As Melki and Jabado (2016) concluded ISIS "misses no opportunity to manipulate these grievances and sensationalises symbolic victories against this western colonial legacy" (Melki & Jabado, 2016). Anderson (2010) found that this was the "means by which individuals and communities make meaning of the present and begin to envision and construct a future." Anderson (2010) also observed that shared collective grievances form part of the social memory of in-groups serving as a way of satisfying norms and sustaining their particular worldview (Anderson, 2010). Andersen and Sandberg (2018) concur, noting that (a) ISIS drew together a broad "cultural toolkit" to appeal to multiple audiences; and (b) their use of "collective action framing is particularly relevant when studying social movement rhetoric and propaganda" (Andersen & Sandberg, 2018).

These elements of content marketing have also been observed by other scholars and can be viewed, as an example, within ISIS's Dabiq magazine

¹¹¹ For example, content that sets clear in/out-group agendas and encourages memory recall of religious rituals, historical battles and elements of collective identity include: Dabiq volume 1 contains articles entitled "The World has Divided into Two Camps" (p.10) and "Murtaddin Repent in the Thousands" (p.48) and "From Hijrah to Kalifah" (p.34); Dabiq volume 10 "From the pages of History: the Expeditions, Battles and Victories of Ramadan" (p.26); Dabiq volume 13 "The Best Shuhadā (p.20); and Dabiq volume 15 "Why We Hate You and Why We Fight you"(p.30) ((ISIS, 2014f, 2015d, 2016a)).

¹¹² For example, content that frames collective grievances and permissible solutions includes: Dabiq volume 7 "From the Pages of History: An Explicit Ultimatum from the Salaf to the Apostates" (p.17) and "The Anger Factory – it's Western Governments' heavy-handed tactics that generate the growing anger that will reduce Western nations to ashes..." (p.76); and in Dabiq issue 12 "Advice to the Muhāhidīn: Listen and Obey" (p.10) (ISIS, 2014b, 2015b).

series. Pelletier et al (2016) observed that ISIS's effective use of messaging to build its legitimacy as a brand and organisation was anchored by historical anti-western tropes that framed the Caliphate as "the only true trusted institution in Islam" (Pelletier et al., 2016). Melki and Jabado (2016) noted that by using a traditional, nation-state, public diplomacy strategy, ISIS was able to evolve its propaganda "dramatizing it with cutting edge production and storytelling techniques, (and) disseminating it widely using social and mass media." This had the concurrent benefit of "aligning (its content marketing) with its brand to serve its public diplomacy goals of converting and recruiting ... while simultaneously using it as a psychological warfare tactic to deter enemies" (Melki & Jabado, 2016). Examples of how these pieces of content manifested in Dabiq include numerous deeply entrenched anti-crusader stereotypes which again support in/out-grouping utility.¹¹³ Demonstrating the way in which ISIS weaves multiple narratives together, Awan (2017) identified that in-group members learn "deviant behaviour" from participation through reinforcement and imitation (Awan, 2017a). Numerous examples of this type of content being used to normalise behaviours like the keeping of sex-slaves and training of children as combatants can also be observed directly from the content shared via Dabiq.¹¹⁴ Nissen (2015), taking a broader approach, suggests "effect-based thinking"¹¹⁵ as an organisational strategy shapes "the decisions of friends, foes and neutrals." This is particularly salient because ISIS demonstrated

¹¹³ For example Anti-Crusader narratives include: Dabiq volume 1 "Until it burns the Crusader Armies in Dabiq" (p.3), "A New Era has arrived of might and dignity for the Muslims" (p. 8) and "The World has Divided into Two Camps" (p.10); Dabiq volume 4 - "Reflections on The Final Crusade" (p.32); Dabiq volume 10 - "Join the caravan of Islamic State Knights in the lands of the crusaders" (p.5); Dabiq volume 15 - "Why We Hate You and Why We Fight You" (p.30); and "By the Sword" (p.78) (ISIS, 2014f, 2014d, 2015d, 2016a).

¹¹⁴ For example, content that encourages deviant behaviour includes: Dabiq issue 3 "The Flood is a refutation of the Pacifists" (p.9); Dabiq issue 8 "The Lions of Tomorrow" on the training and use of child soldiers (p.20) and "Abandon the lands of Shirk" regarding migration to the Caliphate (p.28-29); Dabiq issue 9 "Salve-Girls or Prostitutes?" (p.44); Dabiq volume 10 contains articles entitled "Honor is in Jihad" (p.35); Dabiq issue 13 "Kill the Imāms of the Kufr (p.6) and "Know your Enemy: Who were the Safawiyah?" (p.10) and "Just Terror: Let Paris be a lesson for those nations that wish to take heed..." (p.55); and Dabiq issue 14 "The Knights of Shahādag in Belgium" (p.6) and "Kill the Imāms of Kufr in the West" (p.8) (ISIS, 2014a, 2015c, 2016c, 2016b).

¹¹⁵ "Effects-based thinking" is defined in Nissen's (2015) book '#TheWeaponizationOfSocialMeida' as "a philosophy that includes a much broader understanding of the creation of effects than merely combat and the physical destruction of neutralisation of target sets. Effects-based thinking as a consequence involves the full use of all instruments of power or influence that are political, economic, social, psychological etc" (Nissen, 2015, p.58).

an ability to directly access their target audiences and to exploit unconventional or hybrid warfare tactics (Nissen, 2015, pp. 58, 76 & 90).

6.4 The Outcomes of Terrorist organisation's adoption of content marketing

That terrorist organisations have benefited significantly from the advent of online content marketing and the cyber-enabled environments in which it flourishes, is widely agreed upon across academia. Bruce Hoffman in his seminal 2006 book 'Inside Terrorism' noted at the time of publication the inclusion of a new chapter to focus specifically on terrorist "use of the Internet and other contemporary, cutting-edge communications technologies." Hoffman (2006) describes the consequences of this then-new foray online by violent extremists as "far-reaching" with the ability to operate without "censorship or hindrance." In viewing "violence as communication" Hoffman (2006) argues that violent extremism is an "enduring axiom of terrorism" that is both designed to attract attention via propaganda of the deed and communicate its messages. "As one U.S. Government observer of the terrorism Internet phenomena noted (at the time) ... never in history has there been an opportunity where propaganda is so effective" (Hoffman, 2006, p.11, 219, 235). More recent research indicates that Hoffman's 2006 analysis was as prophetic as it was accurate. Aly et al (2017) describe the "obvious, unique advantages" the Internet has over older media (such as radio and television) while concurrently cultivating online communities, delivering content and messages and other forms of "communicative violence" with little resistance (Aly et al., 2017). Ingram (2015) notes that social media amplifies content and "instils a sense of urgency" in target audiences (Ingram, 2015) while Rudner (2017) observed that "al-Qaeda deemed the Internet a great space for spreading the call of Jihad and following the news of the mujahideen (Arabic: Islamic warriors)" (Rudner, 2017). Kruglova (2020) in analysing ISIS's "content building strategy" and the influence that exerts on potential recruits via its

multi-faceted online storytelling approach identified some of the nuances ISIS content marketing strategists were employing. In comparing how companies convince customers of the value in their product Kruglova (2020) notes that narrative advertising has a high-degree of audience cut-through because through content marketing – or storytelling –the audience is taken on a sense-making journey that allows them to understand the brand (or terrorist organisation) better. The emotional connection this builds with receptive customers (or prospective recruits) – satisfies polarised in-groups because it leverages other propagandist techniques “sparkling anger, offering a utopian ideal of a righteous state,” the holding out of “religious rewards or promises along with some material benefits and an exciting adventure” (Kruglova, 2020).

To what degree –or not - online content marketing radicalises or influences prospective radicals along the radicalisation pathway, however, continues to be an area of contested scholarship. “Skepticism that the Internet might have a role to play in violent extremism and terrorism is not new” (Conway, 2017). Jensen et al (2018) argue that while social media “does not appear to increase the success rate of extremists outcomes, evidence suggests that it has contributed to the acceleration of radicalisation in U.S. extremists” (Jensen et al., 2018). Frissen’s (2021) study on “the anecdotal evidence that asserts extremists materials on the Internet play a decisive role in radicalisation process” concluded that it was not “the Internet as such” that radicalises but rather the prospective radical’s behaviour in “actively seeking out jihadist materials” along with their “moral disengagement” (Frissen, 2021). Baugut and Neumann (2020) in interviewing former terrorists (formers) about their consumption of content, found that it had been interpreted in two ways: via the Internet and in person. Baugut and Neumann (2020) observed that these two modes of content consumption were “strongly intertwined” and that online content consumption “was usually followed by personal talks about the content with peers and preachers.” Further, those intermediary or proxy facilitators–

such as preachers or recruiters– “sought to bolster the credibility” of the content consumed online. When the former violent extremist described person-to-person interactions with those intermediaries, they noted that “preachers aroused and intensified” their “interest in the use of online propaganda.” The observation of the role of intermediaries in the radicalisation process by Baugut and Neumann (2020) also reflects broader academic consensus around the roles others play in the radicalisation process (Baugut & Neumann, 2020).

Winter (2016) observed that interested or prospective recruits could only “go so far” on their own and that the role of the recruiter or facilitator is key to propelling the individual further along the radicalisation trajectory. “Consuming (content) alone is rarely enough to push an individual to sign up to a jihadist group... the point at which the curious onlooker can be taken from support to participation” is under the guidance of the recruiter or facilitator because it is they who provide evidence that what the prospect has seen online is true. Winter (2016) further observed that facilitators and recruiters also reinforce the role “the jihadist echo chamber plays... in the recruitment process... (as) it normalises, isolates, and gives (the prospective recruit) a sense of community. An intense sense of comradeship is borne of this refined, interactive repository of collective extremism and identity” (Winter, 2016).¹¹⁶

Another point of academic consensus in the analysis of violent Islamist content is the repetitive use of narratives that are, by design, highly emotive and which draw upon multiple master narratives.¹¹⁷ Kruglova

¹¹⁶ Refer also: Hassan et al (2018) Exposure to Extremist Online Content Could Lead to Violent Radicalisation: A Systematic Review of Empirical Evidence (Hassan et al., 2018); Frissen (2021) Internet, the great radicaliser? Exploring relationships between seeking for online extremist materials and cognitive radicalisation in young adults (Frissen, 2021); and Baugut and Neumann (2020) Online Propaganda use during Islamist radicalisation (Baugut & Neumann, 2020).

¹¹⁷ The ‘*Master Narratives of Islamist Extremists*’ as identified by Halverson et al (2011) are:

1. “The Pharaoh. The arrogant tyrant rejects the Word of God revealed by His prophet, the tyrant is punished and his body preserved as divine warning for future nations to submit to God’s Will.
2. The Jahiliyyab. The Muslim world has regressed to a state of ignorance, barbarism and polytheism akin to the pagan society that existed before the Islam and its leaders are apostates to be defeated by a vanguard of believers.

(2020) in her study of ISIS's propaganda and narratives observed that their content "demonstrated that the group relied on not only polarisation of opinions and sparking anger" but also held out rewards of a "utopian idea of a righteous state" and religious rewards (Kruglova, 2020). This finding is broadly consistent with content produced by ISIS and by its supporters, which promoted exclusivity of thought and the rewards of life and death in the Caliphate. Droogan and Peattie (2017) in "mapping the thematic landscape" of ISIS's first 13 issues of Dabiq found that these narratives have "remained relatively consistent" and that "basic themes have shifted in presence and pervasiveness over time" relative to the group's strategic communications intent. In particular, themes of "Islam is at War"; "Enemies"; "Call to Arms"; "Building the Caliphate" as well as a focus on "group-level identities and religion" were observed to underpin Dabiq as a body of violent Islamist literature (Droogan & Peattie, 2017). Baugut and Neumann's (2020) research also identified recurrent themes including: "Religious, Political, Victimhood, Revenge, Apocalyptic, Instructional and Martyrdom." These narratives were consistently delivered via a mix of both

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3. The Battle of Badr. Despite seemingly impossible odds, the early Muslims defeat a much larger and better equipped army of unbelievers in Mecca through the strength of their convictions and the help of God and his angels on the battlefield.
 4. The Hypocrites. After migrating from Mecca, Islam is threatened in Medina by a group who proclaim to be Muslims publicly but privately do not believe, only using Islam for political expediency.
 5. The Battle of Khaybar. Amidst a pagan siege on Medina, the early Muslims accuse Jewish tribes of breaking an alliance with them (know as the Constitution of Medina) and punish them for treason.
 6. The Battle of Karbala. Imam Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala teaches Shi'ite Muslims to see the world as a place where the wicked and corrupt reign, and conclude it is better to die than to live under tyranny.
 7. The Mahdi. In Twelver Shi'ism 'The Hidden One' will reappear as a messianic saviour to usher in an era of justice before the Day of Judgement. In Sunni Islam, Muslims believe that a just and righteous leader will emerge at the end of time to guide the world.
 8. The Infidel Invaders. The Crusader master narrative recounts the occupation of Muslim lands and holy places by Western Christians in order to exploit, subjugate and desecrate them. Likewise the Tatar master narrative recounts how Hulagu Khan destroyed the Muslim capital of Baghdad and executed the Caliph during the ensuing massacre. The Mongols (Tatars) later converted to Islam, but ruled according to the Yasa (Mongol law) rather than Islamic law drawing their identity as Muslims into question.
 9. Shaytan's (Satan) Handiwork. The Qur'an warns believers that alcohol, gambling and other vices are snares that Shaytan uses to lead people astray from Islam and send them to Hell.
 10. 1924. The founding of the secular republic of Turkey and the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate by Ataturk, who is secretly Jewish, is part of a conspiracy by the West and the Zionists to destroy Islam and its power.
 11. The Nakba. The establishment of the State of Israel in sacred Palestine and the loss of al-Quds (Jerusalem) is a catastrophe (or *nakba*) for the Arab and Islamic world that must be rectified.
 12. Seventy-Two Virgins. The Qur'anic term *hu al-ayn* or Houris, is interpreted as dark-eyed maidens who will serve as the companions of martyrs in paradise as a reward for their righteous sacrifice in the jihad against the infidels" (Halverson, Goodall, & Corman, 2011, p.7-9).

cognitive and behavioural types of propaganda, Baugut and Neumann (2020) note, driving attentional, behavioural, and informational seeking amongst susceptible audiences. This content works by presenting a 'problem' such as Western lifestyles, with a halal (Arabic: permissible) solution and ways to reach cognitive consonance (Baugut & Neumann, 2020).

While this type of content marketing strategy has been viewed by academics in a linear fashion – as a playbook of sorts (Archetti, 2015; Furlow & Goddall Jr, 2011) – emergent research has better identified and articulated the interplay between the on and offline worlds. Valentini et al (2020) propose that this digital integration of on and offline spaces in the radicalisation process is the result of a hybrid content model that – by design or default – “takes place in onlife spaces.” Valentini et al (2020) define onlife as a “hybrid environment that incorporates elements from individual’s online and offline experiences.” (Valentini et al., 2020). Braddock (2020) also recognised this interplay. In providing an analysis of ISIS’s ‘Blood on Blood’ video, Braddock (2020) observed the strategic use of emotion in content designed to persuade audiences toward or against certain types of behaviours. “Blood on Blood was clearly produced to make audiences feel anger about the victimisation of Muslims and to generate feelings of pride in Muslim children for choosing to fight back against their attackers. Both emotions can be incredibly useful for motivating viewers to support ISIS” (Braddock, 2020. p167).

At a granular level, there is an emergent area of scholarship focusing on the radicalisation trajectories of individuals to better understand the interplay between real-world and online influence. In Shanahan’s (2021) *Typology of Terror – the Backgrounds of Australian Jihadis* – he presents aggregated data on the characteristics of those radicalised towards Islamic extremism. These demographics include being male and aged in their mid-twenties with no known mental health issues (Shanahan, 2019). European

studies of Islamic Extremists also found similar results: they were male and of a median age of 29.9 years of age (Rekawek et al., 2018).¹¹⁸

The identification of this kind of demographical data is important for several reasons: (1) it supports the theory that content is created with specific target audiences in mind (Alfifi et al., 2018; Cohen et al., 2018); (2) it enables a deeper understanding of those audiences using existing psychological scholarship on the effects of online influence, particularly with regards to adolescents, youth and young adults (Koetsier, 2020; Rahman, 2018; Vissenberg, 2020); and (3) it supports the literature around in-group and peer-led behaviours, particularly amongst this demographic (Hegghammer, 2006; Malthaner, 2018).

For example, Australian terrorist Abdul Numan Haider, who was shot dead after stabbing two Police officers at a suburban Melbourne Police Station in September 2014, had an onlife radicalisation trajectory. Cherney (2020) in his case study of Haider, notes several aspects of his radicalisation that can be seen as participatory in an onlife TVEC context: (1) while having an unremarkable adolescence, his transition to adulthood was influenced by radical clerics and peer groups; (2) Haider's behavioural changes during this time included withdrawal from education and sporting activities, instead spending more time following newly developed religious pursuits; (3) Haider, via the influence of his peers, developed an in-group mindset that adopted commonly used grievances promoted by ISIS such as the oppression of Muslims, self-victimhood and the belief he had a religious obligation to defend Islam; (4) Haider, angered by law enforcement action with respect to Islamic extremists interstate, demonstrated instances of civil disorder; (5) law enforcement activities were viewed through an in-group lens of Government oppression rather than as a public safety measure; (6) concurrent to these activities, ISIS issued a call online

¹¹⁸ Refer also: Matejic (2016) The Australian Foreign Fighter and Domestic Actor Report.

(packaged as content marketing) for Australian supporters specifically to “target the government or a member of the public in any way possible” to defend Islam; and (7) after his death, the investigation into his activities found that “Haider had accessed extremist websites, which included ISIS beheading videos and instructions on how to use weaponry to kill members of the public. Further, after interactions with law enforcement due to his acts of civil disorder, Haider changed his Facebook profile to a picture of himself in military clothing, displaying the Shahada flag in an apparent salute to ISIS.” A week later, Haider committed his attack on Police (Cherney, 2020).

Zammit (2017) explains that Haider’s death went on to become the catalyst for one of his in-group associates, Sevdet Besim, who subsequently went on to plan a terrorist attack to be conducted on ANZAC Day in 2015. Besim’s radicalisation trajectory can similarly be viewed as onlife in nature. Raised in a “not particularly observant” family, Besim began attending the same extreme Islamic Centre as Haider, only years earlier in 2012. Several members of this centre, including Australian violent Islamist Neil Prakash, had gone on to successfully travel to Syria and Iraq. Prakash would go on to play a pivotal role in inspiring Besim to action after Haider’s death. Prakash at first tried to persuade Besim to join him in Syria, however, the Government refused his application for a passport. Conversing via social media messaging apps, Prakash and Besim “concluded that if he was going to take action, it would have to be in Australia.” Prakash facilitated an introduction to a London-based teenager “known publicly only as S” who was to mentor and support Besim towards staging a terrorist attack. “S” and Besim conversed via the messaging app Telegram, and over the space of “nine days” they plotted for Besim to “kill one or more police officers on ANZAC Day.” “S” was particularly influential during this period, nudging Besim back towards the plot when he expressed doubts. Besim prepared a martyrdom statement on his phone – “which he continued to edit up and until his arrest” – and had some intention of making a martyrdom video

(Zammit Andrew, 2017). While is it reasonable to conclude that Besim consumed TVEC during his years of involvement at the same Islamic Centre as Haider and Prakash, court reports (DPP (Cth) v Sevdet BESIM Sentencing, 2017) indicate that Besim's consumption of extremist content was particularly concentrated between "22 and 25 January 2015" when he "conducted a number of Internet searches associated with ISIS" when sought out ISIS publications Dabiq and the 'ISIS Report.' After his arrest, a digital forensic analysis of Besim's electronic devices found an "extensive Internet search history of extremist material, most of it focusing on ISIS. Numerous images, audio files, videos and other documents" were located (DPP (Cth) v Sevdet BESIM Sentencing, 2017).

6.5 Conclusion

Terrorist adoption of content marketing strategies and tactics to radicalise and recruit is only as new as the online environments they abuse and exploit. The development of relatively accessible TVEC archives and libraries online, however, does signal a new step in the evolution of Islamic extremism as groups attempt to future-proof their historical and ideological legacy for the next generation. That terrorist groups like ISIS see great importance and value in preserving their content, and should signal to academics and national security practitioners their intent is to wage generational warfare.

The interplay between offline and online influence, particularly where content is a participative catalyst for bridging onlife individual experiences does more than just draw receptive audiences in. Just as big-tech and social media networks have discovered means and ways to keep users engaged, terrorist organisations have learned to adopt similar tactics to polarise worldviews and attract followers. Concurrently, scholarly understanding of exactly how social and online media impacts cognition, memory and decision-making is increasing. Online nudging, particularly via technological interventions that present defaults or stifle liberal paternalism in other ways such as through algorithmic recommendation, and the effects this has on how information is consumed, is also an emergent area of focus. While biases and heuristics have long been leveraged to nudge consumers in a commercial context, the depth at which those same tactics are successful in radicalisation and recruitment is yet to be fully understood. While it's clear that content marketing has a role in this process, it is rarely independent of offline influence.

Keeping pace with the evolution of technology, terrorist organisations have exploited open online architecture to amplify their content for propaganda of the deed purposes. That other extremist groups have adopted similar

tactics, should be of considerable concern. Considering recent world events, it is worthy of note that these observations are not unique to Islamic extremism but equally as replicable within other ideologically or politically motivated group settings that espouse both violent and non-violent forms of extremism.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Refer 'Political radicalisation on the Internet: Extremist content, government control and the power of victim and jihad videos (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009); The Growing Power of Online Communities of the Extreme-Right: Deriving strength, meaning and direction from significant socio-political events in real life (Bliuc et al., 2020); Swiping Right: The Allure of Hyper Masculinity and Cryptofascism for Men who Join The Proud Boys (Kutner & Burke, 2020); GNET Survey on the Role of Technology in Violent Extremism and the State of Research Community – Tech Industry Engagement (Khalil, 2021); and White Supremacy Extremism: The Rise of the Violent White Supremacist (Blazakis et al., 2019).

CHAPTER 7: CASE STUDIES

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, The Radicalisation Cascade model is applied to three separate violent Islamists radicalisation trajectories to highlight how behavioural economics can provide a useful framework to both how we structure and understand information.

The chapter begins by outlining the parameters used to create the research dataset and study inclusion parameters. Some overarching statistics are explored before a short acknowledgement of specific limitations is discussed. Three case studies are then presented that follow the radicalisation, recruitment, and ensuing violence (real or planned) trajectories of:

1. Neil Christopher PRAKASH
2. Ahmad (Abdul) Numan HAIDER; and
3. Alo-Bridget NAMOA

This chapter then concludes by exploring the general trends observed and how they relate to other known-like datasets. Together with Chapter 9, by demonstrating how availability cascades can be used to understand radicalising environments and how behavioural economics provides a useful, agnostic structure to present and organise information, The Radicalisation Cascade seeks to demonstrate a profile of pathways to violent extremism that can be replicated for any individual radicalised within an in-group. By having a standardised framework to benchmark behaviours and qualitative data against, scholars and professional practitioners can better understand the interplay between TVEC consumption and the small number of resulting terrorism events. The researcher warns against taking an absolutist view of radicalisation where

violence is the only possible outcome. Instead, radicalisation should be viewed as a dynamic spectrum or cascade where sympathetic, but disengaged, or actively engaged individuals and groups commune. The role of supporters and enablers, particularly in influencing those within the cascade towards violent extremist ends should not be discounted as they exert valuable in-group influence and may offer operational support.

7.2 Case Study Analysis Parameters

The individuals selected for the following case studies are part of a broader dataset, called the Australian Foreign Fighter and Domestic Actor Nexus – AFFDAN, compiled from open-source information on individuals with involvement in Islamic violent extremism within or originating from Australia. The data set spans the post-9/11 al-Qaeda era (early 2000's) through to the denigration of the physical ISIS organisation circa mid-2020.

To qualify for inclusion into the dataset, the following criteria was applied:

- a) The individual must be an Australian citizen, permanent resident or ordinarily residing in Australia at the time of their offending (such as on a student visa or form of temporary residency); and/or
- b) The individual must have been charged and/or arrested (including having a warrant issued for their arrest in absentia) for terrorism or terrorism-related offences; and/or
- c) The individual must have been killed committing an act of terrorism within Australia; and/or
- d) The individual must have been killed committing an act of terrorism overseas; and/or
- e) The individual must be, on reasonable grounds, believed to have been engaged in or are engaging in behaviours that would be

categorised by the Australian Government as a 'foreign incursion offence'¹²⁰; and/or

f) Reasonably believed to have radicalised in Australia.

As a result, out of 463 individuals identified in AFFDAN as being involved with Islamic extremism in Australia, only 263 met the above criteria for inclusion. The gender breakdown of those 263 individuals can be found in the table below:

Table 2: Gender breakdown of Australian Foreign Fighters and Domestic Actors.

Australian Foreign Fighter and Domestic Actor Nexus (AFDAN)		
Gender		Percentage
Male	237	90.1%
Female	26	9.9%

¹²⁰ Under the Australian Criminal Code, Part 5.5, it is an offence for an Australian citizen "to enter a foreign country with the intention to engage in hostile activity, unless serving in or with the armed forces of the Government of a foreign country; prepare to enter, or for another person to enter, a foreign country with an intention to engage in hostile activity; and recruit persons or join and organisation engaged in hostile activities, or to serve in or with an armed force in a foreign country." For clarity around issues of joining the armed forces of another country – such as in the case of dual nationals fulfilling national service obligations – "The Minister of Home Affairs may permit recruitment of a person or class of persons to serve with an armed force of a foreign country if it is in the interests of the defence or international relations of Australia. It is not an offence under Part 5.5 for an Australian to join the armed forces of a foreign country." Further, "The Minister of Foreign Affairs may declare an area in a foreign country if they satisfied that a listed terrorist organisation is engaging in hostile activity in that area" (Government of Australia, 2021).

Other demographical data pertinent to the selection of case studies from the dataset includes:

Table 3: Age of Australian Foreign Fighters and Domestic Actors at time of their arrest or radicalisation.

Australian Foreign Fighter and Domestic Actor Nexus (AFDAN)				
Age (at time of arrest/radicalisation)				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Unknown	51	5	19.4%	1.9%
Minor (under 18 years of age)	9	1	3.5%	0.4%
18-24 years of age	59	10	22.5%	3.8%
25-34 years of age	72	5	27.4%	1.9%
35-44 years of age	30	3	11.4%	1.1%
45-54 years of age	13	0	4.9%	0%
55 years of age and over	3	2	1.1%	0.8%

Table 4: Ideological allegiance of Australian Foreign Fighters and Domestic Actors (where known).

Australian Foreign Fighter and Domestic Actor Nexus (AFDAN)				
Terrorist Organisation Affiliation				
Proscribed Terrorist Organisations in Australia as at 14AUG2021				
	Male	Female	Percentage	
			Male	Female
al-Qaeda	42	3	16%	1.1%
al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	1	0	0.4%	0%
Al Shabaab	8	0	3%	0%
Abu Sayyaf Group	1	0	0.4%	0%
Jemaah Islamiyah	3	1	1.1%	0.4%
ISIS	109	14	41.5%	5.3%
Lashkar-e-Taiba	3	0	1.1%	0%
<i>*Where individuals changed allegiances or were found to hold multiple allegiances, these were split out and included in each individual category.</i>				
Non-Proscribed Terrorist Organisations in Australia as at 14AUG2021				
	Male	Female	Percentage	
			Male	Female
Including: Ahrar-al-Sham, al-Nusra Front, Brothers for Life, Fatah al-Islam, Free Syrian Army, Hizbut Tahrir, Jama'atul Mujahideen, Saraya el Asher, Syrian National Council and Uighur-based violent extremism.	36	1	13.7%	0.4%
Unknown Affiliation				
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Unknown affiliation	61	9	23.2%	3.4%

Table 5: Foreign or Domestic (or both) intent of Australian Foreign Fighters and Domestic Actors.

Australian Foreign Fighter and Domestic Actor Nexus (AFDAN)				
Foreign and/or Domestic Violent Extremist Intent				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Foreign	111	17	42.2%	6.5%
Domestic	66	3	25%	1.1%
Both Foreign and Domestic	22	0	8.4%	0%
Unknown	38	6	14.5%	2.3%

Table 6: Type of Activity among Australian Foreign Fighters and Domestic Actors.

