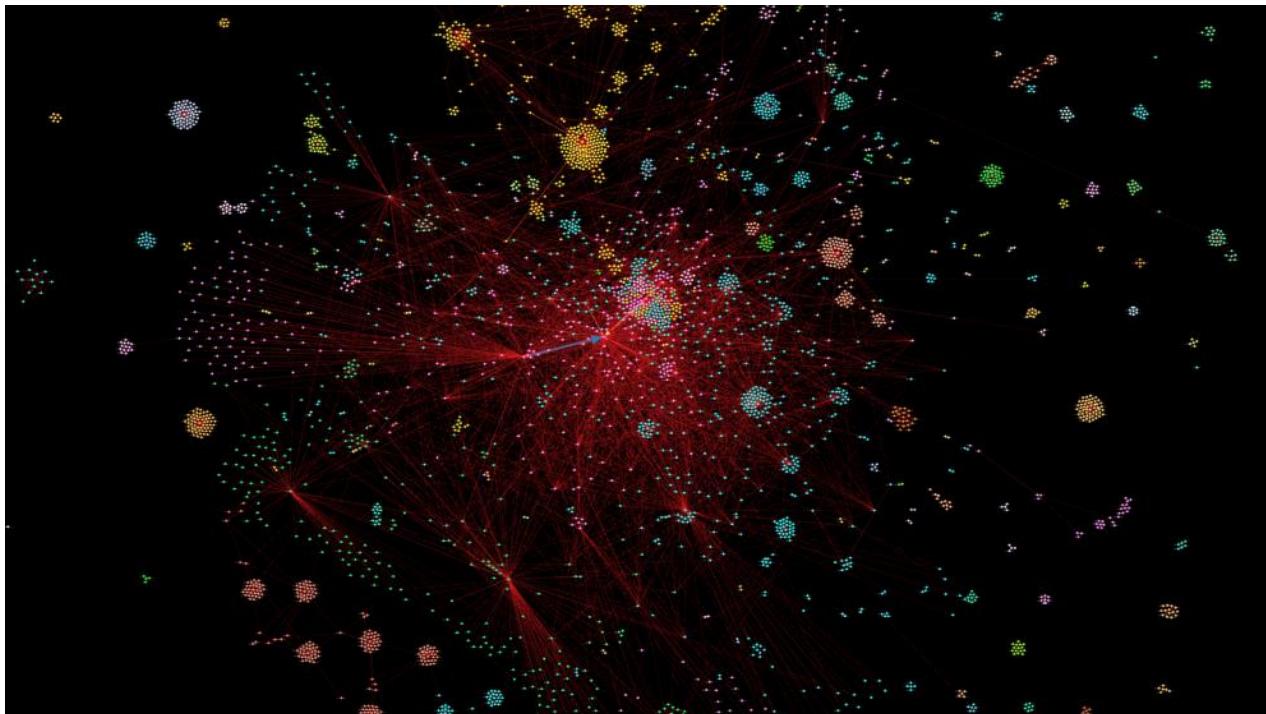


**Centre for
Information
Resilience**

Analysis of the Pro-China Propaganda Network Targeting International Narratives

Analysis of the Pro-China Propaganda Network Targeting International Narratives

By Benjamin Strick



This report shows a coordinated attempt, using a mix of fake, real and stolen social media accounts, to distort international perceptions on significant issues, elevate China's reputation amongst its supporters, and discredit claims critical of the Chinese Government.

The narratives amplified by the accounts are similar to those promoted by Chinese Government officials and China state-linked media.

This report analyses the tactics, techniques and narratives of pro-China networks and how they are used to disseminate digital propaganda on western social media networks.

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Executive summary

A coordinated influence operation on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube is using a mix of fake and repurposed accounts to push pro-China narratives and distort perceptions on important issues.

The network targets significant subjects such as US gun laws, COVID-19, human rights' abuses in Xinjiang, overseas conflicts and racial discrimination in a bid to inflame tensions, deny remarks critical of China, and target western governments. The content was posted in English and Chinese.

The narratives seen in this influence operation have similarities to content seen on the accounts of Chinese Government representatives and China state-linked media, however this is not an indication of attribution.

Pro-China influence operations have maintained a consistent presence on western social media platforms with early operations being identified as far back as [April 2017](#). These operations offer an insight into the tactics, narratives and targets of information campaigns waged to elevate China's status, and discredit opponents at the political and individual level.

This influence operation has similar hallmarks to networks that were taken down by social media platforms in the past. It is likely that this operation is a continuation of those past efforts.

The accounts identified in this influence operation on Twitter used a mix of StyleGAN machine-learning generated images as profile pictures and relied on a much larger network of accounts using more authentic appearing images, anime images and repurposed accounts.

On Facebook and YouTube, many of the accounts appeared to be repurposed as well. There was evidence of previous authentic-appearing ownership of the accounts indicating that at some point there was a change of ownership, either through a takeover from password dumps or a purchase from a seller of stolen accounts.

By conducting a manual review of many of the accounts across all platforms, we estimate there are between 300-500 accounts on Twitter, 40-55 accounts and pages on Facebook and 12 accounts on YouTube.

Why is this report important?

This research is evidence of a deliberate effort to distort international perceptions on significant issues.

In this case, the perceptions are in favour of China. If we value the ability to have open and honest discussions and develop informed opinions on social media, then understanding who is trying to influence us, and how, is important.

About this report

This report is based on publicly available information. While the evidence is used to identify narratives, tactics, and techniques, attribution remains with the social media platforms with access to significantly more data than external researchers.

This report does not intend to overstate the network's impact. The network is spread across multiple platforms, and artificially boosts its own content. While there are verified state-linked accounts sharing similar content, this report focuses on the inauthentic behaviour of the influence operation, and its content.

In assessment of potential links, actors and origins of the networks seen in this report, we do not have strong attribution signals. It should be noted that in some cases, elements of the network may be the result of third parties providing services used by actors for amplification.

China and influence operations

Pro-China propaganda networks have been exposed in the past by research groups working in the influence operations research field. Much of that reporting has been reported off the back of takedowns by social media platforms.

Past reporting from [Graphika](#) has termed similar pro-China propaganda networks as 'Spamouflage Dragon'. Notable reports on the Spamouflage Dragon networks were from [2019](#), [2020](#) and [2021](#). The Australian Strategic Public Policy Institute (ASPI) also covered pro-China networks in [2020](#), as well as Stanford IO in [2020](#), and Bellingcat in [2020](#).

Common tactics that overlap between past influence operations and this one are:

- The use of text-heavy images on Twitter
- The presence of repurposed accounts from previous owners that never posted in Chinese or about any political issues but now appear to only communicate in Chinese and post about western news and pro-China content
- The use of pro-China anti-west sentiment, and
- The tactic of using accounts only for sharing content, and others only for posting

The content of the social media posts seen in this influence operation and those promoted by China state officials and state media is very similar. The areas of crossover are on topics such as [denial](#) of human rights abuses in Xinjiang, connecting issues of [gun violence and human rights](#) in the US, [targeting discrimination](#) in the US and [speculation](#) over the US handling of COVID-19 issues.

Removal of these networks is often publicised by social media platforms in transparency reports; they show examples of content shared in past networks and how it was shared. For example, in [2019](#), Twitter announced the takedown of a pro-China information operation 'attempting to sow political discord in Hong Kong'.

Facebook also announced takedowns in [2019](#) of accounts that originated in China and focused on Hong Kong.

While there are similarities with past networks that have been identified by research groups and have been removed by social media platforms, this research does not intend to attribute this network; the platforms will inevitably have more data to make a more informed attribution.

Methodology

Collection

Data was collected from social media platforms for the purposes of this report through both API access and manual social media search techniques.

The search for the content started with the identification of specific hashtags that have been targeted by pro-China influence operations in the past.

