

# THE ACOUSTIC WORLD OF INFLUENCE: HOW MUSICOLOGY ILLUMINATES STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

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## Abstract

Governments using strategic communications to influence an audience should continue to reassess the intellectual grounds of the discipline. Current thinking on how best to construct a campaign and influence an audience is mixed, sparse, and incomplete. Insights from musicology present an opportunity for a refreshed perspective. Music, as a social text, a practice, and an ecology, provides a powerful means of communication from which lessons of influence can be learnt. This article serves as a study into the parallels between two interconnected topics. It proposes that insight from musicology has the ability to improve strategic communications practice on two levels—constructing a compelling narrative and best influencing an audience. Two case studies are compared to illustrate the benefits of persuading through emotionally-based strategic communications—a Daesh nasheed with music and a counter-narrative campaign without. This article highlights how communicating through a rational-actor model is outdated; to best affect the physiological and emotional state of the audience, musicology must be incorporated.

**Keywords**— *musicology, strategic communications, emotion, rational-actor, influence*

## About the Author

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## Introduction

'Winning over hearts and minds' is a phrase synonymous with military failure, political hubris, and information warfare. In a post 9/11 context, Western governments adopted the metaphor to convey publicly an intent to influence a target audience in a friendly, non-Orwellian, way.<sup>1</sup> Numerous realisations were encountered; specifically, that countering terrorism on the tactical and strategic level involves activity beyond a material or military dimension, in the realm of communication, persuasion, and perception.<sup>2</sup> Mastering a narrative to influence behaviours and attitudes, to achieve a targeted outcome, and to communicate with more effect than a counterpart, became a key necessity for states.<sup>3</sup> Despite persuasive communication being partnered with warfare throughout history, strategic communications as a field of study, discourse, and practice is considered to be in its infancy. As governments strive to speak through the maelstrom of the information age, they must continue to seek radical approaches to strategic communications.

Musicology offers a plethora of insights for strategic communications practitioners. Integrating an alternative discipline that has numerous intersections with related fields inspires academic rigour and a new starting point for strategic communications as a field of study. The current understanding of strategic communications has yet to absorb the complexities of the global communications environment, and the nuance and idiosyncrasies of an individual's interpretation of a series of messages. An intellectual excursion is required to recalibrate academic thinking on the topic, and to incorporate more of the fundamentals in influencing human behaviour. Musicology serves as a platform of knowledge because music crosses epistemological boundaries as language, science, and art. Its ubiquity and prominence as a medium of communication is powerful, and

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1 Henry A. Giroux, 'Totalitarian Paranoia in the Post-Orwellian Surveillance State', *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 29 (2015): 108.

2 Cristina Archetti, *Understanding Terrorism in the Age of Global Media* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 218.

3 H. J. Ingram, 'Lessons from History for Counter-Terrorism Strategic Communications' (The Hague: International Centre for Counter Terrorism, 2016), p. 3.

undeniable in producing affect.<sup>4</sup> Strategic communications discourse and practice have the capability to utilise insight from musicology to establish a holistic approach and a more creative mindset regarding the fundamentals and potential of communicating to influence an audience.

This article seeks to answer the question of how musicology can improve governments' understanding of strategic communications. To delineate the relationship between subjects, it will draw on bodies of theory to show how strategic communications and music can both be conceptualised as social systems which shape meaningful experiences. Physicist Fritjof Capra argues for a 'systems view of life', a holistic approach to studying the interconnectivity of a phenomenon through looking at the totality of its mutual interactions.<sup>5</sup> This systemic understanding is based upon the assumption that 'there is a fundamental unity to life, that different living systems exhibit similar patterns of organization'.<sup>6</sup> The systems approach helps to understand the mutually constitutive relations of communication, materiality and technology.<sup>7</sup> Capra extends this to the social domain accordingly:

Integrating the four perspectives means recognizing that each contributes significantly to the understanding of a social phenomenon. For example, culture is created and sustained by a network (*form*) of communications (*processes*) in which *meaning* is generated. The culture's material embodiments (*matter*) include artifacts and written texts, through which meaning is passed on from generation to generation.<sup>8</sup>

This perspective informs the analysis and comparison of the case studies in this article when also applying the concept of mediation. Mediation is an object of discourse that allows for the characteristics of cultural and socio-technical experience to be addressed through one another. This concept facilitates an intertextual reading of theory and an ability to extend our explanations of human sociality with technology.<sup>9</sup> It recognises the role of materials in mediating and forming cultural worlds, and how meaning is collectively and relationally

4 Marie Thompson, Ian Biddle, *Sound, Music, Affect* (Bloomsbury: London, 2013), pp. 1–26.

5 Fritjof Capra, Pier Luigi Luisi, *The Systems View of Life* (Cambridge: University Press, 2016): 30.

6 Fritjof Capra, *The Hidden Connections* (Harper Collins: United Kingdom, 2002): 70.

7 See Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge* (Shambhala: Boston, 1987); Niklas Luhmann 'The Autopoiesis of Social Systems,' in Niklas Luhmann, *Essays on Self-Reference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind* (Chicago: University Press, 1987)

8 Capra, *The Systems View of Life*, 304.

9 Nick Prior, *Popular Music Digital Technology and Society* (SAGE Publishing: London, 2018): 19.

constructed through such materials. It is useful to understand music and the information environment through these paradigms, to create a nexus by which ideas from musicology can inform strategic communications praxis. As a result, practitioners can be informed on the most persuasive ways to influence an audience.

### Part 1: Strategic Communications—the Conceptual Issues

With discourse on strategic communications covering a range of topic areas, authors differ in defining its exact function and scope. This article understands strategic communications to be a range of activities designed with an intent to shape the behaviour, knowledge, or attitudes of a target audience. These activities can alter the prevailing narrative for a group of individuals.<sup>10</sup> As such, social realities might be shaped through inducing a particular interpretation of a given event or narrative in a target audience. Bruner suggests that the construction of reality then encourages an individual to establish ‘relational positions’ in reaction to a message or activity.<sup>11</sup> Strategic communications can be thought of as a process involving lines of effort and techniques or as a mindset.

#### *Strategic Communications as a Process*

In *Strategic Communication*, Christopher Paul presents a thorough review of the evolution and future considerations for strategic communications practices in the US government.<sup>12</sup> His arguments and recommendations for improvements are underpinned by his idea of *synchronization*. He states that establishing co-ordination mechanisms between all relevant government departments will significantly ‘improve the government’s ability to deliberately communicate and engage with intended audiences’.<sup>13</sup> National objectives can then be ‘realized through influence or persuasion’.<sup>14</sup> His conception of strategic communications envisages a process that is strategic, where action flows in the attainment of policy goals.<sup>15</sup> He suggests that through this unification, a whole-of-government approach can be adopted, improving the ability to deliver strategic communication campaigns with impact.<sup>16</sup>

10 J. Bruner, ‘The Narrative Construction of Reality’, *Critical Inquiry* (1991): 1–21.

11 Ibid.

12 Christopher Paul, *Strategic Communication: Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011)

13 Ibid., p. 206.

14 Ibid., p. 174.

15 Ibid., p. 5.

16 Ibid.

James Farwell argues that strategic communications consist of ‘operational design’, whereby conditions can be engineered to produce a desired end state.<sup>17</sup> In addition to Paul’s recommendations for improving the process of strategic communications, Farwell suggests that problems lie in failing to conceive of the practice as an art.<sup>18</sup> He defines it as ‘the use of words, actions, images, or symbols to influence the attitudes and opinions of target audiences to shape their behaviour in order to advance interests or policies, or to achieve objectives’.<sup>19</sup> Strategic communications can also be conceptualised as a series of tools and techniques, which in scaling the size of the operation up or down,<sup>20</sup> can persuade an individual to support and adopt a given way of thinking.<sup>21</sup> For the defence community, the strategic narrative serves as a framework by which creating, opposing, or reinforcing opinions might translate into beliefs that instigate collective action.<sup>22</sup> Farwell’s recommendations call for a developed understanding of cultural nuance in formulating effective campaigns, describing how television and radio serve as weapons of communication by projecting strategic narratives.<sup>23</sup> From al-Qaeda’s notoriously violent video footage to President Lyndon B. Johnson’s dramatic and emotional 1964 ‘daisy girl’ election advert,<sup>24</sup> both insurgents and state actors utilise media to disseminate ideas.<sup>25</sup> The advantages of utilising channels of media in strategic communications is obvious; nevertheless, a holistic assessment of the full spectrum of available opportunities has yet to be formed.

