



## SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCES ON THE ISIS MOVEMENT AMONG POTA DETAINEES IN MALAYSIA

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**Abstract:** The growing influence and use of social media is significant with the increase in extremists' movement including Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Movement in Malaysia. However, the sophistication of social media usage has become a challenge to National Security because this application has become the main platform for the ISIS Movement to spread their ideology through online media. Hence, this study aims to identify a significant type of social media to influence the involvement of some detainees detained of The Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015 (POTA) in Malaysia. This study used the qualitative method through document analysis and interview involving four detainees of POTA at Simpang Renggam Prison, Johor Bharu, Malaysia. The findings showed that the movement was using social media medium including *Facebook*, *Telegram* and *WhatsApp* to influence POTA detainees. The implications of this study provide exposure to the public society about the type of social medium used by the movement as a strategy of motion struggle. This study is expected to help parties involve such as Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) and the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) to eradicate the ideology of movement that could affect national security.

**Keywords:** Social Media, ISIS movement, POTA.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Islamic State Movement (IS) or also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) or in Arabic called *Daesh* is a radical Islamic Movement group which exists a string of the Salafi Jihadi Movement in Iraq, which originally consisted of three different jihad organisations, one of which was a group of *Ansar al-Islam*, comprising *Salafi Jihadi* members of Iraq who formed their own Islamic rule and practiced a radical life (Nursalihah Ahmad Raston, Yohan Kurniawan, Noor Raihani Zainol, & Nurul Hasliana Hamsani, 2016). According to Adam et al., (2016) there are many contributing factors lead to

the establishment of radical understanding and continuously affecting or influencing others to act violently in pursuing their goal to be represented. The existence of these various movements is caused by the chaos due to political problem and wrong understanding of Islamic teaching. That why the concept of Muhibbah which is practiced in Malaysia that is regarded as one of the tools to maintain the human rights of religious freedom; freedom to practice and publicize the religion; freedom to profess the thoughts and beliefs (Adam, Muhad, Wahid, & Mansor, 2017). The emphasis on knowledge and practice in sufism for example can nourish the sense of piety in a Muslim individual to the existence and oneness of Allah S.W.T. By so doing, the heart becomes clean and one can adapt oneself to the nature and recognition of Allah s.w.t (Abdullah et al., 2018). Besides that, Sayyid Qutb put more emphasis on the literary aspect of the Qur'an without any elaboration on the nature of the Book itself or any other social and political issues (A. A. Rahman, Ahmad, Ali, & Ismail, 2015).

This movement practices radical life including conducting bombing in public places, to blow themselves as well as others, mental and physical abuse against those who are not in the way and recruiting children and young people in their radical group (Gorawantschy, Gunaratna, Sarmah & Rueppel, 2016). The violence done by this movement has provoked the chaos in the Muslim community because of the support of a handful of Muslim youths around the world who want a change and defense to the Muslim community. According to Rahman, Adam and Muhad, (2018), the ISIS militant group utilizes internet technology and social media for the purpose of spreading messages and attracting the world community especially youths to support their organization. Most of the support from the community is obtained through online media platform assistance using Internet networks. The widespread use and influence of the Internet led to the threat of more serious violence.

The ideology of the movement ISIS increasingly contagious through online media and gets a response when new members do not need to Syria and the recruitment of new members are not through physical process. According to reports from the Chief Assistant Director of the Counter-Terrorism Division, Bukit Aman Special Branch SAC Datuk Ayub Khan Mydin Pitchay, a total of 61 Malaysians was detected being in Syria for joining the IS militant groups and out of the numbers, there are 10 women while the latest catches of those suspected of being involved with IS in the country until yesterday have reached to 71 people (Suara TV March 2015). Furthermore, local media reported that the case of two Malaysians was believed to be detonated their own self for the fight with ISIS terrorist (Malaysiandigest.com 2016). The use of social media in spreading ideology and recruiting new members especially young people pose concern to the Government of Malaysia. The strategy used by this movement using social media has attracted the attention of the people especially the young people who are said to be very actively using technology (Chan, 2015).

