

# Propaganda & Para-sociality

A relationship-oriented Analysis of the  
Islamic State's John-Cantlie-Videos

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Para-sociality can intensify the effect of propaganda by offering an individual and intimate approach to the propagated narratives.

# John Cantlie

- British photojournalist reporting from Syria
- captured by IS in 2012
- 14 video featuring Cantlie between 2014 and 2016
  - „Inside“-series (3 videos)
  - „Lend me your Ears“-series (7 videos)
- 4 single videos





*Lend Me Your Ears - Episode 1*



*Inside Mosul*

# Para-sociality

- illusion of a reciprocal face-to-face interaction or relationship between media persona and spectator
- para-social interaction (PSI) - conversational give and take between persona and spectator (Horton & Wohl 1956)
- para-social relationship (PSR) - seeming long-term emotional bond between persona and spectator (Horton & Wohl 1956)
- techniques and factors support the establishment of PSI and PSR

# Para-Sociality and Propaganda

- we tend to simply believe and trust personae whom we have a positive PSR with
- targeting the audience on an emotional level is extremely important in the age of the internet
- a positive emotional experience can lead to a higher acceptance of facts

# Research Question

In how far are factors supporting PSR used in the John-Cantlie-Videos and what role do they play in respect to the effect of the videos?

# Method: relationship-oriented qualitative content analysis

1. Deducing a system of 6 main categories with 61 dimensions of factors supporting PSR from theory:
  - seriality, addressing, content, authenticity, approachability, aesthetics
2. Coding the videos into the system of categories
3. Analyze what the found factors mean in the context of propaganda



# Seriality

- Lend Me Your Ears-series: Ø 11 days between each episode
- Inside-series: Ø 52 days between each episode
- single videos: Ø 136 days between each video
- Internet and terminal devices function as mobile archives
- take your friend with you anywhere and anytime!

# Addressing

- sophisticated, western target audience
- individual implicit and explicit addressing
- direct questions (*„Think you’re getting the whole picture?“*)
- seeming answers (*„I know what you are thinking...“*)
- calls to action (*„act now!“*)

# Narratives

- western society, media and politics
- dialectic of good (IS) and evil (the west)
- Cantlie gives access to information we usually do not have access to
- rational arguments by an authentic western journalist

# Diversity of Roles

- Is Cantlie convinced by what he is saying?
- Is Cantlie only playing a role to protect himself?
- Is Cantlie suffering from Stockholm syndrome?
- Is Cantlie only playing a role to protect himself?
- Is Cantlie even accountable?

# Authenticity

- transfer of feeling onto viewer's personal situation
- Cantlie as person of trust offering a new world appropriation
- Cantlie develops overtime from tense to more natural behavior



# Conclusion

- the hostage Cantlie is turned into a media persona promoting familiarity and sympathy with the IS as well as (non-) virtual interaction
- PSR can have different consequences: adoption of IS narratives vs. anti-Islamism
- PSR creates a pull effect that can lead to mere-exposure effect
- PSR allows for addressing the audience on emotional and rational level
- PSR as useful framework for analyzing extremist material



Para-sociality is a strong tool for increasing the effectiveness of propaganda in every media format.



**Thank You!**