

## Examining the Japanese Fear of ISIS with Soft Terrorism Concept\*

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### Abstract

Terrorism has emerged as a paramount challenge in recent times. With current terrorist organizations adeptly embracing internet technologies and seamlessly integrating them into their strategies, the landscape of terrorism has evolved into a multifaceted global concern. For instance, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has had a negative impact not only on the citizens of the countries they directly target but also on the psychology of individuals in non-targeted countries through their internet-focused strategies. Despite not carrying out any attacks on Japan, the majority of the Japanese perceive ISIS as a significant threat to their nation. This finding serves as a prime example of how a terrorist organization like ISIS, utilizing internet strategies proficiently, can detrimentally affect individuals in non-targeted countries. This study demonstrates how the soft terrorism concept elucidates the heightened fear of ISIS in Japan. By conducting a Google Trends analysis, the Japanese case is examined in this research. The findings indicate that the soft terrorism activities of ISIS have both short-term and long-term adverse effects on the Japanese, primarily attributed to the dissemination of brutal images and videos posted by ISIS on the internet, as posited by the soft terrorism concept.

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## Introduction

The terrorism problem has progressively transcended global borders and taken on added complexity due to technological advancements. A pivotal factor in this transformation is the adeptness of current terrorist organizations in adapting to the evolving internet and social media technologies and effectively integrating these tools into their strategies. Particularly within an increasingly globalized world, the internet has assumed a central role in the tactical arsenal of terrorist groups, leveraging its structure to eliminate geographical barriers and facilitate interactions among countless individuals (Bertram, 2016: 225–252). In alignment with this perspective, Weinberg and Eubank (2007) contend that the internet facilitates the propagation of terrorism across regions, as social media and internet platforms have dismantled temporal and spatial constraints.

Current terrorist groups spread their brutal propaganda more easily and globally via the internet. In addition, terrorist organizations have increased their capacity to create and increase fear among people with their internet strategies (Tulga, 2022: 80). Existing terrorist groups use violent photos and videos on the internet as psychological weapons and try to create fear among people with this strategy (Hoffman, 2006: 103-121). Today, it is seen that this effect is not limited to the citizens of the countries that are the direct targets of terrorism. It also negatively affects the psychology of the citizens of countries that are not directly affected by terrorist attacks (Tulga, 2022: 15).

However, the traditional terrorism literature faces challenges in explaining the phenomenon of terrorism-related anxiety or trends in countries not directly targeted by terrorist organizations. For this reason, the soft terrorism concept has been formulated to explain the strategies used by such organizations and the subsequent negative impact on ordinary citizens. A terrorist attack in a distant part of the world can have negative repercussions on people residing in various regions, even if they are not the direct targets of such attacks, due to “soft” terrorism (Finseraas and Listhaug, 2013). This is because, rather than the terrorist attack itself, social media and exaggerated violent posts on the internet play a significant role (Braithwaite, 2013). The primary factor that induces fear, captures attention, and terrorizes individuals is the dissemination of exaggerated violence through soft terrorism elements such as social media and the internet (Tulga, 2022: 26).

Within this study, the influence of the “soft terrorism” concept is examined through the lens of the Japanese context, and an analysis of Google Trends data is undertaken to comprehend its effects on Japan. Specifically, the study centers on Japanese Google searches utilizing the keyword “ISIS” from January 2014 to December 2018. Furthermore, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of searches related to ISIS, a comparative analysis is conducted by examining inquiries regarding the English Premier League -a globally prominent term- in Japan.

The most important reason for choosing Google Trends analysis in this study is that it is thought that examining Google searches can show the interest and orientation of the public in detail (Scharnow and Vogelgesang, 2011: 110). In particular, problems such as the relatively low usage rate of Twitter and the selection and sensitivity bias in survey analyses make the Google Trends analysis an indispensable resource to understand the Japanese fear of ISIS and their trends towards ISIS.

In the next part of this study, the literature focusing on the relationship between terrorism and the internet has been reviewed. I try to show the different views in the literature. In the following section, I will define the soft terrorism concept and explain why Japan is an ideal case for this research. In the third section, I will describe the analysis methods used in this study. The findings obtained as a result of the analysis are explained in the fourth part of the study. In the fifth chapter, the study’s essential findings are summarized, and the consistency or differences between these findings with the results in the current literature are shown. The study will be concluded with a conclusion chapter.

## 1. Literature Review

Numerous views in academic studies focus on the goals of terrorism. However, one of the most prominent views in the literature is that creating an atmosphere of panic and fear among people to achieve some of the purposes of terrorist organizations is one of the most fundamental goals of terrorism (Weinberg and Eubank, 2008: 190). Many scholars argue that the internet, which allows interaction regardless of distance or a physical location in the globalizing world, is susceptible to exploitation and manipulation by terrorist organizations in their pursuit of goals (Bertram, 2016: 230). Similarly, Hoffman (2006) thinks that the internet has some features that terrorists can use for their purposes, and therefore the internet has become a dangerous tool for terrorists. For this reason, it is thought that the internet has become one of the most important



### Examining the Japanese Fear of ISIS with Soft Terrorism Concept

parts of the strategies of many terrorist organizations (Brück and Müller, 2010: 1-15).