This topic requires further discussion for governments to enhance their understanding of the complexities of message reception and audience interpretation. Farwell concludes that ‘words matter’, and that ‘different cultures use languages in different ways to elicit emotional responses’. He cites Taliban poetry as a non-standard use of language that attempts to engender patriotism and loyalty in actual or potential supporters.<sup>26</sup> Yet, comprehending how varieties of media and the arts affect human experience requires constant evaluation and consideration in regards to modernising frameworks for strategic communications.

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17 James Farwell, *Persuasion and Power* (Georgetown: University Press, 2013), p. xix.

18 Farwell, *Persuasion and Power*, p. 219.

19 *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

20 Brett Boudreau, *We Have Met The Enemy And He Is Us* (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2016):250–52.

21 Jan Hanska, ‘From Narrated Strategy to Strategic Narratives’, *Critical Studies on Security* (2015): 323.

22 Miranda Holmstrom, ‘The Narrative and Social Media’, *Defence Strategic Communications*. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (2015): 123.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 199.

24 The LBJ Library, [‘Daisy Ad \(LBJ 1964 Presidential campaign commercial\)’](#), 14 May 2012.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Currently, measuring effect is considered the primary factor for deducing the success of a campaign. However, this perspective is premised on an outdated model that depicts communication as a two-way exchange with directly correlated output.<sup>27</sup> Strategic communications praxis must adjust to the non-linearity of the information environment by understanding affect and emotion as a driving force in culture and contemporary society.<sup>28</sup> As music has the capability to penetrate this ambiguity and induce meaningful experience, insight from musicology should be integrated within strategic communications discourse.<sup>29</sup>

### *Strategic Communications as a Mind-set*

A second approach to strategic communications is to interpret the information domain through a specific mind-set. 'Mind-set' is about 'inculcating a culture in which the value of communicating an action is an instinctive part of the deliberation, planning and decision-making process from the start'.<sup>30</sup> A strategic communications mind-set and process differ in the context of how practitioners formulate and perceive their chosen lines of effort. Mind-set requires an ongoing 24/7 awareness of how and what activities communicate to the target audience. Process, focuses narrowly on the most efficient method to achieve a policy goal. On the practical level, Paul Cornish suggests that this would foster a shared culture in which the necessary changes to current practice could be easily promoted, and a self-sustaining model would emerge.<sup>31</sup> A fixed, centralised structure thus far has proved cumbersome in dealing with crises: alternatively, an 'interactive system of information and exchange,' involving the numerous participants, would encourage a 'dynamic, versatile and responsible approach to policy'.<sup>32</sup>

With the expansion of strategic communications as a field of study, and the growing complexities of the information age, ideas from innovative social commentators are being applied to this field of discussion and practice. Sociologist Manuel Castells produced a number of key works documenting how technological advances in society have impacted theories of power and influence. The global networks formed as a result of changes in communication technologies

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27 See the discussion section of this article for further clarification of this point.

28 Margreth Lunenberg, Tanja Maier, 'The Turn to Affect and Emotion in Media Studies', *Media and Communication* (2018): 1–4

29 See chapter two for insight from musicology.

30 Boudreau, *We Have Met The Enemy And He Is Us* 276.

31 Paul Cornish, Julian Lindley-French, Claire Yorke, 'Strategic Communications and the National Strategy', Royal Institute of International Affairs (2011): 9.

32 *Ibid.*

are determining the nature of production, experience, power, and culture in modern capitalist societies.<sup>33</sup> Castells names this ‘the network society’, whereby its ‘social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies’.<sup>34</sup> The network is a set of interconnected nodes which communicate with and form around each other. He argues that this constitutes a new social morphology of the information age.<sup>35</sup>

This article will discuss Castells’ theories and the media ecology perspective in greater detail in the discussion section. However, it is worth noting the conceptual approach upon which Castells grounds his theory. If governments focused to a greater extent on the interconnectivity of systems, they could begin to address the challenges facing strategic communicators. How might they improve the impact of their communications, and then ensure their messages remain consistent amongst the competing narratives of the borderless information environment?<sup>36</sup> A strategic communications mind-set is essential. Therefore, to achieve competitive advantage strategic leaders must think in communications terms, becoming more intelligent practitioners of relevant industries and mediums capable of supporting communications objectives. At present, activity has been limited to disseminating messages through words, images, and actions. But what can we learn from music?

## Part 2: Musical Communication—the Power of Organised Sound

*Musicology* is concerned with the academic study of music, distinct from compositional or performance-related factors.<sup>37</sup> To understand how music communicates across a conceptual and physical level, the discussion must be interdisciplinary and examine multiple perspectives. Because there is an abundance of research on the ‘power’ of music, this article provides a synthesis of core research from two of the sub-disciplines of musicology—the sociology and psychology of music.

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33 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of The Network Society* 2000, p. 50

34 Manuel Castells, *The Network Society: A Cross-cultural Perspective* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2004), p. 3.

35 Castells, *Communication Power*, p. 4.

36 Cornish, ‘Strategic Communications’, p. 6.

37 Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 668.

### *The Sociology of Music*

How do music's ubiquity and status in cultural life transfer to social life? The predominant socio-musicological research seeks to answer questions about how music is created, received, and used in everyday life, employing an interdisciplinary perspective to demonstrate the ways in which music is meaningful within human agency.<sup>38</sup> A sociological analysis of relationships and the construction of meaning offer an essential perspective from which to view the potential strategic agency of music. Key texts in the sociology of music cover numerous subjects, such as music and the self,<sup>39</sup> music as a social technology,<sup>40</sup> the influence of gender, class, race, and sexuality,<sup>41</sup> genre and subcultures,<sup>42</sup> and music in political and social movements.<sup>43</sup> This section will provide a concise overview of the relevant literature and research presented by influential authors in the sociology of music. It will highlight how music acts as a medium for self-constitution, and how it serves as a mechanism to inspire collective action.

### *Music and Identity*

Tia DeNora's research on music as a technology of self presents music as a device for ordering the self as an agent.<sup>44</sup> Individuals use music 'to fill out and fill in, to themselves and to others, modes of aesthetic agency and, with it, subjective stances and identities'.<sup>45</sup> In this article, self-identity is understood as the production of a continuous set of individual activity, rather than a fixed or observable set of traits. This argument is closely associated with the work of Anthony Giddens; he proposed that the self is a reflexive project in which individuals actively shape, reflect on, and construct, through forming their own biological narratives.<sup>46</sup> Simon Frith's theory on music and identity extends this idea further. He claims that due to the emotional function of music being prevalent throughout adolescence to adulthood, the similarities between emotional experiences of music and certain kinds of identification make it possible to place ourselves in formulated cultural narratives.<sup>47</sup>

38 William G. Roy, Timothy J. Dowd, 'What is Sociological about Music?' *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 36 (2010): 184.