Australian Foreign Fighter and Domestic Actor Nexus (AFDAN)				
Categorisation of Activity				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Terrorist	189	6	72%	2.3%
Jihadi Bride	0	13	0%	5%
Known Islamic Extremist	48	7	18.3%	2.7%

The cases presented for analysis comprise of 3 individuals from the broader dataset of 263. The details of the other 260 individuals remain available and can be provided on request. Data on each individual was captured using open-source investigative techniques and coded across 88 attributes and variables. While the precise methodology for this process has been explained in more detail in chapters 5 and 9, context is provided here to highlight that the research is both qualitative (descriptive accounts of radicalisation trajectories or behavioural indicators) and quantitative (comparative statistical data) in nature; and as result offers a nuanced understanding of radicalisation pathways. It is also important to note that many of the individuals studied formed part of a large inter-connected network primarily located in Melbourne and Sydney.

The individuals explored in this case study include:

- Neil Christopher PRAKASH (Male, 27 years of age)
- Abdul Numan HAIDER (Male, 18 years of age); and

- Alo-Bridget NAMOA (Female, 18 years of age).

The table below outlines their stated or acted-upon intent, their status and if they were self-radicalised or not:

Table 7: Radicalisation, arrest and status of violent Islamists case studied.

Case studies presented:					
	Foreign Fighter	Domestic Actor	Charged/ Arrest (Including warrant)	Killed committing an act of terrorism	Self-Radicalised
Neil Christopher PRAKASH					
Abdul Numan HAIDER					
Alo-Bridget NAMOA					

7.2.1 Limitations

As has been discussed in the methodology section of this thesis, there are limitations in the research design that must be acknowledged. For the purposes of the case studies presented in this section, impacts on data collation included the amount of information available via open-sources, the reliability of OSINT and a small case-study sample size.

7.3 Neil Christopher PRAKASH aka Abu Khaled al-Cambodi

Neil Christopher PRAKASH'S (PRAKASH) radicalisation trajectory and subsequent terrorism are known from a combination of first-person disclosures (via social media and interactions with the media), investigative journalism, academic studies, and public Government statements. By aggregating this information, a detailed understanding of PRAKASH'S history, radicalisation and terrorism can be understood.

7.3.1 Early Life

PRAKASH was born to parents of Fijian-Cambodian heritage who had migrated to Australia before his birth. His father left the family shortly after PRAKASH was born. During his childhood, PRAKASH'S mother was acutely mentally ill with schizophrenia, and he eventually moved in with another family, spending his formative years living in their garage. Although PRAKASH had cousins living nearby, his family shunned him for his dark complexion. An aspiring suburban rapper known as 'Kree Dafa' PRAKASH "re imagined himself" as a "real-deal, hardcore gangster." In one of his rap songs, his lyrics included [CONTENT WARNING] "I'm just an animal / Hey you calling me a saint? / Get out of my face bitch, here's my dick. Open wide and suck that shit / Yeah, slap me with it." Along with his rapper aspirations, PRAKASH also ran with gangs in Melbourne's West and South-East. PRAKASH was known to use ice, marijuana, and chrome paint. Leaving secondary school early, PRAKASH pursued an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic. A Buddhist at birth, he preferred to be called 'Chris' by his friends (Maley, 2016; Matejic, 2016a).

Embraced by "Melbourne's small Cambodian Buddhist community" and a "regular at Springvale's Buddhist Temple" PRAKASH was noted to be socially isolated by friends at the time: "his school grades were bad, he wagged constantly... He was easy prey for bullies – he was an outcast..."

everyone used to call him 'black boy' – he copped a lot" (Maley, 2016). PRAKASH'S family have described him as "timid, uncertain." A former attendee of the now defunct Al-Furqan centre remembers PRAKASH as unlike the person he has seen in ISIS videos: "he didn't know Arabic, he didn't know how to pray properly, he doesn't know the religion properly." Another former centre acquaintance agreed, noting that it was exactly his lack of Arabic and understanding of Islam that "would have made him an ideal candidate for ISIS, which exploits both the zeal and ignorance of converts... he's in his video reading the Arabic books – but he can't read Arabic. He's praying with a gun in the mosque." Both men testified PRAKASH had radicalised their friend, Abdul Numan HAIDER in the Coronial Inquest into HAIDER'S death (Le Grand, 2016).

A former gang-associate of PRAKASH'S provided an account of his teenage years to investigative journalist Paul Maley in 2016. The friend stated that PRAKASH would "see his dad in the street around Springvale (the suburb where they both lived) although the two would never acknowledge each other – he didn't want nothing to do with him." Providing additional insight into PRAKASH'S relationship with his mother, PRAKASH'S gang-associate noted how close they were. "Debilitated by her mental illness and speaking no English, as soon as she called (PRAKASH) would be in the car and gone" (Maley, 2016).

7.3.2 Radicalisation

It is worthy of note that at some point during his teenage years, PRAKASH took a trip to Cambodia according to his former gang-associates. Reportedly feeling "disgusted with the commercialisation of Buddhism" PRAKASH had begun to question some of the faith's beliefs, such as reincarnation. One of PRAKASH'S closest gang-associates, Halligan, had already converted to Islam in 2011. By 2012 PRAKASH had called Halligan

and told him that he too wanted to become a Muslim. Together with another friend, they set off for Dandenong Mosque so that PRAKASH could “take the Shahada, the Muslim pledge of faith” and convert. In a sliding-doors moment, the trio’s car broke down and they missed the prayer session at Dandenong Mosque. The group subsequently sought out a later session at Springers Leisure Centre where radical cleric Harun MEHICEVIC was leading prayers. MEHICEVIC also led Springvale’s notorious Al-Furqan Islamic Centre which has since been shut-down. PRAKASH converted on that Friday evening amongst some of Melbourne’s most-extreme men and subsequently became a fixture at the Al-Furqan Centre. A year later, he was in Syria. Halligan described PRAKASH’S conversion to Islam as “an intense experience for the youngster: he was weeping and making these strange sounds and his body was shaking” (Maley, 2016; Matejic, 2016a; Safi & Karp, 2016). Maley (2016) describes the young group’s seeking out a later prayer session as a “fateful decision... if PRAKASH had made it to Dandenong Mosque, he might have consummated his new-found life within Islam’s vast community of moderates” (Maley, 2016).

7.3.3 Online behaviours

PRAKASH had a long history of using social media to communicate with other violent Islamists – both at home in Australia and abroad (Li, 2016; Maley & Schliebs, 2016). He was also known to use encrypted messaging apps (Counter Extremism Project, 2016a; Maley & Schliebs, 2016) and was a prolific Twitter user. He called for a terrorist attack on Australia and doxed almost 1,500 British Foreign Office and United States Military personnel by publishing a spreadsheet that included their names, addresses and passwords (Counter Extremism Project, 2018a).

It is clear PRAKASH also took a keen interest in the media coverage about him. Sydney-based investigative journalist Paul Maley, covering PRAKASH

during his halcyon days with ISIS, discovered in August 2016 that PRAKASH (using an alias) had tried to crowdsource his murder online: “my picture was uploaded to an ISIS Twitter account along with the message – Does anyone know where this guy lives in Sydney Australia? We’d like to pay him a friendly visit.” Maley described PRAKASH’S Twitter account as “aloof...opining and conspiring.” This death threat wasn’t Maley’s first – Victorian Counter Terrorism Police had previously, urgently, advised him and a colleague that they were the subject of a ‘kill order’ – PRAKASH had instructed one of his supporters in Australia to behead them as revenge for their media articles (Maley, 2016).

7.3.4 Terrorism

PRAKASH left for Syria in 2013, joining ISIS. He quickly went from posting on social media to actively playing a part in producing TVEC, appearing in several ISIS propaganda videos and magazines. PRAKASH’s rise within the terrorist organisation saw him become a senior recruiter and one of its most prominent Western propagandists. As a recruiter, PRAKASH influenced the radicalisation of other Australians including Zakariah RAAD, Sevdet BESIM, Farhad JABAR and Abdul Numan HAIDER. PRAKASH was involved in the planning of the 2015 ANZAC Day plot in Melbourne, to behead or run down a Police Officer in a vehicle during the ceremony. PRAKASH was also involved in assisting another would-be Australian terrorist in obtaining bomb-making instructions. PRAKASH threatened to behead the national security editor of the Australian newspaper after being named in the media, and from Syria, delivered bomb-hoax threats to Etihad Airlines, Lufthansa Airways, and Turkish Airlines (Counter Extremism Project, 2018a; Matejic, 2016a; Safi & Karp, 2016).

As a propagandist, using the nom-de-plume Abu Khaled al-Cambodi (a nod to his Cambodian heritage) PRAKASH featured in several videos, urging

Muslims in Australia to attack “non-believers” (Maley & Schliebs, 2016). Terrorism expert Professor Greg Barton noted in May 2016 – when it was reported PRAKASH had died in an airstrike – that he was “the last known high-profile link between the Syria-Iraqi battlefield and the extremist networks in Sydney and Melbourne” (Wroe, 2016). Eye-witness accounts at the time had also placed PRAKASH in Mosul where he “acted as a supervisor for the terror group’s medieval punishments” (Bachelard, 2017).

The Australian Government, branding him “the most dangerous Australian” a known fighter with ISIS, issued a warrant for his arrest in 2015. For a time, it was thought he had died in an airstrike in Iraq, however, by November 2016 it was announced that he had been arrested in Turkey while trying to return to Syria. Turkey has subsequently rejected Australia’s extradition request and he remains in a Turkish prison (Counter Extremism Project, 2018a).

7.3.5 Prakash’s Nudge towards violent extremism

Unpicking the choice architecture and nudges from PRAKASH’S radicalisation is perhaps best summed by PRAKASH himself: “The media has portrayed that we came here, that we’re social outcasts, that we had nobody, that we had to turn to Islam because we were troublemakers in the past, but this is far from reality” (Maley, 2016).

Using the radicalisation cascade framework set out in chapter 5; PRAKASH’S radicalisation trajectory towards violent extremism can be seen as follows:

7.3.5.1 Tier 1: Pre-suasion

PRAKASH's challenging childhood, social isolation, his experience of schoolyard bullying and being shunned by his family; as well as his estrangement from his father are all cognitive opening events in their own right. By the time he was running with gangs as a teenager, PRAKASH was already displaying significance-seeking behaviours. Gang-membership afforded him status and belonging, while his aspiring career as a rapper can be viewed as an attempt to become well-known. In observing his gang-associate become a Muslim, and then going on follow his lead, it can be argued that PRAKASH had a history of being influenced by others towards in-group situations.

From an Islamic extremist perspective, PRAKASH represented a low-cost but potentially high-yield prospect to potential in-group influencers. Already self-selecting by converting to Islam of his own volition, he was embraced into Islam within an extremist setting instead of a moderate one (seemingly by happenstance) likely influenced his view of the religion significantly. As described in chapter 5 – “the culmination of such events and personal qualities – particularly around having a history of overt significance seeking and an underlying yearning for belonging, acceptance and meaning” – signals to a recruiter that PRAKASH has the capability to be led, radicalised and become actively engaged in acts of violent extremism.

The information cascades his new, extremist, in-group formed around him in this early stages-built rapport and created personal bonds almost immediately. The cognitive impact the act of conversion had on him cannot be underestimated particularly given his gang-associate's recollection of the visceral experience PRAKASH had at the time. That he may have been a willing participant should also be considered: although his conversion to Islam at an extremist prayer session occurring by happenstance raises questions of overt, intent. Circumstantially, PRAKASH found himself quickly

enveloped in an availability cascade that catered to all his needs. PRAKASH'S known frequency at the Al Furqan Centre highlights the effectiveness of his new-ingroup in influencing how he spent his time and with who.

PRAKASH challenges in life resulted in him not being a risky prospect; but rather, a sure bet.

7.3.5.2 Tier 2: Sense-Making

While at Al Furqan there is no doubt that PRAKASH would have been exposed to a range of TVEC – from in-person sermons to extremely violent videos, audio and magazines. Shop lettering adorning the front of the centre in 2015, before its closure, specifically made mention of the “multimedia” available within and former Al Furqan member Adnan Karebegovic was arrested in 2012 for possessing a'l-Qa'eda's Inspire magazines (Safi, 2015a; Stewart, 2012).

The sharing of TVEC in in-group settings performs, as referenced in chapter 5, an operant conditioning role that services as a social learning framework whereby extreme belief is acquired, encouraged and maintained by the in-group. PRAKASH had already demonstrated channelled attention towards the in-group by this stage and without the external support structures available to him that other young men his age may have access to, would have been receptive to both the sense of comradery the in-group provided and the availability cascade that had formed around him. At this tier of the radicalisation process, the prospect (PRAKASH) is not only learning reward-seeking behaviours but also being assessed for commitment to the cause by the recruiter. Although the Al Furqan Centre had a resident radical cleric in Harun MEHICEVIC, the in-group PRAKASH became a part of included violent Islamists, including Abdul Numan HAIDER who would go to stab two

police officers in Melbourne and Sevdet Besim who was charged with conspiracy to commit acts in preparation for terrorism (Calligeros, 2015a). Due to previous raids on the Centre by Police in 2012 (Stewart, 2012) the groups' operational security was heightened, making the assessment of potential prospects an important part of assessing risk to the group. As PRAKASH was already relatively socially isolated, lacking external influence and receptive to the in-group, he would have again been deemed low or no risk, and amenable to radicalisation.

7.3.5.3 Tier 3: Normalising Extremism

PRAKASH, at this tier of the radicalisation process, moved from prospect to recruit; representing a future pay-off for the in-group and broader ideological movement. Still remaining relatively low-cost, within the availability cascade PRAKASH'S attention also began being shifted from informational outcomes to reputational concerns.

Given PRAKASH had previously experienced cognitive opening events before becoming a Muslim and had such a visceral experience on conversion, the choice architecture the in-group supported within the availability cascade to shift him from extremist to violent extremist was likely framed against the then establishment of the Caliphate by ISIS and how devout followers were leaving Australia to join them in Syria and Iraq. The foreign fighter phenomenon was attracting a great deal of mainstream news media in Australia at the time of PRAKASH'S radicalisation (Williams, 2016), providing ample context for his recruiter and/or in-group to frame collective grievances and injustices against Muslims towards mobilisation. ISIS's publications and media provided in-groups with additional support – particularly in the framing of mobilisation as both an obligation and a means to attaining significance. PRAKASH, already having demonstrated a history of significance-seeking behaviours, would have presented little resistance

to these types of ideas. His prior gang membership also afforded him some exposure to the use of violence as a mechanism for establishing control and superiority. That the in-group framed extreme violence interwoven with sacred values and the need for religious piety (as evidenced in his videos) created a never-ending feedback loop within the availability cascade: with both external (such as mainstream media) and internal narratives reinforcing the in-groups narratives and objectives. There would have been very little need for the in-group to prime PRAKASH against perceptions of insignificance: he had personal experiences (such as being bullied, shunned by his family, and rejected by his father) that he could readily draw upon.

7.3.5.4 Tier 4: Threshold

This is the tier at which PRAKASH left his Al Furqan in-group to join ISIS.

By creating pathways that lead to a payoff for the in-group (PRAKASH successfully transitioning to an active violent Islamist) those radicalising PRAKASH at the Al Furqan Centre only needed to correlate the value of extreme violence with the desired action space (violent jihad) to progress PRAKASH through a narrow choice architecture framework. For PRAKASH this framework would have been limited to two choices: either to commit an act of terrorism domestically or leave Australia to join ISIS's Caliphate.

The payoffs for the Al Furqan in-group in having PRAKASH join ISIS overseas were demonstrably higher: foreign violent Islamists hold significant propaganda value which can act as a catalyst for the radicalisation of other susceptible individuals locally. The perceived success of local- violent Islamists in the Caliphate also provided recruiters and their followers with an evidence base that supports and validates significance-seeking behaviours, sacred beliefs and other held-out rewards such as martyrdom. Through their individual violent Islamist social media profiles

to ISIS media, magazines, videos, mainstream media coverage and obituaries, this content when aggregated provides a constant flow of information into The Radicalisation Cascade availability cascade. As a Westerner, PRAKASH also held higher propaganda value to ISIS in Syria.

The payoffs for the Al Furqan in-group were also more likely (at the time) to be successful if PRAKASH joined ISIS abroad in comparison to the risky prospect of him being able to successfully commit a terrorist attack in Australia on a scale that would garner the same amount of propaganda of the deed value. Additionally, the Al Furqan in-group also stood to gain more credibility within the broader Islamic extremist network from PRAKASH'S international successes as a violent Islamist. In this respect, their significance-seeking choice architecture frameworks - in cultivating susceptible prospects and successfully radicalising him - were intrinsically tied to their ability to commit violent Islamists to ISIS's cause in the Caliphate.¹²¹ That others in the Al Furqan group - and in the Australian extremist network more broadly - had already left for the Caliphate or had their plans thwarted by government interventions (such as the cancellation of their passport) would have served as a catalyst for the in-group to hustle PRAKASH towards this particular action bias. This is consistent with Al Qa'idy's (2010) recruitment handbook, which leaves no option for recruiter or facilitator disengagement with their prospect at this tier: to Al Furqan, PRAKASH was a sunk cost that represented better value abroad than at home.

The Al Furqan in-group, in framing future gains through a hyperbolic discounting bias, used a default choice framework to deliver the reward of significance to PRAKASH. The particular significance of being a foreign fighter, instead of a domestic attacker, would have been clear to PRAKASH.

¹²¹ Members of the Al Furqan Centre was linked to numerous international and domestic terrorist plots and attacks. Most notably, of those who went on to attempt a domestic terrorist attack, many did so because they were unable to leave Australia due to the government cancelling their passport (Calligeros, 2015a).

Significant media attention was being given to Australians joining ISIS abroad at the time of PRAKASH'S radicalisation. In contrast, there had been no attempted or actual Islamic extremist terrorist attacks in Australia since the previous decade when Abdul Nacer BENBRIKA'S al-Qaeda inspired terrorist cells plots were foiled by Police in 2005 (Matejic, 2016a).

Against a cognitive backdrop of PRAKASH'S personal experiences with insignificance and the overt celebration of Australian men joining ISIS in the Caliphate; PRAKASH'S decision (and capability – he still retained a passport unlike some of his Al Furqan counterparts) to leave Australia was an entirely expected high-yield outcome of his radicalisation.

It would be too simplistic to categorise PRAKASH under expected utility theory as representing an uncertain payoff because success to the in-group is sequential rather than binary. Up until his transition from prospect to recruit was complete, PRAKASH would have represented an uncertain payoff. But once he moved beyond this point, so long as he retained an action bias, any activity that delivered terrorist intent would have been viewed by the in-group on a spectrum of success. Even discovery and arrest at the Australia airport as he left would have been viewed as a success: in jail, he would have had the opportunity to radicalise others. Protracted media coverage of his arrest, court appearances and eventual trial would have also served a purpose: to fuel the grievance narrative among other prospects the in-group was cultivating.

7.3.5.5 Tier 5: Stronghold

From his ISIS stronghold in Syria, PRAKASH'S increased availability to perform violent jihad is observed at this stage. Being in the Caliphate and surrounded by like-minded enablers, it would have been near impossible for PRAKASH to avoid succumbing to the availability heuristic. Being in a

perpetual-motion nudge environment would have reinforced in-group behaviours, beliefs and objectives and effectively negated any uncertainty. PRAKASH was no longer talking or thinking about doing violent jihad, he was living it. This manifested in two ways: (1) his personal violent jihad; and (2) his incitement and support of others to commit violent jihad.

As part of his personal violent jihad, PRAKASH maintained extensive social media and online accounts. From Twitter to Facebook, Askbook (a social media site) and encrypted messaging apps Surespot, Telegram, Wickr and Jitsi, PRAKASH used these communications technologies to recruit others. He did this by “answering questions about his supposed daily life, propagating extremist and violent interpretations of religious texts and even flirting with female recruits.” Additionally, PRAKASH became a well-known face in foreign-violent Islamist propaganda videos produced by ISIS. Talking about everything from his life to his conversion to Islam and migrating to the Caliphate, PRAKASH used these videos and his influence on social media to encourage “Muslims, particularly in Australia to either join ISIS or execute domestic attacks.” ISIS cemented his significance to them in a 2015 guidebook, naming him as one of the terrorist organisations’ “top recruiters and facilitators” (Counter Extremism Project, 2016b).

PRAKASH’S violent jihad extended from Syria back to Australia and into the United States, where he acted as both an inciter of violent extremism and a virtual planner. On an Australian front, PRAKASH’S move from being influenced by those at Al Furqan to influencing others in the in-group saw him come full circle in the availability cascade: he was now the availability entrepreneur and choice architect to others, nudging them along the path to violent jihad. Sevdet BESIM, an associate of PRAKASH’S from the Al Furqan Centre, benefited from PRAKASH’S support while planning an ANZAC Day terrorist attack in Melbourne in 2015. PRAKASH had originally promised BESIM the names and addresses of Australian Army personnel,

but this didn't occur. Instead, together with a 14-year-old from the United Kingdom, PRAKASH was able to influence BESIM towards target selection, research, and reconnaissance. PRAKASH also encouraged BESIM to film a martyrdom video and send it to him so that he could announce BESIM'S attack and martyrdom on behalf of ISIS. BESIM never got the chance to put his plan into action, Police uncovered his plot and arrested him 4 days before ANZAC day. In another indication of influence on other Al-Furqan associates, PRAKASH also claimed in an ISIS video that he had personally known Abdul Numan HAIDER who was shot dead by Police after he had stabbed them during a meeting (Zammit Andrew, 2017). Prakash has also been linked to calls for violent Islamists based in the United States to commit lone-wolf attacks (Wroe, 2016).

Through his violent jihad, PRAKASH achieved the significance that was previously held out. While he was no longer co-dependant on Al Furqan for either support or the bestowal of significance, his continued interactions with other members demonstrated both an aptitude for radicalising others towards violence and some level of nostalgia. PRAKASH had, in Moghaddam's (2005) framework reached the fourth floor on the staircase to terrorism: having attained a broad range of successes as a violent Islamist of value to ISIS he was "given a great deal of positive attention and treated as kind of a celebrity" (Moghaddam, 2005a). "Kree Dafa (PRAKASH'S teenage rapper persona) might be dead but the reedy-voiced, sexually insecure kid who created him loved the fact that his name was finally up in lights. It was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to him" (Maley, 2016).

7.3.5.6 Tier 6: Violence

PRAKASH completed numerous acts of terrorism that brought him the significance he sought as a held-out reward. That PRAKASH did not appear

to be interested in martyrdom is perhaps reflective of his poor understanding of the theological aspects of extreme Islam and limited time spent within the religion before joining ISIS. That he valued his life more than the held-out reward of death also speaks to the significance he was experiencing in his roles as a propagandist and recruiter as his value and self-worth became intrinsically tied to in-group approval and the notoriety his activities generated. It can also be argued that to ISIS, PRAKASH was worth more to them alive as a propagandist Western revert with a significant international profile.

While PRAKASH has for all intents and purposes fulfilled the requirements of The Radicalisation Cascade model, what is interesting at this tier is that he demonstrated a delayed sense of anticipated regret once those held-out rewards dissipated. Arrested in Turkey in October 2016, PRAKASH had been caught trying to enter Syria (Counter Extremism Project, 2018a). The Australian Government subsequently stripped him of his Australian citizenship in 2018 (Whinnett, 2018) although it remains unclear if PRAKASH actually holds, or is entitled to hold, Fijian citizenship via his father. Indicating to a Turkish court, where he was tried on terrorism charges, that he had no intention of returning to Australia, PRAKASH's anticipated regret appears to be focused on the circumstances of his capture rather than his stated regret for the roles he played in ISIS "under duress." PRAKASH claims to have been forced into membership with ISIS after having admitted to undertaking religious, weapons and combat training (Whinnett, 2019). However, that he was captured trying to enter Syria suggests an intention to return to the conflict, rather than to flee it. The humiliation of being captured would have quickly turned his significance as a glorified ISIS violent Islamist into that of a failure. Just as ISIS had once held him up as a celebrated foreign fighter, he was now just one of many captured violent Islamists sitting in a foreign prison. Meanwhile, the Australian Government held him up as a successfully captured terrorist.

Given his previous demonstrated behaviour of taking a keen interest in how he was being portrayed in Australian media, this turn of events would have been unwelcome.

A state of no-significance is something PRAKASH would be acutely attuned to because of the challenges he faced as a teenager and young adult. That he has found himself back in this position, and with ISIS holding out no rewards to its captured members, puts PRAKASH at risk of falling into another availability cascade. Unless he is successfully extradited to Australia and/or radicalised, which (at the time of writing) seems unlikely, or genuinely rehabilitated in Turkey (which also seems unlikely) his future beyond being an inmate in a Turkish prison or recurring foreign fighter remains uncertain.

7.4 Ahmad (Abdul) Numan HAIDER

Ahmad Numan HAIDER'S (HAIDER)¹²² radicalisation trajectory and terrorism are well documented primarily due to the publication of the Coronial Inquest into his death. Together with investigative journalism and academic literature, these accounts describe HAIDER'S life before becoming radicalised, his interest in terrorism and the weeks leading up to his death. HAIDER was killed in 2014 after launching a stabbing attack on two Police officers during a pre-arranged meeting. The Coroner's Court heard from 155 witnesses and examined over 4,000 pages of evidence. Some of the evidence was redacted or suppressed on national security grounds. Three witnesses were excused from giving evidence due to issues of "other legal proceedings" at the time or on grounds of "self-incrimination" (Olle, 2017; Staff Writers, 2015a).

7.4.1 Early Life

HAIDER was born on 18 November 1995 in Kabul, Afghanistan. The youngest of three boys, HAIDER's parents emigrated to Australia when he was seven years old fleeing persecution from the Taliban. At first, they settled in South Australia before relocating to Melbourne two years later. HAIDER, by all accounts a proficient student, finished his secondary schooling in 2013 and unlike his brothers, who went on to university, enrolled in a Certificate III TAFE¹²³ course to pursue a career as an electrician. A keen soccer player, HAIDER was known to have many friends. During his last year of secondary school, HAIDER began a romantic relationship with a girl of the same age, Jinaali, who had been born in Australia to Sri Lankan parents. Jinaali was never introduced to HAIDER'S parents due to their strong cultural beliefs that were inflexible towards

¹²² HAIDER has consistently and erroneously been referred to a 'Abdul Numan HAIDER' in media reporting, the origins of which are unclear.

¹²³ In Australia, a TAFE is a 'Technical and Further Education' institution that delivers courses that vary from practical trades (such as carpentry, childcare and electronics) to courses that assist applicants enter university programs (usually at a Bachelor level) such as justice studies and aviation related courses.

intercultural relationships. HAIDER'S romantic relationship with Jinaali ended in July 2014, although they remained in contact up until his death (Olle, 2017, paragraphs 1-7).

7.4.2 Radicalisation and Terrorism

While HAIDER'S radicalisation can be mapped over a two-year period, it's acceleration in the final months of his life was clear. During this time his family and friends noticed that he had become more interested in Islam and attended his local mosque in Hallam twice daily. HAIDER also attended the Al-Furqan Centre (Olle, 2017, paragraph 8).

In the months leading up to HAIDER'S death, his family and friends noticed a transformation: HAIDER lost interest in his apprenticeship and his love of sports. He became secretive and obsessed over issues occurring in the Middle East. HAIDER also began spending significant periods of time with a new group of friends, a mix of young men from the Al Furqan Centre, Hallam Mosque and those he had known since childhood. Some of these associates included Al Furqan Centre radical cleric Harun CAUSEVIC and Sevdet BESIM. HAIDER'S parents were so concerned about some of his new friends that they sought assistance from their Imam at Hallam Mosque. HAIDER'S girlfriend Jinaali also noticed "dramatic changes" in his behaviour, leading to their relationship breaking down in July 2014 (Olle, 2017, paragraphs 9 - 11 and 14).

Concurrently, also in July 2014, HAIDER'S father - in an attempt to remove his son from the influence of his associates and provide him with a more moderate lifestyle - planned an overseas holiday. Together with HAIDER'S mother, they would travel to Europe together and visit Afghanistan. HAIDER's father remarked in the coronial inquest that "part of the reason for the trip was to find a wife for" him. HAIDER'S passport, however, had

nearly expired and so on 29 July 2014, he made an application for a new one, which would have been his first adult passport. With plans to fly out of Australia the following week, HAIDER followed up with the Australian Passport Office on 31 July 2014. He was told that they had received his application but that it was “on hold for an unknown reason.” Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) officers visited HAIDER and his father at home on 31 July 2014 discussing “his passport application, his travel plans and told him he should stay away from the Al Furqan Centre” and encouraged him to “stay at his local mosque.” The following day, on 1 August 2014 the Australian Passport Office advised HAIDER that “his application was on hold for 28 days, pending an assessment by a competent authority (ASIO)” (Olle, 2017, paragraphs 15-19).