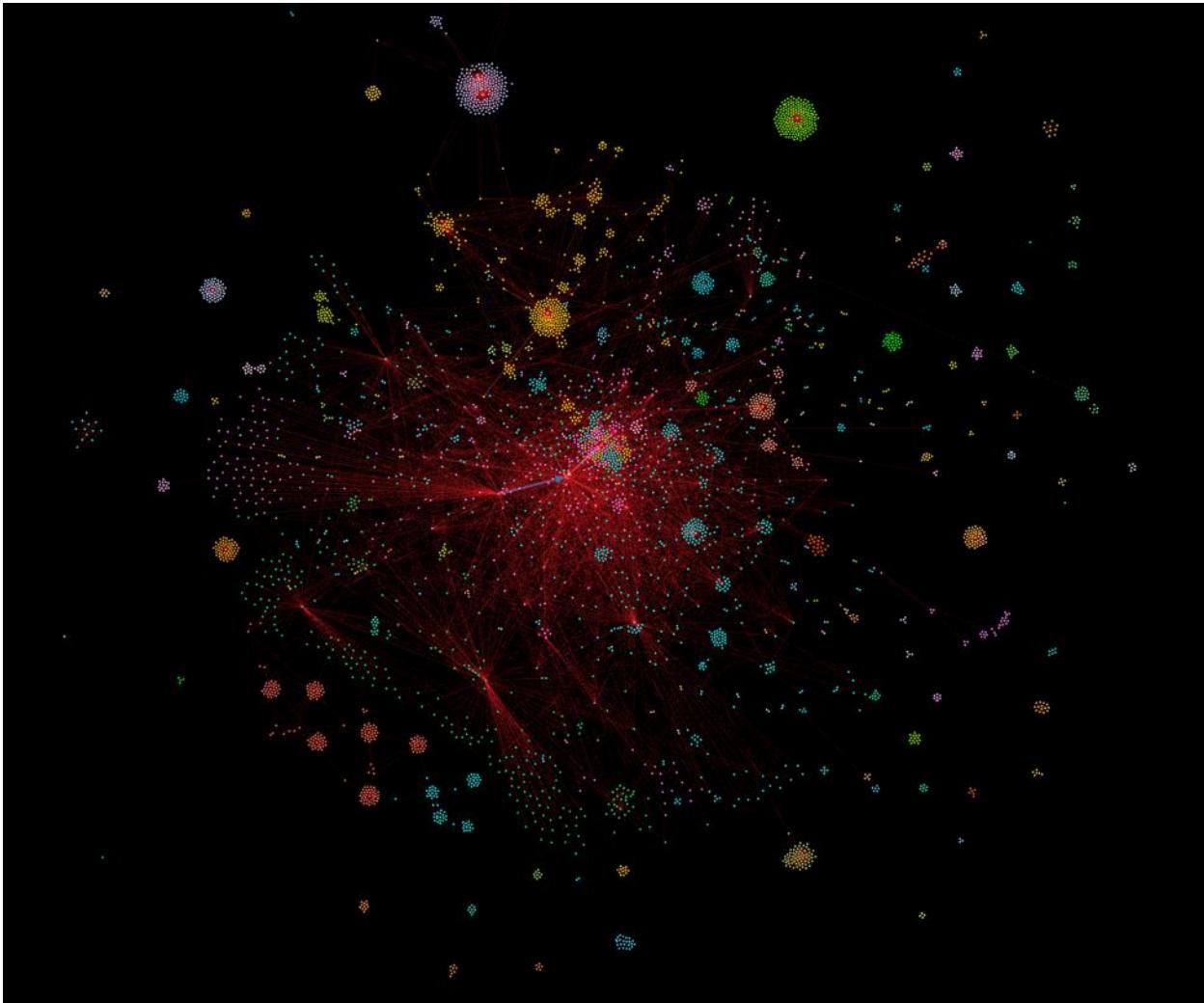
The research started with three main hashtags of simplified terms:

- #香港 (Hong Kong)
- #美国 (United States), and
- #郭文贵 (Guo Wengui)

Those hashtags were used to collect data from Twitter via the platform's API. The hashtags were used in tweets with either Chinese or English text. Where Chinese text was present, auto-translate features were used to analyse tweet content.

After collecting data for a period of one month, the data was processed and cleaned. This facilitated the visualisation of the network via Gephi – a data visualisation platform.

That network of those hashtags was visualised as is, below.



This data visualisation represents the whole of Twitter's activity under the three associated hashtags.

In the visualisation there are small dots which are referred to as nodes; they are the accounts that posted about those hashtags during the collection process. The lines between them, seen in red, are where interactions were strong, such as numerous mentions or retweets between accounts.

This visualisation itself does not represent the whole network in this report. Rather, it shows all of the network discussion around the three hashtags. This network visualisation is useful as it allows the research to be shaped and then further investigated to identify signs of possible automated accounts and the links they might have with other accounts.

During our research, we found there was automation of accounts that posted anti-Chinese Government posts. These are discussed at a later stage in this report. However, it does indicate that by collecting the whole discussion around specific subjects, varying findings can be made.

After the larger visualisation of the data was complete, further analysis of the individual groups of accounts (known as clusters) was performed to check their 'status': as to whether they were part of a coordinated influence network, whether they were using the same text, or if they were normal human user accounts having a legitimate public discussion on content around the three hashtags.

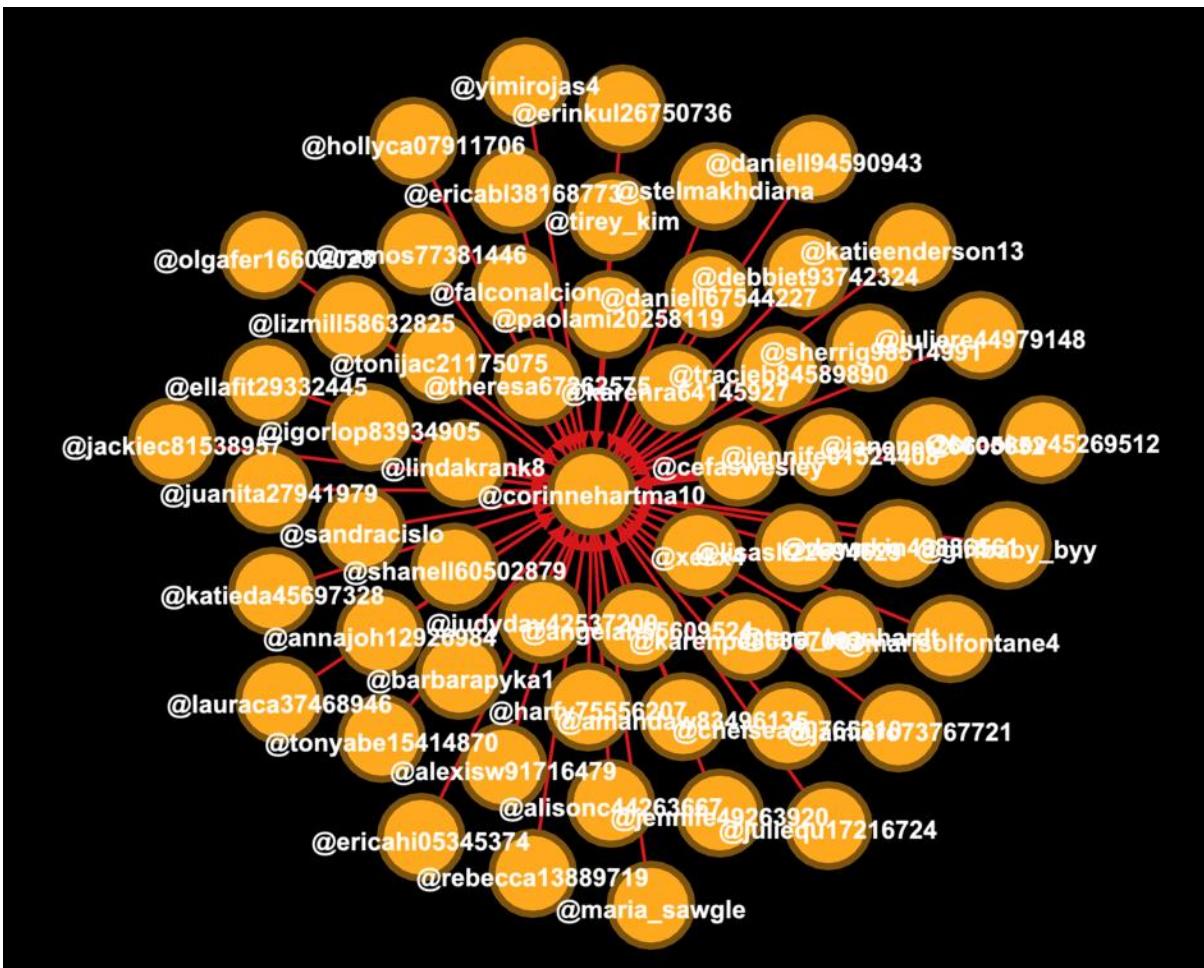
In determining an account's status, some indicators were looked at for each account, such as:

- What was the activity of the account? Were they repeatedly tweeting using the same hashtag?
- Was the content tweeted similar to narratives identified in other reports? Was it a human rights denialist? Did it appear as propaganda?
- Did the account have a unique username? Or did it appear to have a randomly generated Twitter handle?
- Were there personal profile specifics such as a profile picture, cover photo or bio?
- What was the age of the account? Was it recently created?
- What were the account's metrics? Did it have many followers?
- Did the account have a high retweet ratio? Or was it only posting content without interacting with other content?

By following this checklist of questions to sort from authentic activity in the network to influence campaign-linked accounts, we were able to identify clusters of accounts.

Once clusters were identified as possibly involved in the campaign, their accounts were scraped for information such as: what they posted, who was liking their content, who they were following and the bio, creation date and profile information.