Many academic studies argue that with the integration of terrorist organizations into internet technologies and the effective use of the internet by terrorist groups, the aim of creating fear becomes relatively more straightforward, and this fear environment spreads to wider regions of the world (Lavano et al., 2008: 306). In this direction, Qin et al. (2006: 80) argue that terrorist organizations aim to arouse fear and desperation among the public within the scope of psychological warfare through their internet activities. Similarly, Tsfati and Weimann (2002: 317-332) state that terrorist organizations have entered the homes of millions of people via the internet, and this is an essential psychological breakthrough for terrorist organizations.

One of the earliest examples of the relationship between terrorist organizations and the internet is seen in the case of the Islamic State of Iraq. The Islamic State of Iraq posted many videos on the internet containing the group's deadly attacks (Milton, 2018). One of the most striking of these videos was when the organization's leader, Al-Zarqawi, beheaded Nicolas Berg (Nye, 2005). The video was posted on the internet and viewed millions of times by people living in different parts of the world (Cohen-Almagor, 2016: 82).

Given the sustained presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), this terrorist entity stands apart in notable ways from other extremist organizations, largely owing to its adept utilization of the internet and emerging technologies (Cohen-Almagor, 2016: 81). ISIS has disseminated myriad videos and images across the web, depicting harrowing scenes of violence, bloodshed, suicide, and hostage situations. In a broader context, Hamiti (2016: 132) argues that behind the choreographed and videotaped acts of violence, ISIS has a calculated strategy to create an atmosphere of fear among the populace. Through its online endeavors, ISIS does not merely impact the citizens of the nations it directly targets; it casts a negative influence on a multitude of other countries as well (Milton, 2018).

On the other hand, some studies argue that fear-based reactions are more common in areas close to the attack rather than in remote areas (Gaissmaier and Gigerenzer, 2012: 1453). In this direction, Mahat-Shamir and colleagues (2018: 310) find that physical proximity to the terrorist attack, rather than exposure to social media or the internet, is highly associated with both psychological distress and fear of terrorism. Social media and the internet are only effective for sharing violent videos and pictures. Still, these images on social media and the internet are not as

effective as physical terrorist attacks (Tulga, 2022).

However, despite all these studies in the literature, there are still unanswered questions. For example, as a result of the surveys conducted by many research institutions such as the PEW Research Center, it is revealed that more than half of the citizens of countries such as Korea, Japan, and Argentina see the ISIS threat as the most critical threat to their country, even though they are not the target of ISIS or are not even close to the geographies where ISIS attacks (Poushter and Manevich, 2017). The soft terrorism concept can somewhat explain the fear or negative thoughts toward organizations in these countries. In this direction, the soft terrorism concept will be described in detail in the following part of the study.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Nowadays, the development of technology has influenced people's daily lives and caused many innovations (Tulga, 2020). The internet has increased news speed and people's access to information on many issues. Technological progress, especially internet development, has also affected terrorist organizations in the past few years, and these developments have become a significant part of terrorist strategies (Tulga, 2022: 96). With the internet and social media, today's terrorist organizations can influence not only the direct victims of terrorist attacks but also everyone exposed to terrorist groups' posts on the internet and social media (Marin, 2016). Current terrorist groups' effective use of social media and internet technologies has enabled the organizations to broadcast their violent videos and images uncensored, falsely, or exaggeratedly (Barceló and Labzina, 2020: 1539-1559), and this has caused a flow of online violence that spreads all over the world (Marin, 2016).

Today's terrorist organizations could create a general feeling of anxiety and fear among people, using no weapons or with a small-scale attack (Tulga, 2022: 10; Tulga, 2023). In a brief time, millions of people in Japan, Canada, or South Africa can access much more information, brutal images, and videos that could create fear about a terrorist attack in Iraq, Syria, or France (Tulga, 2022). Therefore, social media, the internet, and developing technologies increase the reach and impact of terrorism and terrorist attacks. Because of the news, internet, and social media posts they see, emotions such as fear, and horror emerge. As a result, terrorist attacks affect people even though they are far from the area where the terrorist attack took place (Kaakinen et al., 2021: 1020).



### Examining the Japanese Fear of ISIS with Soft Terrorism Concept

Therefore, it is possible to explain the atmosphere of fear created by terrorist organizations such as ISIS among the citizens of countries that are not directly targeted by terrorist attacks with the soft terrorism concept. In essence, soft terrorism attempts to elucidate how terrorist organizations utilize technologies such as the internet and social media, and the negative impacts of this utilization on individuals residing in various regions across the globe.