In the coronial inquest into his death, HAIDER’S family described him in the weeks and months prior to his attack and death as “frustrated by his situation including the pressures at home, his failed relationship, his inability to obtain information about his passport and his awareness that authorities had an interest in him (Olle, 2017, paragraph 184).”

To best understand HAIDER’S rapid acceleration towards committing an act of terrorism from these events, the following timeline has been constructed:

June 2014 HAIDER came to the notice of Australian law enforcement agencies in June 2014. Concerned that he posed a risk to national security and the then Prime Minister of Australia, ASIO began “monitoring his movements and communications” (Olle, 2017, paragraph 13).

29 July 2014 HAIDER applies for a new, adult, Australian Passport (Olle, 2017, paragraph 16).

31 July 2014 HAIDER makes enquiries with the Australian Passport Office as to the status of his application. He is told they have received it, but it is on hold. They cannot tell him why it is on hold (Olle, 2017, paragraph 17).

31 July 2014 ASIO Officers visit HAIDER at home. His father is present during this visit and they discuss his passport application and try to dissuade him from further association with the Al Furqan Centre (Olle, 2017, paragraph 18).

1 August 2014 The Australian Passport Office advise HAIDER that his application is on hold for 28 days while ASIO assess it (Olle, 2017, paragraph 19).

23 August 2014 HAIDER, telling a friend he was going to start dealing in cannabis and needed weapons for protection, asks about buying knives and a taser. HAIDER showed particular interest in tasers that resembled an iPhone. HAIDER'S friend, surprised by the request, tells him "Not to do anything stupid" (Olle, 2017, paragraph 20).

Late August/ early September

Both HAIDER and his father contact the Australian Passport Office to try and find out about the status of his passport application (Olle, 2017, paragraph 21).

10 September 2014

HAIDER accidentally stabs his friend in the hand with a knife. He takes him to hospital but the pair leave before

his friend could receive treatment (Olle, 2017, paragraph 22).

12-14 September 2014

“Bank and phone records indicate HAIDER travelled to Sydney by car and spent time in the Bankstown area, possibly visiting an Islamic centre which has identified links to extremist views.” The Coroner, in his inquest report, notes the likelihood that HAIDER met with “ISIS recruiters or people who encouraged him to commit politically motivated violence” (Olle, 2017, paragraphs 23 and 189).

16 September 2014

HAIDER is informed that ASIO has requested that his passport be withheld to prevent him engaging in “conduct that might prejudice the security of Australia or a foreign country” (Olle, 2017, paragraph 24).

During this time HAIDER believed he was being followed by ASIO and that he wasn’t sure if he could see a friend after exam time because “who knows if I will be alive or what?” (Olle, 2017, paragraphs 25 and 26).

17 September 2014

HAIDER contacts ASIO in an attempt to find out why his passport was cancelled (Olle, 2017, paragraph 27).

17/18 September 2014

HAIDER visits Dandenong Plaza Shopping Centre where he shows a retailer the Islamic Flag he had with him and

“told him he was angry about having his passport taken, and that he needed it to travel to Afghanistan to find a wife” (Olle, 2017, paragraph 27).

18 September 2014

Police execute large scale counterterrorism raids in Brisbane and Sydney. These raids garnered significant media attention.

HAIDER returned to Dandenong Plaza Shopping Centre with a friend and his ex-girlfriend Jinaali. “While walking near a group of police HAIDER produced a Shahada flag, waving it as he passed the police.”

The police officers present spoke with HAIDER who stated “I’m not going to blow up the shopping centre today... I’ve got nothing against you personally, it’s against your government and Australia. You will pay for what happened in Sydney and Brisbane today.” Jinaali made a video recording of the incident on her iPhone, which HAIDER told her to delete. He also instructed her to “destroy” a book he had left with her for safe keeping from his recent trip to Sydney.

1713hrs: HAIDER called an unknown male and stated, “the police did not even search me... if I’d had a knife, I would’ve stabbed ‘em.”

1947hrs: HAIDER calls an associate requesting the knife he had lent to him be returned.
Later that evening HAIDER updated his Facebook profile picture to one of him “wearing army camouflage and a balaclava and holding the Shahada flag.” Comments from

friends were met with responses from HAIDER including “the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and ASIO being dogs who are declaring war on Islam and Muslims ” (Olle, 2017, paragraphs 28 - 34).

19 September 2014

HAIDER was observed practising street dawah, handing out “leaflets about Islam at the Dandenong Hub.” He later made another telephone enquiry – this time in code – about obtaining a taser that looked like an iPhone (Olle, 2017, paragraph 36).

20 September 2014

A fatwa was issued by the spiritual leader of ISIS “calling upon followers to target the Australian government or the public. It was widely reported via the mainstream media and invited followers to kill in any manner or way” (Olle, 2017, paragraph 37).

21 September 2014

HAIDER expresses to an associate in text messages that “he might be next” referring to the counterterrorism raids; and separately his disgust at reports of Muslim women in hijabs being assaulted in Melbourne the day before.

HAIDER bought two knives from a disposals store, along with a map of Wilsons Promontory (Olle, 2017, paragraph 38 and 39).

22 September 2014

HAIDER receives a letter from the Australian Passport Office telling him his passport has been officially cancelled (Olle, 2017, paragraph 40).

The day of HAIDER'S attack and death:

23 September 2014

HAIDER "drove to the airport with an associate who was believed to be leaving to fight overseas." It is likely this associate was Irfaan HUSSEIN¹²⁴, an enduring school friend and fellow member of the Al Furqan Centre.

HAIDER rings the Australian Passport Office asking if he can obtain a refund for his passport application.

HAIDER "then spent the afternoon with a number of friends in Warbuton where they collected mountain spring water and then went to a local restaurant around 1720hrs."

1715hrs: Police visit the HAIDER family home to speak with him, however, he is still out with his friends. They discuss his activities and their concerns with his family. The Police officers then searched HAIDER'S bedroom with the family's consent.

1815hrs: HAIDER calls home shortly after the Police depart and his mother tells him to come home. He remarks to his friends before leaving them that he "thought the AFP were at his

¹²⁴ This conclusion has been drawn based on the timeframe in which HUSSEIN is known to have left Australia, his known, enduring, close friendship with HAIDER (including photographic evidence of the two together) and HUSSEIN'S known activities as a foreign fighter. HUSSEIN was killed in 2015. The cause of his death is contested: some reports state he was beheaded by ISIS for wanting to return to Australia while other reports state he was killed by a bomb blast (Minear & Dowling, 2015; Mitchell, 2016; Zammit Andrew, 2017).

house." Upon returning home and learning that the Police had searched his bedroom HAIDER became "upset and agitated and left the house again shortly afterwards."

1855hrs: HAIDER phones his friend, telling him "the dogs came to my house, searched my house, my stupid parents let them, they gave them everything." They agree to meet at Hungry Jacks. This friend would later go on to tell HAIDER that he had brought the Police attention "on himself and they talked about him posting a photo on Facebook dressed as a terrorist."

1902hrs: Police ring HAIDER and invite him to the Police Station to talk about the incident at Dandenong Shopping Centre Plaza. HAIDER takes the mobile phone number the Police Officer offers and shortly thereafter calls him back telling him he would prefer to meet at Hungry Jacks. The Police Officer declines to meet him there. HAIDER then hangs up to think things over.

1915hrs: HAIDER rings a different Police Officer to ask if "he was one of the ones who searched his room?" which the Officer confirms. HAIDER asks to meet at Hungry Jack's, but the Officer declines.

1926hrs: HAIDER calls the same Police Officer again telling him he "would meet him in 15 minutes outside the Endeavour Hills Police Station." The Police Officer agrees.

1930hrs: HAIDER drives his mother's car into the Endeavour Hills Police Station car park.

- 1932hrs: HAIDER attempts to facetime a male associate but the call was cancelled before it could connect.
- 1933hrs: HAIDER, arriving at the Police Station much sooner than the 15 minutes he had earlier indicated to Police, rings to tell the Officer he had arrived.
- 1935hrs: Two Police Officers leave the Police Station and find HAIDER sitting on the bonnet of his mother's car. When the officers were about 20 metres away, HAIDER begins to walk towards the officers "with his right hand in his pocket and his left hand by his side." HAIDER shook both officers' hands. One of the Police Officers asks HAIDER to empty his pockets as they needed to search him.

At this point:

"HAIDER pulled out a (6-8cm) knife and lunged towards one of the officers... stabbing him in the arm." The officer falls to the ground after losing his footing. HAIDER then approaches the other officer, who is inspecting HAIDER'S car. The officer is "stabbed several times causing him to fall over. HAIDER crouched over him and continued to stab him." The officer's partner, realising his colleague is in a potentially life-threatening situation, "drew his weapon and fired one shot, which hit HAIDER in the head killing him instantly. He was 18 years old (Olle, 2017, paragraphs 42 - 56, 59 and 106, 108, 112, 113, 114, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123 and 189).

The coronial inquest into HAIDER'S death found that from the time Police left the station at 1935hrs, the attack took place within seconds: with only

approximately 53 seconds elapsing before one of the officers returned, injured, to raise the alarm and seek medical assistance. Further, examination of HAIDER'S body at the crime scene revealed that in addition to the knife he had used to stab the officers, he was in possession of another knife "tucked into the right front waistband of his pants" an iPhone, wallet and Black Flag (Olle, 2017, paragraphs 130 and 133).

7.4.3 Online behaviours

"In the months before his death" HAIDER had been "accessing violent images and videos online including scenes of graphic terrorist violence and took a very close interest in matters relating to the ISIS and events in the Middle East" (Olle, 2017, paragraph 168).

Five days before HAIDER'S attack, ASIO met with Police to "provide them with intelligence." While HAIDER had "shown interest in obtaining a balaclava and a large and small knife" (and they believed he had been successful in acquiring them) ASIO officers also advised Police that he had made "Internet searches of the Holsworthy Army Base¹²⁵, 'home-made suppressor', 'firecrackers wrapped in metal sheet' and the Prime Minister's schedule. He had also told an associate he would 'do it soon'" (Olle, 2017, paragraph 192).

At the time of HAIDER'S death, a crime scene examination located HAIDER'S iPhone which underwent a digital forensic examination. It found that in the two days immediately leading up to HAIDER'S attack the "phone had been used to access a substantial number of websites inciting violent jihad and martyrdom, extremist views, radicalised Islamic ideology, graphic material of executions and beheadings, recruitment propaganda for ISIS and their soldiers depicted dying in triumph and glory." One video, accessed

¹²⁵ The Holsworthy Army Base in Sydney is the location of a thwarted terrorist plot inspired by al-Shabaab in 2009.

on 21 September 2014, was from ISIS “recruiting young men to perform ‘jihad’ and contained graphic instructional content on how to use weaponry to kill and maim non-believers. The video also depicts images of deceased men said to have achieved martyrdom.” Forensic analysis of the iPhone also found that HAIDER had searched Google for information on ISIS and political figures (Olle, 2017, paragraphs 134 -136).

7.4.4 Haider’s Nudge towards violent extremism

HAIDER’S trajectory towards violent extremism was largely influenced by his radical peers, HAIDER’S susceptibility towards their beliefs came at a time in his young-adult life when he was experiencing a range of, normal, teenage situations. These included the breakdown of his first romantic relationship, his transition from secondary schooling to an apprenticeship and attempts to forge his own path from within the confines of a culturally conservative family. HAIDER’S situation was not unique, with similar indicators being present in other studies of radicalised children of immigrants in Australia (Cherney, 2020). While HAIDER acted alone, he “cannot be considered to have radicalised alone” (Harris-Hogan & Barrelle, 2018a).

Using the radicalisation cascade framework set out in chapter 5; HAIDER’S trajectory towards radicalism and violent extremism can be seen as a rapid spiral leveraging a distinct bias towards action. While the following radicalisation cascade is set out within the framework outlined in Chapter 5, it is important to note the timeframes highlighted at the beginning of each tier. That such clear timeframes can be observed in HAIDER’S case is the result of detailed coronial inquest findings being publicly available. With the additional insight these timeframes afford, it is clear that HAIDER progressively spent less time in each successive radicalisation tier by one-half of each previous interval. This compression of time, while not unique

to ISIS recruits, does compress Al Qa'idy's (2010) recruitment manual in ways that perhaps he could not have anticipated at the time of writing. Although his recruitment manual was revised by ISIS, they appear to have given little thought to his stated timeframes, preferring perhaps to capitalise on a more organic radicalisation trajectory. While this is in comparison to Al Qa'idy's (2010) work for al-Qaeda, the differences between the two terrorist groups may also explain the differences in perceptions of time, particularly as al-Qaeda was pre-social media (where TVEC dissemination and therefore consumption was reliant on physical possession of the recruitment aid) in comparison to ISIS's use of the internet as their TVEC conduit and library. These observations also align with the attention spans of recruits in channelled situations, with ISIS again reaping the benefits of the internet in being able to provide content-on-demand and cultivating shorter attention spans among its users due to the rigidity around content lengths on networks.

As a result, HAIDER's radicalisation trajectory can be observed as follows:

7.4.4.1 Tier 1: Pre-suasion

Timeline: prior to June 2014.

HAIDER was known to frequent the Al Furqan Centre in the year before his death. At the Centre, he formed part of a broader network of young Muslim men interested in extreme Islam and acts of violent extremism. HAIDER and terrorist Neil PRAKASH knew each other from the centre (Cherney et al., 2020), with the pair also associating with Irfaan HUSSEIN,¹²⁶ Huran CAUSEVIC¹²⁷ and Sevdet BESIM (Kelly & McCarthy-Jones, 2019).¹²⁸

¹²⁶ For information on Irfaan HUSSEIN refer footnote 177.

¹²⁷ Huran CAUSEVIC was arrested alongside Sevdet BESIM as part of their ANZAC Day terrorist plot however the terrorism charges against him were dropped after he plead guilty to lesser weapons offences (Farnsworth, 2016).

¹²⁸ Sevdet BESIM in 2015 at the age of eighteen-years-old, "plotted to kill one or more Police officers in Melbourne on ANZAC Day in 2015. He received instructions from two-Syria based Australian ISIS members and a 14-year-old UK child pretending to be a significant ISIS member. The plan was to run over a police officer with a car,

Radical cleric Junaid THORNE¹²⁹ was also known to be within the group's orbit (Kelly & McCarthy-Jones, 2021; Sales et al., 2016).

As a prospect, HAIDER'S risk profile was one of discovery by authorities rather than an unwillingness to commit to violent jihad. As a risky prospect, both to himself and his already well-established in-group, HAIDER was heavily influenced by his in-group. While his choices may appear self-propelling, HAIDER was navigated through a traditional violent Islamist recruitment choice architecture framework in much the same way as any other recruit, only at a rapid pace. The pace of his radicalisation and active recruitment can also be observed to be directly tethered to the issues he faced in renewing his passport and the visits to his home by the Police.

That he fell in so easily and quickly with a group of known violent extremists – some of which he already knew socially– facilitated a quick and easy persuasion away from a previous, somewhat uninterested yet moderate inclination towards his Islamic faith. Combined with recent events in his life: the ending of his first romantic relationship and conflict with his culturally conservative parents, HAIDER'S teen angst either found or was funnelled into more extreme religious belief. The actions of his parents, while well-intentioned, may have also contributed to HAIDER'S frustrations. HAIDER'S parents, holding concerns about "some of his new associates... made determined efforts to sever ties with them" on his behalf. His mother made a "dramatic public confrontation" at the mosque while HAIDER'S father sought help from his Imam. HAIDER'S family had also observed changes in his behaviour – he lost interest in the things he had done before preferring to spend "inordinate (amounts) of time (with his) new

grab his or her gun, and start shooting." BESIM was arrested and found guilty of plotting a terrorist attack (S. Hughes & Meleagrou-hitchens, 2017).

¹²⁹ Junaid THORNE grew up in Saudi Arabia from the age of ten until he was deported with his brother in 2013. THORNE was jailed by the Saudi Government and deported back to Australia after he protested his brother's imprisonment on terrorism charges. Saudi officials alleged that his brother was found "in possession of terrorist literature"(Safi, 2015b). Formerly a Perth based radical cleric who often visited Al Furqan and whose lectures were available online, THORNE "was investigated in 2016 in relation to two 16-year-old boys who bought bayonets and were planning to behead a member of the public" (Kelly & McCarthy-Jones, 2021).

associates.” HAIDER became more secretive and “obsessed with issues in the Middle East” according to his moderate family and friends (Olle, 2017, p.4).

It is unclear if HAIDER had a primary recruiter or many availability entrepreneurs. Neil PRAKASH and Junaid THORNE both claimed to have either materially assisted or inspired him on his path to violent jihad. It is plausible he was directly influenced by either one of them or both. His other associates, all arrested for other terrorism plots after his death, may have also acted as enablers. However, the actions of Police and ASIO in affording him the significance of their (well-placed) focused attention, cannot be overlooked as an enabling factor in his pre-suasion: whatever HAIDER had believed authorities thought or knew about him became a spiralling reality within his availability cascade. Whatever TVEC and information HAIDER was exposed to at Al Furqan and presumably on his trip to Sydney (and the Police raids interstate occurring mid-radicalisation), the actions of the Police and ASIO reinforced in his mind the importance of his actions to the cause and more importantly, highlighted to him that a limited action space existed. While perhaps an unintentional by-product of successive interventions and acknowledging the operational necessity of those engagements at the time, one of the consequences of the Police and ASIO interventions was that it afforded HAIDER in-group legitimacy and bestowed significance by default. Their overt attention acted as a proof point for HAIDER’S grievances, although it can also be argued that he baited Police through his actions on and offline.

Readily engaged in issues critical to violent jihad, particularly in the Middle East, HAIDER’S anger towards his parents, the cancellation of his passport and scrutiny by authorities made him ripe for recruitment. Disenfranchised by his family – who overtly disapproved of his friends and behaviour – HAIDER’S in-group was able to quickly build reciprocity and anchor him

within their shared grievances and extreme belief structures. Rapidly progressing through tiers 1 to 3 of The Radicalisation Cascade, every action that was exerted upon HAIDER by external forces (parents and police) served to further convince him of the righteousness of his beliefs and intended actions.

7.4.4.2 Tier 2: Sense-Making

Timeline: June 2014 to July 2014.

61 days.

HAIDER made no secret of his troubles– sharing them and his associated views on Facebook and within his in-group. While his behaviour drew the attention of authorities and therefore posed a security risk to the group, for HAIDER the significance this afforded him was akin to a badge of honour. Among his in-group were young men already accustomed to police interest and in the case of the Al Furqan Centre, police raids. They were all security risks to each other’s violent ideations. Intervention from authorities not only seemed given but anticipated as a prophesied validation of their shared grievances.

Such was the operant conditioning within the Al Furqan in-group that HAIDER’S status afforded him the attention of other successful violent Islamist’s, particularly PRAKASH, who provided additional social conditioning and amplified his sense of insignificance.¹³⁰ The impact of this cannot be underestimated, both as a held-out reward and as a form of channelled attention. Such perceived favouritism also increased, at least in HAIDER’S mind, his value to the cause. In providing HAIDER with what he needed most: like-minded channelled attention, his availability

¹³⁰ HAIDER’S perceived insignificance is perhaps best viewed via his Facebook posts which often expressed out-grouped ideations about how the actions of Police and Intelligence Service staff were denigrating Muslims, and by extension, himself.

entrepreneurs – particularly those of some significance themselves – set up a self-perpetuating system of in-group belonging as a held-out reward that was bestowed.

HAIDER'S commitment to spending time with his in-group, much to the displeasure of his parents, gave those influencing him ample opportunity to reinforce their relationships with him and solidify grievances. HAIDER was a high-risk radical (potentially more so than his peers given his acceleration towards an action bias) but also a high reward. That HAIDER perceived his external support structures as insufficient for his needs speaks to three successful radicalisation outputs at this tier: (1) that his in-group had established themselves as his sole support network to the absolute exclusion of any other out-groups; (2) that those newfound bonds were more influential than those he had left behind; and (3) HAIDER'S in-group established a routine with him that centred around prayer and togetherness. Regardless of HAIDER'S perceptions of his external support network, the reality documented in the Coronial Inquest is that his family and some friends did all they could to try to dissuade him from involvement in violent extremism, even as he viewed these attempts at helping him as interference in his life. HAIDER had readily accepted his in-group and they went about reinforcing all that he had come to believe was true.

Time spent together with his in-group – under the auspices of religious devotion - also enabled shared TVEC consumption and discussion. The influence this had on him was evident. Knowing he had a limited, domestic action space to work within, he sought out and chose weapons that were immediately accessible and yet highly symbolic: knives were frequently promoted by ISIS as weapons of choice.¹³¹ Graphic videos of and

¹³¹ Knife-based terrorism (and its results) are explicitly mentioned in: Issue 3 of Dabiq (ISIS, 2014a, p.3); Issue 7 of Dabiq (ISIS, 2014, p. 37); Issue 9 of Dabiq (ISIS, 2015, p. 49 and 51); Issue 12 of Dabiq (ISIS, 2015a, p. 17 and 30); Issue 13 of Dabiq (ISIS, 2016a, p.15); Issue 14 of Dabiq (ISIS, 2016b, p.22); Issue 15 of Dabiq (ISIS, 2016a, p. 41); Issue 2 of Rumiyaah contains a feature article on how to conduct terrorism, including knife-based attacks (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2016, p. 11-13); Issue 3 of Rumiyaah (ISIS, 2016c,

instructions in their use, such as in beheadings and stabbings, were abundant and Haider watched them in preparation for his attack.

7.4.4.3 Tier 3: Normalising Extremism

Timeline: August 2014.

31 days.

HAIDER'S rapid adoption of collective grievances and concern for events in the Middle East enabled his influencers to cultivate a sense of collective insignificance, which in turn fuelled his action-bias as a means of seeking a near real-time remedy. The intersectional aspect of HAIDER'S shift into a reputational frame within the availability cascade also coincides with a shift towards revenge-like behaviours. While appearing outwardly agitated and aggressive towards those that he perceived to have put him in the situation he found himself in, HAIDER'S underlying motivations appear to be less concerned with personal significance seeking and more concerned with righting personal and shared perceived grievances. HAIDER'S personal grievances against the government, Police and ASIO were profound: they provided a proof point for the master narratives employed by ISIS to justify violent jihad. That a fatwa was issued by ISIS while HAIDER was actively radicalising, encouraging followers to "target the Australian government or the public" (Olle, 2017, paragraph 37), provided additional validation. HAIDER demonstrated a distinct lack of self-awareness of how his actions shaped the consequences he experienced, particularly with regard to Police and ASIO interest in his activities.

Together with a limited action space for him to commit his violent jihad, HAIDER at some point came to the realisation that his actions only had four

p. 3, 12 and 30); Issue 4 of Rumiyah (ISIS, 2016. p. 37); and Issue 13 of Rumiyah (ISIS Al Hayat Media Center, 2017, p.39).

possible outcomes: (1) Failure, capture, and imprisonment; (2) Failure and a dishonourable death that would not result in his martyrdom; (3) Success, capture, and imprisonment; or (4) Success and martyrdom. From his consumption of TVEC, HAIDER would have been acutely aware that not only was martyrdom the preferred outcome, but by attacking Police the likelihood of him achieving martyrdom was more higher. That he viewed Police as one of the sources of his troubles also served the purpose of driving a desire to achieve restitution. These elements of HAIDER'S radicalisation – personal circumstances that he brought to the in-group as opposed to the in-group cultivating them – may have contributed to his accelerated radicalisation timeframe. The in-group did not need to convince or influence him towards adopting ways to remedy his situation: HAIDER had already come to that conclusion himself.

As martyrdom is a major feature of this tier of radicalisation, it is important to note here that HAIDER'S plans for his attack did not seem to go beyond it. That is, he did not expect to survive his encounter with the Police. While HAIDER had remarked to an associate that 'he may not be around after exam time,' in the majority, the evidence that supports HAIDER'S intent on becoming a martyr is derived from his actions rather than his words. In dressing like a terrorist and uploading the picture to Facebook he emulated other martyrs who had come before him and who had been held up as violent jihadi role models by ISIS. His display of the shahada flag at Dandenong Plaza Shopping Centre could also be interpreted as an attention-seeking exercise on his part. On the first occasion, he showed a shop keeper his flag, perhaps assuming that they would report the incident, while on the second occasion, he deliberately and publicly displayed it while walking past Police. The Coronial Inquest also notes HAIDER stating that 'if he had had a knife with him then he would have attacked the Police' and that he was disappointed that the opportunity had eluded him.

With his in-group reasonably confident HAIDER would, before too long, commit an act of terrorism, the payoffs to those in availability entrepreneur roles would have been clear. Even a failed attempt or one that did not end in HAIDER'S martyrdom would still have energised his in-group and other violent Islamists. Within HAIDER'S in-group, others would go on to plan attacks after his death – so it is reasonable to conclude that no matter what terrorism event HAIDER delivered, it would have been an influential lever for further in-group radicalisation towards mobilisation to violent extremism.

HAIDER was committed to his violent jihad: PRAKASH and THORNE, expecting additional significance to be bestowed on them as a result aligns with Al Qa'idy's (2010) playbook, tying recruiter/availability entrepreneur success to the success of their prospect. HAIDER being a sunk-cost at this point with a limited domestic action space would not have been able to be disengaged from his plans (nor was it in PRAKASH or THORNE'S interests to have him do so) nor was there an opportunity to redirect HAIDER towards other targets. While HAIDER propelled himself along the radicalisation trajectory at pace, PRAKASH and THORNE, along with his in-group, contributed to keeping his motivation and momentum up.

Up until this point, HAIDER had spent 92 days on a radicalisation fast-track. In the following tiers that timeline becomes further compressed, effectively halving in time for each tier as he moves from fully radicalised to recruited at the conclusion of the next tier.

7.4.4.4 Tier 4: Threshold

Timeline: 1 to 14 September 2014.
14 days.

HAIDER brought to this tier an already well-established sense of grievance about both his own situation and his views of Muslim oppression by the West. In seeking options to displace the anger he felt towards those grievances, he was concurrently devising options to fight that perceived unfair treatment. HAIDER'S interest in Middle Eastern affairs in previous tiers became fully morally engaged in this one. Morally engaged violent extremists are influenced by religious doctrine to conclude that the only way to effectively address those grievances is via violent jihad. This of course, at an absolute level, is not possible. An individual violent Islamist's actions do not solve all collective grievances, but rather their actions are promoted as accumulative across the *umma* (Arabic: a community of Muslims). This enables recruiters and availability entrepreneurs to leverage the hard-easy effect among violent Islamists. By overstating the impact individual acts of violent jihad will have on the cause, violent Islamists fall victim to being overly confident in their (hard task) attack success and under-confident (easy tasks) at elements leading up to the attack. In HAIDER'S case, as he begins to reconcile how he might solve his issues via a violent jihad, the hard-easy effect becomes particularly evident as he progresses further through the remaining radicalisation cascade tiers.

HAIDER'S limited action space, in addition to his extreme religious convictions, also placed him in a binary choice setting. Inaction or disengagement did not appear to be options he considered with any seriousness. While some friends were noted to have cautioned him against doing anything foolish, by this time HAIDER had demonstrated a pattern of deceptive conduct and of ignoring advice from the out-groups he remained engaged with.

HAIDER'S inability to think beyond his frustration and anger made him overly susceptible to the effects of the availability heuristic. This occurred at both the individual and group levels. Individually, HAIDER'S reliance on

information only recently shared with him by his in-group led to what HAIDER considered good quality decisions, but which ultimately led to his death. The same over-reliance on his own perceptions of what the Police and ASIO thought of him and the actions he expected them to take, were also evident. Further, he relied on others' interpretations of the TVEC that was shared with him. The same TVEC was shared with others in the in-group by availability entrepreneurs, yet framed in ways that immediately activated HAIDER but not others. The reliance the in-group had on individual grievances, that by default could be spun towards almost any narrative of collective grievance, became particularly clear after HAIDER's death when a handful of his associates also went on to plot attacks. His in-group, keen not to dissuade him from his intent on committing violent jihad, and likely under the same influence of the availability heuristic themselves, would nor could do anything to correct this bias.

7.4.4.5 Tier 5: Stronghold

Timeline: 14 to 22 September 2014.

7 days.

There are two key aspects of HAIDER'S preparations for violent jihad that contributed to the overall picture of how his radicalisation culminated in his attack on the Police. These are:

- (a) The influence ISIS TVEC had on his preparations, and
- (b) His fixation on – and increasing availability to a particular attack target - Police and ASIO.