39 T. DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

40 Nick Prior, *Popular Music Digital Technology and Society* (London: SAGE Publishing, 2018), p. 33.

41 David Hesmondhalgh, *Why Music Matters* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2013)

42 Peter J. Martin, *Sounds and Society: Themes in the Sociology of Music* (Manchester: University Press, 1995)

43 A. Ross, *The Rest is Noise* (New York: Faurer, 2007)

44 'Agency' refers to the thoughts, actions and ability of an individual to behave in a way that expresses their individual power. Mustafa Emirbayer, Ann Mische, 'What Is Agency?', *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (1998): 962-1023.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

46 A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991)

47 Simon Frith, 'Music and Everyday Life', *Critical Quarterly* (2002)



Drawing on interviews and ethnography, DeNora's work showcases music's role in everyday life. She finds that music enhances experience in multiple ways.<sup>48</sup> Whether it serves to re-energise or relax an individual, part of music's affective power is its co-presence with other things, such as people, events, or scenes. Thus, its emblematic capacity has a conditional presence, which in turn affects an individual's construction of meaning. DeNora explains that in such cases 'the link, or articulation, that is made—and which is so often biographically indelible—is initially arbitrary but is rendered symbolic'.<sup>49</sup> Music is paired or associated with aspects of an experience. Therefore its semiotic power is also related to our construction of memory. Music does not simply act upon individuals; meaning is constructed through relevant affect and extra-musical connections, such as occasions, circumstances of use, and personal associations.<sup>50</sup>

### *Music and Belief*

Music's capacity to evoke nostalgia and affect memory in an individual is primarily studied through the lens of music psychology. However, it can also be understood through its relationship to social memory, as mental images and nostalgia can form political and cultural profiles. If memory serves as the medium by which individual and collective identity is constituted, and music contains the capacity to evoke emotional memories, then music also serves as a powerful means for manipulating our frames of reference and perception of the world. Understanding music's role in connection to social movements is therefore intimately connected to memory, tradition, and cultural formation.<sup>51</sup>

Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison contend that music acts as part of a 'cognitive praxis' of social movements, and as a resource in the transformation of culture.<sup>52</sup> They use examples from political movements across history, such as the 1960s rock 'n' roll era and black music in the civil rights movement, to represent how music helps reconstitute 'the structures of feeling, the cognitive codes, and the collective dispositions to act, that are culture'.<sup>53</sup> The term 'structures of feeling' describes the thoughts and emotions that can be accessed through

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48 DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, p. 47.

49 Ibid., p. 66.

50 Ibid., p. 61.

51 Ron Eyerman, Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 42.

52 Eyerman and Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, p. 173.

53 Ibid., p. 173.

music.<sup>54</sup> However, these structures are not merely emotive; such construction of meaning also contains a rational, logical core and truth-bearing significance. In social movements, structures of feeling can be preserved in and through music. Whilst this experience may only be temporary, it is still recorded and enters into the memory of an individual or collective group.<sup>55</sup>

David Hesmondhalgh's work also contributes significantly to understanding music's place in society. Through his theory of society and critique of cultural industries, he explores how music enhances the lives of both individuals and groups, and discusses the obstacles that may prevent it from doing so. He asserts that 'social publicness' is a virtue promulgated by musical culture.<sup>56</sup> Musical culture develops identities and values that have the potential to sustain political ideals and serve as a binding force for communities.<sup>57</sup> Whilst his argument is similar to that of Eyerman and Jamison—that music has the potential to influence our constructions of identity and attachments to extra-musical experiences—his ideas also present an alternative perspective.

Hesmondhalgh suggests that music's role in social and political movements needs to be understood beyond the standard interpretation, which commonly conceives of music as either a vehicle of expression and sentiment, e.g. protest songs, national anthems, and political campaigns,<sup>58</sup> or as a response to society through political thought in action.<sup>59</sup> Punk, rave, rock, hip hop, and reggae are depicted as rebellions against the prevailing conditions of their time, yet also as a site for 'pompous, self-aggrandizing pseudo-revolt'.<sup>60</sup> Hesmondhalgh claims these topics are too often mythologised. Instead, he describes music's ability to influence collective flourishing through its relationship with politics and the 'social publicness' of the communication it inspires.<sup>61</sup> It enhances and co-presents interactions between people in different social places.

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54 Ibid., p. 161.

55 Ibid., p. 162.

56 David Hesmondhalgh, *Why Music Matters* (Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 2013), p. 146.

57 Hesmondhalgh, *Why Music Matters*, p. 171.

58 D. Lynskey, *Thirty-Three Revolutions Per Minute: A History of Protest Songs* (London: Faber, 2010); R. Garofalo, *Rockin' the Boat* (Cambridge, MA: Beacon Press, 1992); K. A. Ceerulo, 'Symbols and the world system', *Social Forum* (1993): 243.

59 J. Street, *Music and Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012)

60 Hesmondhalgh, *Why Music Matters*, p. 143.

61 Ibid., p. 144.

### *The Psychology of Music*

Music psychology is an interdisciplinary research domain that seeks to understand how the underlying mechanisms involved in creating, processing, and enjoying music, influence listeners and performers. Humans are intrinsically musical beings due to our tendency to seek patterns, solve clues, unravel sensory data, and communicate through story-telling.<sup>62</sup> Failing to address the plethora of cognitive functions involved in a musical experience would result in an incomplete understanding of music's capabilities; however, different theoretical approaches, methods, and samples have left a heterogeneous picture regarding the number and nature of musical functions.

A process of perceiving and constructing meaning is essential to the formation of musical experience.<sup>63</sup> Thomas Schäfer's research suggests three distinct underlying dimensions in our motivation to listen to music—to regulate arousal and mood, to achieve self-awareness, and to express social relatedness.<sup>64</sup> The way we integrate musical experiences into our lives depends on these dimensions. Psychologist Patrick N. Juslin is a pioneer in the field of music and emotion who has contributed significantly to prevailing thought in the subject. His research findings draw on multiple disciplines, including ethnomusicology, neuroscience, and experimental psychology, to create the *BRECVEM model*, which serves as a framework for understanding how mechanisms in music induce emotional states.<sup>65</sup>

*The BRECVEM model* provides a framework for understanding music's potential to induce emotion through seven mechanisms or information-processing devices at different levels of the brain. Each mechanism utilises a distinct type of information to guide future behaviour. The key feature of all seven is 'the psychological mechanism that mediates between the musical event and the listener experiencing the music'.<sup>66</sup>

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62 Philip Ball, *The Music Instinct: How Music Works and Why We Can't Do Without It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 409.

63 Siu-Lan Tan et al., *Psychology of Music: From Sound to Significance* (Routledge Press, 2017), p. 2.

64 Thomas Schäfer et al., 'The Psychological Functions of Music Listening', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4 (2013): 511.

65 Patrick N. Juslin, 'From Everyday Emotions to Aesthetic Emotions: Towards a Unified Theory of Musical Emotions', *Physics Life Review*, 10:3 (2013): 235–66.

66 Juslin, 'From Everyday Emotions to Aesthetic Emotions', p. 238.

1. *Brain stem reflex* refers to ‘a process whereby an emotion is induced by music because one or more fundamental acoustic characteristics of the music are taken by the brain stem to signal a potentially important and urgent event that needs attention’.<sup>67</sup> This could involve sounds that are sudden, loud, or dissonant, or that feature accelerating patterns, quick attack, or sharp timbre. As such, brain stem reflexes may evoke feelings of surprise in the listener by increasing arousal.<sup>68</sup>
2. *Rhythmic entrainment* refers to ‘a process whereby an emotion is evoked by a piece of music because a powerful, external rhythm in the music influences an internal bodily rhythm in the listener (e.g. heart rate), such that the latter rhythm adjusts toward and eventually ‘locks in’ to a common periodicity’.<sup>69</sup> This feeling of entrainment, evident in certain genres such as techno music and film music, can increase arousal and feelings of communication.<sup>70</sup>
3. *Evaluative conditioning* refers to ‘a process whereby an emotion is induced by a piece of music simply because this stimulus has often been paired with other positive or negative stimuli’.<sup>71</sup> A piece of music played at a particular event may become synonymous with the emotions experienced at that event, so that the music arouses the same emotions in future. Juslin argues that this mechanism is most interesting since it ‘involves subconscious, unintentional, and effortless processes that can be subtly affected by a mundane musical event’.<sup>72</sup>
4. *Emotional contagion* refers to a ‘process whereby an emotion is induced by a piece of music because the listener perceives the emotional expression of the music, and then “mimics” this expression internally’.<sup>73</sup> Feelings arise from the voice-like features of the music due to a ‘brain module’ responding automatically to certain musical features—as if they were coming from a human voice expressing emotions.<sup>74</sup>

67 P.N. Juslin, ‘Music and Emotion: Seven Questions, Seven Answers’, in I. Deliège, J. Davidson (eds), *Music and the mind: essays in honour of John Sloboda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 113–35.