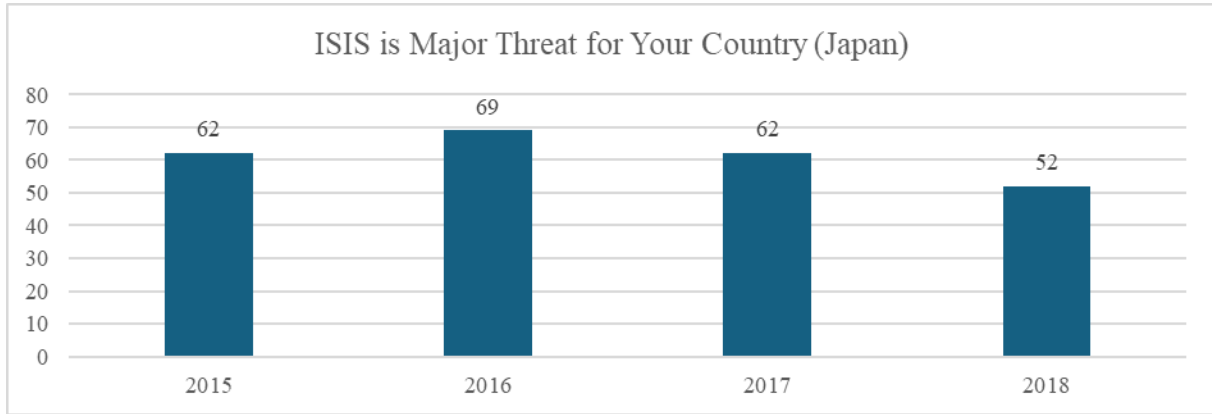
The essential elements of this concept are social media and the internet. The best example of the soft terrorism concept is the violent pictures and false and exaggerated information shared on social media or the internet (Tulga, 2022: 112). The soft terrorism concept enables terrorist organizations, members, sympathizers, and supporters to achieve their goals of negatively affecting people's psychology. A terrorist attack that occurs in a distant part of the world has a negative impact on people in various regions through the soft terrorism strategy employed by terrorist groups. Because the posts, including excessive violence (Braithwaite, 2013: 98), on social media and the internet play a more important role than the terrorist attack. Today's terrorist organizations, such as ISIS, by using the soft terrorism strategy, overestimate their brutality, power, and capacity, causing broader fear and surprise in public. Unlike previous terrorist groups, today's terrorist organizations cause shocks and fear not only in the country they target but also in many regions or countries with their soft terrorism strategies.

The soft terrorism concept also enables terrorist groups to create a sense of sudden surprise, which is crucial in achieving the goals of terrorism by instilling fear and capturing the public's attention (Tulga, 2023). Some political scientists suggest that terrorist organizations gain public attention, surprise, and fear by demonstrating their power, violence, and capabilities (Hoffman and McCormick, 2004; Siegel and Young, 2009). Soft terrorism strategies enable current terrorist groups to easily create an atmosphere of surprise, which can quickly spread to larger audiences and result in lower costs for terrorist organizations (Tulga, 2023).

In summary, terrorist groups effectively instigate an atmosphere of fear worldwide and attract the attention of individuals through the use of soft terrorism strategies (Tulga, 2023). The soft terrorism essentially offers a framework to comprehend and elucidate the adverse effects of existing terrorist organizations on people residing in various parts of the world, particularly those who are not the direct targets of terrorist activities, and how these organizations manage to garner attention (Tulga, 2023).

ISIS could be considered an example of the soft terrorism concept. The organization disseminates its violent acts through elements of soft terrorism, such as the internet and social media platforms, reaching individuals globally (Tulga, 2022). For instance, the widely publicized burning of a Jordanian fighter pilot on January 3, 2015, and the burning of two Turkish soldiers on December 22, 2016, were broadcast online, attracting thousands of viewers in a short period of time. These incidents exemplify a calculated strategy by ISIS to instill fear among people and attract the attention of individuals living in various parts of the world through the implementation of soft terrorism strategies (Tulga, 2022).

The effects of ISIS' soft terrorism strategy can be seen in countries such as Greece, Japan, Korea, and Argentina. In all these countries, according to the 2017 PEW Research Center survey, those who consider ISIS as the biggest threat to their country constitute the vast majority of those surveyed (Poushter and Manevich, 2017: 1). However, all these countries have not been faced with any ISIS attacks, and all of them, except for Greece, are far from the main geographic areas that ISIS targets. In particular, Japan differs from these countries in the long run. This is because, in the surveys of the PEW Research Center from 2015 to 2018, most Japanese respondents considered ISIS a threat to their country (Poushter and Huang, 2019: 25).