## **ISIS MOVEMENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

Internet Evolution shows the existence of social media that are part of life of every electronic media user. According to Collin Dictionary (2018) social media refers to websites and computer programs that make communication possible with the use of computers or mobile phones. As we all know, social network is one of the most important mediums in sharing information that is used by society in this world. Social Media is a group communication network online and is

more focused on specific communities for information sharing. According to Adam, Anuar and Ali, (2014) the digital technology demands a high awareness among youth to benefit them in religious knowledge as appeared in blogs. The use of social media in daily affairs has led to high dependence on this application. Although the use of social media is seen facilitating the sharing of information and communication among users, it can also be exploited and applied to the interests of individuals and specific organizations including the terrorist groups and the network. The need for social media in the life of modern society has been utilized by many terrorist organizations and radical movements using this platform to promote ideologies and recruit experts from all corners of the world.

There are a few social media used by ISIS Movement as a strategy of successful group missions it is Facebook, YouTube and Twitter (Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Wan Kamal Mujani, & Ahmad Aiman Zuhaily A.M, 2018; Ahmad Sauffiyan Abu Hassan, 2016; Awan, 2017; Jessica Stern & Berger, 2015; Klausen, 2015; Muhd Imran Abd Razak, Rahimin Affandi Abdul Rahim, Mohd Anuar Ramli, Siti Maimunah Kahal, & Ratha, 2018). Although media technology offers various facilities such as providing information, communication and so on, but this ease can lead to very dangerous social implications. This article is supported by the findings Jessica Stern and Berger, (2015) said the social media will be able to curb people's involvement to participate in militant and violent activities but social media also provides opportunities for the terrorists to recruit new members. Thus, in the issue of social media use by extremists in recruiting experts and spreading their propaganda, it is also necessary to be handled by the authorities using the same medium to curb the transmission of religious extremism threats among the community (Gordon, Sharan, & Florescu, 2017).

## **THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ISIS MOVEMENT**

Ferguson, (2016), said the use of the Internet in the dissemination of ISIS Movement through major media is very effective. The emergence of the ISIS Movement in June 2014 has shown that the group modernization revolution or terrorist organization in the Internet exploit. The ISIS Movement has used social media to spread ideologies, recruit and collect funding sources from various sources at the verge of its rise around 2014 to 2016. The digital Era has been on the move from various angles until the militant group has managed to attract the focus of nearly 30,000 foreign fighters or known as Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) from various parts of the world to Syria and Iraq to create a “*Islamiyyah Caliphates*”. This statement is supported by Campbell, (2015) has said the ISIS Movement has used social media to the maximum in influencing Muslim Communities in the United States. This indicates that the ISIS Movement not only limiting ideological spread in the Middle East but expands to all countries including Western countries.

The submission of information and communications offered by the ISIS Movement has been fully utilized by the ISIS radical movement to convey ideology to the world community (Ahmad Sauffiyan Abu Hassan, 2016; Muhd Imran Abd Razak et al., 2018). Meanwhile, social media through the Internet network has been used by extremists to recruit experts, education, communicate and fundraisers (Awan, 2017; T. Gordon, Sharan, & Florescu, 2015; Jessica Stern & Berger, 2015). In addition, social media is also applied by the ISIS Movement to give threats to enemies and parties against spreading their group (Ahmad Sauffiyan Abu Hassan, 2016).

This is based on findings of Fikri, (2013) shows that ISIS militant group committing violence and cruelty like beheading, burning people alive, on the cross and displaying murder bodies around the world through social media. The use of social media to spread ideologies, recruit new experts, education, communicate, fundraise, and give threats has increased the name of the ISIS Movement as a professional terrorist organization in the online medium.

## **DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

The primer sources of this study is some detainees detained of The Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015 (POTA) in Simpang Renggam, Johor Bharu, Malaysia. The process of this study emphasises on two types of data collection methods, which is through document analysis and an interview.

### **Document Analysis**

The literature study is the basic method used in this study. This study involved the observations of local secondary data, which refers to data obtained through local researchers' studies whether past or current study. The data are obtained through newspapers, Internet, books, magazines, papers, articles and so on. Information collection works and secondary data are largely done at several universities which is Perpustakaan Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Perpustakaan Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) dan Perpustakaan Tun Seri Lanang, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). In addition, resources are also taken in several key institutions such as RMP and MOHA.

### **Interview**

A semi-structured interview was done on four POTA detainees who were involved in the face of the purpose to obtain the information required to complete the research objectives. These semi-structured interview questions will be determined first but the answers to the questions are open and can be developed at the discretion of researchers and study participants.