HAIDER'S TVEC consumption can be seen to have directly influenced the way he approached committing his attack. The coronial inquest into HAIDER'S death noted that not only did he choose knives as a weapon of

choice, but he also brought a Shahada flag and iPhone (Olle, 2017, paragraph 179). The combination of these items mimics other single-actor attacks depicted and encouraged by ISIS whereby the attacker films their victims alongside the flag for propaganda value. That HAIDER left no known martyrdom video or manifesto, suggests that he intended to either make the propaganda himself or construct the attack environment in a way that would result in the media doing so. He was shot dead by one of his victims, a Police Officer before he could do either.

HAIDER'S increasing scrutiny by Police and ASIO also led to an increasing physical availability to them. HAIDER had expressed a desire to stab Police before his attack, remarking to an associate that he 'would have stabbed the Police if he had had a knife' the day Police questioned him at the Dandenong Plaza Shopping Centre after he flew a *shahada* flag in front of them. Whether HAIDER was in fact baiting Police into close-quarters opportunities cannot be known for certain, however, his actions suggest this was likely his intent. From HAIDER'S expressed regret at missing an opportunity to stab Police at Dandenong Plaza to his trying to entice them to meet him at Hungry Jack's before his attack, demonstrates that he was situationally aware of the attention he could command in a public space and of the power dynamics in play regarding how Police might react in those same spaces. It stands to reason, given his susceptibility to the hard-easy effect, that he (again) over-estimated the perceived advantages of attempting to control environments – such as the shopping centre and Hungry Jack's - which were not in fact tactically sound.

HAIDER's susceptibility to the hard-easy effect is likely attributable to ISIS's videos which portrayed the power dynamic between attacker and victim with clear bias: the aggressor is always in control over a subservient victim who does not fight back or attempt to flee. This framing adds another heuristic into play: the simulation heuristic. In plotting an act of terrorism,

the violent Islamist must place themselves in the role of attacker by mentally picturing themselves committing the extreme acts of violence they have planned. By mentalising how they believe events will unfold they also attempt to predict how others in those scenes will behave and react. By running mental simulations HAIDER, and other violent Islamists, draw on the TVEC they have consumed to help them visual themselves in situations of glory and triumph. The convergence of the availability bias, simulation heuristic and the hard-easy effect has an additional benefit to ISIS at this point: it maximises the utility of its TVEC to assist the violent Islamist in overcoming inhibitory autonomic functions. Humans are hard-wired, instinctively, for survival which makes fantasising about a glorious attack and it's possible lethal consequences to the attacker an essential element of the radicalisation trajectory for those who, like HAIDER, will go on to commit acts of terrorism. Conceptualising themselves as the all-powerful attacker, like other forms of daydreaming or fantasy, provides emotional and neurological rewards. The violent Islamist, in visualising their attack, also imagines how they will feel, which the body responds to neurologically with adrenaline, for example. This immersive fantasy can also be seen as a religious experience that promises an even greater natural high as a held-out reward: attaining entry to Heaven and the promised pleasures that await martyrs.

The fatwa issued by ISIS, calling for Government officials to be targeted, can be seen as both a preferred target signal and leadership influenced: which raises questions about HAIDER'S self-determination. While there is no doubt HAIDER was singularly fixated on Police, he may have been influenced by the hyperbolic discount bias here as either he, or his availability entrepreneurs, realised his window for action was rapidly closing cannot be dismissed. That HAIDER'S associates went on to plot an attack specifically targeting Government personnel on a date of national significance (ANZAC Day) the following year also suggests that the in-group

had a fixation towards Police and the Military that was not entirely the result of HAIDER'S death (although it clearly contributed to it). HAIDER, having no access to Military personnel but easy access to Police may have seen this confluence of events (fatwa, individual grievances, in-group fixation due to terrorism raids and increased police interest) as a form of divine virtue signalling.

7.4.4.6 Tier 6: Violence

Timeline: 23 September 2014.

1 day.

HAIDER'S rapid move into the action space can be seen as the culmination of his violent jihadi nudge trajectory:

- (a) HAIDER clearly wanted to be seen as supporting ISIS. The purchasing of a shahada flag, dressing in violent Islamist combat attire, publishing a photo on social media and his mimicry of violent jihadi language towards Police all demonstrated a clear intention to associate himself and his actions with the terrorist group
- (b) HAIDER held deep grievances towards both the Police and ASIO for their real and perceived roles in denying him a passport, suspecting him of terrorism activities and, by extension, persecution of his beliefs
- (c) HAIDER had expressed regret at not having had the opportunity to stab the Police during his previous encounter with them. In anticipating the same regret, HAIDER ensured that on his second opportunity to engage with Police in close quarters, he came prepared; and
- (d) HAIDER, holding the intent to stab police with the knives he had in his possession, sought to remedy his personal grievances while also

fulfilling his violent jihad, to attain the rewards of in-group notoriety and bestowed significance.

HAIDER, with an over-reliance on ISIS propaganda and availability entrepreneur-led perspectives, misjudged the probability of his attack succeeding. What looks easy in a beheading or stabbing videos, is much harder in reality. Targets do not always behave in an expected fashion and, as it the case with HAIDER'S attack, do not always die because of their injuries. Point in case, at least one of HAIDER's victims fought back – and killed him.

It is worthy of note that HAIDER is not uniquely susceptible to the availability heuristic among violent Islamists. The act of killing another – or many – changes significantly depending on the methods used. For example, killing with a gun is physically easier and can be achieved at some distance. Guns are hard to obtain however in many countries, as is the case in Australia. Vehicle ramming and improvised explosive devices are equally as destructive and leave a distance between the attack and the attacker. While vehicles are easier to obtain than the components necessary for crude explosive manufacture, the distance between attack and attacker is much shorter. Rammings also require a level of preparedness and reconnaissance. Knives, however, are the most personal form of attack. Conducted in close-quarters, knife attacks require significant physicality on the part of the attacker. Unlike in TVEC videos, random targets are not subdued and tied up in preparedness for a compliant beheading. TVEC such as that produced by ISIS for example therefore attempts to overcome these challenges by depicting attacks as easily achievable.

Regardless, at the time of his terror attack, HAIDER had in his possess a Shahada flag as well as an iPhone. From the content produced by ISIS, we know that attackers often displayed this flag while gloating about their

success over the dead bodies of their victims. It stands to reason that given the presence of both the flag and an iPhone, HAIDER intended to produce some kind of propaganda but failed to fully subdue his victims and was killed before having the opportunity to do so.

7.5 Alo-Bridget NAMOA

Alo-Bridget NAMOA's radicalisation trajectory and terrorism are well documented primarily due to the publication of court reports detailing the findings of her court cases, appeals and administrative orders. Together with investigative journalism and academic literature, these accounts describe NAMOA'S life before becoming radicalised, her interest in terrorism, subsequent imprisonment, parole, re-offending, re-imprisonment and re-parole.

Of significant note in NAMOA'S radicalisation trajectory is her husband, Sameh BAYDA, who was also imprisoned on terrorism charges.¹³² The pair were found guilty in October 2018 at a trial where they were listed as co-offenders conspiring, preparing, and planning a terrorist act. NAMOA was sentenced to three years and nine months imprisonment (Justice Rares, 2019), while BAYDA was sentenced to four years imprisonment (Byrne, 2021).

While the evidence tendered in court and, as a result, news media reporting placed BAYDA as the primary instigator and offender with NAMOA framed as an invested wife, these conclusions have been made in the context of the information delivered when mounting a legal defence. Cherney et al (2020) observed that BAYDA and NAMOA "co-radicalised" (Cherney et al., 2020) with Harris-Hogan and Barelle (2018) noting their joint-arrest within the context of an intimate relationship (Harris-Hogan & Barrelle, 2018b). While BAYDA had a history of extreme-Salafist indoctrination, and he believed then that Salafism was the correct sect of Islam to follow, his violent Islamist ideation was not well developed before his relationship with NAMOA (Justice Fagan, 2019). That Court documents are, by-design the

¹³² Sameh BAYDA "grew up in a Muslim family of Lebanese background. Religious teachers at a bookstore and prayer hall taught him militant Islam from about mid-2013, when he was 15. He became more fanatical in late 2015." BAYDA was sentenced to 4 years imprisonment for "conspiring to do acts in preparation for, or planning, a terrorist act between 8 December 2015 and 25 January 2016" (Justice Fagan, 2019).

product of a well-established judicial process to determine innocence or guilt against a set of allegations, their conclusions usually only have binary outcomes: findings of guilt or innocence. Therefore, the Court, while factually accurate in considering the evidence before it in the context of the prosecution and legal defences made for both NAMOA and BAYDA, does not consider NAMOA's radicalisation beyond using it to explain her offending to determine guilt or innocence.

It must be noted that NAMOA's defence lawyers had significant ability to set a narrative agenda and control the frames in which she was portrayed. Further, there is an implicit conflict of interest between NAMOA's legal defence and her husband's. There appeared to be little conflict between the evidence presented on behalf of both defendants, with NAMOA consistently portrayed as young, gullible, and led astray by BAYDA. As NAMOA was found guilty, the Court further relied on the evidence at hand to determine her level of culpability in delivering a judicial sentence. Much of the court documentation available on NAMOA is based on legal appeals mounted by her defence challenging the charges of conspiracy laid against her in an effort to have them struck out on the basis the judge had erred in conflating her actions with BAYDA'S (Court of Criminal Appeal of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, 2021). In addition to the agenda setting and framing presented by NAMOA's legal defence, is the overtly gendered language used by her lawyers and the media. This was later reflected by academics. While the judicial system consistently referred to the pair as "co-accused" (Fagan, 2019; Justice Fagan, 2018; Justice Payne et al., 2020) NAMOA's lawyers presented her as unable to conspire as one party to a marriage citing previous case law ruling a husband and wife are as one person (Chief Justice Kiefel et al., 2020; Justice Nettle & Justice Edelman, 2020) and that "the very being of the legal existence of a woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least it is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband" (Justice Rothman, 2020). In 2016, NAMOA's lawyer also

remarked outside the court to the media that she was very happy “Her Honour appeared to adopt my submission that it was misguided loyalty that had motivated Ms Namoa, and obviously profound naivety” signalling some strategic thought behind the way in which NAMOA’s offending had been presented to the court (Peters, 2016). The media also portrayed NAMOA in a gendered context. The Daily Mail (2016) referred to NAMOA as “the teenage bride of a Sydney terror plotter” (Peters, 2016); The Daily Telegraph (2018) called NAMOA BAYDA’s “young bride”, “teen Islamic bride” and an “accused terror-bride...” (Gleeson, 2018a). Even after her conviction, reporting on NAMOA continued to be gendered: “How a Jihadi bride jailed for planning a stabbing rampage with her husband wrote chilling letters to a Muslim extremist gangster, dreaming of beheading infidels- but she was set free” headlined The Daily Mail (Ruiz, 2020).

In contrast, BAYDA was often portrayed as “too soft for alleged terror attack” by Stuff (Benny-Morrison, 2017) and headlined as “Don’t let everybody down...” in a quote taken from NAMOA by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (Calderwood, 2019). Academics have also adopted this gendered framing: Harris-Hogan and Barrelle (2018) describe NAMOA as “arrested alongside her husband” (Harris-Hogan & Barrelle, 2018b) while Cherney frames his observations on NAMOA from within the context of her romance and marriage (Cherney et al., 2020). The influence lawyers were able to exert in setting this agenda and successfully framing NAMOA as ‘just a young, misguided Muslim wife’ early in proceedings, together with the media’s broader fascination with jihadi teenage brides have all contributed to a picture of NAMOA as less culpable than her husband. Further, in a 2017 committal hearing for the pair, their defence barrister noted that their possession of thousands of images and videos of TVEC might not indicate terrorism but rather BAYDA’s interest in Islam as a scholar “with a curiosity in propaganda.” Their defence barrister also indicated that “NAMOA may have been swept up in his religious studies”

(Benny-Morrison, 2017). This again illustrates the lengths to which lawyers for the pair went, ostensibly to frame their behaviour as harmless. By being consistently framed as a co-conspirator led astray, NAMOA's legal defence was able to reduce the perception of NAMOA's culpability and therefore limit her prospects of conviction and/or imprisonment

From a radicalisation perspective, however, it appears from the evidence available that NAMOA was significantly more invested in violent jihad – or the idea of it – than her husband. This will become clearer as the radicalisation cascade considers her trajectory.

7.5.1 Life before violent extremism

NAMOA was born in Sydney to Tongan parents and attended primary school with BAYDA. NAMOA has four older brothers, an older sister, a twin brother, and a younger brother. NAMOA was raised in the Catholic faith. By her own account, NAMOA found primary school difficult and experienced learning challenges. Attending a different high school to BAYDA, her learning difficulties continued. At high school, she recalls being an angry and aggressive teenager who could not finish her education due to her behavioural problems. Leaving high school at the age of 16 after completing year nine, she suffered from "depression and symptoms of generalised anxiety disorder." NAMOA recounted to the court-appointed consulting forensic psychiatrist that she had been exposed to family violence and neighbourhood physical conflict. The Court psychiatrist's assessment was that NAMOA's cognitive function is "well below average." Apart from working in a café for two months, NAMOA has no history of employment (Justice Fagan, 2019).

NAMOA converted to Islam at around 14 and a half years of age. By her own account, she was introduced to Islam by two street preachers in 2012

and did not become a “fanatic” until mid-2015 (Justice Rares, 2019). According to testimony from a consulting forensic psychiatrist to the Court, NAMOA had a history of “mental health problems that had been present since at least 2010.” These included “depression, anxiety, emotional dysregulation, low self-esteem, low self-worth, anger issues, learning difficulties and a low level of cognitive function.” Further, the court report references NAMOA’s treatment by a clinical psychologist in 2011, 2012 and again in 2016. The consulting forensic psychiatrist to the Court concluded that these mental disturbances made NAMOA “vulnerable to being influenced by others and were also thought to be related to her conversion to Islam. Her suspected learning difficulties were thought to be manifesting in social and cognitive immaturity, with suspected deficits in consequential thinking and general executive function including problem-solving and higher order thinking” (Justice Rares, 2019).

NAMOA had a teenage romance with BAYDA from around April 2015 until late November or early December at which time they broke up. The pair had little contact between this time up until Christmas Day of 2015 at which time BAYDA reinitiated communication with NAMOA. By this time NAMOA had become interested in another man and BAYDA felt compelled to ask her to marry him on 27 December 2015 in an effort to prevent her from taking up with his romantic rival. Although seemingly hesitant to rush into a serious relationship with BAYDA, NAMOA changed her mind when he told her that “If you do not marry me, I am going to do an attack and die.” BAYDA had, since only the prior day, made plans to “carry out an extremist operation” with two other associates. BAYDA again reiterated his commitment to carry out an act of violent extremism with his associates on 29 December 2015 and that they “opposed his marriage because it would cause him to back out.” NAMOA subsequently agreed to marry him on 30 December 2015. BAYDA then “promptly arranged an Islamic marriage ceremony for that evening.” Later that evening NAMOA asked BAYDA if he

could withdraw his participation in the group's planned violent jihad, to which he said he could not. Aware that BAYDA'S attack was planned for New Year's Eve – 31 December 2015 – the pair visited the mosque together that morning. NAMOA gave evidence that "she initially attempted to talk BAYDA out of the planned attack and when this was unsuccessful, she gave him encouragement" but without admitting to any collusion. BAYDA and his associates never carried out the planned attack despite trawling the streets for potential victims and attempting to vandalise some parkland by setting it on fire with a crudely constructed Molotov cocktail, which failed to ignite properly (Justice Fagan, 2019).

The timeline in which BAYDA became interested in violent jihad appears directly linked to the timeframe in which he reinitiated communication with NAMOA on 25 December 2015. He began planning the terrorist attack on 26 December 2015, and then told NAMOA of his plans should she refuse to marry him on 27 December 2015. In his testimony, BAYDA said he had no intentions of carrying out an attack but rather that he used the fiction to "try and convince her to marry me and not the other guy." Further, BAYDA stated that he "kept up the pretence of a planned suicide attack to manipulate NAMOA, when trying to convince her to marry him... even after he had secured marriage to NAMOA he had no interest in even the limited street crime which had been planned for that night." Beyond the plan itself, and consumption of TVEC, BAYDA had not demonstrated any interest in violent jihad before 25 December 2015. Justice Fagan (2019) remarked in court documents that he accepted that "BAYDA did not intend to carry out on New Year's Even an attack of a kind likely to lead to his death" and that he found it "plausible in all of the circumstances that he (BAYDA) exaggerated to NAMOA the nature of what he was planning." As Police became aware of BAYDA'S activities and served him with weapons prohibition orders on 13 January 2016, Justice Fagan further noted that

“BAYDA made excitable phone calls to NAMOA and to his mother... illustrating his capacity for histrionics” (Justice Fagan, 2019).

NAMOA, however, continued to offer encouragement and appeared to be swept up by the idea of them being terrorists. NAMOA described her marriage to the Police as an “Islamic Bonnie and Clyde” and wrote farewell love notes to her husband in preparedness for his terrorism and martyrdom to encourage him. “I love you, don’t forget me...” one note read, while another said “I’m really proud of you and I smile every time I think about it” (BAYDA committing a terrorist attack) (Ford, 2017).

7.5.2 Court

In a report tendered to the court by a consulting forensic psychiatrist, NAMOA was described as “naïve and suggestible” and that “she could well have been taken in by false boasting from BAYDA that he was on a suicide mission.” Justice Rares noted separately that NAMOA’s conduct “at the time of her arrest” and the letters she sent from prison demonstrated “her immaturity, lack of critical judgement and previous immersion in jihadist thinking.” Justice Rares also noted in his control order (2019) that NAMOA, together with her husband “had adopted a fanatical Islamic hostility towards non-Muslims and towards Australia’s liberal democratic society in accordance with the religious instruction they had received, both directly and online.” Justice Rares further noted that that the pair’s intent to commit violent jihad arose out of a sense of “religious duty and devotion” (Justice Rares, 2019). However it is clear that NAMAO understood her legal predicament and “that she knew she would implicate them both if she were to speak of what she knew” (Gleeson, 2018a). Further, NAMOA’S history of failing to answer questions put to her by the New South Wales Crime Commission in 2016 (Peters, 2016) also signals a level of awareness of both her offending and circumstances.

NAMOA and BAYDA were “found guilty of conspiring to commit a random terror attack on non-Muslims on New Year’s Eve 2015.” Tried as co-conspirators in a trial that had the High Court of Australia established that married couples could be considered as acting together instead of single individuals, both were sentenced to terms of imprisonment (Byrne, 2021).

7.5.3 Radicalisation

NAMOA’s radicalisation appears to have occurred over the relatively short period of time that she was dating BAYDA. By her own account, her fanaticism only began in mid-2015 which coincides with the timeline of their pre-marital relationship. From the quantity of TVEC discovered by Police, the pair’s involvement in extreme Telegram channels, and NAMOA’s mid-2015 recollection of being interested in violent jihad, it is reasonable to assume that the couple had been consuming and sharing content together until the time of their arrest.

NAMOA’s reversion to Islam at a 14 and a half years-old presents as opportunistic rather than influenced by any family or personal connection with Islam. By her own account, NAMOA was influenced towards renouncing her Catholic faith and reverting to Islam by two female Muslims performing street *da’wah* (Arabic: proselytisation). Street *da’wah* is akin, in a Christian sense, to Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons’ door-knocking homes to spread the word of Jesus Christ, giving those who appear receptive to their messages free Bibles and other religious pamphlets. Street *da’wah* preachers differ in that they primarily position themselves in areas with large amounts of public foot traffic, such as shopping malls, near public transport hubs or entertainment venues. There is usually a table present where pamphlets are laid out alongside signs and banners that proclaim, for example, “I found the Prophet Jesus in the Qur’an” and “Find the true message of Jesus in the Qur’an.” Free copies of the Qur’an are available,

and one of the da'wah leaders usually has a microphone or loudspeaker to preach to those passing by. Australian Islamic extremists, particularly in Sydney, became quite prolific in attracting young adults into the religion during the early rise of ISIS and there is some evidence of the practice of da'wah being used as a gateway to extremism. Australian foreign fighter Tyler CASEY, for example, was 17 years of age when he reverted to Islam and moved to Sydney to join a street dawah movement. CASEY, and his wife Amira KARROUM, travelled to the Caliphate and were shot dead by the Free Syrian Army within days of arriving in 2014 (Shorten, 2017). Similarly, Australian foreign fighter Mohammed Ali BARYALEI was a prolific street dawah preacher before moving to the Caliphate in 2013 where he was killed in October 2014 (Matejic, 2016a).

NAMOA's entry into Islam via the street dawah movement as a young teenager is perhaps more indicative of her immaturity and the cognitive challenges she faced. Justice Rares in his 2019 imposition of control orders on NAMOA described his impressions of extenuating circumstances believing "jihadism was a childish phase from which she had matured, including that she had not studied Islamic scriptures with sufficient thoroughness or understanding... and that she had been drawn into Salafi jihadist beliefs at a superficial and emotional level because that doctrine gave her a sense of belonging to something as well as a sense of purpose and a channel for expression of aggressive feelings." Justice Rares also found that she had been subject to what he called "Islamic brainwashing" (Justice Rares, 2019). It is not clear what involvement NAMOA had with the Muslim community or if she had received any formal religious education in the years before she reconnected with BAYDA. However, from court documents, it is reasonable to deduce she was engaged at some level in activities within a community having reconnected with BAYDA and met another man she was interested in marrying within that context. It is unclear how she drifted back into BAYDA's orbit, or he hers.

What is clearer is that, by her own admission, from mid-2015 she considered herself a fanatic and that this timeframe correlates with her relationship with BAYDA. The relationship provided her with a more substantia- – extreme - education in Islam. What is also clear, is that her ideation of being party to some form of violent extremism was far greater than that of BAYDA. The timing of her religious fervour and the decision to marry BAYDA because she believed she was about to become a martyr's wife also speaks more to the risky behaviours often displayed by teenagers. Harris-Hogan and Barrelle (2018) note that teenagers are "drawn to adventure, excitement and credibility" as much as they seek out "a positive sense of self and status." Further, teenagers are "biologically orientated towards their peers" and that research has shown that "almost all people who join terrorist groups have pre-existing relationships with people already engaged in the network" (Harris-Hogan & Barrelle, 2018b). NAMOA also conveyed to BAYDA her wish to have a child with him in the lead-up to his planned attack. With this in mind, together with NAMOA's cognitive challenges and overall immaturity, her radicalisation can be seen as being primarily significance-seeking in nature. However, her level of engagement and radical ideation far surpassed BAYDA's.

7.5.4 Online behaviours

Both NAMOA and BAYDA were found by Police with volumes of extremely graphic TVEC on their electronic devices. During a firearm and weapons prohibition order raid in January 2016, NAMOA was found in possession of "English language documents consistent with Islamic extremism and numerous ISIS videos" (Gleeson, 2018b). In a letter to the sentencing judge, NAMOA wrote "I acknowledge that I was a fanatic and that I've accessed a substantial amount of ISIS propaganda, as well as downloading various books and documents onto my phone" (Justice Rares, 2019).

Evidence collected by Police and presented at NAMOA's trial included "thousands of images, numerous graphic videos of executions and other deaths, and social media profiles showing the pair had adopted alternate names. NAMOA also linked BAYDA into group-chats on Telegram that gave advice to those who could not come to Sham (Syria and the Levant). When confronted by Police at their home, BAYDA instructed NAMOA to delete the messages between the pair on her phone. Police later retrieved more than 5,000 of those messages" (Staff Writers, 2018c). Based on the large quantity of TVEC discovered by Police; and that NAMOA (and BAYDA) were active on Telegram group-chats for Islamic extremists, it is reasonable to conclude that they consumed at least some of the volume of content found in their possession. Given NAMOA's lack of formal instruction in Islam, it is also reasonable to conclude that her exposure to such vast quantities of TVEC in this context influenced her understanding of Islam.

7.5.5 Terrorism

NAMOA was "found guilty of conspiring to commit a random terror attack on non-Muslims on New Year's Eve 2015" (Byrne, 2021) however this does not reflect the entirety of her offending. In addition to the offence she was found guilty of, NAMOA supported and encouraged BAYDA, was found in possession of TVEC and stored that content at the request of BAYDA along with other items including a knife and shahada flag. Her refusal to answer questions put to her by the New South Wales Crime Commission also supports a broader history of civil disobedience. The depth of her ideation is best expressed in her own words: "I want to do an Islamic Bonnie and Clyde" NAMOA texted to her husband, Police intercepts show (Deutrom, 2017). NAMOA repeated this ideation to the Police when asked about her and her husband's intentions upon downloading ISIS TVEC (Auerbach & Fife-Yeomans, 2016).

7.5.6 Namoa's nudge towards violent extremism

NAMOA's radicalisation can be seen as a combination of her age, her cognitive challenges, her immaturity, and significance-seeking behaviours. Using the radicalisation cascade framework set out in chapter 5, NAMOA's trajectory towards radicalism and violent extremism can be seen as follows:

7.5.6.1 Tier 1: Pre-suasion

Timeline: Upon reversion (from age 14 and half years old) until the early part of her relationship with BAYDA at 18 years of age.

4 - 4.5 years

NAMOA's challenging youth and adolescence primed her for developing both significance-seeking and risky decision-making behaviours. Her lack of normal peer and friendship groups appropriate to her age due to her dislocated education and lack of employment prospects contributed to a level of social isolation that predisposed her towards influence types that held out the rewards of in-group belonging. NAMOA's adoption of Islam based on the influence of street preachers is unsurprising, as becoming a Muslim provided her with a clear pathway to an in-group. Despite reverting to Islam from Catholicism at the age of 14 and half years of age, there is no indication that NAMOA received any formal religious guidance or education thereafter until she and BAYDA reconnected in mid-2015. It appears that via her pre-marital relationship with BAYDA, NAMOA's education in and understanding of Islam was formative and framed towards extreme Salafi ideology. This is consistent with BAYDA's background as an indoctrinated Salafi extremist and the timeline presented for her self-described fanaticism.

NAMOA's cognitive deficiencies must also be noted as also contributing to her situation. NAMOA's significance-seeking behaviours reflected her

overall immaturity towards building and maintaining healthy relationships with others. As a radicalisation prospect, while low-cost yet potentially high yield, NAMOA's value was limited. While she displayed qualities that would have otherwise made her a good prospect, such as fixating on TVEC, supporting violent jihad and a tendency to idolise others, her gender, singledom and status as a new revert limited the interactions she could have within the extremist community without facilitatory support. It is unclear how she overcame these barriers to reconnect with BAYDA, nor is it clear if NAMOA was invested in an in-group outside of the one BAYDA presented.

What is clear is that BAYDA essentially played the part of a recruiter in nudging NAMOA towards radicalisation and recruitment in much the same way as a recruiter would normally approach a prospect. NAMOA's religious ignorance afforded BAYDA the opportunity to shape her outlook and enabled him to position himself as an authority in this regard. NAMOA for her part, reciprocated and began demonstrating her interest in things that were important to him, such as the consumption and sourcing of TVEC. Further, NAMOA's susceptibility to the availability cascade built around her from the time of her reversion can also be viewed as participatory: as much as information was pushed towards her, NAMOA's susceptibility to it and her desire for personal status, saw her not only perpetuate the cascade but saw her increasingly seek out ways to make the effects of the cascade available to her. Inherently informational at the persuasion tier, NAMOA's susceptibility to biases such as the availability heuristic and bandwagon effect resulted in her overreliance on social cues to understand Muslim life. By virtue of her reconnection with BAYDA at the end of this tier, it is reasonable to conclude that those social cues were being delivered by him and others holding extreme religious beliefs.

7.5.6.2 Tier 2: Sense-Making

Timeline: April 2015 to November 2015
6 months

The timespan of this radicalisation tier directly correlates with NAMOA's premarital relationship with BAYDA. Evident is operant conditioning via love bombing one another into a mutual infatuation. While this could be partially attributable to their immaturity – both were 18 years of age at the time of their offending – the social rewards this behaviour bestowed upon NAMOA were likely far greater than those she had ever experienced before.