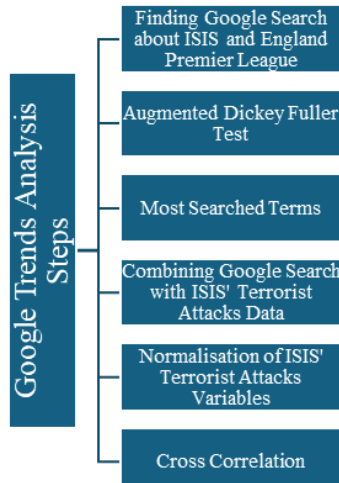


**Figure 1.** *ISIS is a Major Threat for Japan (Poushter and Huang, 2019)*

Japan offers an essential example for testing the soft terrorism concept due to the high threat perception or fear of ISIS between 2015 and 2018. Therefore, in this study, I choose Japan as a case, which is analyzed with Google Trends to make sense of the threat perception and trend towards ISIS. The methods used in the analysis will be explained in detail in the next section of the study.

### 3. Research Design

In this study, to understand the effect of the soft terrorism concept on the Japanese, I focus on Google searches specifically in Japan between January 2014 and December 2018. This analysis examines the change in Japanese interest in ISIS and the events that led to the increase and decrease in interest in ISIS.



*Figure 2. Analysis Steps*

One of the paramount phases in the analysis of Google Trends involves the meticulous selection and examination of specific keywords that faithfully reflect public sentiment. The judicious choice of terms for Google Trends analysis is believed to provide a more precise gauge of public interest and inclinations (Scharkow and Vogelgesang, 2011: 110). Nevertheless, given that Google Trends analysis is predicated on a single keyword, its findings can be deceptive and lack meaningful insights. Consequently, the keyword under scrutiny necessitates comparison with another

keyword. Thus, in this study, a juxtaposition was conducted between searches related to ISIS and inquiries concerning one of the most globally pervasive search terms, the English Premier League.

Category	Key Words
ISIS	“ISIS”
Premier League	“English Premier League”
Searched Dates	01.01.2014 – 31.12.2018
Formulas	gtrends (keyword = c(“ISIS”, “Premier League”), geo = “JP”, time = “2014-01-01 2018-12-31”, gprop = “web”, hl = “ja-JP”)

*Table 1. Information about Google Trends Analysis*



The obtained dataset shows us weekly searches related to ISIS and the English Premier League. For the results, I first tested the stationarity of the dataset. The Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test is a standard statistical test used to determine whether time series datasets are stationary. This test is one of the most widely used statistical tests for analyzing a series' stationarity (Cheung and Lai, 1995: 278).

	Augmented Dickey-Fuller Test	Lag	P- Value
ISIS	-5,064	6	<0.05 (***)
Premier League	-5,045	6	<0.05 (***)

*Table 2. Augmented Dickey-Fuller Test Results*

As a result of the ADF test, both variables are stationary because the p-values of Google searches for both keywords are less than 0.05. In other words, both variables do not have a time-dependent structure, show a constant change over time, and have an ideal structure for trend analysis. With this result, the time-series dataset is also suitable for correlation analysis because non-stationary data are prone to spurious correlation results (Mellon, 2013: 285). Therefore, an Augmented Dickey-Fuller test result of less than 0.05 indicates that the patterns observed in the dataset used in this research are unlikely to be due to chance or random fluctuations (Zhang et al., 2015: 287).

Then, the obtained and tested dataset on a weekly basis were converted into monthly data. Weekly Google search data is best structured to analyze searches over several weeks rather than demonstrating long-term trends. On the other hand, monthly data is the most accurate way to indicate long-term trends (Eichenauer et al., 2021: 700). For this reason, our weekly data is averaged and converted into monthly data. The following formula was used to calculate the mean of the data;

(1)

$$X_{Average} = \frac{X_{Sum\ of\ All\ Data\ Points}}{X_{Number\ of\ Data\ Points}}$$

Following the conversion of the data to monthly data, the most searched words were analyzed to provide more detailed information about the Japanese trends towards ISIS. The ten

### Examining the Japanese Fear of ISIS with Soft Terrorism Concept

most searched terms related to ISIS were found in this direction. Finding the most searched words is an important step in understanding the impact of the soft terrorism concept on the Japanese, as it provides an opportunity to understand the Japanese interest in ISIS.

Then, the terrorist attacks by ISIS worldwide and in “Western” countries such as America, England, France, Germany, and Australia were combined with Google searches. The most important reason for considering these two variables separately in this study is that it is understood that the entire terrorist attacks of ISIS or the terrorist attacks carried out in certain countries attract more attention in the eyes of the Japanese. Data on terrorist attacks organized by ISIS are taken from START’s Global Terrorism Database (START, 2022). As a result of the merging process, a dataset with four variables and 60 observations was reached.