When identifying some of the clusters as part of the network, we were able to identify 'batches' of accounts that were part of the same network. This was mainly done by looking at who retweeted content, and who liked content. An example of one of these batches can be seen below.



More analysis of 'how' those clusters operated is discussed further in the report.

After those batches were identified, the topics they were posting about or sharing was analysed, and 'lists' of accounts on Twitter were built to monitor the accounts.

The accounts were split into two categories in those lists:

- 'Posters': Accounts that tweeted content and did not use any retweet or like functions. Rather, their job was to post original content.
- 'Amplifiers': Accounts were there to retweet, like and comment on tweets made by the poster accounts. This made the tweets from the poster accounts look legitimate in appearance with retweets, likes and comments. Some amplifier accounts also acted as followers, giving the poster accounts the appearance that they had legitimate follower numbers.

Those poster and amplifier accounts were monitored for changes in tactics and the observation of new narratives as they were introduced into the networks. Many of those new narratives were easily identified as they came in 'waves' of tweets and infographics.

For example, a new set of images and text was fed into the network two days after US President Biden's announcement to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. Tweets were uploaded with the tag #美国 (United States). Some of the posts asked: "what did the US do in Afghanistan?" to raise doubts about the US and its overseas operations.



Narrative identification

When new narratives were identified, such as the example of the overseas wars above, common keywords were selected and were added to the API collection to capture activity on the spread of the new narratives, as well as the existing campaigns.

After the collection of more than 4000 tweets during March and April 2021, we then focused on looking at individual amplifier accounts and the content they had posted in the past. By doing this, we could identify where links were made away from Twitter, such as to blogs, various news sites and YouTube.

For example, the cluster identified below shows numerous nodes (accounts) surrounding a central node.

The central node is the poster, which in this case is account @voQ1dg6GDRTjJZD. The tweet from the poster can be seen on the right.

The accounts surrounding poster @voQ1d96GDRTjJZD are the amplifiers.

By following the activity of poster @voQ1dg6GDRTjJZD, we were able to identify further topics the accounts in the network was posting about or sharing, indicating more narratives.



Cross-platform research

After the collection of keywords from Twitter, a follow-up manual search was conducted on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube using various digital research techniques and tools.

When accounts were identified as having shared similar or same content (either through same text, or similar infographic-style images) they were further analysed for narratives as well as TTPs.

For example, below is one of the search results for the tag #美国 (United States) on [Facebook](#). These posts were often the same, if not similar, to the posts identified as being amplified by the networks through Twitter.



The screenshot shows a Facebook search results page for the hashtag #美国. There are four visible posts:

- Fgfhh (10h)**: The U.S. Anti-China "Strategic Competition Act" has been approved for a low proportion of national defense. [View Post](#)
- Trevor Philips (10h)**: Don't be afraid to suppress and insist on speaking for China: pay tribute to these "anti-black China" foreigners. [View Post](#)
- Moore Ritika (10h)**: The U.S.'s severely deformed and distorted outlook on development hurts others and hurts itself. [View Post](#)
- Babul Ba (10h)**: Brinken warns China not to challenge the international order: the West has not fallen yet. [View Post](#)

Each post includes a link to a Chinese-language article, which appears to be the same or very similar across all posts. The posts have varying levels of engagement (Likes, Shares, Comments).

Data analysis

While there is a dependency on tools to collect, visualise and analyse the data collected in this research, we relied on manual open-source verification of that data where possible.

The reliance upon mass data analysis tools may misidentify the level of automation of accounts, the origin of accounts, or the legitimacy of the content those accounts produce.

One way we mitigate this is the follow-up analysis we conducted after collecting accounts associated with specific hashtags or keywords. After collecting those accounts, we manually investigated the accounts before assessing their role as part of a campaign, or just part of a network communicating about a subject the campaign is targeting. We take this step to mitigate potential risks of misidentification of automation or role as part of a network.

Privacy

During the research and identification of this influence campaign, we identified a number of accounts that we believe were not purpose-made to serve the network, but rather were previously owned by authentic human users.

Where necessary, in this report, we have redacted their details so as to maintain the privacy of those unintentionally affected individuals who we suspect may be unaware their accounts are being used as part of a pro-China propaganda campaign.

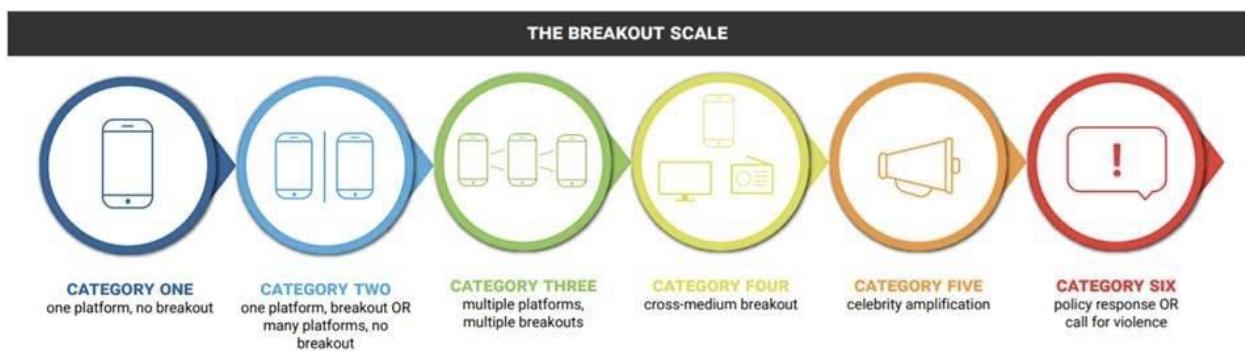
Limitations

It should be noted that this process only uses publicly available information. There are limitations in this reporting as our research is based on a portion of the data which social media platform investigation teams have full access to. In consideration of that, we identify what is visible and provable through scrutiny of the data available to us and report those findings to the platforms for their consideration. We attempt attribution where we are certain and can independently prove elements.

Measuring impact

Assessment of the impact of this network, and others like it, are difficult given the nature of these large, multi-account and cross-platform campaigns. However, one proven method to provide a simple categorised indication of the impact of the network was summarised in a report detailing a '[Breakout Scale](#)' by influence operations specialist and Facebook Global Influence Operations Threat Intelligence Lead Ben Nimmo.

The Breakout Scale is a model that addresses the challenge of assessing the impact of influence operations and disinformation. It divides influence operations into six categories indicative of 'whether they remain on one platform or travel across multiple platforms (including traditional media and policy debates), and whether they remain in one community or spread through many communities'.



We assess, given the available data and the limitations of not having access to full user data, that this network could fall within the parameters of 'Category Two' on the Breakout Scale, namely due to the multiple platforms we have identified its presence on, but minimal breakout into authentic communities. Much of this network's content, as far as we have identified, has only been shared by other accounts in the network with the purpose of amplifying that content.

In the network identified in this report, we estimate there to be between 300-500 accounts on Twitter, 40-55 accounts and pages on Facebook and 12 accounts on YouTube. However, there are limitations to the searchability of these platforms and auto-deletions that may affect this estimation. Therefore, the actual size of the networks will be best figured by the related platforms.

We also found that some of the accounts on Twitter and Facebook had different traits compared to those in this network and more common of those associated with pro-China networks. We believe these may be either 'bought' accounts or accounts hired through a vendor for the purpose of spreading campaigns. This means there may be 'cross-network' amplification and may be attributable to a different actor.

Part one: Multi-platform spread

The majority of the network collected in this research was found to be present on Twitter, followed by Facebook, YouTube then Instagram (in order of count).

This does not necessarily indicate the preference of Twitter as a platform to use, as there are other limiting factors that could explain this count such as the searchability of each of those platforms for accounts, or other factors such as access to purchasing these accounts for the network, or ease of creation of amplifier and poster accounts.

Repeated text and media were also identified on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, similar to past reporting.

The main techniques we identified that were utilised on each platform were:

- **Twitter:** Large numbers of accounts with some acting as content posters, while the majority acted as content amplifiers. The accounts held a mix of profile images, but a noticeable trait was the use of the StyleGAN images.
- **Facebook:** Use of previously human-owned accounts to spread activity, amplification networks with a mix of repurposed and new accounts, some with StyleGAN images, to push narratives through post and comment functions.
- **YouTube:** Dispersal of narratives through video content ranging from well-produced productions to short infographic style content. Many of the accounts were identified as having previous owners, with significant gaps in uploads and often changing from a non-English language to Chinese after years of no activity. The comments section underneath videos were also used as a tool for amplification of narratives by what appears to be fake accounts – some of which also uploaded the same video content.