NAMOA's existence within the availability cascade during this tier consolidated her adoption of an extreme Salafi worldview. This included significant consumption of TVEC. The effect this had on her is unsurprising: the repetition of master narratives within violent jihadi content is well established. As a result, NAMOA's familiarity with the content she was consuming likely influenced her belief in and adoption of the ideology it presented. The availability heuristic and bandwagon effect are again present in her decision-making, as is the familiarity effect. At this tier, however, BAYDA as a pseudo-recruiter also became a pseudo-availability entrepreneur. BAYDA, having had his own experience of being drawn into extreme Salafism and demonstrating a clear emotional affection towards NAMOA, had no other framework to rely upon for NAMOA's formative education in Islam other than the one he had received via his own radicalising environment. BAYDA's perpetuation of this cycle is not surprising but signals that further research needs to be done to fully explore the way in which otherwise disengaged (but not deradicalised) violent extremists can inadvertently radicalise others (the suggestion being that BAYDA did not intentionally draw NAMOA into extreme Salafism with the purpose of radicalising her but drew on his own religious indoctrination as a means of conveying knowledge to her).

NAMOA and BAYDA's mutual infatuation also held influence in its own right. Noting the cyclical and repetitive nature of an availability cascade, their pair's ability to bond over their consumption of TVEC was highly influential for NAMOA. It is clear that NAMOA's reaction to TVEC was receptive as she sought out, stored and shared it with BAYDA as well as encouraged him to join her in Telegram chats with violent Islamists. Also acting as an additional, siloed, availability entrepreneur is the mutually reinforcing ideological conformity that exists within extreme Salafi groups who adopt violent jihad over other sects within the movement. Salafi jihadist content is inherently dramatic, reliant on personal testimony, and promotes a romanticised view of violent history and the exultation of martyrs. Beyond the information and/or context BAYDA offered NAMOA, the TVEC she consumed made her even more predisposed to ideas of violent jihadi grandeur. This is also not surprising given the confirmation bias in play against a backdrop of held-out rewards. To NAMOA, her receptiveness to TVEC and her ability to conform to faith-based practices were positively correlated with her feelings towards BAYDA and his in-group. Even when their pre-marital relationship ended sometime in November 2015, NAMOA continued to seek out marriage opportunities ostensibly within BAYDA's broader network.

That NAMOA continued to seek out the same types of social and in-group held-out rewards after her relationship with BAYDA ended is indicative of her preference towards remaining within the availability cascade. In seeking out the same held-out rewards from different sources, NAMOA demonstrated that she understood their value to her. No longer tethered to BAYDA however, NAMOA's loss of an availability entrepreneur – and her search for a male replacement to fulfil that role – acted as a self-reinforcing spiral within the cascade.

At this tier, NAMOA was romantically involved with a Turkish man called 'Riz' (Justice Payne et al., 2020). Upon reconnecting with NAMOA in person on 25 DEC 2021, BAYDA learned that she was seeing another Muslim man and that he had proposed marriage to her. After their conversation, BAYDA felt that his chance to win NAMOA back was vanishing.

7.5.6.3 Tier 3: Normalising Extremism

BAYDA's re-entry into NAMOA's life brought with it his channelled attention. While romantically involved with 'Riz', BAYDA's renewed interest in her afforded NAMOA a sense of significance and increased her social value within the in-group. BAYDA's reappearance also reinforced a pre-existing positive feedback loop as he was the one who had awakened 'Emaan' (Arabic: faith/belief) within her in a way that had previously been absent since her reversion as a teenager. This type of religious revelation - a cognitive opening event - is significant and difficult for others to emulate because it establishes a compelling, perpetual anchor for the person experiencing it. Al Qa'idy (2010) references this anchor within his recruitment playbook at this stage of radicalisation, reminding recruiters that "this stage never ends. This is because we believe Emaan increases and decreases" over time (Al Qa'idy, 2010). That NAMOA's anchor was grounded to BAYDA afforded him primacy over her other suitor 'Riz.' This is because 'Riz' had insufficient time to build rapport and morally engaged authority over NAMOA in the short time they were involved (less than a month).

In a somewhat curious deviation from in-group norms, the way in which non-martial relationships have been framed in media and court reports regarding NAMOA and BAYDA; and NAMOA and 'Riz' respectively, are representative of a secular style of dating. While there is evidence that NAMOA and BAYDA did spend time alone together during their pre-martial relationship and after they renewed contact, this is not usually acceptable

behaviour within strictly observant Muslim communities. As a result, it is more likely that 'Halal dating'¹³³ occurred in the majority of instances, which places NAMOA directly within in-group settings. This is an important observation because such interactions with an in-group are known to be highly influential. In strengthening her religious beliefs and holding out the significance-based rewards associated with the in-group, NAMOA's decision-making defaulted to conforming with her peers. While not outwardly hostile to any person or group whom she interpreted as contributing to her personal circumstances, but with a history of behavioural aggression, NAMOA's fanaticism towards adopting extreme Salafist worldviews included a hatred for Australians and non-Muslims. Adopting this particular out-grouping over personal grievances contributed to NAMOA's fundamentalism because it served as social reinforcement while placing her in control of her reputation-enhancing decision-making.

By 27 DEC 2021, BAYDA's sense of loss aversion saw him concoct the fiction of his imminent suicide attack in an effort to influence NAMOA into marrying him telling her "if you don't marry me, I'm going to do an attack and die" (Justice Payne et al., 2020). While it is clear BAYDA had no intention of actually going through with plans for a suicide attack, the pair's radicalisation had reached a crescendo. As a pseudo-recruiter, there was no payoff for BAYDA beyond marrying her. "I knew I was about to lose her and she was about to marry this Turkish guy," BAYDA told Police after his arrest, saying that "he managed to convince her he was going to do an attack, then continued to string her along and (later) her replies encouraged him" (Staff Writers, 2018e). Pre-empting NAMOA's move into a dominant reputational frame within the availability cascade, BAYDA's level of self-interest resulted in the choice architecture he had inadvertently

¹³³ 'Halal dating' is a term used by young Muslims to describe the way in which they get to know one another without being alone together. This can include by spending time together with other people their age, by having a chaperone on outings or when one visits the others home. It can include the use of social media and messaging apps without a third-party present to supervise. 'Halal dating' strictly excludes any form of physical contact or intimacy before marriage.

built around her pushing her past his own level of radicalisation. This is significant because BAYDA was radicalised but disengaged, while NAMOA would go on to become both radicalised and engaged.

While NAMOA accepted BAYDA's proposal of marriage on 30 DEC 2015, and their Islamic marriage ceremony occurred hours later, in coming to her decision to marry BAYDA it is plausible that NAMOA thought a short-term marriage to BAYDA (given his apparent impending martyrdom) would afford her the opportunity to also marry 'Riz' after BAYDA's death; or that BAYDA's martyrdom and her new-found status as the wife of a martyr would increase her social value, remarriage prospects and opportunities beyond 'Riz'. This type of thinking emulates the narratives around and testimonies of the jihadi brides depicted in TVEC where brides are encouraged to consider 'successive husbands' who become martyrs as an honoured part of their role in the Caliphate.

7.5.6.4 Tier 4: Threshold

NAMOA married BAYDA under the belief that he was about to commit a suicide attack and martyr himself. There is some evidence that NAMOA was beholden to the hard-easy effect at this tier, underestimating BAYDA's ability to actually go through with committing a terrorist attack that would result in his death. While noteworthy, this isn't surprising as NAMOA has demonstrated that she was easily influenced towards situations that provided her with held-out rewards. The Dunning-Kruger effect is also present at this tier, with both NAMOA and BAYDA misjudging his perceived and actual competence as a violent Islamist. There is no doubt that BAYDA's lack of intent also contributed to his failure to follow through with his attack plans in the next tier. This disparity between ideation and action is likely the result of the significant volume of TVEC the pair had consumed during their pre-marital relationship. While conducive to the radicalisation process

and somewhat instructive in a planning context, TVEC does not clearly translate to an individual's physical and mental ability to perform violent jihad when the time comes in and of itself. This barrier to violent jihad-success is something Al Qa'idy (2010) notes in his recruitment playbook at this tier – "There is a difference between one who wants and one-who wishes" - putting in place measures to ensure the prospect/recruit overcomes these mental and physical barriers in later tiers (Al Qa'idy, 2010).

BAYDA's fictitious violent jihad served as a radicalisation accelerator for NAMOA as his representations of imminent martyrdom consolidated his prior inadvertent indoctrination of her. From the guidance he had provided in her adoption of extreme Salafi jihadism to the master narratives and moral engagement embedded in the TVEC they had consumed together, BAYDA's self-annihilatory violent jihad was the logical conclusion to all that she had learned, seen, watched and come to believe in. For BAYDA, his actions had become a sunk cost. While he had concocted the fiction of his violent jihad and imminent martyrdom to influence NAMOA into marrying him, he now had to follow through on those representations or try to escape them. This was not easy as NAMOA had become captivated by the idea of his martyrdom. To NAMOA, not only was BAYDA's violent jihad a legitimate action justified by the violently extreme worldview she had adopted, but the scarcity of martyrdom and the rewards it would bestow communicated the value of these actions to her. NAMOA had become far more invested in BAYDA's impending jihad than BAYDA.

NAMOA's recognition of BAYDA's martyrdom as her conduit to significance is clear as she went about reducing any unexpected outcomes by actively supporting BAYDA's plans. NAMOA's encouragement of BAYDA's plot: writing him farewell love letters, asking him for a child and otherwise romanticising her 'Bonnie' to BAYDA's 'Clyde' demonstrates an in-depth

understanding of the value BAYDA's actions would have for her. The held-out reward of becoming a martyr's wife consolidated her sense of impending improved circumstances and social identity: being a bride is auspicious, and being the widow of a martyr, sacred.

As a formative part of The Radicalisation Cascade, the shift to channelled reputational considerations within the availability cascade is something NAMOA seemed acutely aware of, later telling Police of the romanticised Islamic 'Bonnie and Clyde' style duo she pictured herself a part of. Having consumed large amounts of TVEC, NAMOA also knew that BAYDA's martyrdom would catapult her into the violent Islamist-media spotlight, affording her a status and level of significance she had never experienced before. The positive feedback loops the availability cascade generated at this tier deeply influenced NAMOA's sense of radical engagement. BAYDA set in motion a chain of events that are common to availability cascades: he engaged a topic that was highly topical in the Australian media at the time (ISIS and ISIS attacks), he was able to tie violent Islamist grievances to local conditions (Australians, non-Muslims and their haram lifestyle), and by using TVEC as proof he was able to influence NAMOA into emotion-based decision-making.

7.5.6.5 Tier 5: Stronghold

Timeline: 8pm, 30 December 2015 (from the time of their marriage)
12 hours

While BAYDA had acted as a pseudo-recruiter and availability entrepreneur to NAMOA up until this point, as she surpassed his level of radicalisation and engagement, their roles reversed as NAMOA defaulted to serving as BAYDA's pseudo-recruiter and availability entrepreneur in an effort to ensure he went through with his plans. This level of co-dependency

between recruiter and recruit is evident in Al Qa'idy's (2010) framing of this stage of his recruitment playbook as it serves to bestow 'true believer' status while providing anchoring as the availability cascade begins to come full circle (Al Qa'idy, 2010). That the pair acted as pseudo-recruiters for each other within the confines of their relationship and swapped places at this higher tier, is worthy of further study into the dynamics of intra-relational radicalisation. In NAMOA's case, her defaulting to the behaviours BAYDA had previously influenced her with is unsurprising given her cognitive challenges her lack of any other radicalising framework, and the continuing ideation of herself as a part of a 'Bonnie and Clyde' violent Islamist duo. While initially overestimating her part in BAYDA's violent jihad, the role-swap between the two of them after their marriage signalled her intent to do all that she could to ensure BAYDA's attack success. To NAMOA, BAYDA had become a sunk cost: she had married him (costs incurred) on the understanding that he would soon die a martyr. NAMOA's attempts to exert influence on BAYDA to keep him on track to martyrdom can be seen as an effort to avoid the losses she would incur as a result of his disengagement. NAMOA had no expectation that their marriage would be a long one and BAYDA's lack of attack success would impact her ability to attain significance as a result.

NAMOA's encouragement of BAYDA was noted as significant in court. "From the early afternoon of 30 December 2015, text messages were exchanged between (NAMOA and BAYDA) concerning an act of violence against non-Muslims which was planned by BAYDA and encouraged by NAMOA. She expected BAYDA would be killed in this attack. BAYDA's responses confirmed he was planning an action in which he expected to die for the sake of Allah." Further, evidence tendered by Police demonstrated NAMOA held an understanding of the metaphysical held-out rewards in play, expressing her admiration for his commitment to martyr himself, an action she stated would "take him to paradise" (Fagan, 2019). The held-out

rewards of the afterlife, in particular, are framed in a way that reveres the actions of the soon-to-be martyr and those they leave behind. The significance-seeking behaviours that this encourages cannot be underestimated, particularly within in-groups that have consumed significant amounts of TVEC that promote and deify martyrdom.

In addition to encouraging BAYDA, NAMOA's radicalisation and engagement were heavily influenced by her romanticised view of violent jihad due to the amount of TVEC the pair had consumed. By emulating the behaviours she had observed in TVEC, NAMOA was able to see herself in the stories of others. This is a particularly gendered aspect of TVEC due to the role women are given in extreme Salafism and the manner in which martyrs are venerated by their mothers, wives, families and communities. The rewards provided to wives and families (often monetary as well as esteem based) would have also been clear, acting as an incentive for NAMOA to ensure BAYDA kept his promise. NAMOA's modelled behaviour in this regard is unsurprising. Just as BAYDA had instilled in her the extreme version of Salafi Islam that he had been indoctrinated in, NAMOA mimicked the nudges that were applied to her back onto him. NAMOA, having already demonstrated a tendency to default to a hyperbolic discounting bias in her decision-making through her reversion, quick decision to get married, marriage within hours of that decision and her overt support of BAYDA's violent jihad; can be observed as having a history of preferencing situations that deliver her more immediate rewards. In seeking significance-related short-term rewards from her supposedly short-marriage, NAMOA had a clear idea from the TVEC she had consumed of how her status was about to level up in violent Islamist in-groups. NAMOA also recognised that the scarcity of these actions increased BAYDA's social value and by default, hers. This again fed her significance-seeking inclinations.

While BAYDA came to the marriage with a plan for violent jihad, albeit a largely fictitious one, he and by default NAMOA were also influenced by BAYDA's own in-group to a degree. While BAYDA was telling NAMOA of his imminent suicide attack, he and his co-conspirators were instead planning terrorist attack-like activities that were unlikely to have led to their deaths. NAMOA indicated she was aware of this in text messages prior to their marriage. As will be explored in tier 6 of NAMOA's radicalisation cascade, she continued efforts to support planning towards acts of violent extremism even after BAYDA's plan- had failed - and he demonstrated a reluctance and inability to commit an act of physical violence - saw her continue to treat him as a sunk cost. This reflects the way Al Qa'idya (2010) presented recruits at this tier as sunk costs to their recruiter in his recruitment playbook (Al Qa'idya, 2010).

7.5.6.6 Tier 6: Violence

Timeline: 31 December 2015 (from around 7am onwards)
12 hours

The terror attack BAYDA and his co-conspirators had planned on New Year's Eve 2015 did not eventuate. Despite dressing up as violent Islamists and trawling the streets for possible targets, and then attempting and failing to set a public park on fire, neither BAYDA nor his co-conspirators committed an act of violence against another person. While BAYDA had made representations to NAMOA that he was planning a suicide operation, in reality, the plans he had made with his co-conspirators were to use baseball bats to bash drunk non-Muslims and steal any valuables they may have on them. BAYDA and his co-conspirators had also considered "robbing a brothel, a bank and starting a bushfire" (Staff Writers, 2018e). If carried out, it was unlikely that any of these types of attacks would have resulted in BAYDA's death.

After the failure of the New Year's Eve plan, BAYDA and NAMOA conducted further online research related to attacks that involved improvised incendiary devices and bladed weapons. Police would later allege that BAYDA then went on to "look at instructive documents relating to stabbings" (Scheikowski, 2018b). For BAYDA going through the motions of the plot without intending to commit extreme violence was performative and solely for NAMOA's benefit. His actions became a sunk cost the moment he created the fiction of his impending martyrdom to entice NAMOA into marrying him. NAMOA on the other hand was more invested in the idea of violent jihad as she saw this as a means of 'acting together' as she played the role of the new, supportive wife. BAYDA saw the failed attack as the end of his 'violent jihad' while NAMOA continued to encourage him and plot with fervour. This cyclical pattern of trying and failing at this tier is also defined in Al Qa'idy's (2010) recruitment playbook with failed prospects nudged into a holding pattern of monthly re-radicalisation, again signifying their sunk cost to the recruiter in seeking payoffs that might not eventuate (Al Qa'idy, 2010). While BAYDA was stuck at the previous tier, unwilling to take real action, NAMOA had progressed and was ready for him to commit an act of violent extremism. Beholden to the peak-end rule, NAMOA based her significance-seeking on how she felt when she knew BAYDA was about to commit an attack. Anticipating the emotional highs she felt in the knowledge that significance was about to be bestowed upon her, NAMOA's enjoyment and engagement of her relationship with BAYDA was anchored in his projected death. Her experience of their marriage outside of that frame of intensity was as unfamiliar as it was unexpected. It can be argued that the end of the peak-end rule only came into effect for NAMOA when (1) BAYDA failed to commit the planned attack; or (2) BAYDA, was arrested and imprisoned. The net unpleasantness associated with this heuristic was short-lived because of the time between their marriage and BAYDA's failed attack and his arrest. This is because the pair achieved some level of significance as a result of their arrests and associated media attention.

That a violent Islamist's held-out rewards can only be delivered or bestowed after the fact was a challenge NAMOA could not surmount. However, this did not stop her from attempting to circumnavigate BAYDA's inability to overcome his inability to act to complete a successful attack (if he ever had the intent, to begin with). Kruglanski et al (2014) and Lankford et al (2014) demonstrate that the link between held-out rewards such as martyrdom and the direct benefits that are bestowed as a result (to the martyr or their wife and families) can be attributed to attention-seeking behaviours observed online. That these online spaces fulfil needs such as in-group belonging as well as providing a conduit to significance (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Lankford, 2014b) continued to drive NAMOA's actions. Phillips and Pohl (2020) also observed a trend of terrorist organisations using TVEC propaganda to trigger prospective violent Islamists into comparing their impending violent jihad against a long history of successful martyrs. With this in mind, the impact of the TVEC NAMOA had consumed resulted in anticipated regret (Phillips & Pohl, 2020) as BAYDA had failed to deliver her the significance she sought and he had promised her. As a pseudo-recruiter and availability entrepreneur to BAYDA, NAMOA was unable to influence him to the desired outcome before authorities took an interest in their activities. While the media interest in their criminal case was high, NAMOA's imprisonment limited the benefits she could receive as a result.

The coercive aspects of both NAMOA and BAYDA's actions up to this point in the availability cascade are also worthy of note. While arguably the cascade came to an abrupt halt upon BAYDA's arrest and imprisonment, the depth of the availability cascade and its influence on NAMOA – particularly with respect to their in-group – saw her fanaticism taken on a new dimension as she transitioned from being part of BAYDA's plot to establishing personal grievances of her own and cycling back through the radicalisation cascade. This is particularly evident in her continued

radicalisation trajectory throughout her incarceration and periods of parole, and stands in stark contrast to BADYA's total disengagement with the idea of violent jihad since his release from jail.

7.5.7 Beyond the failed attack: A timeline of continued fanaticism, arrest, imprisonment and breaches of parole

After BAYDA's arrest and imprisonment, and then hers shortly thereafter, NAMOA continued to demonstrate a commitment to extreme Islam with violent tendencies. NAMOA's repeated breaches of parole, letter-writing campaign in prison and ideations of religiously inspired extreme violence were dispersed between her protestations of innocence, repeated court appeals and a stint trying to convince Police and the Court that she had returned to Catholicism. A timeline of events following BAYDA's arrest is helpful in understanding how NAMOA's continued violent extremism cycled back through the radicalisation cascade.

Police allege that between 8 December 2015 and 25 January 2016, the pair plotted to commit a terrorist attack (Scheikowski, 2018a).

13 January 2016

Police raided the home NAMOA was staying in, searching for prohibited firearms and weapons. NAMOA got out of bed and dressed herself in a niqab (Arabic: a garment worn by women that fully covers the face and body, with a small parting of fabric at eye level to enable the wearer to see) and reached into her handbag to get gloves (as is common practice for many Muslim women). Police were present in the bedroom and stopped her, searching her handbag. Inside they found a tactical knife wrapped in black cloth, and underneath that, a folded a *shahada* flag

(Arabic: a flag depicting 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God'). The shahada flag is traditionally used as a declaration of faith but has been widely adopted by ISIS, particularly in their production of propaganda during and after terrorist attacks. NAMOA claimed the knife was for her protection and the flag was a common item among Muslims. As Police did not find any prohibited firearms or weapons (NAMOA's knife did not contravene the prohibition orders in place) she was not arrested (Gleeson, 2018b).

25 January 2016

BAYDA is arrested and instructs NAMOA to delete text messages on her phone. Police later recovered more than 5,000 deleted messages from NAMOA's phone (Staff Writers, 2018c).

5 February 2016

NAMOA was charged with "failing to answer 31 questions before the New South Wales (NSW) Crime Commission." Counter-Terrorism Police allege NAMOA ignored their questions expressing a desire to protect BAYDA and an overt refusal to cooperate with non-Muslims.

At the sentencing hearing for refusing to answer questions from the NSW Crime Commission, the Prosecutor referred to a psychiatrist's report in which NAMOA had told the psychiatrist "I can watch (beheadings) it all day... I don't know (why)... I like it, but I could never do that to anyone." NAMOA's lawyers argued that her refusal to answer the questions put to her

were “out of loyalty to her husband, not some sinister motive.” They also argued that NAMOA was psychotic at the time of the psychiatrists interview and that she was now taking medication for this condition (AAP, 2016; B. M. Levy & Olding, 2017).

NAMOA’s radicalism reverted to tier 5 – Stronghold- at this time, as she retained her engagement and ideation towards further violence. Due to the pair’s arrest, NAMOA had also acquired new out-groups to focus her attentions on, police and prison authorities. NAMA O also demonstrated that she continued to pursue the sunk-cost of significance bestowal, attempting to establish herself as a hardened jihadi-bride and in-group devotee.

11 February 2016

NAMOA was granted bail as legislative amendments made to limit the bail available to terrorism related offenders had not yet been passed into law.

22 February 2016

NAMA O was re-arrested and remanded in custody on charges of “recklessly possessing an item connected to a terrorist act and recklessly collecting documents connected to a terrorist attack” (Auerbach & Fife-Yeomans, 2016).

6 October 2016

NAMOA was found guilty of refusing to answer questions put to her by the NSW Crime Commission and sentenced to eight months imprisonment. A non-parole period of

four months was set, which was backdated to February when NAMOA was taken into custody. She remained on remand in custody to face other terrorism-related charges (Peters, 2016).

6 July 2017

NAMOA and BAYDA faced a committal hearing on terror-related charges. The pair, who had been separated from each other in custody since their arrest, “kissed and giggled” in the dock drawing a stern warning from the magistrate (Benny-Morrison, 2017). The Court heard that Police had found in the pair’s possession over 28,126 images, 81 videos and numerous PDFs of TVEC, extensive text messages between the two, a shahada flag and knife. Pictures of the pair giving a one-finger salute in the style of ISIS were also found as was a goodbye note from NAMOA to BAYDA (Benny-Morrison, 2017; Groom, 2017; Staff Writers, 2018b).

NAMOA remained in the tier 5 – Stronghold – phase during this time, revelling in the media attention each court case and appeal gave her. Her co-trial with BAYDA can also be viewed as another performative indication of her desire to be seen as ‘acting together.’ The media coverage surrounding the trial and appeals, including pointing out the volume of TVEC the pair had in their possession, served as a form of significance bestowal. NAMOA, through her consumption of significant amounts of TVEC, understood that both possession and consumption was akin to a badge of honour within the violent jihadi community. The reliving of the experience

of plotting with BAYDA and her aspirations for extreme violence to occur, also re-engaged her and served to further solidify her thinking about extreme Islam.

31 July 2017

NAMOA and BAYDA were remanded in custody and committed to stand trial before a jury on terrorism related offences.

2 August 2017

NAMOA learned that her husband had become a Christian and decided that she too wanted to become a Christian. "Two days after the pair were committed to stand trial, NAMOA informed correctional staff at the facility where she was held that she had renounced Islam altogether and reverted to Christianity" (Justice Rares, 2019). Citing personal security concerns while remaining in prison, and after consulting with prison staff, NAMOA chose to keep up the rouse of following Islam by wearing the hijab to avoid conflict and confrontation. However, during this same time she was also writing letters to a convicted terrorist, their family and prison staff that suggested her rediscovery of Christianity was not genuine.

4 September 2018

The jury in the trial of NAMOA and BAYDA was discharged. Justice Fagan's reasons for discharging the jury cannot be published (Gleeson, 2018b).

5 October 2018

NAMOA and BAYDA were both found guilty of plotting a terrorist attack in late 2015 and early 2016.

2019

NAMOA was sentenced to three years and nine months in jail for her part in the terrorism plot. BAYDA was sentenced for four years in jail (Byrne, 2021).

During her sentencing hearing NAMOA stated she told prison officials that she had “renounced radical Islam and converted to Christianity” in December 2017 (Ruiz, 2020). BAYDA gave further evidence stating that he no longer believed the pair to be married as it was only an Islamic marriage not recognised by law (Calderwood, 2019; Staff Writers, 2018d, 2018a).

At NAMOA’s parole hearing Police presented evidence of several letters she had written to convicted murder and known Islamic extremist Bassam HAMZY.¹³⁴ In the letters she asks HAMZY to take her husband “under your wing and look after him like a brother” and that her phone privileges in prison had been revoked because she gave another prisoner a razor. In a letter to HAMZY’s cousin she asks, “am I still your baby terrorist?” while asking not to be beaten in apparent reference to directions from HAMZY. Police tendered to the parole board that NAMOA had also written to NSW prison officials, including the

¹³⁴ Bassam HAMZY is the former leader of ‘Brothers 4 Life’ a Sydney based gang. HAMZY is part of a family-based violent criminal syndicate and was jailed for 40 years in 2001 for murder. HAMZY has “committed serious offences while in prison including allegedly running a drug ring” and violently assaulting other inmates (Sutton, 2021). HAMZY is known to have been kept in New South Wales’ Supermax prison where Islamic extremists, including those involved in the 2005 Pendennis terrorist plot, have also imprisoned since 2005. It is believed by authorities that HAMZY is part of a wider prison culture of violent coercion forcing other prisoners to convert to radical Islam. The media have referenced the prison as ‘Super Mosque’ instead of Supermax, and note its population is dense with Islamic extremists (Sutton, 2017).

Commissioner, [CONTENT WARNING] offering to send them photos of “beautiful beheadings” after release, asking “do you think we could turn a kafir’s brain into macaroni?” and “our men love death more than life. One day we will dominate, may we be the generation to raise the black flag” (Ruiz, 2020). With time already served in custody, she was eligible for release on parole immediately following the court’s guilty verdict.

NAMOA remained at the tier 5 – Stronghold – level of the radicalisation cascade at this time. Her actions demonstrably inconsistent with a person with a newfound devotion to Christianity. Her violent ideation remains clear. Further, her continued approval-seeking behaviour from within her in-group (and others of esteem within the violent Islamist community) demonstrate that she remains fixated on violent jihad. NAMOA could have been considered as transitioning to tier 6 – Violence – if it were not for her lack of opportunity and means to commit an attack at the times of her letter writing.

December 2019

NAMOA was released from prison under strict parole conditions.

January 2020

BAYDA is released from prison on parole.

July 2020

NAMOA was found to have breached her control order and was sent back to prison. “In the weeks and months following her release in 2019, she had downloaded an

image of a violent Islamist flag and received an image believed to be of herself and her brother raising their finger in an ISIS salute.” Continuing to breach her control order, NAMOA spoke to the wife of a convicted terrorist and over the space of several months continued to attempt to initiate contact with her. She also continued to write letters to a convicted terrorist. NAMOA’s trial on charges of breaching her control order was held in December 2021. NAMOA plead guilty and was sentenced to a further 16 months’ imprisonment. However she walked free from court as her sentence was backdated to when she had returned to custody as time already spent (Hildebrandt, 2021; Scheikowski, 2021).

NAMOA’s persistent tier 5 – Stronghold – behaviours demonstrate that her commitment to violent jihad and extreme Islam had not waned. Continuing to seek out the approval of significant others within the violent Islamist community, her behaviour also underpins a continued desire to redeem the sunk-cost of her and BAYDA’s failed attack to establish herself as a significant person within their in-group. NAMOA’s recidivism also speaks to her self-nudging towards tier 6 – Violence – as it demonstrates not only a complete disregard for the law and the control orders she was subject to, but also her ability to sidestep inhibitory mechanisms to continue radicalising.