Variables	Number of Observation	mean	median	min	max
Search_ISIS	60	3,951	1,675	0,25	47
Search_Premier League	60	36,423	37,75	8,25	82,8
ISIS_attacks_world	60	127,417	143	31	231
ISIS_attacks_west	60	1,850	1	0	9

*Table 3. Descriptive Analysis*

Following the merging process, the normalization method was applied to the attacks by ISIS worldwide and in Western countries. Normalization is a critical step in preventing the repetition, consistency, and inadequacy of the data. Since the Google Trends data is already normalized, the normalization process was applied only to two variables focusing on the attacks by ISIS around the world and in “Western” countries. The following formula was used in the normalization process:

(2)

$$x_{Normalisation} = \frac{x - x_{min.}}{x_{max.} - x_{min.}}$$

In the last analysis step of the study, the cross-correlation between the variables in the data set was analyzed. I try to explain, to some extent, with the correlation process, the role of attacks

of ISIS in the searches of the Japanese about ISIS on Google. The cross-correlation method was used because the dataset examined in the correlation analysis was a time series. Cross-correlation is a conventional technique employed to establish the temporal relationship between various indicators and a specific target variable. It involves calculating correlations across time to pinpoint time lags that exhibit the maximum correlation between variables (Eichenauer et al., 2021: 700).

(3)

$$r_k(A, B) = \frac{\sum(A_t - A)(B_{t-k} - B)}{\sqrt{\sum(A_t - A)^2} \sqrt{\sum(B_t - B)^2}}$$

The correlation analysis does not aim to provide information about causation. It is only intended to show the direction and trend of this relationship if there is a statistical relationship between the variables in the data set. The findings obtained from all these analyses will be explained in detail in the following part of the study.

#### 4. Results

The first finding was reached as a result of the analysis of the trends that focused on the terms “ISIS” and “English Premier League,” covering the years between January 2014 and December 2018. As the English Premier League is one of the most searched terms in the world and across Japan, searches for the Premier League in Japan are generally expected to be much higher than searches related to ISIS.

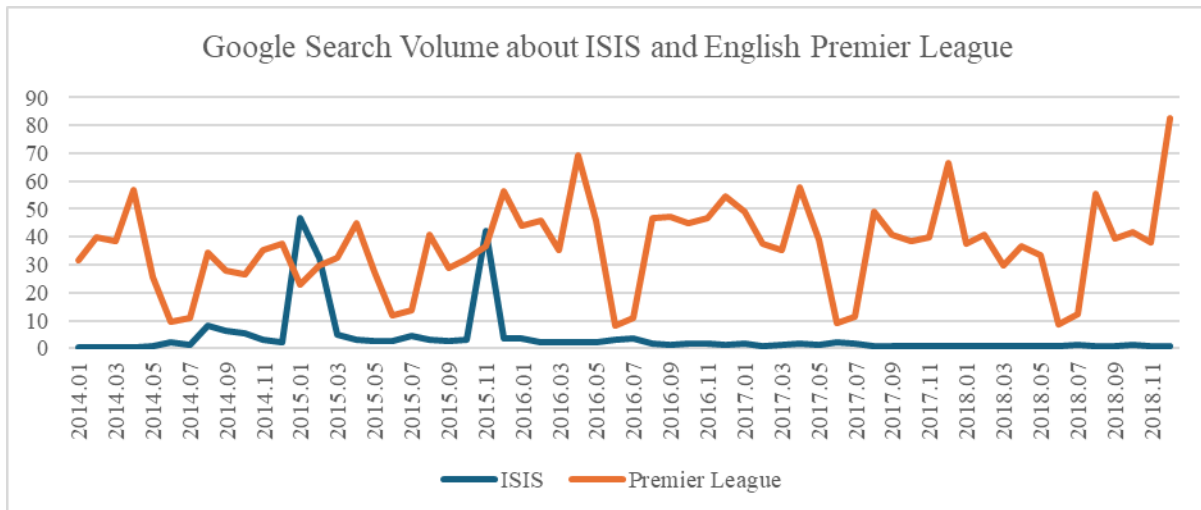


Figure 3. Google Trends about English Premier League and ISIS



### Examining the Japanese Fear of ISIS with Soft Terrorism Concept

As expected, it is seen that searches for the Premier League, in general, are higher than for ISIS. However, in comparing general trends, it is seen that January 2015, February 2015, and November 2015 are especially prominent, and the searches related to ISIS in these months are much higher than those related to the Premier League. Between 21 January and 2 February, it is seen that ISIS beheaded two Japanese citizens, Haruna Yukawa and Kenji Goto, in Syria, and videos of this brutal act were posted on the internet.

The second period that searches related to ISIS surpassed inquiries related to the Premier League is November 2015. Especially between 13 November and 20 November, it is seen that the searches associated with ISIS are high, and all of these searches are related to the attacks organized by ISIS in Paris, France. It is seen that the most searched words during this period are predominantly about images and videos of the attack.