Twitter: Amplification rings and StyleGAN accounts

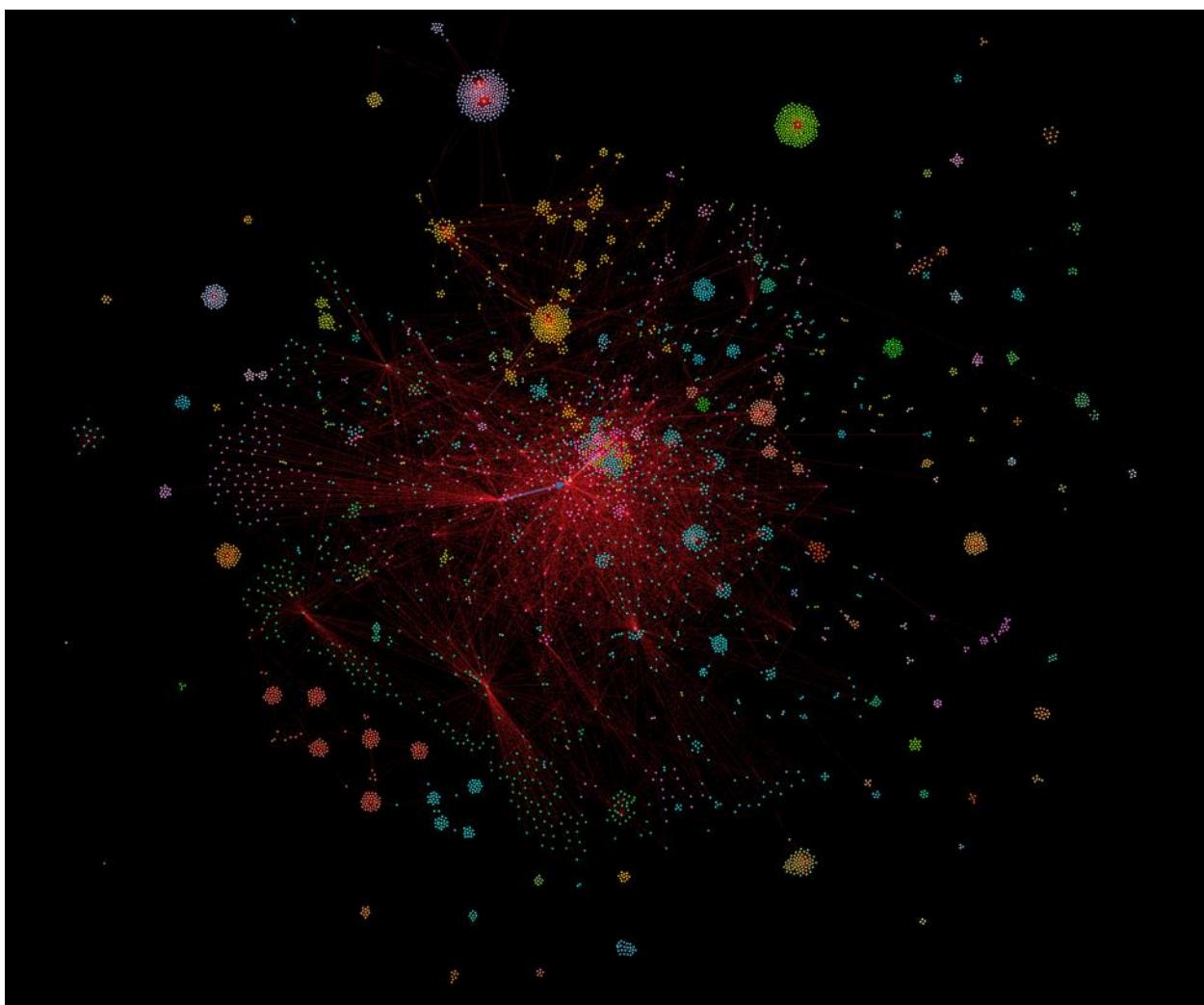
Data was collected from Twitter using the API and the following hashtags:

- #美国 – (United States)
- #郭文贵 – (Guo Wengui)
- #香港 – (Hong Kong)

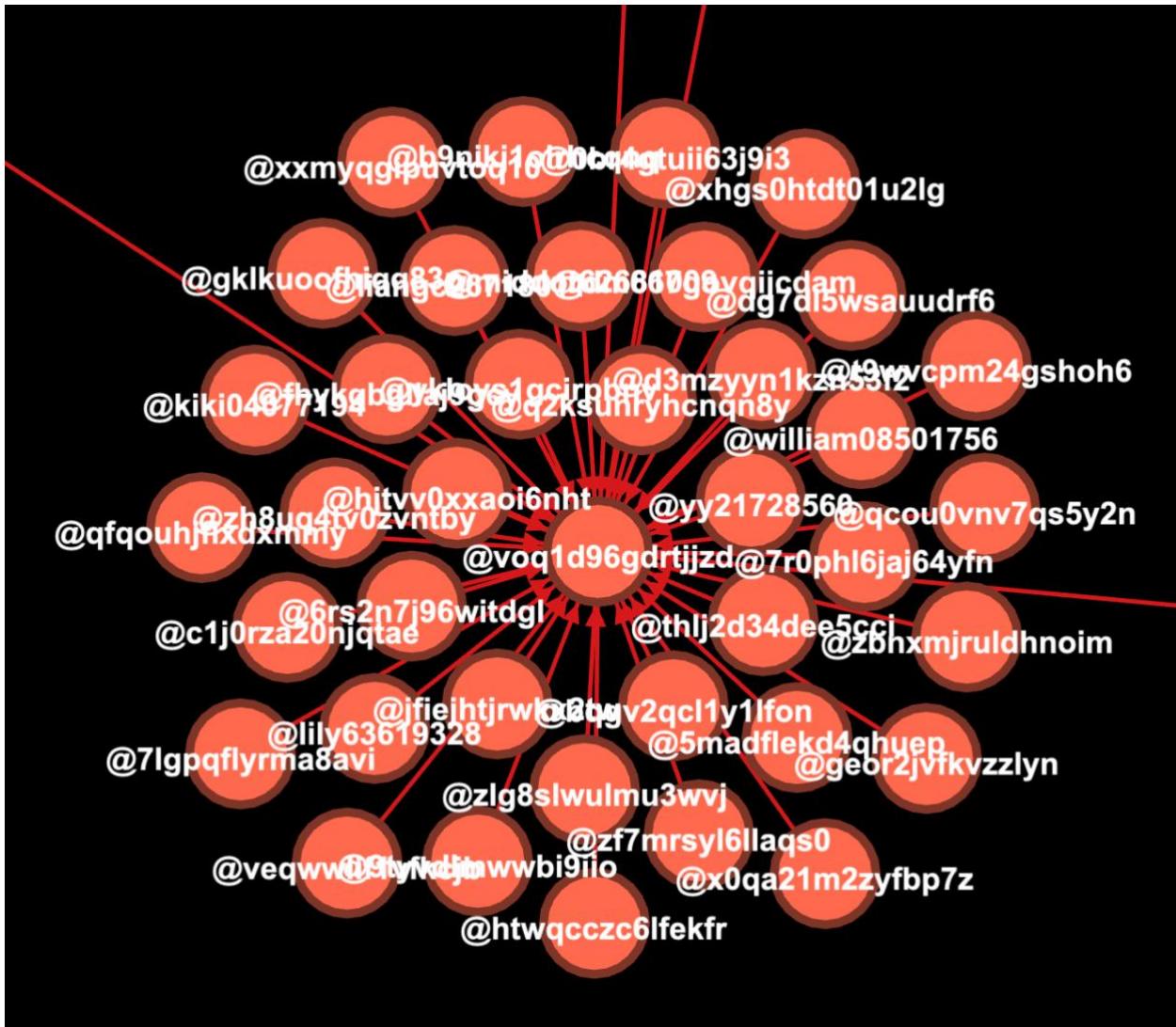
These tags were repeated targets of pro-China propaganda sentiment and amplified or discredited subjects using those hashtags.

However, it should be noted that not all of the content under those hashtags was pro-China content. Rather, there was a mix of authentic users joining the international discussion around those topics, as well as other propaganda. Anti-CCP propaganda was also present in content under these hashtags. Similar elements of that anti-CCP content were identified in this [report](#) from Graphika on social media platforms with a strong presence on Twitter.

All the data collected was visualised in a network graph format through Gephi for further analysis of the way the networks operate in terms of original posters and the amplifiers. This visualisation can be seen below. In the graph, each small node represents a Twitter account, the red lines seen between some of the accounts represent the weight of interactions.



We can see the nature of how some of the accounts operated in the network in more granular detail by looking at accounts that were identified as repeatedly posting pro-China propaganda. For example, account @voQ1d96GDRTjJZD is centred in the middle of the cluster below.



We can see the surrounding accounts that are clustered around the central account of voQ1, which correlates with what we see on Twitter in the screenshot below.