December 2021

[CONTENT WARNING] Upon re-release and parole, it was noted in court that NAMOA had made “several frenzied

threats in the last year, including to shoot, stab and kill people and pour acid down someone's throat." NAMOA also threatened to "cave her sister's f*ken head in." Court documents show that she presents an "ongoing risk of committing a terrorist act" and that she remains a risk to national security. Court documents also revealed that she admitted to faking her abandonment of Islam and reversion to Christianity in prison. NAMOA has since told her psychologist that she was trying to renounce her extreme views and that she rejects the violent Islamist philosophy. Australian Federal Police however believe that NAMOA's interest in violently extreme forms of Islam is enduring as "she continues to espouse it and encourage others to adopt it."

Upon her release she returned to live with BAYDA (Hildebrandt, 2021).

It is evident that NAMOA at this time had transitioned to the precipice of tier 6 – Violence– via her ideation of committing violent extremism against specific people. Her violence of choice mirrors that found in TVEC and known terrorist attacks; and is inherently reputational in nature. She however has not committed an act of violence to-date.

BADYA was released from custody in 2020 after claiming to have renounced Islam and converting to Christianity in prison. At the time of writing this thesis, BAYDA had not reoffended nor breached the terms of his control order or parole (Hodge, 2020).

7.6 General Trends

In addition to basic personal and terrorist group affiliation, additional data captured as part of this research included a range of demographic and psychographic information.

Table 8: Status of Australian Violent Islamists (if known).

Violent Islamist status (as of 2021)	Count		Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Alive	64	18	24.3%	6.8%
Alive – in custody	101	3	38.5%	1.1%
Alive - presumed	10	0	3.8%	0%
Deceased	39	3	14.8%	1.1%
Deceased – presumed	4	0	1.5%	0%
Unknown	16	2	6.1%	0.8%

7.6.1 Radicalising family and peer environments

The research finalised in 2021 continues to support the finding that the majority of Australian violent Islamists radicalise via peer to peer or family networks, with over 43.7% of all terrorists and violent extremists either connected via immediate or extended family members, or via marriage. Shanahan (2019) noted that “marriage statistics include both legally and Islamically married (couples) at the time of their offending” and that “there is anecdotal evidence that ... jihadists marry into like-minded families.” Shanahan (2019) observed in his studied of ISIS era individuals that “at least 44 people, comprising 19 sets of siblings feature – accounting for a quarter of all known contemporary jihadis” (Shanahan, 2019).

Table 9: The radicalisation conduit of Australian violent Islamists.

Radicalisation conduit	Percentage			
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Family (including spouse)	38	6	14.5%
Online (only)	4	2	1.5%	0.8%
Peer to peer	77	3	29.3%	1.1%
Previously radicalised (such as via al-Qaeda)	9	0	3.4%	0%
Prison	7	0	2.7%	0%
Self radicalised	7	1	2.7%	0.4%
Unknown	100	15	38%	5.7%

Table 10: Marital status of Australian violent Islamists.

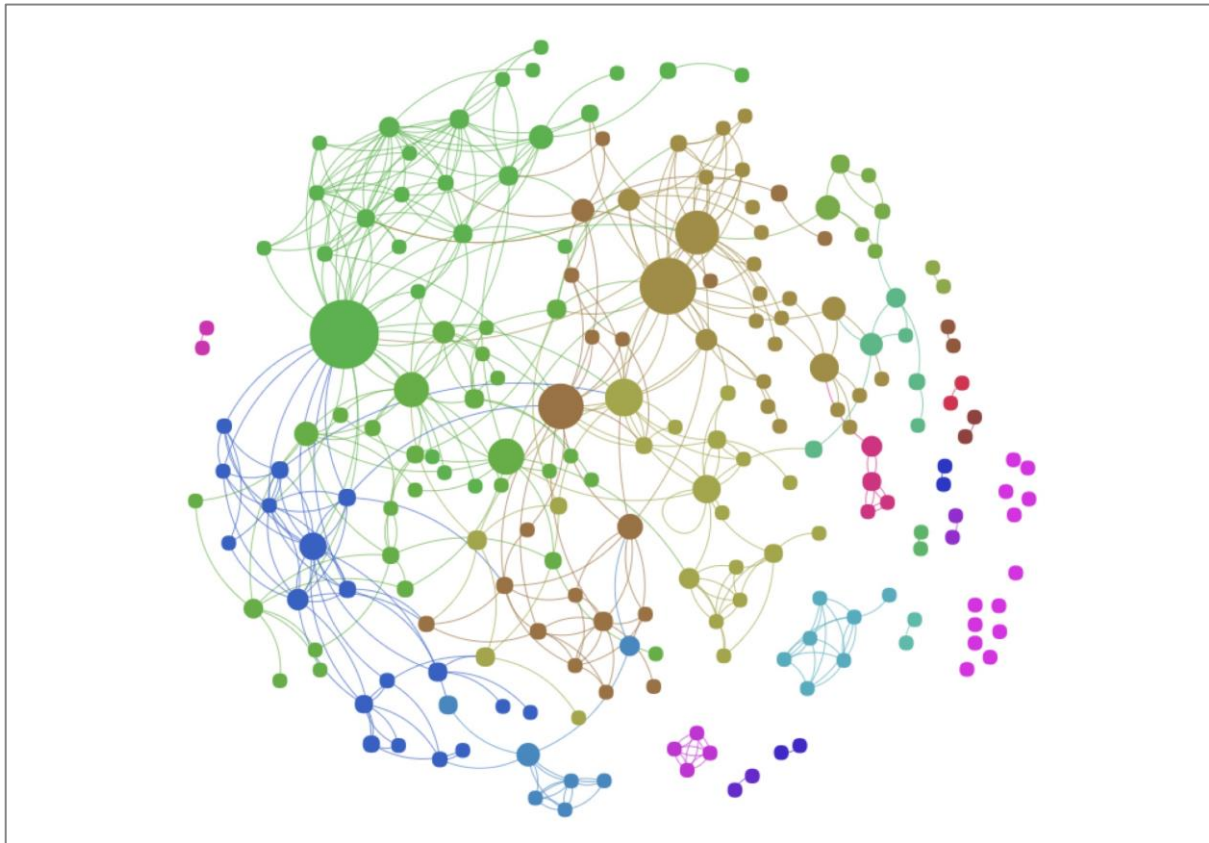
Violent Islamist marital status	Percentage			
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Married	77	13	29.3%
Single	8	1	3%	0.4%
Divorced	3	0	1.1%	0%
De-facto	0	0	0%	0%
Widow/Widower	1	5	3%	1.9%
Unknown	148	7	56.3%	2.7%

Table 11: The involvement of violent Islamist's immediate and extended family members in terrorism.

Immediate and extended family involvement in terrorism	Percentage			
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Immediate and Extended Family	72	8	27.4%
Spouse	21	14	8%	5.3%
None	3	1	1.1%	0.4%
Unknown	150	8	57%	3%

The confluence of inter-marriage and networked Islamic Extremism in Australia was identified by Matejic (2016) who identified out of a then 186 cohort of violent Islamists, that not only were significant levels of inter-marriage between families evident but that the network itself was largely interconnected as depicted in the network analysis below:

Figure 5: Social network centrality of Australian Foreign Fighters and Domestic Actors. Matejic (2016).



7.6.2 Major cities incubate violent jihad when compared to regional Australia

Data from this study concludes that populous cities are over-represented when compared with regional areas. Shanahan (2019) noted in his ISIS era study that “more than 90% of offenders were from Sydney or Melbourne” (Shanahan, 2019). While the absence of large numbers in regional areas could signal a preference for urban living, and that there is known migration-centric theories around groups settling in cities within Australia, that individuals do not appear to be radicalising in regional areas in comparison to urban areas, however, is worthy of further study.

Table 12: State level location (or origin) of violent Islamists in Australia.

	Location of violent Islamist origin at time of offending – Australia by State			
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
New South Wales	92	12	35%	4.6%
Victoria	71	4	27%	1.5%
Queensland	9	0	3.4%	0%
Northern Territory	0	0	0%	0%
Western Australia	4	2	1.5%	0.8%
South Australia	5	1	1.9%	0.4%
Tasmania	0	0	0%	0%
Australian Capital Territory	0	0	0%	0%
Unknown	57	7	22%	2.7%

Table 13: City-level location (or origin) of violent Islamists in Australia.

	Location of violent Islamist origin at time of offending – Australia by City/Region			
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Sydney	73	8	27.8%	3%
Melbourne	61	3	23.2%	1.1%
Brisbane	8	0	3%	0%
Darwin	0	0	0%	0%
Perth	2	2	0.8%	0.8%
Adelaide	3	1	1.1%	0.4%
Hobart	0	0	0%	0%
Canberra	0	0	0%	0%
Regional NSW	5	1	1.9%	0.4%
Regional VIC	2	0	0.8%	0%
Unknown	84	11	32%	4.2%

7.6.3 Migratory, Religious and Ethnic Pathways to violent extremism

While limited research has been done on the migratory pathways or ethnic heritage of Australian violent Islamists, Zammit’s (2011, 2014) research demonstrates that these factors were of note during al-Qaeda’s halcyon days after their September 11 attacks in 2001 (Zammit, 2011b). Zammit and Harris-Hogan (2014) again finding in 2014 that “Australian Muslims of Lebanese descent and consequently Australian Muslims who become

involved in jihadist activity are statistically more likely to have Lebanese backgrounds.” Zammit and Harris-Hogan further note that while “Lebanese-Australian Muslims make up 60% of those charged over alleged jihadist activity in Australia, they constitute only 20% of all Australian Muslims” (Harris-Hogan & Zammit, 2014). These findings remain broadly consistent with findings by Matejic (2016) and Shanahan (2019) in later studies.

Table 14: Country of birth of Australian violent Islamists.

Violent Islamist country of birth	Percentage			
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Afghanistan	8	0	3%	0%
Africa (no further details)	0	1	0%	0.4%
Algeria	1	0	0.4%	0%
Australia	47	8	17.9%	3%
Bangladesh	2	1	0.8%	0.4%
Bosnia	2	0	0.8%	0%
China	1	0	0.4%	0%
Egypt	1	0	0.4%	0%
France (Overseas territories)	1	0	0.4%	0%
Indonesia	1	0	0.4%	0%
Iran	2	1	0.8%	0.4%
Iraq	2	0	0.8%	0%
Jordan	1	0	0.4%	0%
Kuwait	2	0	0.8%	0%
Lebanon	10	0	3.8%	0%
Libya	1	0	0.4%	0%
Morocco	0	1	0%	0.4%
New Zealand	1	0	0.4%	0%
Pakistan	1	0	0.4%	0%
Palestine	2	0	0.8%	0%
Poland	1	0	0.4%	0%
Saudi Arabia	1	0	0.4%	0%
Singapore	1	0	0.4%	0%
Sri Lanka	1	0	0.4%	0%
Somalia	7	0	2.7%	0%
Sudan	1	0	0.4%	0%
Syria	1	0	0.4%	0%
Turkey	0	1	0%	0.4%
United Kingdom	1	0	0.4%	0%
United States of America	1	0	0.4%	0%
Unknown	136	13	51.7%	4.9%

Table 15: Ethnic heritage of Australian violent Islamists.

Violent Islamist ethnic heritage (inclusive of those born overseas)				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Afghan	7	0	2.7%	0%
African (no further details)	0	1	0%	0.4%
Alawhitian	1	0	0.4%	0%
Albanian	1	0	0.4%	0%
Algerian	3	0	1.1%	0%
American (USA)	1	0	0.4%	0%
Australian	4	4	1.5%	
Australian - Indigenous	4	0	1.5%	0%
Bangladeshi	5	1	1.9%	0.4%
Bosnian	1	0	0.4%	0%
British (UK)	1	0	0.4%	0%
Bulgarian	1	0	0.4%	0%
Cambodian	1	0	0.4%	0%
Chinese	1	0	0.4%	0%
Egyptian	1	0	0.4%	0%
Fijian	1	0	0.4%	0%
French (Overseas territories)	1	0	0.4%	0%
German	1	0	0.4%	0%
Greek	1	0	0.4%	0%
Indonesian	3	1	1.1%	0.4%
Iranian	1	0	0.4%	0%
Iraqi	2	0	0.8%	0%
Iraqi-Kurd	2	1	0.8%	0.4%
Irish	1	0	0.4%	0%
Italian	2	1	0.8%	0.4%
Jewish	1	0	0.4%	0%
Jordanian	2	0	0.8%	0%
Kazakh	1	0	0.4%	0%
Kuwaiti	2	0	0.8%	0%
Lebanese	50	1	19%	0.4%
Libyan	1	0	0.4%	0%
Moroccan	1	0	0.4%	0%
New Zealander	1	0	0.4%	0%
Palestinian	5	0	1.9%	0%
Pakistani	1	0	0.4%	0%
Polish	1	0	0.4%	0%

Violent Islamist ethnic heritage (inclusive of those born overseas)				
Saudi Arabian	1	0	0.4%	0%
Singaporean	1	0	0.4%	0%
Sri Lankan	1	0	0.4%	0%
Somalian	7	1	2.7%	0.4%
Sudanese	1	0	0.4%	0%
Syrian	4	0	1.5%	0%
Tongan	0	1	0%	0.4%
Turkish	7	2	2.7%	0.8%
Uighur	1	0	0.4%	0%
Vietnamese	1	0	0.4%	0%
Unknown	105	15	40%	5.7%

Shanahan (2019) observed in his research that converts (reverts) represented 9.3 per cent of his study's cohort, and refugees 7.7 per cent (being first or second-generation refugees). Third-generation Australians represented 5.7 per cent of his study. Noting his study was limited to 194 jihadists, Shanahan's (2019) descriptive statistics differ (Shanahan, 2019) from the observations made during this research. While broadly comparable in all but study cohort size, based on the data provided it can be argued that the Australian violent Islamist community is larger and more reliant on reverts than previously thought.

Table 16: Observation on whether Australian violent Islamists were born into Islam or reverted.

Revert (convert) vs born into Islam (any sect)				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Born into Islam	70	10	26.7%	3.8%
Revert (convert from another faith)	143	9	54.4%	3.4%
Unknown	145	9	55.1%	3.4%

Australia's religious diversity is vibrant with over 17 different religions recognised in the national Censuses in 2011 and 2016. Christianity remains the most dominant religion with over 12 million adherents despite a seven

percent drop in growth during that time. In the same time period, the number of Australians who identified themselves as Muslim totalled 4.6 million in 2011, increasing by 27 per cent to just over 6.9 million adherents in 2016.¹³⁵ This increase in adherents follows a global trend placing Islam as the fastest growing religion in the world (Lipka, 2017).

7.6.4 Education and employment levels are not reliable indicators of susceptibility to extremism

Education and meaningful employment have not been observed to be particular factors likely to increase or decrease involvement in radicalisation or violent extremism despite prevailing media narratives focusing on low-education levels and unemployment. Researchers have documented numerous examples of violent Islamists with varying levels of education and employment histories which reflect the diversity of the society in which they live. Du Bois (2017) observed that “wealth, housing, education, autonomy...” does not necessarily hold a direct correlation between an individual’s predisposition towards terrorist activities. Du Bois (2017) noted that the individual’s perception of their situation is more influential than the reality of it. “Even if a person does not necessarily live in deprived conditions, the mere feeling and perception of deprivation can induce people to risky decisions, in the case of terrorism” (Du Bois, 2017). This observation supports the theory that “personal grievances and triggering events” hold a higher degree of influence (Cherney, 2020) in radicalising in-groups (Tsintsadze-Maass & Maass, 2014) than factors otherwise common to society as a whole .

¹³⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018) Census reveals Australia’s religious diversity on World Religion Day (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Table 17: Occupation of Australian violent Islamists before their involvement in terrorism.

Occupation prior to violent Islamism			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Actor	2	0	0.8%	0%
Aviation (pilot, engineer)	3	0	1.1%	0%
Business owner	2	0	0.8%	0%
Childcare worker	0	2	0%	0.8%
Disability pensioner	2	0	0.8%	0%
Farm Hand	1	0	0.4%	0%
Homemaker	0	3	0%	1.1%
IT	7	0	2.7%	0%
Medical Professional	2	0	0.8%	0%
Military	2	1	0.8%	0.4%
Para-professional	4	0	1.5%	0%
Prison Officer	1	0	0.4%	0%
Professional sportsperson	6	0	2.3%	0%
Public Servant	2	1	0.8%	0.4%
Religious Cleric	0	4	0%	1.5%
Service Industry	12	1	4.6%	0.4%
Student	38	4	14.5%	1.5%
Teacher	2	0	0.8%	0%
Tradesperson	29	0	11%	0%
Various jobs	4	0	1.5%	0%
Unknown	127	15	48%	5.7%

Table 18: Violent Islamist's highest known level of education prior to their involvement in terrorism.

Highest level of education prior to violent Islamism.				
	Male	Female	Percentage	
			Male	Female
Primary School (incomplete)	0	1	0%	0.4%
Secondary School (incomplete)	1	1	0.4%	0.4%
Secondary School (unknown if Completed)	25	3	9.5%	1.1%
TAFE (unfinished studies)	1	0	0.4%	0%
TAFE (unknown if completed studies)	10	1	3.8%	0.4%
TAFE (completed studies)	1	1	0.4%	
University - undergraduate (unfinished studies)	4	1	1.5%	
University - undergraduate (unknown if completed studies)	14	2	5.3%	
University - undergraduate (completed studies)	6	0	2.3%	0%
University – postgraduate (unfinished studies)	1	1	0.4%	0.4%
University – postgraduate (completed studies)	2	0	0.8%	0%
Theological School	2	0	0.8%	0%
Military-based further education	1	1	0.4%	0.4%
Unknown	169	14	64.3%	5.3%

It is worthy of note that Australian violent Islamists fall across the spectrum of education and employment levels; from Alo-Bridget NAMOA being unemployed and having no further education beyond Year 9; to Abdul Numan HAIDER having started TAFE vocational trade studies; through to Australia’s most extreme radical preacher Abdul Nacer BENBRIKA holding qualifications in aerospace engineering and violent extremist doctor Tareq KAMLEH holding advanced professionally recognised medical qualifications. In addition to the limitations of this research (and the high level of uncertainty in many cases) no trends can be observed regarding the employment and education of Australian violent Islamists.

7.6.5 Criminal first, violent Islamist second?

While for some violent Islamists criminality is used as a gateway to more serious offending, including terrorism, and there are concerns from prison officials at the rate extreme Islam is being adopted by prisoners (Basra et al., 2016) the overall rate of offending among followers of extreme Islam does not outpace that of the offending in the general Australian population.

In the year 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2019 the “national imprisonment rate was 219 persons per 100,000 adult population. Males continued to comprise the majority of the Australian prisoner population” representing 92 per cent of all prisoners.¹³⁶ Of those prisoners not all are terrorism offenders, with the total number of those incarcerated on Federal offences (which represents the majority of terrorism cases in Australia) were 1,470. Those on parole for Federal offences totalled 225 individuals. Males again “accounted for the majority of offenders, with at least nine in ten federal prisoners being male and at least eight in ten federal parolees being male.” Additionally, “the majority of federal prisoners (95%) and federal parolees (98%) were non-Indigenous.”¹³⁷

Table 19: Instances of criminality prior to violent Islamism.

Pre-jihadist criminality				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Yes	55	0	21%	0%
No	2	2	0.8%	0.8%
Unknown	180	24	64.5%	9.1%

¹³⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) Prisoners in Australia 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2019 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

¹³⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) Prisoners in Australia 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2019 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Table 20: Categories of pre-violent Islamist criminality.

Categories of pre- violent Islamist criminality				
(Of those identified with pre-violent Islamist criminality: 55 cases, percentages are representative of within that cohort)				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Armed robbery	3	0	5.5%	0%
Arson	3	0	5.5%	0%
Assault (including police)	16	0	29%	0%
Attempted murder	1	0	1.8%	0%
Bias crimes	6	0	11%	0%
Breach of a control order (including interim)	2	0	3.6%	0%
Breaching parole	1	0	1.8%	0%
Breaching a restraining order	1	0	1.8%	0%
Car theft	3	0	5.5%	0%
Dealing with the proceeds of crime	1	0	1.8%	0%
Firearms offences (inclusive of breaching prohibition orders and _)	8	0	14.5%	0%
Fraud (inclusive of financial and property by deception fraud types)	2	0	3.6%	0%
Immigration offences	4	0	7.2%	0%
Intimidation	1	0	1.8%	0%
Member of an outlaw criminal group or gang	2	0	3.6%	0%
Murder	2	0	3.6%	0%
Narcotics offences	9	0		0%
Perverting the course of justice	1	0	1.8%	0%
Resisting Police	1	0	1.8%	0%
Sexual Assault	1	0	1.8%	0%
Terrorism	9	0	16.4%	0%
Terrorism (possession of illegal content)	1	0	1.8%	0%
Theft	2	0	3.6%	0%
Threats to kill	2	0	3.6%	0%
Traffic offences	4	0	7.2%	0%
Trafficking weapons	2	0	3.6%	0%
Weapons offences	6	0	11%	0%
Using undeclared Apps	1	0	1.8%	0%
Unknown	181	26	-	-

Table 21: The level of recidivism among those violent Islamists identified in this study.

	Recidivism amongst terrorists and violent Islamists		Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Yes – post al-Qaeda	13	0	4.9%	0%
Yes – post ISIS	3	1	1.1%	0.4%
Unknown	221	25	84%	9.5%

Comparatively, a 2015 report stated that “Muslims made up 9 per cent of prisoners but just 3 per cent of the general population” in New South Wales. In Victoria, “8 per cent of the prison population identified as Muslims, versus 2.2 per cent of the general population” (McCutchan & Campbell, 2018). These descriptive statistics can be broadly considered as accurate given it has already been established that the majority of violent Islamists in Australia are located in Sydney and Melbourne (NSW and Victoria respectively). That there is no great over-representation of Islamic extremists (or Muslims) in the prison system is unsurprising given their religious minority status observed in the overall Australian population.

Shanahan (2019) reports that 48.7 per cent of Australian violent Islamists engaged in acts in preparation or conspiracy to commit a terrorist attack; 23.1 per cent engaged in foreign incursion offences; 19.2 per cent supported, funded or were a member of a terrorist organisation; and 5.1 per cent were shot dead during the commission of their terrorist attack. Of note in Shanahan’s (2019) research is that 66.7 per cent of Australian violent Islamists had no prior criminal history or record; 19.5 per cent were known to authorities for minor offences (driving, minor drugs charges and intimidation) and 13.8 per cent had previously been involved in major offences (murder, violence, terrorism, weapons charges and significant narcotics cases). While differing slightly in statistical comparison to this study, and it should be noted that Shanahan’s (2019) study includes

interviews with “journalists, government and law enforcement officials” (Shanahan, 2019) which this research did not.

7.6.6 Attack Targets, Violence of Choice

While at least 23.6 per cent of Australian violent Islamist’s had a foreign intent (and the intent of 54.8 per cent of those studied was unspecified) for the purposes of this section the domestic threat landscape will be briefly explored. This is due to the data available on attack and target choice which speaks to a broad picture of domestically focused terrorism in Australia. Of note, the tightening of the Australian border to outbound local violent Islamists as well as ISIS’s advice to ‘do what you can, with what you have, where you are’ can be seen as contributing to domestic related plots or attacks. In recognition of these risks, the Australian Government published a national strategy for “Protecting Crowded Places from Terrorism” in 2017 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017). While the document seeks to draw from both local and international knowledge, the instructions al-Qaeda and ISIS¹³⁸ provided to followers with respect to particular types of attacks is also represented in both the strategy and the findings of this research.

¹³⁸ [CONTENT WARNING] Refer for example to ISIS magazines Dabiq (all issues) illustrating how successful violent Islamists’ have committed attacks using trucks, knives and bombs; to al-Qaeda’s overtly instructive ‘Lone Mujahid Pocketbook’ (AQAP, 2013) in how to use vehicles as bombs; how to use vehicles to cause accidents; how to start forest fires using gasoline, acid, cigarettes and lenses; how to use a vehicle to mow down pedestrians for ‘maximum carnage’; how to destroy a building using gas; how to make a bomb “in the kitchen of your Mom”; to training with a handgun and AK47 (AQAP, 2013) descriptive examples of how others have successfully carried out terrorist attacks or how you can learn how to carry out your own terrorist attack are easily accessible online.

Table 22: Terrorist plot and attack targets.

Plot Targets/Terrorist Intent				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Aircraft	2	0	0.8%	0%
Civilians	37	2	14.1%	0.8%
Embassy	1	0	0.4%	0%
Foreign intent	60	2	22.8%	0.8%
Government	4	0	1.5%	0%
Military	9	0	3.4%	0%
Place of worship	3	0	1.1%	0%
Police	13	0	4.9%	0%
Unspecified intent	122	22	46.4%	8.4%

Table 23: Weapons of choice in terrorist plots/attacks.

Violent Islamist weapon/s of choice for domestic plot/attack (Inclusive of thwarted plots and failed attacks across entire cohort)				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Bladed weapons	19	1	7.2%	0.4%
Explosives	25	1	9.5%	0.4%
Firearms	17	0	6.5%	0%
Rocket launcher	1	0	0.4%	0%
Vehicles	4	0	1.5%	0%
Not applicable	179	24	68.1%	9.1%

As an example, al-Qaeda and ISIS published extensive instructions on how to commit bladed-weapon based attacks as well as how to cause mass casualty events with vehicles. Local violent Islamists responded to these instructions, plotted and/or executed attacks in exactly these ways at venues likely to be crowded at the time of the attack. From the thwarted plot to bomb the Melbourne Cricket Ground by Abdul Nacer Benbrika and his terrorist cell in 2005; to Abdul Numan HAIDER's attempted murder of two Police Officers outside a Police Station in suburban Melbourne in 2014; to Sevdet BESIM's thwarted plot to run down police officers using a car on ANZAC Day at the Shrine of Remembrance in 2015; to Hassan Khalif SHIRE's ramming of his gas-cannister laden utility vehicle into pedestrians

in Melbourne's city centre in 2018; the attack and target choices are reflective of the instructional TVEC accessible online to prospective or recidivist violent Islamists. The observation that TVEC has potentially more influence on the target selection of violent Islamists is worthy of further study if we consider that not all those who radicalise (under the influence of TVEC) go on to commit acts of violent extremism.

7.6.7 Prior Military Service or attempts to join the armed forces

Matejic identified a potential emergent trend in research published in 2016. At that time four per cent of a cohort of 186 violent Islamists were found to have been former Australian Defence Force members, or individuals who had wanted to join the Australian Defence Force but who were rejected during the application stage. Given the original study was conducted at a time when Australian violent Islamists were only beginning to find themselves banned from international travel; the trend was noted for future benchmarking (Matejic, 2016a). Further research concluded in 2021 however does not show any increase in the number of individuals having either served or applied to serve with the Australian Defence Force (excepting the one violent Islamist having served with the New Zealand Defence Force).

Table 24: Prior service in National Defence Forces.

Known Prior Service in National Defence Forces				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Yes	4	1	1.5%	0.4%
Australian Defence Force (served)	3	1	1.1%	0.4%
Australian Defence Force (unsuccessful attempt to join)	1	0	0.4%	0%
New Zealand Defence Force (served)	1	0	0.4%	0%
Unknown	232	25	88.1%	9.5%

Further, general population military service rates in Australia published in 2019 observed “92,666 personnel comprising of 58,476 permanent Australian Defence Force members; 17,328 Australian Defence Force Reserve members and 16,862” public service employees (Australian Department of Defence, 2019). Given the population of Australia in 2019 was 25.37 million people; taking into account the number of permanent and reserve members per capita (representing 0.03% of the total population of Australia) the rates of Australian violent Islamists with known prior Australian military service is marginally higher than the national average.

7.6.8 Mental health issues are not a reliable indicator or predictor of violent extremism

In 2016 when Matejic conducted her first tranche of research into Australian violent Islamists she noted that 10 per cent of the 186 cohort studied were observed to have a mental health condition. Data from the 2014 to 2015 National Health Survey then placed 17.5 per cent of the total Australian population as reporting having a mental health condition. At the time, this placed Australian violent Islamist’s at a lower rate of experiencing mental health-related issues than other Australians (Matejic, 2016a). By 2021

when this thesis' research was concluded that rate had shifted downwards to 9.5 per cent within a larger cohort of 263. This reduced the overall statistical result to 3.6 per cent.