68 Juslin, ‘From Everyday Emotions to Aesthetic Emotions’, p. 244.

69 M. Clayton, R. Sager, U. Will, ‘In Time with the Music: The Concept of Entrainment and its Significance for Ethnomusicology’, *European Meetings in Ethnomusicology*, 11 (2005): 3–75.

70 A.P. Demos et al., ‘Rocking to the Beat: Effects of Music and Partners’ Movements on Spontaneous Interpersonal Coordination’, *Journal of Experimental Psychology* (2012): 49–53.

71 Juslin, ‘From Everyday Emotion to Aesthetic Emotion’, p. 246.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Juslin, *Handbook of Music and Emotion*, 310.

5. *Visual imagery* refers to ‘a process whereby an emotion is evoked in the listener because he or she conjures up inner images (e.g. of a beautiful landscape) while listening to the music’.<sup>75</sup> The listener is conceptualising the musical structure in terms of non-verbal mapping between the metaphorical ‘affordances’ of the music and ‘image-schemata’, grounded in bodily experience.<sup>76</sup> This may evoke feelings of pleasure and deep relaxation, which could have far-reaching implications in clinical applications.<sup>77</sup>
6. *Episodic memory* refers to ‘a process whereby an emotion is induced in a listener activated by a salient melodic theme associated with emotionally charged events in the listener’s memory’.<sup>78</sup> This is often referred to as the ‘Darling, they’re playing our tune...’ phenomenon. When the memory is evoked, the corresponding emotion is too. Multiple studies have also shown episodic memories can be linked to the arousal of emotions such as nostalgia, pride, a sense of self-identity, and belonging.<sup>79</sup>
7. *Musical expectancy* refers to ‘a process whereby an emotion is induced in a listener because a specific feature of the music violates, delays, or confirms the listener’s expectations about the continuation of the music’.<sup>80</sup> This theory was pioneered by Leonard Meyer, and has since been rigorously investigated by other prominent music psychologists such as John Sloboda and Jaak Panksepp.<sup>81</sup> Musical emotions related to violation of expectancy might include surprise, thrills, and anxiety.

This summary of the core findings from Music Psychology shows why and how music affects a listener’s physiology and emotions. The evidence-based theories outlined in the *BRECVEM model* act as a framework for the musical analysis in the following case study.

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75 Juslin, ‘From Everyday Emotion to Aesthetic Emotion’, p. 348.

76 Z. Kövecses, *Metaphor and Emotion* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000)

77 Juslin et al., ‘An experience sampling study of emotional reactions to music: listener, music, and situation’, *Emotion* (2008): 668–83.

78 J.B. Davies, *The Psychology of Music* (London: Hutchinson, 1978)

79 P. Janata et al., ‘Characterization of Music-evoked Autobiographical Memories’, *Memory*, 15 (2007)

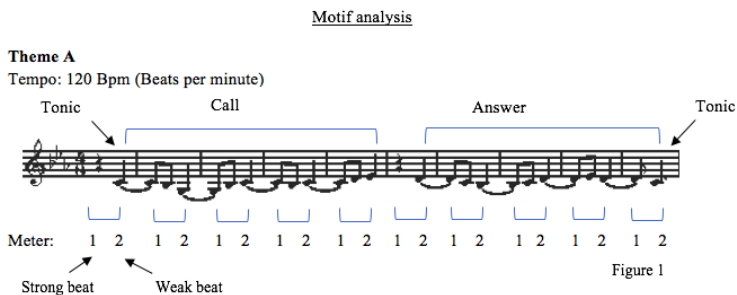
80 Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, 1956.

81 John Anthony Sloboda, ‘Empirical Studies of Emotional Response to Music’, in M. Riess-Jones, S. Holleran (eds) ‘Cognitive bases of musical communication’, *American Psychological Association* (1992): 33–46; Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1998)

### Part 3: Case Study One—‘My Ummah, Dawn Has Appeared’

‘My Ummah, Dawn Has Appeared’ is a Daesh *nasheed* that was published online by the Ajnad Media Foundation in December 2013.<sup>82</sup> *Nasheeds*, or *anashid* in Arabic, are militant Islamist hymns Daesh use as tools for disseminating messages to a global audience. They most commonly are used to accompany visuals in propaganda videos, but are also distributed online through audio files.<sup>83</sup> The jihadi nasheeds originated in the 1970s and 80s during the Islamic revival in the Middle East.<sup>84</sup> Famous Islamic poems are used as the textual base for these hymns to influence public opinion and arouse nostalgia. Arab nasheeds are a capella in accordance with the fundamentalist Wahhabi and Salafist interpretation of music and Islam, which forbids musical instruments owing to their potential for distraction from the study and recitation of the Quran.<sup>85</sup> ‘My Ummah’ represents a departure from the traditional modes of production that pre-date the digital revolution in music. Whilst Daesh adhere to the strict interpretation of no instruments, the nasheed features post-production editing and techniques associated with contemporary popular music.

#### Musical Analysis



By deconstructing the musical elements in this nasheed, it becomes easier to understand how it arouses emotion and acts like a force multiplier, mobilising support for Daesh recruitment campaigns. The immeasurable complexity and

82 Alex Marshall, ‘How ISIS got its anthem’, *Guardian*, 9 Nov 2014.

83 Vimeo, ‘My Ummah, Dawn Has Appeared - Nasheed’ (2016)

84 Behnam Said, ‘Hymns (Nasheeds): A Contribution to the Study of the Jihadist Culture’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol 12 (2012): 865.

85 Jonathan J. Lee, ‘The ISIS Aesthetic and the Imagined Islamic State’, Masters dissertation, University of Exeter (2015), p. 135.

depth of music’s ability to affect cognitive experience can be analysed through the multiple perspectives of musicology’s sub-disciplines. The interconnected relationship between the nasheed’s compositional features and their subsequent physiological effects are outlined below to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the music affects a listener on a spectrum of levels.<sup>86</sup> Although this paper does not explore the neuroscience research in depth, the arguments presented here presume that the causal relationship between music and its physiological effects is a result of neural activity in the brain.<sup>87</sup>

		<u>Structure analysis</u>		
Theme:		Call	Answer	Repetitions:
A	[	My Ummah, dawn has appeared (loomed), so await the expected victory The Islamic State has arisen by the blood of the righteous		] x 2
B	[	The Islamic State has arisen by jihad of the pious They have offered their lives rightly with steadiness and certainty		] x 2
B1	[	So that the religion may be initiated in it, the law of the Lord of the Worlds		] x 1
A	[	My Ummah accept the good news, don't despair, victory is near The Islamic State has arisen and begun imposing its might		] x 2
B	[	It has arisen, drawing out glory, and the era of the sunset is ended By faithful men who are unafraid of war		] x 2
B1	[	They have drafted immortal glory that will not perish or disappear		] x 1
A	[	My Ummah, God is our Lord so grant your blood Victory will not return except with the blood of the martyrs		] x 2
B	[	Who have spent their time, hoping for their Lord in the House of the Prophets They have offered their lives for God, and the religion of redemption		] x 2
B1	[	They are the people of sacrifice and giving, the people of generosity and dignity		] x 1
A	[	My Ummah accept the good news: the sun of steadfastness has risen We have marched in masses to my lord: the honoured glory		] x 2
B	[	That we may return the light, faith and glorious might (splendour) By men who have forsaken the material world and have won immortality		] x 2
B1	[	And they have returned the Ummah of glory and the certain victory		] x 1
A	[	My Ummah, dawn has appeared (loomed), so await the expected victory The Islamic State has arisen by the blood of the righteous		] x 2

Figure 2

<sup>86</sup> Listening to the nasheed is recommended to contextualise the musical analysis presented. Please note the following reference for the musical source. See, Vimeo, *My Ummah, Dawn Has Appeared - Nasheed* (2016)  
<sup>87</sup> Daniel Levitin, *This Is Your Brain On Music* (Atlantic Books: Great Britain, 2008): 83–111.