Apart from these two periods, there are also two more periods that increased Japanese interest in ISIS, and searches for ISIS surpassed searches for the Premier League in the short term. It is seen that these dates are 23 October 2017 and 31 July to 1 August 2018. When we look at the features of these dates, it is seen that 23 October 2017 was the date when the Marawi Siege in the Philippines ended, and the most searched words in this period were the terms “Philippines ISIS” and “Mindanao Islamic State.” On 31 July and 1 August 2018, the searches seemed to be related to Junpei Yasuda, who was kidnapped in Syria. Searches about ISIS seem to have increased during this period due to negative experiences such as Junpei Yasuda being abducted in Syria despite not being abducted by ISIS and the brutal murder of two Japanese citizens at the beginning of 2015. In this period, it is seen that the most searched words are “ISIS execution,” “Haruna Yukawa,” and “Islamic State hostage.”

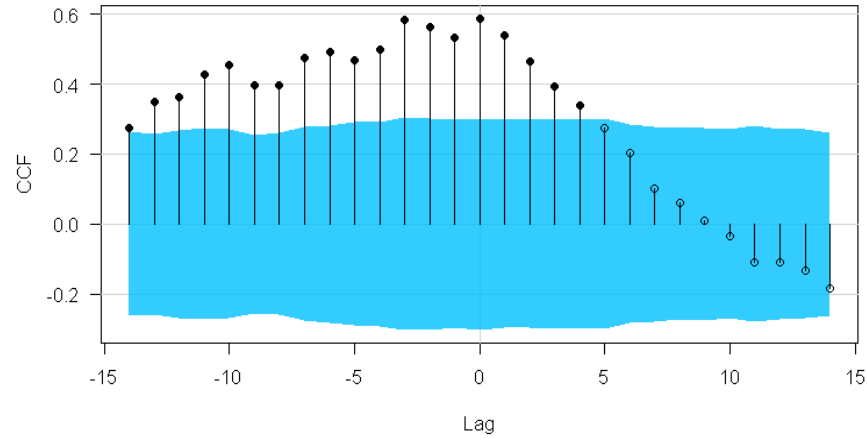
Then, to understand the general interest of Japanese people in ISIS, the ten most searched terms related to ISIS between 2014 and 2018 are found. The ten most searched terms show that ISIS execution images and videos of atrocities attracted the attention of the Japanese. In particular, the beheading of two Japanese citizens by ISIS in 2015 and the uploading of videos and images of this atrocity on the internet seem to have negatively affected the Japanese’s perception of ISIS in the long run.

ISIS	
Value	Subject
100	イスラム (Islam)
96	isis 後藤 (ISIS Gotō)
72	イスラム 国 (ISIS)
69	isis 動画 (isis videos)
67	isis 湯川 (isis yukawa)
52	isis 処刑 (isis execution)
42	isis コラ (ISIS memes)
39	日本人 isis (Japanese man isis)
35	クソ コラ グランプリ isis (Japanese Anti-ISIS memes)
34	isis 斬首された (ISIS beheaded)

*Table 4. Most Searched Terms on Google*

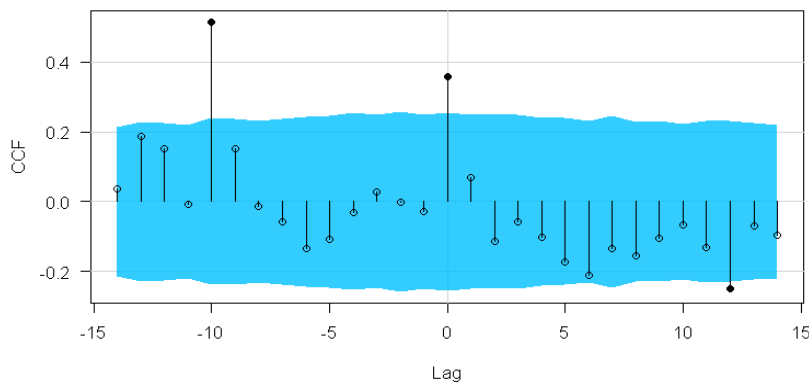
The research is concluded with a cross-correlation analysis. The first correlation analysis covers Google searches on ISIS and its terrorist attacks around the world between 2014 and 2018. Cross-correlation coefficients below 0.5 signify a moderate level of correlation, whereas those approaching 0.6 indicate a stronger correlation. Specifically, at a lag of -3, the coefficient stands at 0.58, signifying a significant positive correlation. This observation implies a connection between searches related to ISIS in Japan and global attacks, with a three-time-step shift. At a lag of 0, the correlation is approximately 0.60, suggesting a simultaneous positive correlation. Furthermore, as the lag increases after lag 0, the correlations diminish, alluding to delayed connections between searches about ISIS in Japan and the occurrence of global attacks by the group. Interestingly, these correlations tend to intensify with closer temporal proximity.

### Examining the Japanese Fear of ISIS with Soft Terrorism Concept



**Figure 4.** Correlation Result Between Search on ISIS and ISIS' Attacks around the World

As a result of the correlation analysis focusing on the ISIS terrorist attacks in “Western” countries and the Japanese Google searches for ISIS shows that the correlation or statistical relationship between the two variables is weaker. The sole notable outcome emerges from the correlation analysis conducted at a lag of -10. Specifically, at Lag -10, the correlation coefficient registers at 0.52. These findings collectively indicate a statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables at Lag -10, albeit presenting a moderate degree of correlation between them.