独草孤花
@voQ1d96GDRTjJZD

#美国 "Some countries have aggressive DNA, yes, I'm talking about the United States"

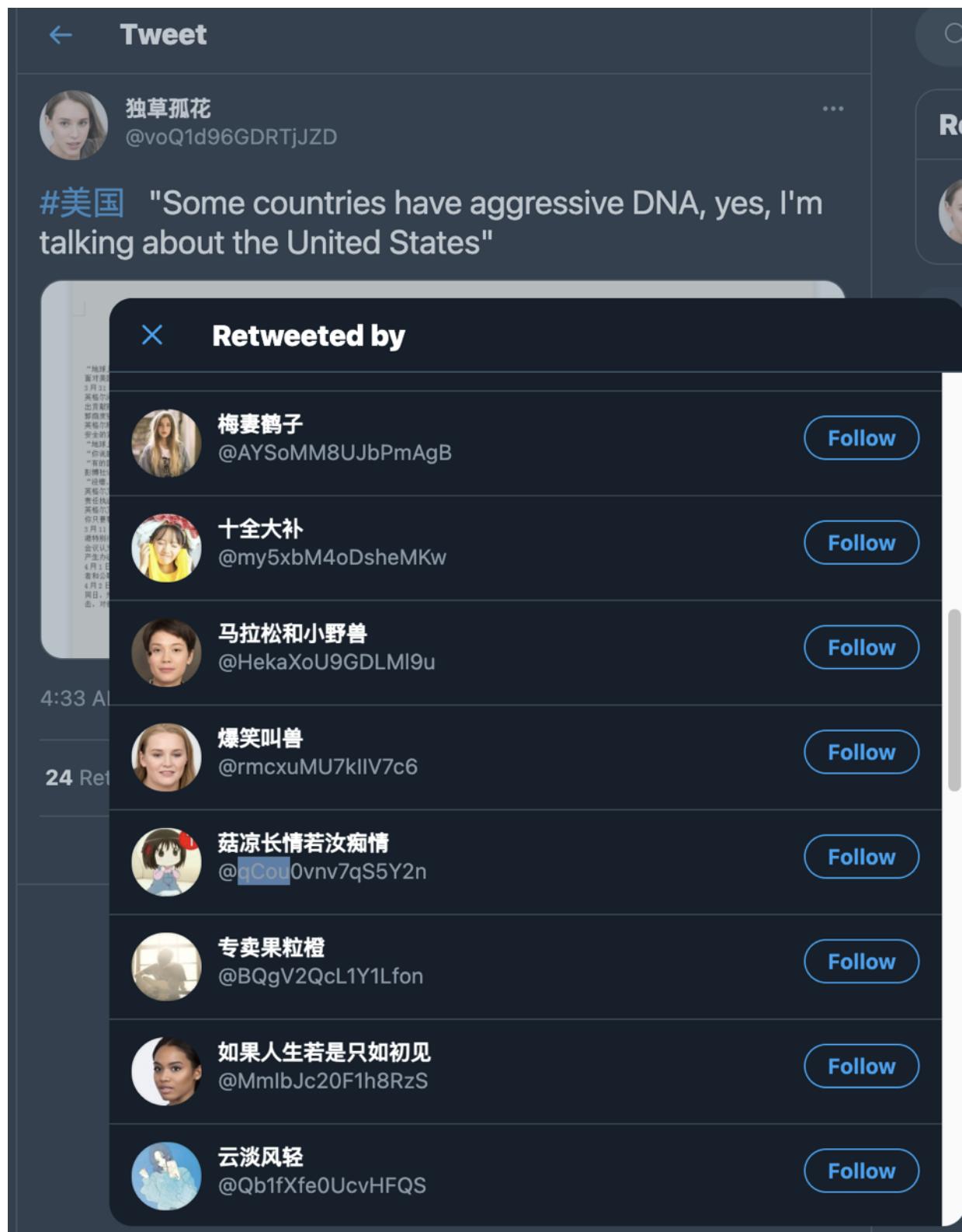
“有的国家有侵略性 DNA，没错，我说的就是美国”

“地球上有的国家，有侵略性 DNA。”“没错，我说的就是美国。”
面对英国媒体路透社的专访，香港警务处副处长郭嘉威直言不讳。他谈到：“港人不应‘以身试法’，探《香港国安法》的‘红线’”。
3月31日，郭嘉威接受彭博社记者文翠芬·莫格尔(Stephen Engle)采访，谈及《国安法》，国家安全等议题。
莫格尔问到什么行为被定义为《香港国安法》时，郭嘉威表示，这是个很严肃的问题。“不要以身试法，这很严重。一个正常理智的态度是，我怎样才能成为一个负责任的公民？只要确保我为这个地方的整体和善、和平和安全做出贡献就可以了。”
郭嘉威强调，“市民不应漠视其道而行，让我看看我可以选择多远，我几乎可以触摸红线，但你不能碰我……这不是我们想要维护香港安定的方式。”
莫格尔问：“一些法律界人士和西方国家政府批评《香港国安法》法律条文模糊，目的是‘监禁反对派人士’。”
“地球上有一些国家，一些咄咄逼人的侵略性 DNA。”郭嘉威说。
“你说的是美国吗？”莫格尔询问。
“有的国家有侵略性 DNA，没错，我说的就是美国”
彭博社记者翠芬·莫格尔采访郭嘉威。
“没错，没错就是美国。我想他们目的也很清楚了，就是打压中国的发展，这是一个公开的秘密（open secret）。”郭嘉威直言。
莫格尔又提到，西方国家形容香港是“警察城市”，对此，郭嘉威予以反驳。他指出，中央及特区政府经常负起责任快速，以保障香港稳定、安全及繁荣。保障市民的正常生活。
莫格尔又问及香港的选举制度以及“警队国安处会就候选人资格提意见”。他询问香港警方会以什么标准只要你看到地球上所有的国家如何进行《国家安全法》、律师和控制权就可以了，能有多大不同吗？”
3月11日下午，十三届全国人大四次会议以高票表决通过《全国人民代表大会关于完善香港特别行政区选举制度的决定》。这是继制定实施《香港国安法》后，国家完善香港特别行政区选举制度和政治体制的一次重大举措。
会议认为，香港回归祖国后，重新纳入国家治理体系。《中华人民共和国宪法》和《中华人民共和国香港特别行政区基本法》共同构成香港特别行政区的宪制基础。香港特别行政区实行的选举制度，包括行政长官和立法会的产生办法，是香港特别行政区政治体制的重要组成部分，应当坚持“一国两制”方针，符合香港特别行政区实际情况，确保爱国者治港，有利于维护国家主权、安全、发展利益，保持香港长期繁荣稳定。
4月1日，香港林区公职会《2021年公职（参选及任职）（咨询修订）条例草案》委员会举行首次会议。香港特区政府政制及内地事务局局长曾国卫在会上发言时指出，虽然条例草案修订多项本地法例，但香港基本法对公职人员的基本要求从未改变，即必须符合“拥护基本法、效忠香港特区”的人才能出任相关公职。
4月2日，美国驻港总领馆负责人在《南华早报》发表文章，攻击特区选举制度。
同日，外交部驻港公署网站发文，题为《美方没有资格打标签说谁谁的幌子搞港事务》。文章指出，美国驻港总领馆负责人的文章混淆是非、颠倒黑白，恶意诋毁香港国安法，对中央政府依法完善香港特区选举制度更加攻击，对香港事务横加干涉，再次暴露出美方根深蒂固的意识形态偏见、臭名昭著的“双重标准”和唯我独尊的霸道心态。