### *Instrumentation*

As noted above, ‘My Ummah’ adheres to the Salafist fundamentalist teachings on music and so features male voices singing unaccompanied (a capella). One male voice becomes a group through applying post-production edits; the techniques of *layering* and *reverb* add resonance to the leading voice, making it sound as if it were accompanied. The voices are *layered* octaves apart to create a full, powerful sound. The use of *reverb* makes the voices sound as if they were close to the listener. When Theme A repeats, voices can be heard harmonising in the background, which gives additional support to the re-emergence of the main theme. The choral effect of men seemingly singing together enhances one of the central messages of this nasheed—a call to the *ummah*, or collective community of Islamic peoples.<sup>88</sup> An individual susceptible to Daesh propaganda might hear the multiple male voices as an audio representation of the virtual Caliphate.<sup>89</sup>

### *Melody*

In music theory, *melody* is the main theme of a musical piece, a *motif* is a shorter musical idea, and *inversion* refers to the technique of composing an original melody backwards. As presented in Figure 1, Theme A dominates the entirety of the nasheed—it is repeated, inverted, or slightly modified in every line. Theme B is the inverted melody, and theme B1 is a modified version of B. Inverting a melody gives the listener a sense of both familiarity and newness; the listener is familiar with the pitch intervals between notes and surprised at the manipulation of the melody. This technique stimulates attentiveness whilst embedding the melody into the memory.<sup>90</sup> Consistent repetition of similar motifs adds to the meditative quality of the nasheed and deepens a listener’s attention to the words being sung.

The motif is ten bars long and is experienced as two mini phrases. These are labelled *call* and *answer* because the melody is unfinished after the first *call* phrase—it fails to end on the note with which it began, and there is a rest between phrases. The *tonic* is the first note of the motif and acts as the ‘home’ note of the melody; in this case its corresponding key is C minor. In order for a

88 Fawaz Gerges, *Journey of the Jihadist* (Harcourt: Florida, 2008), p. 287.

89 Charlie Winter, ‘The Virtual “Caliphate”’: Understanding Islamic State’s Propaganda Strategy’, Quilliam Foundation (2015): 22–28.

90 See Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1956)



melody to ‘feel finished’, composers often use the tonic as the final note, which occurs at the end of the *answer* phrase. This call and answer technique is found throughout musical history—it is most effective in combination with lyrics as it compliments their delivery and creates a pattern listeners easily attune to.<sup>91</sup> The call and answer technique creates a kind of musical hyperbole, adding further emphasis to the words of the nasheed. The verbal structure of the nasheed is shown in Figure 2—each line is divisible into two mini phrases.

### *Rhythm*

*Rhythm* refers to the length of musical notes and how they group together into units of time. melody can be described as having a *swung rhythm* due to the combination of long and short notes in sequence, as depicted in Figure 1. Swung rhythms are most commonly used in jazz music (think of the familiar snare drum intro ‘taa—ta—ta—taa’). Whilst this nasheed can not be likened to jazz, the melody uses a modified swung rhythm to create a particular groove, or propulsive rhythmic feeling (‘taa—ta—taa—ta—taa’). This rhythm etches a pattern into the listener’s memory through ‘swinging’ around the strict metre.<sup>92</sup> In addition, a rule in the classical form of Arabic poetry includes ‘the application of a monometer with lines divided into two hemistichs (half lines) and a monorhyme’.<sup>93</sup> The English translation in Figure 2 fails to portray the Arabic rhymes; however they can be heard when listening. This rhyme scheme corresponds to the melodic *call* and *answer* as previously described in the melody section.

### *Metre*

Metre refers to the way strong and weak beats are grouped together. The metre is a critical compositional feature in this nasheed as it creates momentum for the text. A particularly interesting point here is that the notes with a longer duration (i.e. two notes at the same pitch, tied together with a slur—the curved line—underneath) land on the weak second beat of the metre (labelled as 2 in Figure 1). This effect compliments the swung rhythm and allows it to be repeated in a cycle. The rhythmic pattern together with the melodic pattern enhance the meditative quality of the nasheed, tending to induce a trance-like state in the listener.

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<sup>91</sup> Levitin, *The Organized Mind*, p. 62.

<sup>92</sup> Philip Ball, *The Music Instinct* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 328.

<sup>93</sup> Henrik Gratrud, ‘Islamic State Nasheeds As Messaging Tools’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 39:12 (2016): 1051.

### *Tempo*

*Tempo* refers to the pace of a piece of music and is a significant compositional feature. It is strongly related to the rhythm and metre of a phrase—determining how fast or slow the music appears to flow. The mechanics of music perception are exceedingly sensitive to the rate at which musical structures are presented to the brain.<sup>94</sup> This nasheed has a tempo of 120 bpm, which is considered a moderate pace. The resonance theory of tempo perception asserts that tempo perception and production are closely related to the natural movement of humans.<sup>95</sup> Numerous studies have found that 120 bpm is a ‘preferred’ tempo; it has a significant physiological effect that encourages listeners to have an emotional response to the music.<sup>96</sup> A tempo of 120 bpm is fast enough to increase the heart rate and respiration rate of listeners, which have been linked to feelings of excitement and anxiety.<sup>97</sup> In ‘My Ummah’, the rhythm of each thematic repetition fluctuates slightly, but the tempo remains constant throughout.

### *Text*

The text of ‘My Ummah’ is sung in Arabic, although Daesh produce nasheeds in a variety of languages.<sup>98</sup> The English translation (see Figure 2) reveals the central themes and poetic origin of the nasheed.<sup>99</sup> Extensive research has shown that Daesh’s messaging focuses on six interconnected themes—brutality, victimhood, mercy, war, belonging, and apocalyptic utopianism.<sup>100</sup> The frequency of these topics in ‘My Ummah’ is revealed through narrative analysis. The text centers around and promotes the following messages—jihad is the solution, fighters are role models, martyrdom reaps rewards, the Islamic state is established, there will be war and brutality for all, Daesh is the leader and protector of Islam.<sup>101</sup> Lines such as ‘the Islamic state has arisen by the blood of the righteous’ and ‘the sun of steadfastness has arisen’ are used figuratively to increase the religious credibility of the text. Metaphors serve as a linguistic and conceptual tool of persuasion, and are an integral technique for inspiring political action.<sup>102</sup> This

94 Robert Jourdain, *Music, The Brain, and Ecstasy* (Harper Collins: New York, 1997): 142.

95 L. Van Noorden, D. Moelants, ‘Resonance in the perception of musical pulse’, *Journal of New Music Research*, 28 (1999): 43–66.

96 A. Fernández-Sotos et al, ‘Influence of Tempo and Rhythmic Unit in Musical Emotion Regulation’, *Frontiers in Computational Neuroscience* (2016): 80.