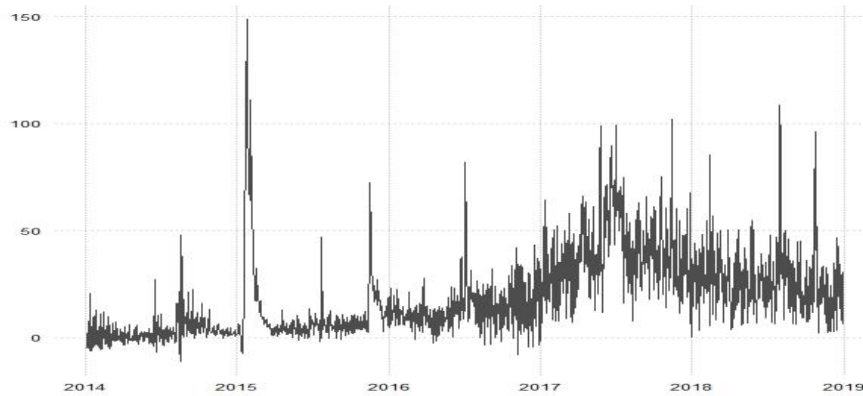
**Figure 5.** Correlation Result Between Search on ISIS and ISIS' Attacks in Western Countries

In short, these cross-correlation results can help identify any time lags where the two series are correlated, which can help identify the direction between variables. However, it is essential to note that correlation does not necessarily imply causation and further analysis may be needed to establish a causal relationship between the two-time series.

## 5. Discussion

As a result of the analysis, numerous findings are reached. While some of these findings are similar to the findings of the studies in the literature, some results differ from the findings in the literature. In addition, the results show how the soft terrorism strategies of ISIS shaped Japanese attitudes towards ISIS.

The first finding in this direction results from an analysis of Japanese interest in the English Premier League and ISIS. Looking at the trends towards the Premier League and ISIS, it is seen that the trend towards the Premier League, which is one of the most searched words in the world and Japan in the long term, surpasses the trend towards ISIS. However, as soft terrorism suggests, it is evident that Japanese interest in ISIS has surpassed that of the Premier League after the brutal acts broadcasted by ISIS on the internet and social media and attracted attention in various parts of the world.



*Figure 6. Japanese Daily Basis Search on Google about ISIS*

In other words, it is seen that ISIS' brutal events posted on the internet play an important role in the increase in the trends towards ISIS, and, with one exception, the interest in ISIS is short-lived. The exception is the case of Kenji Goto and Haruna Yukawa, two Japanese nationals who were beheaded in northern Syria. This finding is consistent with the results of some studies in the literature. In this direction, Misis, Bush, and Hendrix (2017: 128) found that the public's fear of terrorism in the United States of America changed over time and that the public's fear of terrorism decreased over time passed. Lin, Margolin, and Wen wrote a similar study in 2017. The authors found that, due to the Paris attacks in November 2015, fear and anger among people



### Examining the Japanese Fear of ISIS with Soft Terrorism Concept

increased sharply immediately after the attack (Lin et al., 2017: 1583). Still, these emotions began to decrease sharply in the following days (Lin et al., 2017: 1585). A similar situation could be seen in the Japan case, but the effects of the beheading of Kenji Goto and Haruna Yukawa were not short-lived, as it became clear in the inquiry for the most searched words. It is seen that interest in ISIS has increased due to the fact that the Japanese continued to conduct Google searches for Haruna Yukawa and Kenji Goto even in 2018 and due to the possibility of repetition of bad memories as a result of events such as the kidnapping of Junpei Yasuda.

Another result supporting this finding was reached as a result of the examination of the most searched words. Based on the most searched terms, it is seen that the atrocities organized by ISIS and uploaded on the internet are among the most important factors affecting the Japanese interest in ISIS. In particular, it was found that the effect of the beheading of two Japanese citizens in Northern Syria and their videos on the internet was significant and long-lasting. However, it seems that other brutal acts by ISIS also attracted the attention of the Japanese, but the effect was short-lived. An example of this situation is that one of the most searched ISIS-related topics on 23 October was “three young men beheaded by ISIS in Wilayat Al-Khayr.” In addition, it has been found that the term “ISIS execution” in general is one of the words frequently sought by the Japanese. These findings are consistent with the result of Hoffman’s research in 2017. The author found a positive and strong relationship between the fear and interest in ISIS in Western European countries and the consumption of violent videos and images broadcast by ISIS (Hoffman, 2017: 86). This finding is also consistent with the soft terrorism concept because it argues that terrorist organizations, their sympathizers, and their supporters influence people’s psychology through violent videos and pictures posted on the internet (Tulga, 2022: 120).