4:33 AM · Apr 6, 2021 · Twitter Web App
IMG ↴

24 Retweets
1 Like

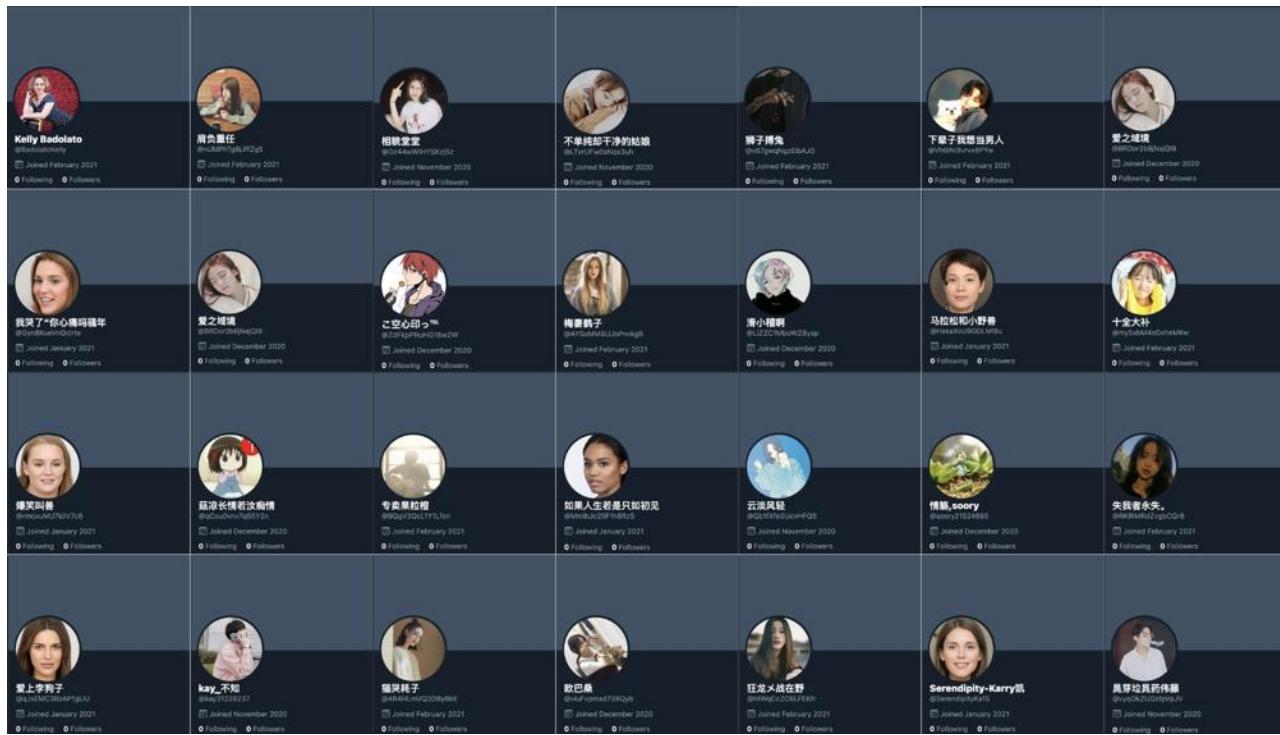
Below is a screenshot of the accounts that retweeted that post seen above.



The screenshot shows a list of 24 accounts that have retweeted a specific tweet. Each entry consists of a small profile picture, the user's name in Chinese, their Twitter handle (@username), and a blue 'Follow' button. The names and handles are as follows:

- 梅妻鹤子 @AYSoMM8UJbPmAgB
- 十全大补 @my5xbM4oDsheMKw
- 马拉松和小野兽 @HekaXoU9GDLMi9u
- 爆笑叫兽 @rmcxuMU7kIIV7c6
- 菇凉长情若汝痴情 @qCou0vnn7qS5Y2n
- 专卖果粒橙 @BQgV2QcL1Y1Lfon
- 如果人生若是只如初见 @MmlbJc20F1h8RzS
- 云淡风轻 @Qb1fXfe0UcvHFQS

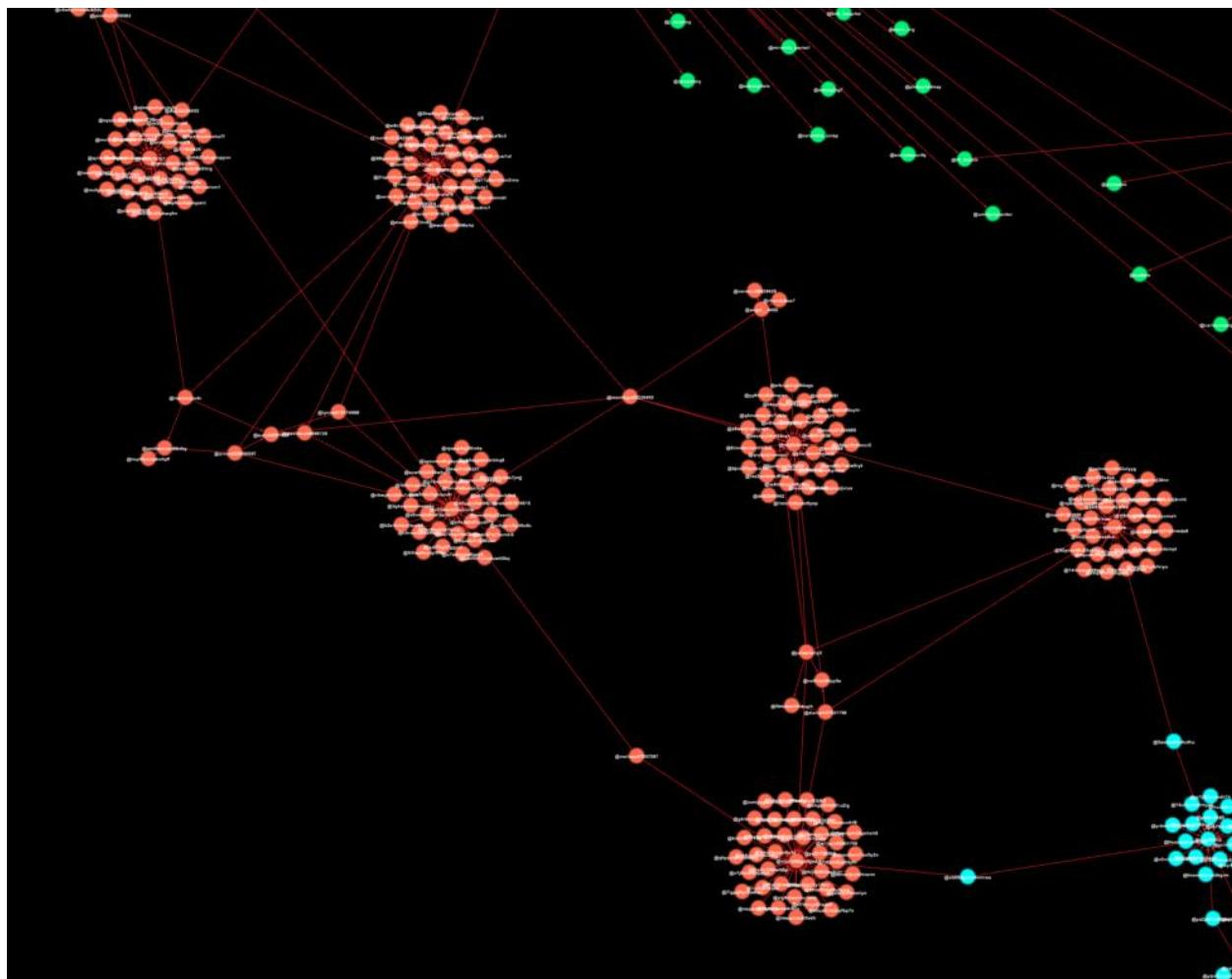
All the accounts retweeting that post, and many others like it, follow zero accounts, and have zero followers. Their purpose is to amplify content.



This cluster is not alone, many of the clusters we identified in the entire network follow the same process and carry the exact same traits.

Through the Gephi visualisation, the clusters were coloured based on modularity, or the strength of their connections within the clusters.

For example, many of the accounts in the clusters below, especially the amplifier accounts, were directly connected through either interactions, or through the accounts they followed. This is why they are all indicated by the same colour, due to their strong connections of follows, likes and retweets.



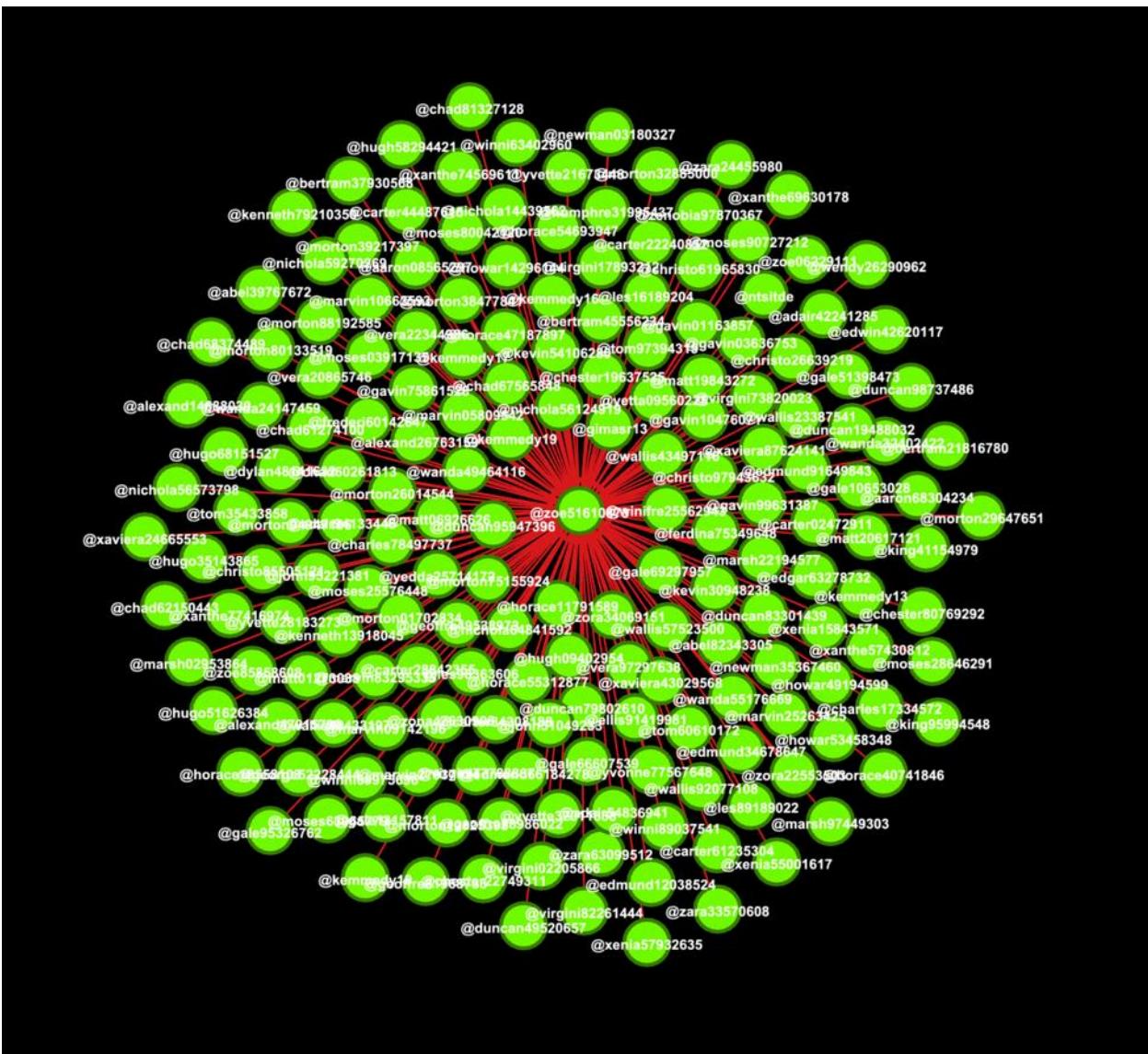
Another example of the clustering of amplifiers can be seen in the analysis of a tweet by user @Zoe51610873 (below) that had 152 comments, which is abnormally high in comparison to the 11 retweets and four likes of the post. It appeared many of these were iterations of support for the post with comments such as "that's funny", "I'm embarrassed to hear that" and "just rediculous ! amazing!".