97 Fernández-Sotos et al, ‘Influence of Tempo’, p. 80.

98 Gratrud, ‘Islamic State Nasheeds As Messaging Tools’, p. 1051.

99 Translation sourced from Lee, ‘The ISIS Aesthetic’, 68–71.

100 Winter, ‘The Virtual Caliphate’, p. 25.

101 Gratrud, ‘Islamic State Nasheeds As Messaging Tools’, p. 1055.

102 Elena Semino, *Metaphors in Discourse* (Cambridge: University Press, 2008), p. 85.

symbolism correlates with the Salafi belief system to exploit an individual's unconscious emotional associations. The technique encourages listeners to build a conceptual structure of the message presented, heightening their interpretation of the nasheed by constructing a particular meaning.<sup>103</sup>

### *Structure*

*Structure* refers to the overall layout of a composition's musical form. Figure 2 presents a structural breakdown of 'My Ummah'; it can be summarised as A—B—B1—A (which in Western music theory is called *modified ternary form*). This is also significant for a listener's experience of music. The structure of most popular music creates a familiar pattern, e.g. verse—chorus—verse—chorus. A previously-heard structure is recognised by the cognitive schema in a listener's brain, encouraging a greater level of attention.<sup>104</sup> Theme B1, as a modified version of Theme B, also draws the listener's attention: the text of B1 repeats only once, adding significance to the line. The *instrumentation, melody, rhythm, metre, tempo*, and *text* all contribute to the perception of *structure* over time as they manipulate the listener's expectation and memory.<sup>105</sup>

### *Strategic Intent*

Nasheeds serve as a tool to mobilise supporters, to recruit aspiring jihadis, and to encourage a higher level of cognitive involvement in understanding and relating to Daesh. Each individual musical element contributes towards stimulating an emotional response from the listener. More broadly, they form an integral part of jihadist culture as an expression of their ideology and goals.<sup>106</sup> The memorable melody and rhythmic pattern of 'My Ummah' engages listeners, encouraging them to receive the message of the nasheed in a heightened state of awareness. Music with aggressive and violent lyrics can increase the potential for experiencing aggressive thoughts and feelings.<sup>107</sup> Listening to such music can lead to violent behaviour, giving greater power to the 'call to take up arms'. Music can be used by both producers and listeners to motivate intent and action. This becomes extremely powerful when embedded in a social movement, as the social publicness of a musical culture develops identities and values that

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103 George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University Press, 2000), p. 146.

104 Levitin, *This Is Your Brain On Music*, 237.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

106 Said, 'Hymns (Nasheeds)', p. 864.

107 C. A. Anderson et al, 'Exposure to Violent Media: The effects of songs with violent lyrics on aggressive thoughts and feelings', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84 (2003): 960–71.

have the potential to sustain political ideals, suffusing an individual's beliefs with purpose and strengthening a sense of community.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, the nasheed's message is preserved in an online audio file, and therefore, can be played repeatedly and rehearsed. This form of distribution is leveraged by jihadis and provides an extremely powerful way to build community at a distance. This case study has highlighted how Daesh nasheeds conjure a meaningful experience for their target audience; by appealing to listeners at the emotional level, they 'instrumentalise the truth to suit their strategic objectives'.<sup>109</sup>

### Case Study Two: 'Abdullah-X'

In comparison, this case study will evaluate a behavioural change campaign aimed at countering the emotive pulls of Daesh's recruitment efforts. It highlights how the rational-actor approach commonly found in strategic communications campaigns is less effective at influencing a target audience. Music is notably absent from this campaign. I suggest to its detriment. Little attention is paid to non-discursive factors, emotional appeal, positive sense of communal identity, or encouraging a pro-active, non-violent response to legitimate grievances.

'Abdullah-X' is a counter-narrative campaign produced by the Institute of Strategic Dialogue in collaboration with a former anonymous extremist.<sup>110</sup> Using an animated character as the narrator and protagonist, its content centres around the thoughts of a conflicted Muslim boy searching for his identity in British society. The project aims to 'radically challenge online extremist messaging using hard-hitting, robust, specialist, subject-based knowledge'.<sup>111</sup> As a counter-narrative, it adheres to the definition through directly challenging, deconstructing, discrediting, and demystifying the violent extremist narrative.<sup>112</sup> The multimedia online campaign launched in January 2012 disseminates content across social networking channels including YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Offline, the campaign presents its message through graphic novels distributed to schools and other education facilities. The appearance of 'Abdullah-X' changes between videos with the intent of spreading the message that 'the character could be anyone'.<sup>113</sup> The project's slogan is: 'Abdullah-X: Mind of a Scholar, Heart of a

108 Eyermann, Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*.

109 Kierat Ranautta-Sambhi & Erin Duffy, 'Daesh and Its Single Truth', in *Fake News: A Roadmap*, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (2018): 52.

110 Radicalisation Network, 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism', p. 10.

111 Abdullah-X, 'Abdullah-X', Accessed 10 July 2018.

112 A.S. Hemmingsen, K.I. Castro, 'The Trouble with Counter-Narratives', Danish Institute for International Studies (2017): 5.

113 Sky News, 'Abdullah-X Cartoon Aims To Deter Jihadists', (July 2014) Accessed 10 July 2018.

Warrior'.<sup>114</sup> The project's YouTube channel was its most active platform with a total of 22 videos and 1,538 subscribers when last accessed.<sup>115</sup> Two videos are used as examples in this analysis—the first has the highest number of views and the second is the most recently published video to date on the channel.

#### YouTube Video 1: 'Five Considerations for a Muslim on Syria'

##### **Metrics**

Publish date: 7 March 2014

Views: 35, 960

Likes/Dislikes: Disabled

##### **Stills from the video**



Original source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKKbydB4scA>

#### YouTube Video 2: 'Knowing your place'

##### **Metrics**

Publish date: 12 Oct 2016

Views: 1,761 views

Likes/Dislikes: 46 / 4

<sup>114</sup> YouTube, '[Abdullah-X](#)', Accessed 10 July 2018.

<sup>115</sup> These metrics are publicly available information and subject to change. Measures of engagement for the campaign were unavailable due to access being restricted to non-account holders.

## Stills from the video



Original source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QsAiBqtEr0&t=20s>

### *Narrative Framing*

The greatest strength of ‘Abdullah-X’ as a behaviour change campaign is also its greatest weakness. Primarily, it seeks to re-frame the narrative propagated by Islamist extremist groups.<sup>116</sup> In ‘Five Considerations for a Muslim on Syria’ it directly confronts the audience, asking, ‘Have you actually thought about the needs of the people?’ and describes the militant activity in Syria as a ‘manufactured jihad’. This could be judged as successful because it acknowledges and takes seriously the concerns of the intended audience, whilst admonishing the turn to violence as a solution to their grievances. It addresses what is influencing the target audience but seeks to redirect their behaviour through challenging preconceived beliefs. Additionally, it undermines the promises of utopia promoted in much of the content published by Daesh.<sup>117</sup>

Conversely, in questioning the audience and appealing to their rationality, the campaign fails to communicate its message as effectively as it might by using more emotionally manipulative tactics. It presumes the target audience will respond to argument-based logic, instead of addressing the emotional factors involved in making a decision to join a terrorist organisation.<sup>118</sup> Asking the audience to weigh up the pros and cons of travelling to Syria is equivalent to adopting a rational choice model (based on a cost-benefit analysis of options),

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116 This can be assumed to be Daesh due to the rhetoric used in numerous videos.