The third key finding of this study emerged through cross-correlation analysis. This analysis delved into the attacks orchestrated by ISIS both globally and within “Western” nations, leading to the derivation of two distinct conclusions. Evidently, a relatively robust, positive, and statistically significant correlation surfaced between the worldwide spectrum of ISIS attacks and Japanese Google searches related to ISIS. More specifically, the most pronounced correlation manifested at Lag -3 and 0. These outcomes insinuate the potential existence of a lagged association between Google searches pertaining to ISIS in Japan and the occurrence of global terrorist attacks by ISIS. Notably, the correlation grows stronger when the temporal proximity of



events is closer. Conversely, a relatively weak correlation has been revealed between ISIS's attacks on "Western" countries such as America, Germany, and France and searches related to ISIS in Japan occasionally. Notably, the statistically strongest correlation between ISIS attacks on these "Western" nations and Japanese Google searches for ISIS is observed at Lag -10. It is vital to acknowledge that correlation analysis inherently lacks the capacity to elucidate causation; its primary objective lies in delineating the statistical interrelation between chosen variables and the direction of this relationship.

All these results show that the soft terrorism strategies of ISIS had adverse effects on the Japanese and that ISIS attracted the attention of the Japanese without any attack on mainland Japan. In addition, these results are not consistent with the argument of some scholars, such as Simons, that terrorism and terrorism-related propaganda outputs only create fear in the targeted audiences (Simons, 2020: 20). These results show that terrorist organizations affect millions of people in different parts of the world with their soft terrorism strategies. In addition, these results are inconsistent with the arguments of Gaissmaier and Gigerenzer (2012: 1450) that reactions based on negative emotions are more common in places close to the attack after terrorist attacks. As a result of the study, it was found that although ISIS did not attack near Japan, it affected the Japanese with soft terrorism strategies.

However, despite these findings, the study has a significant shortcoming. The most critical weakness of the study is that the results of the Google Trends analysis were not supported by face-to-face interviews. Through face-to-face interviews, more in-depth information based on people's subjective thoughts can be provided on Japanese fears of ISIS or the impact of ISIS' soft terrorism strategies on the Japanese.

### **Conclusion**

With the adaptation of terrorist organizations to developing technologies and the internet, the problem of terrorism has become more complex and negatively affects people living in many countries around the world. Especially as the internet has removed borders, the images of brutality that terrorist organizations broadcast on the internet reach millions of people quickly and negatively affect thousands of people living in different parts of the world (Tulga, 2022).

Terrorist organizations understand the power of the internet and social media channels (Tulga, 2020: 50). For this reason, they use the internet effectively in their strategies. Terrorist



### Examining the Japanese Fear of ISIS with Soft Terrorism Concept

organizations aim to expand their war with these strategies. At the same time, the internet is used to create fear in public (Tulga, 2020: 60). ISIS is one of the organizations that use the internet and social media technologies most effectively, and its internet strategies have a negative impact on thousands of people living in various countries around the world. Some studies prepared in this direction reveal that people living in countries that are or are not the direct target of ISIS in many parts of the world define ISIS as one of the main threats (Mansour, 2018: 100).

However, the existing literature has difficulties answering questions about how existing terrorist organizations such as ISIS negatively affect people in countries that are not their direct targets. The soft terrorism concept has been developed to give some answers to the questions that the literature cannot answer. I have also tried to show the success of these strategies in influencing public opinion in countries that are not direct targets of terrorism. Accordingly, in this study, Japan, which is not the direct target of ISIS but where the fear of ISIS is relatively high, has been chosen as the case. In this study, I try to interpret the fear and trend perceptions of the Japanese towards ISIS with Google Trends analysis.

As a result of the analysis, many significant findings were reached. It was found that the Japanese attitudes towards ISIS increased due to its actions, which were broadcast on the internet and attracted attention. It has been seen that the most important reason behind the trends of the Japanese towards ISIS is the brutal actions of ISIS, especially the beheading of the two Japanese. While some acts of ISIS have a short-lived impact on Japanese attitudes towards ISIS, events such as the killing of two Japanese citizens in northern Syria have been found to have a long-term effect.

In conclusion, existing terrorist organizations such as ISIS can create an atmosphere of fear and attract the public's attention, even in countries that do not have a direct target, such as Japan, with their soft terrorism strategies. It has been shown that the argument underlined by many studies in the literature that the fear of terrorism is directly related to the experience of a physical terrorist attack is not consistent in cases such as Japan and that fear of terrorism can be created with soft terrorism strategies in countries that are not exposed to physical terrorist attacks. Soft terrorist elements such as social media and the internet expand the harmful effects of terrorism and cause the fear of terrorism to increase even in countries that are not directly affected by the attacks.

However, despite these findings, the study has a significant limitation. This limitation is because the study's findings were not supported by the subjective opinions of the Japanese. Findings from face-to-face interviews can provide more in-depth information on the impact of soft terrorism on the Japanese.

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