Table 25: Known medical illnesses among violent Islamists studied.

Known medical issues				
(based on information tendered to the Court or family testimony/comment to the media)				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Yes (all medical conditions)	27	2	10.3%	0.8%
Yes				
(only mental-health related conditions)	25	0	9.5%	0%
Yes				
(only other chronic conditions)	9	1	3.4%	0.4%
Unknown	210	24	79.8%	9.1%
Acquired brain injury	1	0	0.4%	0%
Adjustment disorder	1	0	0.4%	0%
Anxiety	1	0	0.4%	0%
Autistic	1	0	0.4%	0%
Dementia	1	0	0.4%	0%
Depression	6	0	2.3%	0%
Drug addiction	4	0	1.5%	0%
Hallucinations	2	0	0.8%	0%
Histrionic personality disorder	1	0	0.4%	0%
Inflammatory bowel disease (IBS)	1	0	0.4%	0%
Learning difficulties	2	0	0.8%	0%
Mental impairments	1	0	0.4%	0%
Messiah complex	1	0	0.4%	0%
Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)	2	0	0.8%	0%
Paranoia	4	0	1.5%	0%
Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	2	0	0.8%	0%
Schizophrenia	5	0	1.9%	0%
—				
Yes - unspecified	6	2	2.3%	0.8%
Suspected by Coroner	1	0	0.4%	0%
Received psychiatric care as a minor	1	0	0.4%	0%

Recognising the limitations of the research data, we can still make some observations about the rate of mental illness and chronic health conditions in comparison to the general Australian population:

Table 26: Comparison of rates of mental illness among violent Islamists studied and the general Australian population.

Rates of illness within the Australian violent Islamist community compared with rates of illness within the general Australian Population:					
	General Australian Population			Australian violent Islamist Community	
	Overall	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mental Health related Illness	20.1% ¹³⁹	17.9% ¹⁴⁰	22.3% ¹⁴¹	9.5%	0%
Other chronic Illness	27.2% ¹⁴²	33.1% ¹⁴³	34.7% ¹⁴⁴	3.4%	0.4%

The data shows that both overall and in a by-gender breakdown, Australian violent Islamists experience lower mental health related illnesses and chronic health conditions as a cohort than Australians generally. Factors that might influence this lower outcome that should be considered include the younger general age range of Australian violent Islamists (the majority being within the 18-24 and 25-34 years of age, a combined total of 55.3% of the total data set) and that the research was unable to ascertain any health status for over 88.9% of those studied. A similar Australian study by Rodger Shanahan (2019) of 173 Australian residents and citizens involved in ISIS, noting the same research limitations, indicated that data found that “mental health plays a very minor role in Islamist terrorism.” Shanahan (2019) further observed that in 13 legal cases where mental health considerations were relevant, the judge only accepted 3 of them

¹³⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) Mental Health, reference period 2017-2018 financial year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021, accessed 14 November 2021).

¹⁴⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) Mental Health, reference period 2017-2018 financial year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021, accessed 14 November 2021).

¹⁴¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) Mental Health, reference period 2017-2018 financial year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021, accessed 14 November 2021).

¹⁴² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) Chronic Conditions, reference period 2017-2018 financial year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021a).

¹⁴³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) Chronic Conditions, reference period 2017-2018 financial year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021a).

¹⁴⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) Chronic Conditions, reference period 2017-2018 financial year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021a).

during sentencing. Shanahan (2019) also observed that “some families and community groups are wont to sheet home responsibility for terrorist crimes to ‘mental health issues’ on the part of the offender” as a means of removing religious identity “as a possible motivating factor” (Shanahan, 2019). Cherney et al (2020) in an Australian study investigating the radicalisation of 33 minors, but with access to Police and other information holdings, found that caution was needed to ensure reporting of mental illness was clinically diagnosed and not confused with speculation that was in fact based on “teens with behavioural issues or personal disabilities.” Cherney et al’s (2021) study reported a higher rate of mental illness among minors (42.4%) noting that this was higher than studies that drew from larger sample sizes (Cherney et al., 2020). Gill et al (2021) in a global larger aggregate study of 1705 subjects, found that when studies on the mental health of terrorists were based on open-source investigations “diagnoses were present 9.82 per cent of the time.” In comparison, 14.4 per cent of the studies aggregated suggested a confirmed, clinical, diagnosis (Gill et al., 2021).

7.6.9 Welfare dependency is not a reliable indicator or predictor of violent extremism

At the time of publishing the initial study in 2016, Matejic noted the then Government’s narrative around violent Islamist’s being welfare dependant. Announcements such as cuts to welfare for those named as terrorists or supporters of Terrorism (at home and living abroad) were widely reported in the media in 2014 (Australian Associated Press, 2014; Cheer, 2014; McDonald & Fay-Ramirez, 2015; Norman, 2015). This narrative continued in 2018 (Credlin, 2018).

Table 27: Rate of welfare recipience among violent Islamists studied.

Known welfare recipient				
			Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Yes	10	3	3.8%	1.1%
Unknown	227	23	86.3%	8.7%

It is difficult to get a clear picture from Australian Government data on the rate of welfare dependency in the general population. Government data appears to focus on the cost of welfare rather than how many people receive it. The data is further diluted by reporting across a range of categories of welfare that are supported (such as disability, carer, single parent, education, and unemployment). To get a clearer picture, data from 2001 through 2019 was aggregated via the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. For clarity, only welfare categories that were identified within the researcher’s dataset were included. The table below sets this out in more detail:

Table 28: Income Support types and percentages among the general Australian population.

Type of income support	% of Australian population (2001-2019)
Unemployment	On average 3.7% of the population.
Parenting	On average 2.7% of the population.
Disability and Carer	On average 5.2% of the population.
Other	On average 0.76% of the population
TOTAL	12.36% of the general Australian population received one of the categories of income support listed above during 2001-2019.
Data source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Income recipients by payment type, taken each June from 2001 to December 2021 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021).	

Based on the data in the table above, on average 12.36% of the general Australia population received one of the four categories of income support (unemployment, parenting, disability and carer; and other) during the period of 2001 and 2019. This is in comparison to the 4.9% observed within the Australian violent Islamist cohort in the researcher’s data.

This time period is largely consistent with the terrorist activity demonstrated across the studied cohort, although the following limitations should be noted: (a) limited court reporting and news reporting is available online from the early 2000's; (b) as student welfare support payments were not included, the rate may or may not be higher; and (c) aged pension data was specifically excluded because none of the cohort studied were eligible for the aged pension at the time of their offending or radicalisation. Further, it is not known if the vast majority (95%) were recipients of welfare at the time of their offending or radicalisation and as such the dataset is very small.

Noting the above limitations, the studied cohort was by category on par, or overall, well below the trends observed in the general population. Shanahan (2019) observed slightly different trends in his like-study (of a smaller cohort) noting "17 per cent were unemployed or receiving social welfare." International data indicates that unemployment rates and dependence on state welfare among violent Islamists is even higher internationally (Shanahan, 2019). It should be noted that Shanahan's work studied a significantly shorter period of time when ISIS were active, over the span of some 6 years compared to the researcher's inclusion of all post 9/11 terrorists and jihadists over almost two decades.

7.7 Conclusion

Consistent with what other scholars in Australia have found, the descriptive statistics and case studies presented in this chapter do not present a particular 'profile' of an Australian violent Islamist but rather a collection of like trajectories that can be seen as influencing and/or contributing to the radicalisation of individuals. This research therefore lends itself towards profiling pathways to terrorism rather than the terrorists themselves. By engaging an understanding of how availability cascades work to exert

influence on prospects and recruits; together with source-material from the terrorist organisations themselves; and the mapping of radical pathways for Australian violent Islamists, we can build a deeper understanding of how influence is exerted during radicalisation and recruitment activities.

The role of significance seeking, as a direct by-product of the era of online and social media 'influencer' culture we live in, and the way that availability cascades feed this need for recognition and notoriety is particularly evident in all the case studies presented. The collective belief that brings like-minded individuals together online serves to trigger a chain reaction for those in the cascade as they seek to join and then manipulate the violent extremist discourse in their respective spheres. Joining and contributing to the availability cascade bestows in-group rewards for followers, while the manipulation of discourse within those spheres by violently extreme availability entrepreneurs affords them the ability to radicalise and recruit others. The way in which leaders act as availability entrepreneurs within those offline spheres, and the convergence of that influence with significant seeking behaviours driven by the TVEC consumed by in-group members, spills over into offline, real-world plots and attacks. Availability entrepreneurs in this setting not only seek out the significance for themselves but are able to advance the terrorist organisation's agenda in ways that are highly influential. Further, significance is steeped in social proof for the in-group while actively contributing to the perpetual motion of the availability cascade by continued investments of TVEC.

While the in-group audience focuses on the informational aspects of the availability cascade, for example as it satisfies their need for sense-making, grievance resolution and/or the need to apportion blame other than for the consequences of their actions; leaders are primarily focused on reputational frames. This is not to say there is not a progression from information to reputational frames in prospects and recruits – as evidenced by the case

studies presented herein – particularly as tier 6’s violence approaches; however, as leaders often position themselves as those responsible for the bestowal of physically tangible held-out rewards, their concern for the reputational aspects of the cascade is more prominent. The only thing availability entrepreneurs within the cascade can’t deliver are meta-physical held-out rewards. While the leader or availability entrepreneur can venerate a martyr and see that wives, children and families are taken care of financially; they cannot deliver the promised held-out rewards of the afterlife – only Allah can. This makes their position as availability entrepreneurs within the cascade potent: as influencers with control over the reputational considerations of others, they hold a status that is both anchoring and available.

A particular avenue of further scholarship is evident from the NAMOA case study, in so far as her husband was the unintentional radicalising agent. With the Australian violent Islamist community so interwoven via family relationships and inter-marriages, it is likely that other cases like NAMOA’s may be present. Building an understanding of the dynamics in play between a husband and wife in the Salafi-jihadist community may prove particularly useful in identifying how and where PCVE measures could be deployed to disengage people or avert radicalisation and recruitment towards violent extremism.

Taking a behavioural economics approach to the challenge of understanding radicalisation in this way is novel. The way online and social media has evolved – and our understanding of the psychological effects they have on people – has also led to a deeper understanding of this challenge, particularly in the way TVEC is geared to trigger heuristics and biases to influence prospect or recruit decision-making. Common to all the individuals presented in the case-studies in this chapter is the influence not only that the in-group had on their trajectory, but the influence TVEC has

on their perceptions, biases and views of reality. That availability cascades are only beginning to be understood in the context of social media echo-chambers and the challenges faced by society more broadly in preventing violent extremism demonstrates the need for further scholarship in this area to build upon the foundations already provided by Sunstein, Thaler, Moghaddam, Kruglanski, Phillips and Pohl.

CHAPTER 8:

MODEL, RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The Radicalisation Cascade looks at the process of radicalisation through a behavioural economics lens. It serves as a new framework to organise information in a way that focuses on the decision-making behaviours associated with the radicalisation process. As a thesis addressing a real-time, real-world challenge, this contribution to original knowledge has been deliberately focused towards enabling those working in the deterrence, disengagement, prevention and countering violent extremism environments with a framework to support professional practice. By exploring coercive influence, TVEC, and its impact on an individual's decision-making, we can better understand how, and to some extent, why, people are drawn towards violent extremism. This deeper understanding aims to support the development of more effective policy settings and programs to address these challenges. Further, by viewing radicalisation within the framework of an availability cascade, we can begin to better identify those at risk and develop holistic deterrence and preventative solutions to disengage people at the lowest possible level of intervention.

While the example of faith-based extremism (through an Islamic extremist lens) has been used in this thesis to demonstrate how availability cascades, biases, and heuristics, support the radicalising environment, the framework this thesis presents can be applied to other forms of violent extremism and harmful in-group settings, particularly those who leverage content marketing style propaganda as a tool of influence.

8.2 Model

Terrorism, and the radicalisation and recruitment activities that underpin it, has long been a focus of study for scholars. The need to understand why people are drawn towards or into radical belief and violent extremism is, like the study of criminology, the way we try to make sense of why people commit horrific crimes. For most of the world's population, witnessing such extreme violence is thankfully infrequent. That most people cannot fathom why someone would murder others to fulfil a religious, political, or ideological belief, is perhaps the best indication we have that while terrorism continues to be present in society, for most of the world it is not a daily feature of life.¹⁴⁵ On the whole, this speaks to a level of social cohesion; cultural and religious tolerance; and peaceful political intent that demonstrates an inherent belief in the goodness of people. This perspective is often overlooked when researching terrorism and it is certainly never in the frame when the media report on violent extremists, terrorist attacks or their aftermaths. But it's an increasingly important distinction to make. Case in point, out of a 2021 population of 25.7 million Australians, only 263 met the threshold for inclusion in this thesis' research. That's 0.00102% of the Australian population. So, while models help us explain how bad things like terrorism can happen, they should also be able to provide context and insights into where points of opportunity exist for meaningful engagement before people are drawn into radicalism or violent extremism. This is particularly true of multicultural societies like Australia, where each of the 263 individuals studied as part of this thesis, had pathways towards violent extremism that were unique-to-them. These unique circumstances primed them for situations where influence might be exchanged for held-out rewards. Many other Australian have also experienced similar unique circumstances; however, the descriptive statistics clearly show that almost none of them become radicalised or interested in violent extremism.

¹⁴⁵ Excepting countries such as Israel and Palestine; Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries who continue to suffer from regional, political, ideological and religious conflicts on an often near daily basis.

Therefore, radicalisation models looking to explain the radicalisation and recruitment process must be able to demonstrate flexibility towards dynamic influence pathways, particularly ones that are able to successfully circumvent the cohesive social factors present within society.

As a work-based research project, this model has been developed from real-world observations, an analysis of primary sources from al-Qaeda and ISIS, and mapped against existing academic behavioural economics and psychological models.

Acknowledging radicalisation as a spectrum or cascade in nature, rather than a linear pathway, may go some way to achieving this. Engagement doesn't always equate to violent extremism, just as disengagement doesn't equate to a departure from ideological belief. While sequential movement through each radicalisation tier in The Radicalisation Cascade is required, it is also possible for individuals to join at any of the lower levels and still progress onward so long as they already meet the prerequisites established. This might also go some way towards explaining how this same cascade works for individuals who are considered lone-actors and who were self-radicalised; and those who radicalise quickly. Equally, those on the radicalisation trajectory may top-out at any level, remaining ideologically aligned but otherwise disengaged. It is also possible for people to move between tiers, as their interest or commitment waxes and wanes. Having reached the pinnacle of their own radicalisation journey people may also go on to become active or passive supporters of the group or to perform other roles at any of the higher tiers. Only those deradicalised and disengaged could be considered as entering a radicalising environment but truly abandoning it.

It is also worthy of note that previously published research that has contributed models of radicalisation and/or recruitment towards violent

extremism remains relevant, and as already referenced in this thesis, has underpinned much of the understanding of terrorism and radicalisation that informs this work. Historical scholarship should not be viewed as mutually exclusive between itself, nor within this new framework. Rather, there is much to be gained from multidisciplinary work in this field and contributions to existing knowledge sets should be viewed as complimentary: just as pathways to terrorism are diverse and dynamic, so too must our understanding and responses to it.

In developing *The Radicalisation Cascade*, which has its origins from observations spanning over a decade of professional practice, the researcher sought to explore what decision-making pathways, nudges and behaviours were common to Australian violent Islamists. What the research found was that whether formally or informally (or via their own radicalising environment) the underlying radicalisation framework observed in a 2010 recruitment handbook first disseminated by al-Qaeda continues to be the most common trajectory prospective violent Islamists are nudged towards violent jihad on. This is evident even where the research was not able to directly place the document with the violent Islamist (in an actual physical or circumstantial manner) because the behaviours exhibited by recruiters and violent Islamists consistently emulated those found in the handbook. The only noticeable difference in the conveyance of the core-radicalisation methodology has been the adaptive nature of recruiters and availability entrepreneurs to exploit the benefits presented to them by online and social media-based communications conduits. This has enabled recruiters to be more effective in attracting prospective violent Islamists as well as more coercive in the application of nudges. No longer beholden to face-to-face interactions, contemporary recruiters have at their disposal the entire suite of the internet of things. This ensures that the radicalising process not only continues in perpetual motion due to the participatory investment of its in-groups, but as has been demonstrated in Chapter 6, it

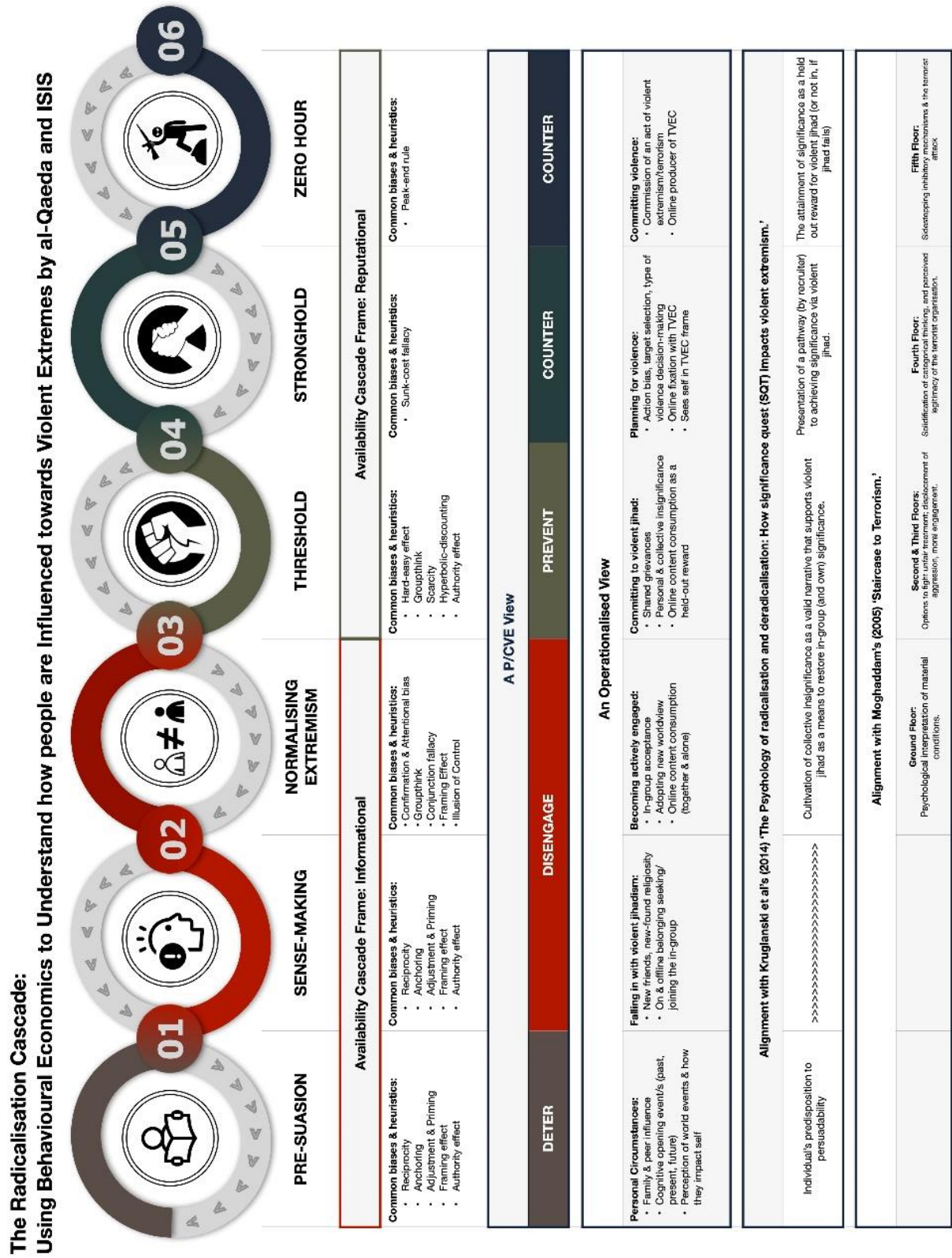
draws additional momentum from the nature of violent Islamist storytelling via content marketing. This content marketing style of communications and propaganda has become so prevalent within all forms of terrorism that it is now universally referred to as 'terrorist and violent extremist content' (TVEC). By viewing The Radicalisation availability cascade, we have a framework to explore not only the nudges being applied to prospective violent Islamists but also to track the coercive influence being exerted over varying periods of time. As has been demonstrated in Chapter 8, while the length of radicalising environments is increasingly becoming shorter, the time spent radicalising is not an indicator of overall radicalisation success.

Additionally, viewing the radicalisation process through an availability cascade enables us to better understand the breadth of contributing factors to every individual's circumstance and how that has influenced their predisposition to violent extremism. Where other models assume a level of existing radical interest or belief, The Radicalisation Cascade does not. It begins at a position of pre-suasion which is well before the individual has had any conscious or overt ideation of radicalism or violent extremism. By capturing this part of the radicalisation trajectory within the structure of an availability cascade, the elements that have contributed to the individual's susceptibility to radicalisation become clearer. Equally, by starting at a point of pre-suasion we can observe how recruiters systematically select potential prospects by assessing them based on their receptiveness to influence. Those who are easier to influence make better recruits, those who are resistant to, or cannot be, influenced are poor prospects that present little to no value to the recruiter. It is clear from the behavioural economics theory explored in Chapter 5 that recruiters will only pursue prospects that present as low-cost, low-risk high-yield opportunities. If recruiters were to deviate from this type of prospect theory, they would exist in an almost perpetual cycle of sunk costs with recruits that will never

progress to the level of radicalisation needed to commit acts of violent extremism.

To best understand The Radicalisation Cascade, the following visual representation has been constructed. This model has been designed to highlight the coercive influences on decision-making and the types of behaviours exhibited by the individual as they move from prospect to recruit. As a tiered cascade, the model also demonstrates the ease at which those within the availability cascade who do not fully radicalise to committing acts of violent extremism dwell, or top-out. As a perpetual-motion cascade, those who don't radicalise to violent extremes still deliver passive but positive in-group benefits by virtue of their presence and continued participation which acts as in a facilitatory way to propel others forward by attaching significance to in-group membership and information.

Figure 5: The Radicalisation Cascade.



8.3 Results

In Chapter 7 the case studies of 3 Australian Islamic extremists were explored. As part of this research, broader trends and observations were made by drawing statistical data from the aggregated demographic and psychographic information available from a larger cohort. This approach resulted in a range of insights being produced that enabled the research to be compared with like datasets globally, and later¹⁴⁶ Australian research. Perhaps most importantly, the research provided an evidence base from which comparisons could be made, enabling the validation of these findings and that of other scholars. While a core representation of that data can be found in Chapter 7, there are additional observations that can be made which will be presented in this section.

The story the data tells will not be surprising to those investigating or working in the PCVE environment; however, the results remain at odds with media-led narratives that focused on the harms of the Internet and its ability to radicalise young people into joining ISIS. The lack of an evidence base for these media narratives is likely due to poor research on the part of some journalists but also, perhaps, due to the online dominance ISIS achieved. In amplifying their TVEC, journalists appeared to mistake volume for influence, and promoted the idea that 'the Internet' was radicalising young Australians when the data clearly shows this was not the case for the vast majority of individuals. What the data did highlight, but which lacks the newsworthiness of 'online radicalisation', was the high prevalence of peer-to-peer and family-based radicalising pathways in Australia.

¹⁴⁶ The researcher's 2016 approach, published as a report, has since been replicated by other Australian researchers. This later work improves upon the accessibility of the overall findings, with each researcher coming to broadly similar conclusions based on independent investigations into a similar group of Australian violent Islamist's.

Table 29: Known radicalisation conduits of Australian violent Islamists.

Radicalisation conduit	Percentage			
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Family (including spouse)	38	6	14.5%	2.3%
Online (only)	4	2	1.5%	0.8%
Peer to peer	77	3	29.3%	1.1%
Previously radicalised (such as via al-Qaeda)	9	0	3.4%	0%
Prison	7	0	2.7%	0%
Self radicalised	7	1	2.7%	0.4%
Unknown	100	15	38%	5.7%

While the table above demonstrates this statistically, a social network analysis better demonstrates the rarity of lone-actors and self-radicalised violent Islamists in the Australian community. This is because known connections were easier to establish with publicly-open social media accounts used by youth within the community. As depicted in the graphic below, what is clear from the social network analysis of the cohort studied is that they are broadly inter-connected. Further, the influence of a handful of key individuals within that network can be seen to cascade throughout the Islamic extremist community (as depicted by the larger nodes). What can't be demonstrated in this thesis is the way the nodes extrapolate the connectivity between influencer and their broader networks interactively. An example has been provided below alongside the original social network analysis to depict this in a two-dimensional way using Neil PRAKASH's data. In PRAKASH'S case, his span of influence across several smaller, but interconnected networks and other influencers is evident.

Figure 6: Full Social Network Centricity (Matejic, 2016).

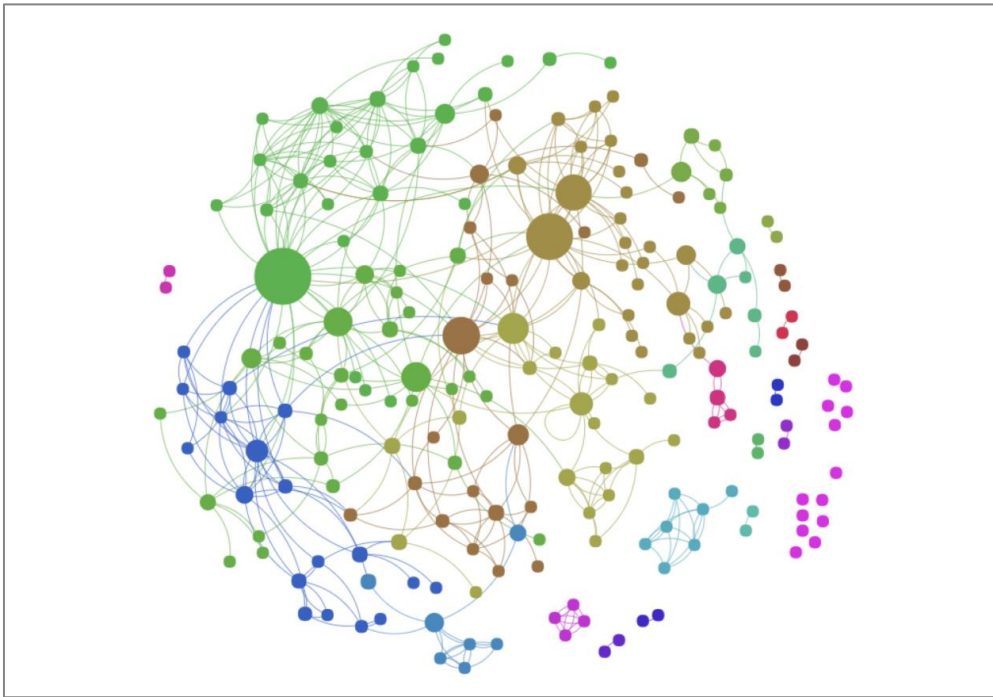
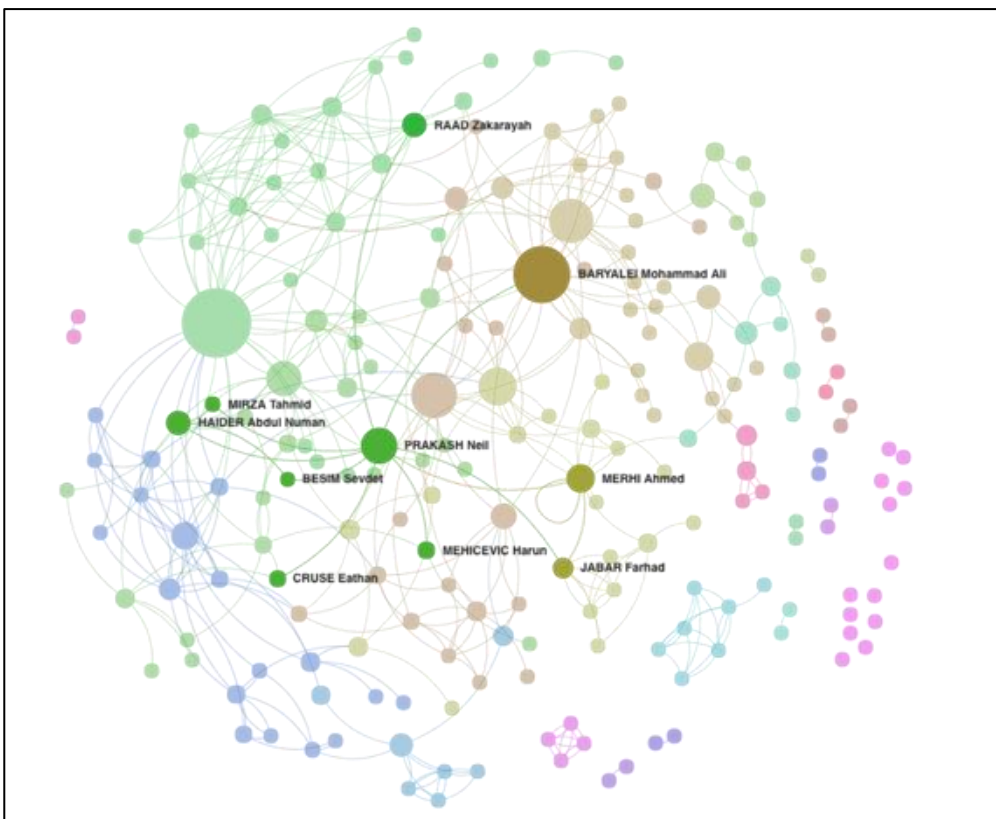


Figure 7: Partial Social Network Analysis highlighting PRAKASH'S known centricity (Matejic, 2016).