-  **Zoe** @Zoe51610873 · Mar 24 · ...
Replying to @Zoe51610873
That's ridiculous
-  **Zoe** @Zoe51610873 · Mar 25 · ...
Replying to @Zoe51610873
yes,it is funny
-  **linxin** @huanglinxin963 · Mar 25 · ...
Replying to @Zoe51610873
really funning
-  **iTeller_zc** @ItellerZ · Mar 23 · ...
Replying to @Zoe51610873
just rediclious! amazing!
-  **Nicholas** @Nichola67218038 · Mar 25 · ...
Replying to @Zoe51610873
I'm embarrassed to hear that
-  **QunWenjing** @WenjingQun · Mar 25 · ...
Replying to @Zoe51610873
hope more people know the truth
-  **LingMiaoke** @ling_miaoke · Mar 25 · ...
Replying to @Zoe51610873
a lie is always a lie

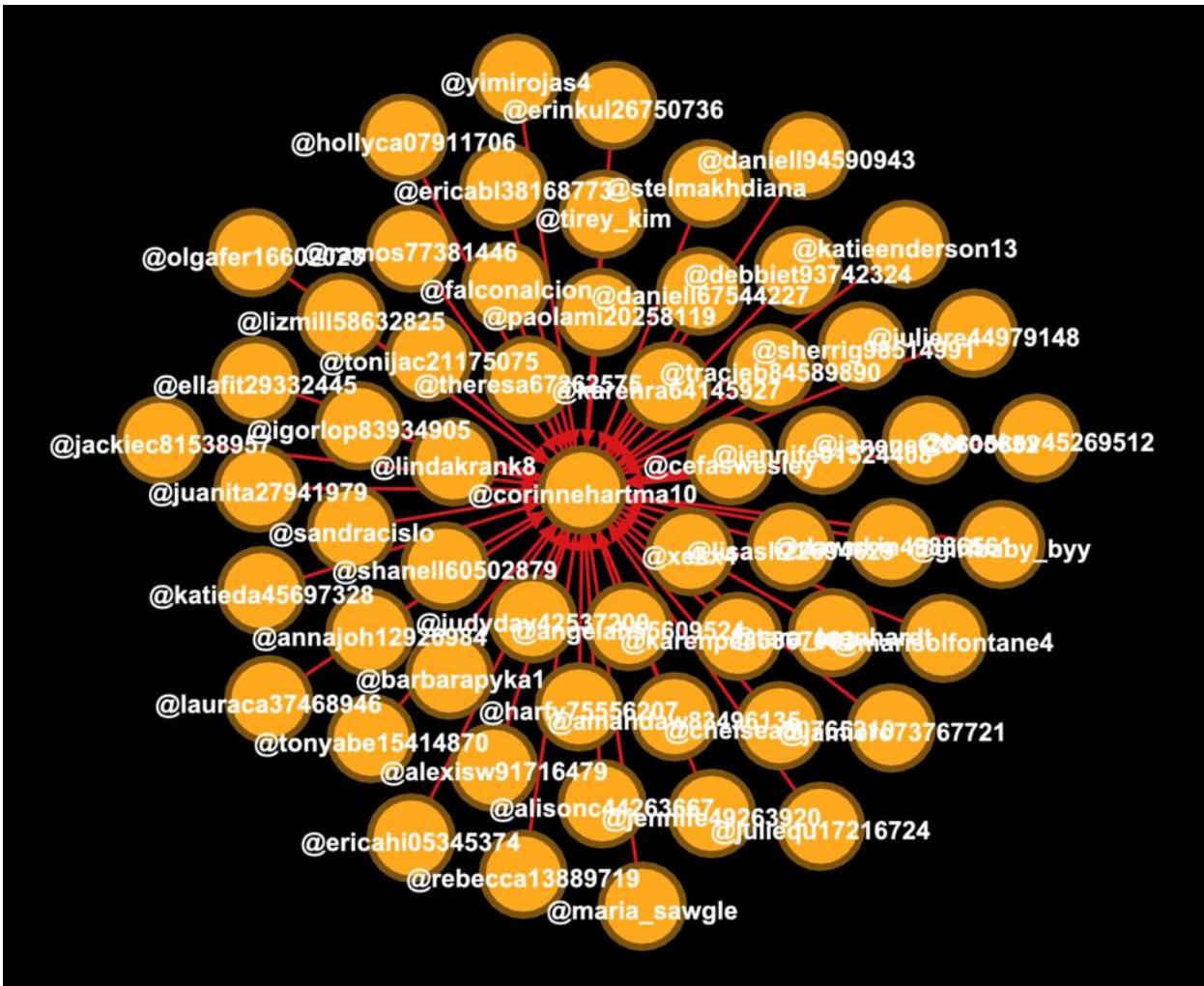
On a graph, this can be easily detected as seen below. There appeared to be only interactions with amplifiers in the campaign's network and did not appear to have any links with authentic users on Twitter posting about the hashtag or commenting on it. This is very indicative of a poster and amplifier cluster.

It should be noted that this does not mean that these accounts are 'bots', as they may be human users running the accounts. But it does show that this cluster had no links to other accounts posting about the same hashtag.