117 Winter, ‘The Virtual Caliphate’, p. 22.

118 F. M. Moghaddam, ‘The Staircase to Terrorism: A psychological exploration’, *American Psychologist* 60 (2005):161–69.

with the inherent limitations of that model.<sup>119</sup> It fails to account for variance in the target audiences' beliefs, or to consider where they might be found along the radicalisation spectrum. On the other hand, research has shown that emotions are key to connecting with a group's perceptions and motivations.<sup>120</sup> Exposing an audience to positive emotionally-framed messages effectively mitigates potential cognitive dissonance. *Cognitive dissonance*, or the psychological state of having conflicting beliefs, is considered a significant barrier counter-radicalisation practices must overcome.<sup>121</sup>

### *The Target Audience*

The issues raised in the section above are symptomatic of some of the wider issues in using counter-narrative campaigns to change the behaviour of a target audience. Part of the problem is ensuring the message communicates effectively with its intended audience, rather than being a generalised counter-statement.<sup>122</sup> In strategic communications, identifying the correct target audience involves a deep understanding of behavioural and attitudinal criteria.<sup>123</sup> A multi-tiered assessment should be performed to establish the strategic and technical literacy of a campaign, to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of using different mediums to deploy a message. The Institute of Strategic Dialogue collaborated with Jigsaw, a project created by Google, to ensure the video 'Five Considerations for a Muslim on Syria' appeared as the top link for an individual searching for related content online.<sup>124</sup> The intended purpose of the 'redirect method' was to provide those browsing the Internet with specific questions with answers from voices debunking Daesh recruitment narratives.

However, whilst this video may have enjoyed some success in reaching its target audience, it failed to provide information about the success of the campaign in preventing or deterring an individual from radicalisation. If in fact the campaign was successful and some young people were swayed to not join Daesh, providing evidence for a 'non-event' and incorporating it into a measure of success is extremely challenging. A longer timescale for evaluation has been suggested

119 Raymond Boudon, 'Beyond Rational Choice Theory', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29 (2003): 18.

120 Krešimir Čosić et al., 'Emotionally Based Strategic Communications in the Process of Societal Deradicalization', *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 12 (2018): 209

121 Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, 'Promoting Exit from Violent Extremism: Themes and Approaches', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 26 (2013): 100.

122 Radicalisation Awareness Network, 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism', p. 9.

123 European Parliament, 'Countering Terrorist Narratives', p. 42.

124 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

to mitigate this problem.<sup>125</sup> Yet, the sporadic posting of ‘Abdullah-X’ videos on YouTube over the project’s two years of activity was neither sufficient nor sustained.

### *Mixed Messages*

The main criticism of this campaign is the copious number of mixed messages it presents to the audience. In numerous videos it describes Muslims as victims of an unfair system and as targets of Islamophobia. Whilst this may be addressing the legitimate grievances of the target audience, it also supports the ‘in-group vs. out-group’ divide. This strategy emphasising a division between Muslims and non-Muslims is evident in numerous videos. The ‘Knowing Your Place’ video tells the story of a Muslim experiencing prejudice as a result of the Brexit referendum. The character says ‘don’t worry about those haters, they’re blaming us for their own system’s failures’. But if Abdullah-X is meant to be a British citizen, then by saying ‘their system’ he is excluding himself from belonging to Britain, thereby exacerbating the us-and-them divide. In the video ‘A Message to Muslim Youth’ the character expresses a feeling of angst and the opinion that Muslims are undermined in the mainstream media. It directly addresses Muslim youth saying ‘none of these latte-drinking, fashion-beard-growing and skinny-jean-wearing crowd, have a clue about the amount of strength and will-power we Muslim youth show every day’.<sup>126</sup>

Daesh regularly capitalise upon the identity conflicts of vulnerable individuals to promote their ideology and ‘superior’ way of life.<sup>127</sup> The campaign fails to address Muslims positively, as part of a wider community and a valued group in British society. A disenfranchised individual is more open to manipulation and to recruitment by a violent extremist organisation that can leverage his need to belong. The ‘Abdullah-X’ project fails to create a powerful message or theme and to promote it consistently across its videos. The overarching message of the campaign is that an individual at risk of radicalisation should ‘think more’. However, it provides no alternative narrative young Muslims can ‘think’ about, and no positive inclusive movement they can belong to.

125 Tanya Silverman et al., ‘The Impact of Counter-Narratives’, Institute of Strategic Dialogue (2016): 50.

126 Abdullah-X, ‘A Message to Muslim Youth’, 27 Oct 2015.

127 Charlie Winter, ‘Apocalypse, later: a longitudinal study of the Islamic State brand’, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 35 (2018): 103.



Moreover, the project does not consistently adhere to the principles it promotes. The video 'Freedom of Speech vs. Responsibility #CharlieHebdo', posted five days after the terrorist attack on the French newspaper, speaks about the importance of freedom of expression and the acceptance of diverse opinions.<sup>128</sup> Yet the comments section is disabled on numerous videos, including 'Five Considerations for a Muslim on Syria'. In 'Knowing Your Place' the character criticises the Brexit referendum, labelling it as 'bull' and claiming that the prejudices of the older generation can be compared to the behaviour of terrorists. The hypocrisy here is twofold: First, disabling comments prevents viewers from expressing their thoughts and responding to the content. Pro-Daesh accounts and violent extremist organisations can use this as an easy counter-attack to support their argument that Western liberal democracies do not 'practice what they preach'.<sup>129</sup> Second, it describes itself as a political account, however, it only discusses current affairs in two videos. These inconsistencies limit the success of 'Abdullah-X' as a behavioural change campaign.

More importantly, the rational-actor model upon which many counter-narrative campaigns are founded, fails to compete against the emotive pull of Daesh recruitment techniques. The absence of any appeal to emotion, physiology, memory, and sense of identity, which might be supplied by, for example, a musical component, makes this campaign much less effective than it might otherwise have been.

#### **Part 4: Discussion**

This section will utilise the analysis from the two case studies and introduce hybrid communication theories to assess the parallels between musicology and strategic communications, covering two critical factors—the audience and their environment.

##### *The Audience*

Strategic communications discourse has yet to assimilate completely the concept of the 'active audience' into its practice. This idea proposes that individuals modify the information they receive by interpreting it through the lens of their own cultural experience.<sup>130</sup> Communication is a multi-modal process: it is

128 Abdullah-X, 'Abdullah-X: Freedom of Speech vs Responsibility #CharlieHebdo', 13 Jan 2015.

129 H. J. Ingram, 'Three Traits of the Islamic State's Information Warfare', *RUSI Journal*, 159 (2014): 5–8.

130 Castells, *Communication Power*, p. 127.

not linear nor consumed passively. Regardless of how successfully a message is propagated, the notion that a change in behaviour might be solely attributable to the impactful delivery of a strategic message is an outdated concept. Audiences are not merely receivers, they are also producers of information; the audience ‘carves out its meaning by contrasting its experience with the one-directional flows of information it receives’.<sup>131</sup> In communication studies, Castells’ theory of ‘the network society’ focuses on the centres of power in social networks, and on the empowerment of individuals through their connection to the network.<sup>132</sup> These nodes and links make a difference to the delivery and reception of a message or narrative. As communications recur in multiple feedback loops, they create self-generating networks and produce a dual effect<sup>133</sup>—coordinated behaviours and mental activity that generate images, thoughts, and meanings.<sup>134</sup>

This matters in the context of persuading a target audience through narrative. Firm assumptions cannot be made in predicting the kind of information an individual might be exposed to, how they perceive it, and the meaning they take from it. Cristina Archetti asserts that narratives are ‘socially and relationally constructed rather than scripted messages’.<sup>135</sup> Individuals reflexively constitute their own narratives through myriad factors including, but not limited to, their social relationships, a fluid world view, their perspective resulting from their position in the social space at any given time, and their account of and reasoning about their behaviour.<sup>136</sup> This dynamic relationship between individual agency and socio-structural conditions, means that understanding how a narrative is appropriated and filtered by each individual is critical to communicating effectively.