We can also see the influence of the availability entrepreneur exerts in how Australian violent Islamists chose their targets. As suggested in chapter 6, it appears that TVEC exerts significant influence in this decision-making process.

Table 30: Plot/Attack targets.

Plot Targets/Terrorist Intent	Percentage			
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Aircraft	2	0	0.8%	0%
Civilians	37	2	14.1%	0.8%
Embassy	1	0	0.4%	0%
Foreign intent	60	2	22.8%	0.8%
Government	4	0	1.5%	0%
Military	9	0	3.4%	0%
Place of worship	3	0	1.1%	0%
Police	13	0	4.9%	0%
Unspecified intent	122	22	46.4%	8.4%

The specificity of target selection observed, as being influenced by either al-Qaeda or ISIS leaders– particularly via video or magazine instructions – came from an individual holding the availability entrepreneur role. This is particularly noticeable when we recognise that as a reputationally focused activity within an availability cascade, availability entrepreneurs will seek out targets that will achieve as much death, destruction, and propaganda of the deed value as is possible. While civilians are statistically (domestically) overrepresented in this study as a target, the location of those civilian attacks or thwarted plots affords contextual notoriety. Target selection also incorporates propaganda of the deed value. For example, a successful attack on civilians in Melbourne’s central business district in 2018 served to use the iconic Bourke Street Mall and adjacent areas as a backdrop. The Bourke Street Mall is considered ‘the heart’ of Melbourne and is promoted globally as a shopping destination. Similarly, thwarted plots on Federation Square, the Melbourne Cricket Ground and St Pauls Cathedral

Church would have resulted in greater propaganda of the deed value via expected media coverage due to their iconic locations and the timing of the attacks (during large public gatherings). For those with foreign intent, the reputational aspect of the availability cascade pivoted to celebrate not only victorious insurgent activity, but also (among other outcomes) to deliver propaganda of the deed value.

While these descriptive statistics are broadly valuable to policymakers and operational PCVE practitioners, the context in which they appear as part of thwarted plots, successful attacks or foreign incursion speaks to the way the availability cascade can maintain influence in the absence of a core-leadership structure. So long as an availability entrepreneur remains available to the ingroup, the cascade continues in perpetual motion. This means that availability entrepreneurs may be virtual, appearing only via monologues on videos or in magazines. That each terrorist cell can exist within its own availability cascade, while concurrently adhering to the same ideology and maintaining some ability for interoperability with other cells via shared virtual availability entrepreneurs, reflects the robustness of the online radicalising environment and virtual in-group coercive control. While decentralisation has long been a feature of Salafi-Jihadism, this research demonstrates that in an information environment where online influence is leveraged and new availability entrepreneurs can be grown, or presented virtually without personal interaction, this acts as a facilitatory mechanism for the availability cascade to incubate and facilitate terrorist attacks.

8.4 Discussion

In Chapter 4, the theoretical aspects that underpin nudging were outlined. This included how availability cascades, prospect theory, expected utility theory and terrorist choice work together to influence prospective violent Islamists, radicalise them and turn them into terrorists. It must be noted,

however, that this model does not have an equal effect on all to whom it is applied.¹⁴⁷ As discussed earlier in this chapter the pre-qualifying aspect of pre-suasion as a means of influence on susceptibility towards radicalisation is in many ways a form of self-selection in or out of the availability cascade. Without the cognitive opening event having occurred in a prospective violent Islamist's life prior to their meaningful interest in extreme Islam, the recruiter must either trigger one via a sense of shared grievance or assess the individual as a risk. In the 263 individuals studied as part of this research project, the pre-suasion element of The Radicalisation Cascade can be accounted for via pre-existing family or peer network involvement in extreme Islam (normalisation) or such a cognitive opening event has occurred in their life.¹⁴⁸

8.4.1 Availability Cascades

Availability cascades, particularly when paired with social media and content marketing style information payloads, are well suited to demonstrating how in-group participation propels radical belief forward towards violent extremism. Whether violent extremist ideology is based on religious beliefs (such is the case of this research), or political, identity, nationalistic or racial foundations is immaterial to the function of the availability cascade: so long as in-group members actively participate in it, the cascade remains in perpetual motion.

¹⁴⁷ While some individuals will radicalise towards violent extremism, others will radicalise but not to the point of active engagement with violence. Instead, they may fulfil supporting roles such as financing, becoming a jihadi bride and/or recruiters. Some individuals may not fully radicalise at all. Some may radicalise but disengage from all active ideation of committing or supporting violence, although remaining sympathetic.

¹⁴⁸ A cognitive opening event in this context can vary widely from a death of a parent to death of a friend (particularly a friend who was involved in extreme Islam who died via interaction with Police); international events where Muslims are the subject of violence or denigration; a diminished mental capacity to the extent that the individual realises their opportunities in life are not like their peers; mental health challenges; a history of drug or alcohol abuse; child abuse; parental and/or cultural disapproval; or circumstances that culminate to produce or trigger a cognitive opening event that enables an agenda to be set and frame created by a recruiter. For example, a young male who has limited cultural independence, is sexually frustrated and/or unable to find an arranged marriage and/or has experienced racism within Australian society – can be led to believe these problems are the fault of others (such as Western society) and that violent jihad can provide them with a pathway towards redemption and significance. It is for these reasons, for example, that ISIS provided those Western males who migrated to their Caliphate a wife, home, whitegoods, car and cash upon their arrival. These examples of being bestowed with gifts and significance are often held out as rewards of what was otherwise unattainable for them in Australia.

In the context of violent Islamist radicalisation and recruitment, the availability cascade provides a structure for the recruiter to influence the prospective recruit's decision-making. This is largely done in a coercive and deceptive manner that presents as autonomous decision-making under the guise of conditional reciprocity. The held-out rewards of channelled attention and of in-group membership are reliant on the absolute conditional approval of the recruiter. To advance through The Radicalisation Cascade, the prospective violent Islamist must conform to both behavioural and world-view norms that consistently align with the in-group. Deviation from those norms is not tolerated. By way of in-group self-moderation, compliance becomes both participatory and punitive to those within the availability cascade.

The role of an availability entrepreneur within The Radicalisation Cascade radicalisation cascade can be viewed as belonging to the recruiter. This is because the recruiter derives personal benefit from recruiting others to commit violent jihad.¹⁴⁹ Many self-styled clerics and self-appointed Sheikhs acting as both religious leaders and terrorist cell leaders could also be considered availability entrepreneurs due to their ability to attract, groom and radicalise followers. By positioning Allah – not themselves as a recruiter, cleric, or leader – as the ultimate authority and bestower of held-out rewards, availability entrepreneurs are able to side-step accountability. So long as the ways to please Allah remain at the centre of the influence being exerted, and in-group members know that only disbelievers would dare argue with a God, coercive compliance results.

¹⁴⁹ By way of comparison, an availability entrepreneur within health and wellbeing movements are motivated also by the bestowal of significance by their target audience, which then results in an increase in their social value in that market segment. The ability to influence others within that marketplace then enables those influencers (availability entrepreneurs) to derive a financial benefit from their status by way of advertising, marketing and sponsorship opportunities. As is often the case in influencer marketing, whether the influencer uses and likes the products or services they promote to their audience is immaterial to the fact that they derive a financial benefit from advertising the product and, in the case of major or luxury brands, an additional increase in their social value via positive association.

Availability entrepreneurs in this context use their own significance to exert coercive control. The more popular the radical sheikh, cleric, or recruiter, the higher their social value in violent Islamist circles becomes. The higher their social value, the more people are drawn into their orbit. The more people they can attract, the more legitimacy is granted to their ideology, resulting in a higher probability of them successfully radicalising a portion of their following. Successful violent Islamists, bestow even more significance on their radical cleric and/or recruiter leading to higher-still increases in social value (on and offline) while concurrently acting as a catalyst for propelling burgeoning in-group members forward within the availability cascade. The rewards that this presents to the recruiter or radical cleric go beyond channelled attention and influence over others: money is often donated to support them, in addition to the perceived rewards bestowed in the afterlife. Whether the radical cleric and/or recruiter believe in the permissibility and necessity of violent jihad itself is not a requirement for success – they need only be persuasive enough to draw others into their orbit to ostensibly do the act of terrorism that they themselves are unlikely– or unable - to commit.

8.4.2 Availability Cascade: Informational Frame

The informational frame within The Radicalisation Cascade performs an educative (or re-educative in the case of Muslims from other sects) function to change and re-orient prospective recruits' beliefs and behaviours to conform with violent Salafist worldviews. The role of online communities and social media in the informational aspect of the cascade is critical to the formation of participatory behaviours, which in turn act as distributed, additional agents of influence. The more the prospective violent Islamists observes other people positively associating with one-another (on and offline), investing in behaviours such as sharing TVEC and terrorist act ideation, the more likely they are to also begin to believe in the validity and

permissibility of those actions – and mimic those behaviours. That the informational aspect focuses on a violent Salafist application of Islamic ideology, is reflected in the overt composition of the content produced by terrorist organisations like ISIS. While such TVEC is steeped in master narratives, religious and cultural cues, they are not actually focused on teaching Islam as a religion. Rather, they focus on the ways the Salafist interpretation of jihad justifies violent action against those who oppose it – the near enemy, (other Muslims of different sects) and the far enemy (the West, non-believers). The out-grouping framed within the content reinforces this and is particularly influential when paired with in-group shared grievances.

Another influential aspect of the availability cascade in the informational frame is its ability to pass off information that is incorrect or misinterpreted as historical or present-day fact. The availability entrepreneur's ability to communicate in ways that are easy for the in-group to understand, even if what they say is not true, makes those messages easier to remember and share. This results in the availability entrepreneur retaining credibility even when the information presented is patently false. As Barr (2013) reminds us, one of the ways they do this is by channelling focus via the use of dramatic anecdotes (Barr, 2013). Salafi jihadist's do not dispute historical events so much as dispute the mainstream interpretation of them. To reverts or lapsed Muslims, or those from other sects within Islam, this creates a knowledge-gap that must be filled to convince prospective violent Islamists of the accuracy, validity – and ultimate superiority and authority - of the information they are being fed. As evidenced by the content produced and disseminated by ISIS and al-Qaeda, their flair for communicating in a dramatic tone forms the backbone of their broader content marketing strategy. The availability cascade's ability to deliver violent Salafi indoctrination in this way is successful because the majority of prospective violent Islamists do not have a well-rounded understanding

of Islam and lack the desire to do that research on their own (as it presents no value to them outside of the in-group). And why would they? The availability cascade, due to its participatory nature, keeps them in a state of newly found cognitive consonance so long as they keep investing it in. Additionally, recruiters are fastidious in ensuring a prospective recruit's information diet consists of only what they feed them, actively discouraging, and taking steps to prevent any information being sourced from outside of the in-group. The in-group not only constructs the cascade around the prospective violent Islamist in this way, but it self-moderates itself to ensure continued compliance. Those not in lockstep with in-group views are publicly admonished and either acquiesce, keep their non-conforming beliefs to themselves, leave, or are removed from the in-group.

The influence this exerts on the information being shared – both via content and observational behaviours – contributes to reinforcing perceptions within the availability cascade. That all this information remains easily accessible to the prospective violent Islamist, via the cloud caliphate or their offline and/or online in-groups, makes them not only more likely to believe what they read, hear and view – but more likely to participate in validating it for other group members. This assists the cascade in spreading TVEC and violent ideation further, perpetuating a cycle of constant informational reinforcement.

8.4.3 Availability Cascade: Reputational Frame

The informational frame within The Radicalisation Cascade performs the functions of governing social approval and attaching significance to the beliefs and actions of the in-group. By attaching the bestowal of significance to social approval, the cascade perpetuates coercive control by self-moderating in-group behaviour while rewarding violent ideation and action.

Availability entrepreneurs in the informational frame continue to use dramatic framing to illustrate their objectives, particularly as the prospective violent Islamists move through The Radicalisation Cascade radicalisation cascade with an increasing bias for action. Acutely aware of the need to tie social acceptance to their behaviours and beliefs to a reputational frame, availability entrepreneurs highlight the stories of successful martyrs against a backdrop of failure to illustrate the bestowal and withholding of held-out rewards. Further, prospective jihadists who aren't yet (or will never be) at a point of violent ideation are viewed in a 'less-than' way by the in-group.

Within the context of The Radicalisation Cascade, reputational concerns are tethered to both the individual and the in-group. The individual, by demonstrating behaviours that seek social approval, can attain a level of significance simply by remaining compliant within the in-group. Membership itself is a reward. Additional significance is offered as a held-out reward on completion of their violent jihad. For some this may mean they go on to become recruiters of note themselves or propagandists. However, martyrdom by successful violent jihad is viewed as the pinnacle of success for in-group members. Obituaries and videos celebrate highly successful violent extremists in death, for the benefit of the living, while reinforcing the promise of the rewards of the afterlife that can only be delivered by Allah.

8.5 Applications for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism PCVE

Applying 'The Radicalisation Cascade' to P/CVE challenges can be achieved by considering four opportunity spaces: (1) Deter; (2) Disengage; (3) Prevent; and (4) Counter, activities. These have been mapped onto the model at 8.2

It's important to caveat at the outset that none of the P/CVE levels are aimed at changing people's core cultural or religious beliefs. The aim is to help them to understand and accept that violence is not the way to remedy any grievances they may hold, and to present other options for meaningful diversion away from violent ideation.

P/CVE is a complex topic and significant research, and resources go into building programs that meet the needs of the communities and individuals that need them. There is no one-program-fits-all solution, and the needs of communities in varying countries around the world necessarily differ. While it is not possible to consider the P/CVE landscape in depth in this section, a brief discussion to provide context on how each level of the P/CVE framework can be applied as mapped within The Radicalisation Cascade follows:

8.5.1 Deter

Deterrence is the most passive level of the P/CVE framework. It aims to deter individuals from engaging with violently extreme ideas and content, such as before they encounter them. Programs that sit at this level include:

- Education, in age, religious and culturally appropriate ways, about topics that may draw people into information cascades that are harmful. Building awareness and resilience towards of online harms how others seek to manipulate people on and offline, can assist people in identifying them when they come across these types of behaviours or content online.
- Technological solutions can include search redirection and a better understanding and regulation of algorithms, to ensure people do not find themselves in harmful eco-chambers that lead to violent extremism.

Deterrence must also be supported by societal and governmental initiatives that promote social cohesion, equality, and tolerance. At its core, these are people-led challenges that need to be addressed to avoid situations where individuals, particularly but not only youth, become disaffected and disengage with society.

8.5.2 Disengage

Disengagement can occur when a person is already stepping into or is involved in a low level radicalising environment. They may have been exposed to TVEC or they might be already disaffected and disengaging from their interpersonal relationships, and they are beginning to normalise violence as one of many actions that could remedy their grievances. Disengagement activities could include:

- The provision of psychosocial pastoral and/or professional support, to assist the individual in disengaging from normalising violent ideation; and
- Providing meaningful pathways away from the environments that are normalising violent ideation and reconnect them with their families and community-based networks (for example sporting clubs and community service-based activities).

Disengagement activities necessitate the existence of support and diversionary programs to be effective. It is not enough to disengage an individual from violent ideation if they have no defined off-ramp to support them through the process. Building these resources – such as supported living and working arrangements – can take time and requires community and governmental support.

8.5.3 Prevent

Prevention activities most often occur when an individual is already radicalised and has established violent ideation but has not progressed to an action space. Prevention occurs in a dynamic environment where the level of an individual's radicalisation and the pace of their planning determines at what point they become a risk to themselves and others – and at what point prevention moves to countering interventions. If an individual's planning advances quickly, for example, enforcement agencies like Police will become involved to protect public safety. Prevention activities at the earlier stages could include:

- Tailored pastoral care and support
- Staged interventions by family and friends (under professional supervision and guidance)
- The provision of structured exit strategies to disengage them from the radicalised groups and peers (such as supported living and working environments); and
- Open, frank discussions about the consequences of their violent ideation and the options available to them to begin to disengage.

There may be a point where individuals are unable to be disengaged from their intention to commit an act of extreme violence. While they may not then be at an active 'counter' stage (depending on the sophistication of their plans and capability to commit an act of violent extremism), they may face enforcement outcomes if they are unwilling to disengage from violent ideation.

8.5.4 Counter

Countering activities occur when an individual is actively planning to commit an act of extreme violence, and has the means and capability to carry out that plan. This could include situations where they are actively

seeking out the opportunity to commit violence or have a particular timeframe and/or target/s in mind. At the countering stage, the individual is a danger to themselves and others. Because of their risk to public safety, police will often deliver interventions. Countering activities could therefore look like:

- Police interventions, including arrest and imprisonment
- Court-ordered participation in deradicalisation programs; and
- Community-supported disengagement (such as supervised pastoral psycho-social care).

The complexity of the P/CVE challenge, and the intensive needs of those individuals who are open to disengagement and deradicalisation, should not dissuade efforts to continue to advance our understanding of how frameworks like The Radicalisation Cascade can be used to inform program development. By understanding the underlying biases and heuristics employed at each tier of The Radicalisation Cascade, further research and professional observations have the potential to map out more nuanced strategies to fully explore opportunities behavioural economics offers in this context.

8.6 Summary of Contributions

The contributions this thesis has set out to make are directly focused on delivering original knowledge that is relevant and of value to professional practice. The academic and operational understanding of the radicalising environment is often siloed in professional practice, with non-academics finding scholarly work valuable but challenging to digest and even harder to operationalise. Attempts to bridge this think-do gap are often approached through consultation between police, academia, social support services and communities; however, each stakeholder's level of understanding around the radicalisation process differs, and scholarly

models of understanding are not always accessible when academics are not part of that picture (as is often the case, paywalled academic literature presents a barrier to knowledge). Where academic work is accessible, there are limited frameworks available to understand the radicalisation process systematically and to base disengagement, prevention or countering violent extremism strategies on. Further, generalised disengagement programs have historically tended to be run by law enforcement with support from other stakeholders, but because of their placement within the prison system or delivery in community policing environments, it is often difficult to ascertain if the programs delivered are successful or used by offenders as a means to reduce their sentence/s, improve their conditions in prison, and/or improve their parole prospects. There is insufficient data available from such deradicalisation processes over time to come to sound conclusions. With these challenges in mind, this thesis aims to provide stakeholders working in the deterrence, prevention, disengagement and deradicalisation spaces with an accessible model to (a) more holistically understand the radicalisation trajectory for violent extremists; (b) identify points of sensible intervention for those individuals and/or groups; and (c) provide an additional framework for deterrence, prevention and disengagement work to be developed. That this thesis and the resulting model are based, and build upon, existing scholarly work of note is important because just as the field of professional practice reflects the diversity of possible approaches to this challenge, so too must the academic contribution reflect that diversity through a multi-disciplinary approach.

The first contribution of this thesis is the delivery of a new framework that represents a way to structure the analysis of the radicalisation process. As a decision-support tool it equips stakeholders with a tangible sense-making framework to not only understand how nudges and influence are exerted during the radicalisation process, but how content marketing has been used by terrorist organisations to achieve their aims. Understanding the

convergence between traditional radicalisation models and how modern information communications technologies leverage nudges and availability cascades is critical to understanding the interplay and co-dependency each element shares. That behavioural economics theory can be explained in plain English in ways that operational and policymakers can understand is a fundamental attribute of The Radicalisation Cascade. Not only does it enable the knowledge it contributes to be shared in an accessible way, but it also affords operational decision-makers with the tools they need to distil information holdings and pinpoint the radicalisation trajectories of at-risk individuals before they commit an act of extreme violence. Similarly, the model also supports post-attack analysis and sense-making.

The second contribution of this thesis is that the work expands on the small but emergent field of behavioural economics that considers challenges in a national security context. Sunstein's (2009) book 'Going to Extremes' and work on terrorism and probability neglect (2003), along with Phillips and Pohl's work on terrorist choice (2014, 2017 and 2018); the economic profiling of lone wolves (2012 and 2014); terrorist anticipated regret (2020); terrorism watchlists and suspect ranking (2018); and how terrorism red flags can be missed (2019) (P. Phillips, 2014; P. J. Phillips & Pohl, 2012b, 2018, 2019, 2020; Sunstein, 2003, 2009), are all seminal in current scholarship on the topic. More recently, other scholars have also taken an interest in this field such as Gill et al's (2020) exploration of terrorist choice in the context of risk (Gill et al., 2020); and Velásquez et al's (2021) paper on the possibilities of nudging collective chemistry (Velásquez et al., 2021). It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to more research being conducted to further our understanding of how behavioural economics can support the analysis of national security related challenges. Further, as a multi-disciplinary body of work this thesis has demonstrated the value of drawing from allied fields of study in a discipline that has historically been dominated by terrorism studies literature.

The third contribution of this thesis is the presentation of case studies to illustrate how terrorist content marketing, nudging and influence guides the radicalisation process while highlighting the biases and heuristics in play. The role of significance quest theory (Kruglanski et al., 2014) is also a critical factor in illustrating contemporary violent Islamist motivations that are either actively cultivated as part of the radicalisation process, or pre-existing within the individual. By mapping The Radicalisation Cascade against the case studies presented, those in professional practice will benefit from a different way of viewing offending – both in the radicalisation or pre-attack phase and as a means of post-attack analysis and debrief. The need for this new view – one that encompasses the significant role TVEC and online significance seeking behaviours play in contemporary violent extremism – is essential; due to a persistent preoccupation some scholars, professional practitioners and journalists have for attempting to simplify the challenge by defining a ‘profile’ of what a violent extremist looks like for targeting and intervention purposes. It is academically accepted that no such profile exists, nor could one be accurately constructed as a one-size-fits all solution. The Radicalisation Cascade does not seek to place individuals into a profile-pattern but rather encourage researchers and professional practitioners to look at individual and group behaviours as a series of escalating indicators of possible violently extreme intent. The cascade should not be applied in isolation but alongside other available information and most importantly, local knowledge and context.

At the lowest possible tiers within The Radicalisation Cascade radicalisation cascade, strategic interventions aimed at deterrence and disengagement should always be the aim. By understanding which tier a violent extremist is likely to be sitting at within the cascade, intervention options can be tailored and scaled to avoid creating situations that drive them and their in-group further into their availability cascade. While this is not always possible given the speed at which some individuals radicalise and mobilise,

the underlying intent to seek a protective outcome (to protect the violent extremist from themselves as much as other people) that creates the least amount of cognitive friction, should always be the preferred approach. When a violent Islamist has already radicalised into the higher tiers, particularly at tiers five (planning phase) and six (attack phase), the cascade framework can be used, in conjunction with other available information, to expand evidentiary gathering processes before and after offender arrest; or during a coronial inquiry. While the operational challenges of securing enough evidence against a violent extremist before they commit an attack remains a race against the clock, it is clear that this has often resulted in less than desirable prosecution outcomes. By providing law enforcement and prosecutors with the ability to apply the cascade to the offender's radicalisation trajectory retrospectively, the framework supports building a picture of intent, capability and means (where such evidence exists) to better support judicial proceedings. As a result, evidence before the courts may be more compelling, resulting in an increase in convictions among offenders.

The fourth contribution of this thesis is the application of decision theory to the radicalisation trajectory. This has two parts: (a) the cultivation of professional practitioner's use of the cascade to better understand those they are investigating; and (b) assisting decision-makers prioritise potential terrorists in a structured way. While the cascade should not be used in isolation or without local knowledge and context, it does offer law enforcement professionals a systematic method of categorising individuals within particular tiers to better understand and risk assess their prospective, future, decision-pathways. The application of a decision-making framework to assist robust analysis also affords law enforcement a broader view of terrorist choice and the influence agents nudging prospects through radicalisation towards active engagement. Interpreting the way significance seeking behaviours or states of grievance-based comments, for

example, manifest may lead to patterns of expected behaviours emerging. The ability to prioritise intervention and/or enforcement activity in ways that address risk may lead to better outcomes (prevention of attacks) and more opportunities for meaningful intervention in earlier radicalisation tiers.

8.7 Suggested further research

Filling a current scholarly gap, this thesis hopes to encourage further research that applies behavioural economics models to challenges in the national security environment. It also hopes to encourage a more nuanced approach to deterrence, disengagement, prevention, and countering work by providing a framework by which offenders can be better understood; resulting in the identification of opportunities for meaningful intervention and protective disengagement. This is particularly pertinent as the way government officials often interact with suspects or offenders compounds the grievances held by them, their in-groups, families, and peers. This often acts as a driver that pushes people further into the radicalisation cascade.

The case study of radicalised teenager Alo-Brigit NAMOA also presents an area of further possible research. While a great deal of literature has been written regarding the radicalisation pathways of those in family clusters, peer to peer networks and as the result of online influencing agents, inadvertent radicalisation appears to be a topic of little current interest to scholars. In NAMOA's case, her radicalism appears to be a distinct, yet inadvertent, by-product of her husband's own radical indoctrination. Further research into this phenomenon could prove useful to those working in preventing and countering violent extremism, particularly where the networked centrality and inter-marriage rates within violent Islamist communities is high.

Application of The Radicalisation Cascade Radicalisation Cascade to the study of Islamically inspired lone-actors and self-radicalised individuals would also be beneficial due to the influence of availability cascades in the online and social media environments. The term 'lone-actor' and 'self-radicalised' are rightly being contested by victim-communities as misnomers because online interactions should be included as part of research that studies influence on would-be terrorists. While the actions the individual may take are performed 'alone' and they may not have been a member of a traditional in-group; the influence of information within the online availability cascade/s, for example, and those they interact with online (even anonymously) can't be discounted as agents of influence.

Further, while this work focuses on only Islamic extremists to illustrate the radicalisation cascade, the framework may also be applied in a like-fashion to other forms of violent extremism. Further research in mapping the framework developed by this thesis against other forms of violent extremism may prove useful, again in professional practice, but also more broadly within academia. Not only would such work test the model constructed against differing ideologies, but it would also test our understanding of availability cascades in the violent extremism environment. With the rise of and increasing number of terrorist attacks perpetrated by individuals and groups aligned with identity, political, white, nationalistic, racist, mixed and single-issue forms of extremism further research could underscore the agnostic commonalities observed across all forms of violent extremism.

8.8 Closing Remarks

The Radicalisation Cascade Radicalisation Cascade delivers a new framework to understand how radicalisation to violent extremism can be understood. Encompassing the interplay and co-dependency of the

influence of contemporary content marketing in this process, the framework provides a useful tool to organise information and subsequent analyses. By exploring Australian Violent Islamists from within a behavioural economics context, this thesis meets its objectives. Further, it adds to a growing body of scholarship that uses behavioural economics as a tool to explore national security challenges.

By exploring the way influence is delivered into availability cascades, and how participatory propaganda sets them in perpetual motion, this thesis helps make sense of the decision-making trajectories of violent extremists, their recruiters, and in-groups. It is clear that the convergence of radicalisation, violent extremism and propaganda of the deed will continue to be a societal challenge into the future. With the advent of new technologies and communicative conduits, the risks and harms presented to public safety by violent extremists are likely to evolve in tandem. By taking a view of the radicalising environment as an availability cascade, this thesis offers a new lens to interpret current and future information in a way that is ideologically agnostic. This flexibility is particularly important because, as this thesis has observed, the ability for terrorist organisations to outpace content moderation measures to effectively counter their TVEC remains a global challenge. While the outcomes of this thesis are many, it's primary contribution of this framework represents value to both academia and those working at the coalface in the prevention and countering violent extremism environment.

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