### **Data Analysis**

There will be transcription of the interview data, which is typed with complete to facilitate the analysis process. A complete transcription is very important because the researchers only use the write on the notebook during an interview session. Lastly, the interview data will be analyzed.

### **Findings of Research**

The findings show an interview with four POTA detainees which is using analysis thematic based on the objective of the study. This thematic analysis is one of qualitative data analysis techniques. Thus, all the qualitative information obtained from a semi structured interview which is structured according to certain categories. There are answers and responses from the

objectives of the study to identify a significant type of social media to influence the involvement of some detainees detained of The Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015 (POTA) in Malaysia.

### **Detainee 1**

“I was invited to enter in one of the groups of Telegram's group Gagak Hitam but I left this group”

### **Detainee 2**

“At first, I opened Facebook to see the war crisis and find out the issues through video related to the cruel Bassad army who killed people. Besides, I also get the news of Muslims in Syria through SyriaCare and Green Project. I once mention the name on Facebook then I was added. I am acquainted with Muhammad Wandy the leader of the IS Movement in Asia through Facebook. He asked my phone number through Facebook. In 2015, Wandy add me in a group Whatsapp– finally I left the group. Besides, I have been put in the group Gagak Hitam but never reply to the content of the message. I ever transferred money or funds to Syrian Care as much as RM1000 and transferred money to the account owner named En Bukhary (while interviewing En Bukhary detained under SOSMA)”.

### **Detainee 3**

“I started to know the movement IS through page Syria Care because for my opinion the page of Syria Care supports the fight IS Movement. I continue to follow the page. They apply for a financial contribution and conduct a humanitarian mission. Many submissions are in the comments section of the page. The fights happened due to view dispute. I've met Wandy in Penang. He is the contact me. He tells about the situation in Syria and the conflicts that occurred in the country as well as the influence of Bassar Assad. He tells about the IS Movement in depth. He adds me into a Whatsapp group namely Gagak Hitam to get and know the current info. One of the medium used is Gagak Hitam Telegram operated by Muhammad Wandy. The members of this group when I was a member is 46 people. Admin named Sogon who was 29 years old”.

### **Detainee 4**

“One of the medium used is the Gagak Hitam Telegram operated by Muhammad Wandy. I used a Telegram account named Ibnulirama and Ana Hamba Allah supported IS. Besides that, the Telegram Amanah (PHB) vs PAS was also operated by Muhammad Wandy. The social medium used is Wechat and Telegram. First contact in 2015. I was arrested on July 19, 2016 because I am the member of Gagak Hitam. Initially, the desire to know the development and situation in Syria. At that time, the Internet network is slow. I searched for initiatives through books and blogs also but can't find it. Next, I was acquainted with Wandy through someone, a fighter in Syria. Indeed, I have been looking for a website with respect to the Syrian situation. I see the Syrian Care page too many libels like hit Syrian NGO Care caused me to not trust this

page. I have four Usrah WeChat group. I also browse the website of Hizboots Tahrir. Besides, the blog is also the one that I visit is composed of Indonesian, English and Malay language. Muhammad Wandy also added me in the Gagak Hitam Group (3 months) 2016. I also get information through newspapers and TV”.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result and discussion from the interview with detainees show that the Detainee 2, the Detainee 3 and the Detainee 4 are surfing Facebook to find out the issues and news in Syria through the Syrian Care Page and Green Project. Through Facebook, the detainees became acquainted with Muhammad Wandy, the leader of the ISIS Movement and Muhammad Wandy added them into the *Telegram*, *Whatsapp* and *Wechat* groups named the *Gagak Hitam Group*. Meanwhile, Detainee 1 was invited into Gagak Hitam but he left the group. Muhammad Wandy as admin group will send *jihad qital* message and apply for funds to the ISIS Movement., Muhammad Wandy also controlled Telegram Amanah (PHB) vs PAS. Besides that, Detainee 4 is also looking for initiatives through blog, books, newspapers and television and he has four group of *Usrah Wechat*.

## CONCLUSION

Platform social media has indeed given many advantages to the ISIS to spread ideology and its influence over the world in a short time. The medium like *Facebook*, *Telegram*, *Whatsapp* and *WeChat* become a selection to ISIS Movement to convey their ideology and communicate with members of the group. The use of social media has enhanced the activities of this movement. Apart from the catch of a member, the RMP must cooperate with other agencies to reduce the spread of this extremist movement and improving the existing communication policies in our country.

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