On the other hand, musicological discourse embraces the idea of an active and reciprocal audience. Musical communication occurs at the interface of the personal, musical, and situational variables which give rise to a musical performance, and the response to the piece of music in a specific situation.<sup>137</sup> The performance context of music goes beyond the typical image of a concert and an obedient audience. With the development of mass media and global digital communications, music can be consumed in numerous ways and settings, e.g. through the use of mobile app, at a festival, or through a viral meme. Not only

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131 Ibid., p. 132.

132 Ibid., p. 4.

133 Ibid., p. 26.

134 Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, p. 72.

135 Archetti, *Understanding Terrorism in the Age of Global Media*, p. 220.

136 Ibid., p. 221.

137 North and Hargreaves, *The Social and Applied Psychology of Music*, p. 7.

do people listen to music in a wide variety of settings, their reasons for doing so also vary; a listener might use music for specific arousal-state goals.<sup>138</sup> As the research around social connections, emotions, and music show, the old linear model of a communicator using a channel to send information to a receiver is insufficient for describing the process of musical communications. Moreover, musical communication can be understood as interactive, and predicated on the listener's assessment of meaning and extra-musical associations.

In addition, musicologists also accommodate for the variance in the way an audience listens to music. The modes of listening can be segregated into three types—listening in search, listening in readiness, and background listening.<sup>139</sup> Mode one, *listening in search*, describes a listener actively searching the acoustic environment for cues, with an ability to focus and analyse specific details. Mode two, *listening in readiness*, depends on the associations a listener has built up over time. Familiar sounds are more easily identifiable than others; when a piece of music is new to a listener, their perceptual system is ready to pick up new acoustics if they encounter some familiar elements. Mode three, *background listening*, refers to the process of hearing all sound where the listener is not attempting to pick out a particular acoustic event. Listeners have the ability to switch modes and evaluate the music or sound they are hearing. Listeners are likely to engage more deeply when the instruments, rhythms, melodies they are hearing, or the topics represented in the music are familiar.<sup>140</sup> This correlates with Archetti's argument; specifically, the importance of understanding that individuals filter narratives through internal social and emotional structures.<sup>141</sup>

### *The Environment*

Since the advent of the Internet and digital services such as YouTube, Spotify, and Facebook, the conditions in which an individual consumes information have rapidly changed. Castells notes three prominent changes in how individuals interact with Internet-based media, including but not limited to the simultaneity of communicative practices i.e. combining attention to different wireless devices; dissolution of 'prime-time' in favour of 'my time'; time substitution of Internet-based communication for incompatible activities.<sup>142</sup> This section will not investigate

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138 Ibid., p. 11.

139 B. Traux, *Acoustic Communication* (Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing; 2001).

140 Anthony Lemieux and Robert Nill, 'The Role and Impact of Music in Promoting (and Countering) Violent Extremism', (2011): 147.

141 Archetti, *Understanding Terrorism in the Age of Global Media*, 224.

142 Castells, *Communication Power*, 134.

digital cultures in depth due to the scope and research objectives of this article; however, it is critical for governments to understand these changes within the theories of media ecology, in order to have a progressive mind-set and approach to strategic communications. Media ecology is the study of communication technologies as cultural environments.<sup>143</sup> This perspective reflects the attempt to unveil media as a complex set of message systems and to understand the resulting impact on human perception, understanding, and feeling.<sup>144</sup> It is critical to consider this perspective within the strategic communications field in order to build a comprehensive understanding of how a medium affects the delivery of a message, or how it might be studied to influence a target audience.

This ecological concern is central to McLuhan's work and to the expression he coined—"the medium is the message".<sup>145</sup> He sought to convey that the importance of any communication technology is not the message it transmits, but the effect of introducing that message into human affairs using that specific technology. The means used to communicate affect any message communicated by those means: today's technology has radically changed the form, quantity, speed, distribution, and direction of the information we consume, which also seems to be affecting our values and attitudes. The musical analysis of the nasheed in Case Study One demonstrates this point. The nasheed is accessible partially because of the familiar traditional musical forms it is based on, but the technological manipulation creating resonance and layering voices exemplify the message of the hymn in a way that could not be done before, and thanks to the reach of modern technology, this community strengthening device can be deployed at a great distance.

As outlined in the opening sections, theories from the sociology of music highlight music's capability to perform multiple social functions. Research from DeNora, Hesmondhalgh, Eyermann, and Jamerson all converge on the notion that music is an active medium; through music individuals engage with their own consciousness and with their social identity. Music has the capability to deliver messages with impact because it influences an individual's physiology, emotions, and memory. Its role and consumption in society, place in culture, and utility as a flexible, communicative medium, are built upon myriad interconnected patterns and relationships. Understanding music through the aggregate of its heterogeneous elements allows for an interpretation that is active, emergent, open, and hybrid.

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143 W. J. Ong, 'Ecology and some of its future', *Explorations in Media Ecology*, 1 (2002): 6.

144 C. M. K. Lum, *Perspectives on culture, technology and communication: The media ecology tradition*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2006): 28.

145 McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 13.

## Conclusion

This article has shown that strategic communications as a field of study can benefit from the perspectives of musicology. The research has supported the original hypothesis suggesting that these insights have the ability to improve an understanding of how strategic communications should best construct a compelling narrative and influence an audience. Both domains seek to understand how the meaning of a message is depicted through a medium, interpreted by an audience, and affected by the environment in which it is received. Both music and strategic communications share the purpose and intent of influencing an individual's behaviour, knowledge, or attitude.

Music can communicate meaning more effectively than a strategic communications behaviour change campaign because it has the capability to address the audience on deeper levels. Music targets emotion, physiology, memory, and sense of identity. The findings from Case Study One in the analysis section demonstrated why and how a Daesh nasheed is more likely to change an individual's behaviour and attitude. The arousal of emotion in music can be targeted through its compositional elements: a catchy song has the ability to serve as a force multiplier in a social movement or in an individual's personal narrative.<sup>146</sup> Music also affects an individual's physiology and perceptual system.<sup>147</sup> An alteration in the temporal change of a compositional element, or disrupting a familiar musical pattern, manipulates the listener's attention.<sup>148</sup> Therefore, due to this interactivity, the message of a piece of music can be delivered with impact both during and after a musical experience.

Strategic communications doctrine should conceptualise how to deliver powerful messages in a similar manner and construct emotionally-based behavioural change campaigns.<sup>149</sup> Findings from Case Study Two indicate that the rational-actor model upon which many counter-narrative campaigns are founded, fails to compete against the emotive pull of Daesh recruitment techniques. Designing targeted activities that can shape an individual's interpretation of meaning should be a primary focus in conducting strategic communications. Communicating meaning, therefore, becomes a source of social power through framing

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146 Eyerman and Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, 160.

147 Levitin, *This Is Your Brain On Music*, 83–111.

148 *Ibid.*, 169–83.

149 Čosić et al., 'Emotionally Based Strategic Communication', 196–214.

the mind to interpret a message in an intended way.<sup>150</sup> Utilising music as a tool to induce emotional response, means the potential to deliver a message to a target audience with more impact.

This article presents a hybrid conceptual framework of integrated theories, to understand how music and strategic communications can be compared as ecological networks. These insights should contribute towards evolving strategic communications discourse and practice. The infamous phrase—‘winning over hearts and minds’—is a hollow sentiment if only the rational mind is considered and the social emotional heart is neglected. As a result of this study, further research should be conducted to understand how the aforementioned ideas could be leveraged by governments conducting strategic communications. Additional studies might include assessing music socially as a broader reflection of attitudes, or the processes by which a piece of music, or a music-related message, goes viral online. Strategic communications practitioners might be inspired by the holistic musicological approach of seeing communication as social ecology and community in practice.

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150 Castells, *Communication Power*, 136.

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