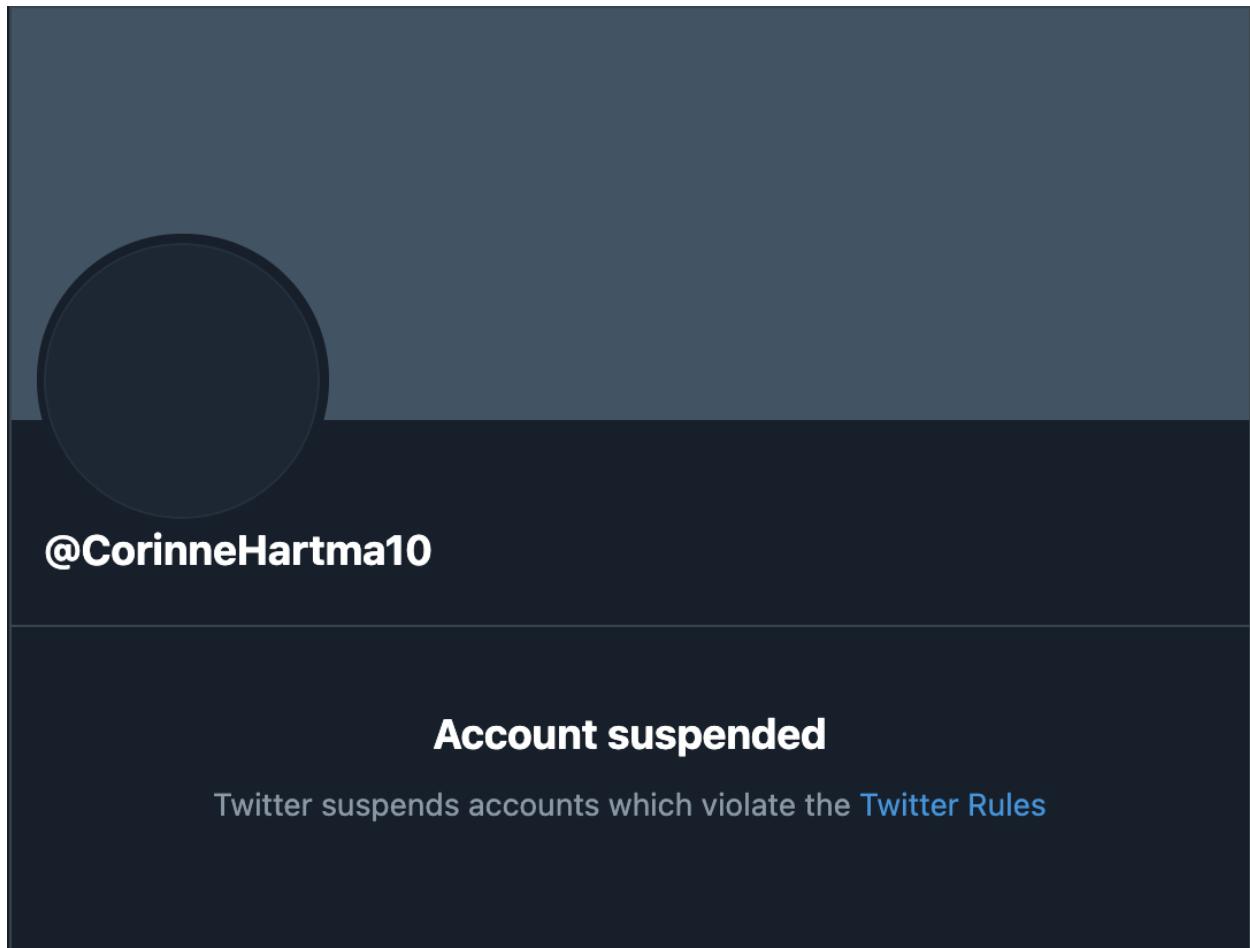


During the collection of Twitter accounts, some of the posters and their amplifier clusters appeared to be removed by Twitter. This was possibly due to automated indicators picked up by the platform.

For example, we can see account [@corinnehartma10](#) and their corresponding amplification cluster below.



Subsequently, the account was suspended from the platform.

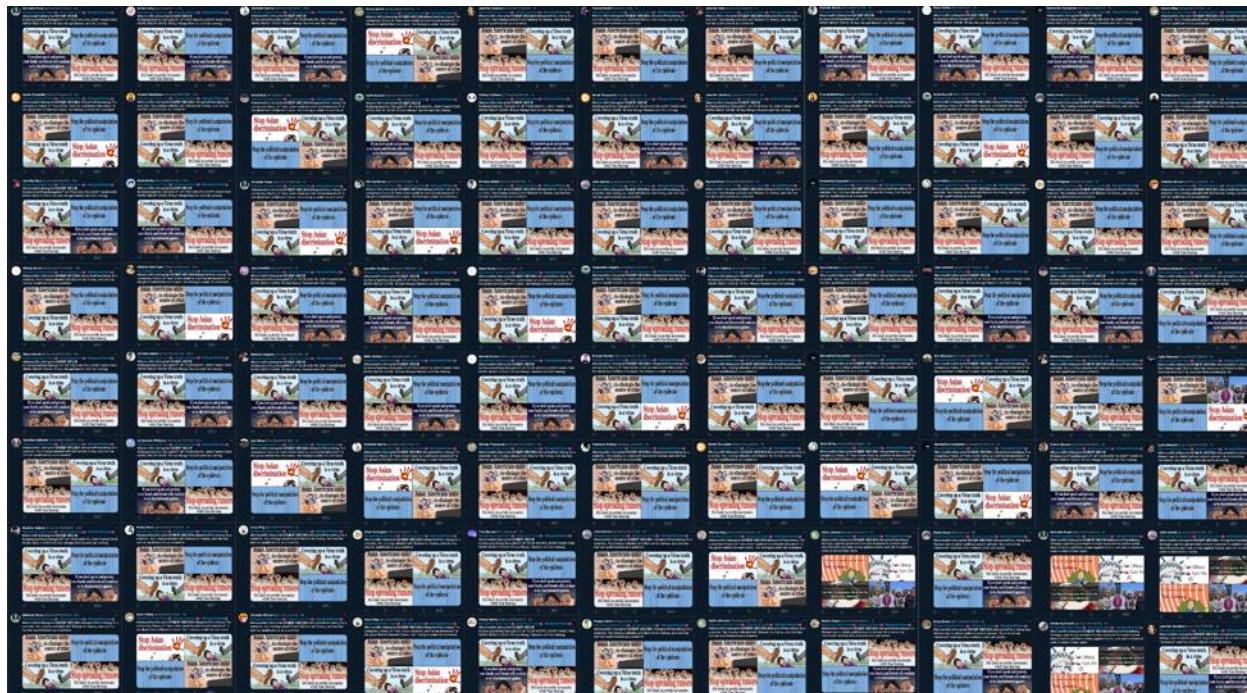


The amplification of some of the tweets in the network were simple to spot in the research. For example, some tweets gave a very inauthentic imbalance of comment, retweet and like ratios, as seen in the examples below from accounts [@memory_017](#), [@judeyow](#) and [@AdelitaAdelisa](#).





The research also found other tweets that were not liked or retweeted but were instead just spam tweets using the same text, tags and images. For example, in the graphic below tweets using the same tags, text and images were all seen uploaded in one day.



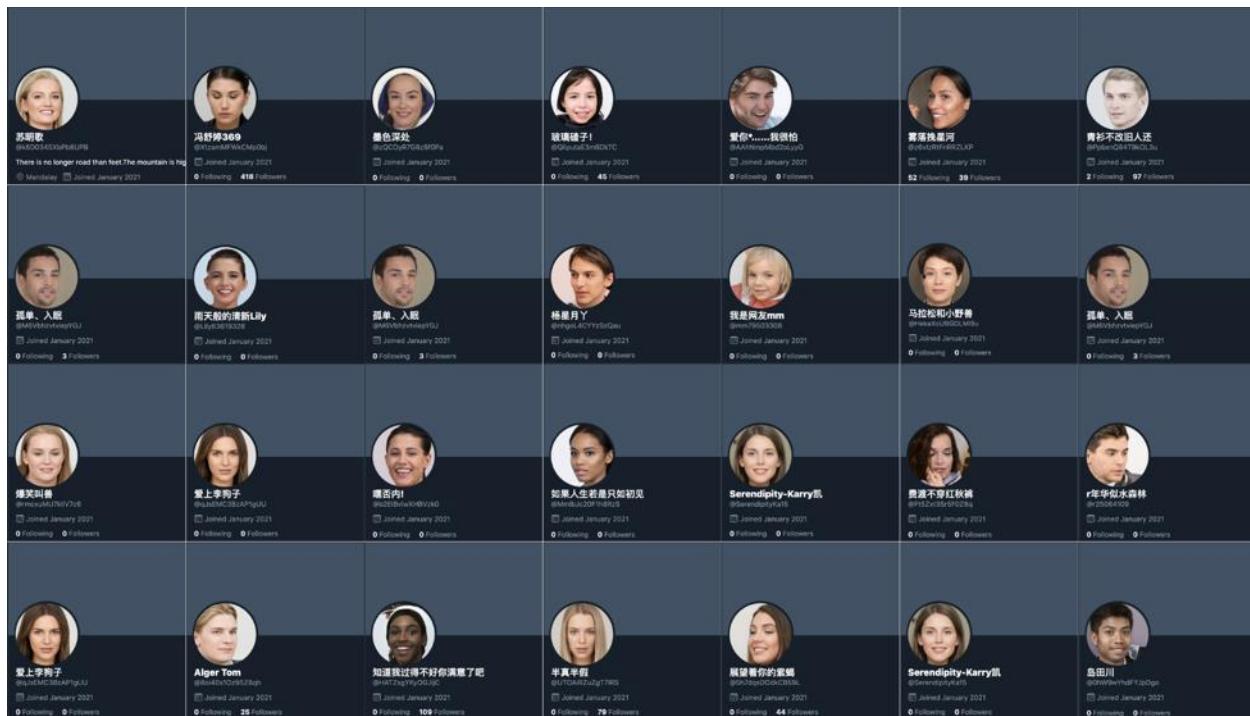
Throughout the research, we also identified a significant presence of StyleGAN images used as profile pictures within the networks.

StyleGAN, short for Style Generative Adversarial Networks, is a type of machine learning framework, where a technique trained on a dataset is able to generate new data with the same statistics as the dataset. For StyleGAN networks, the technique enables brand new faces to be created that don't exist in real life.

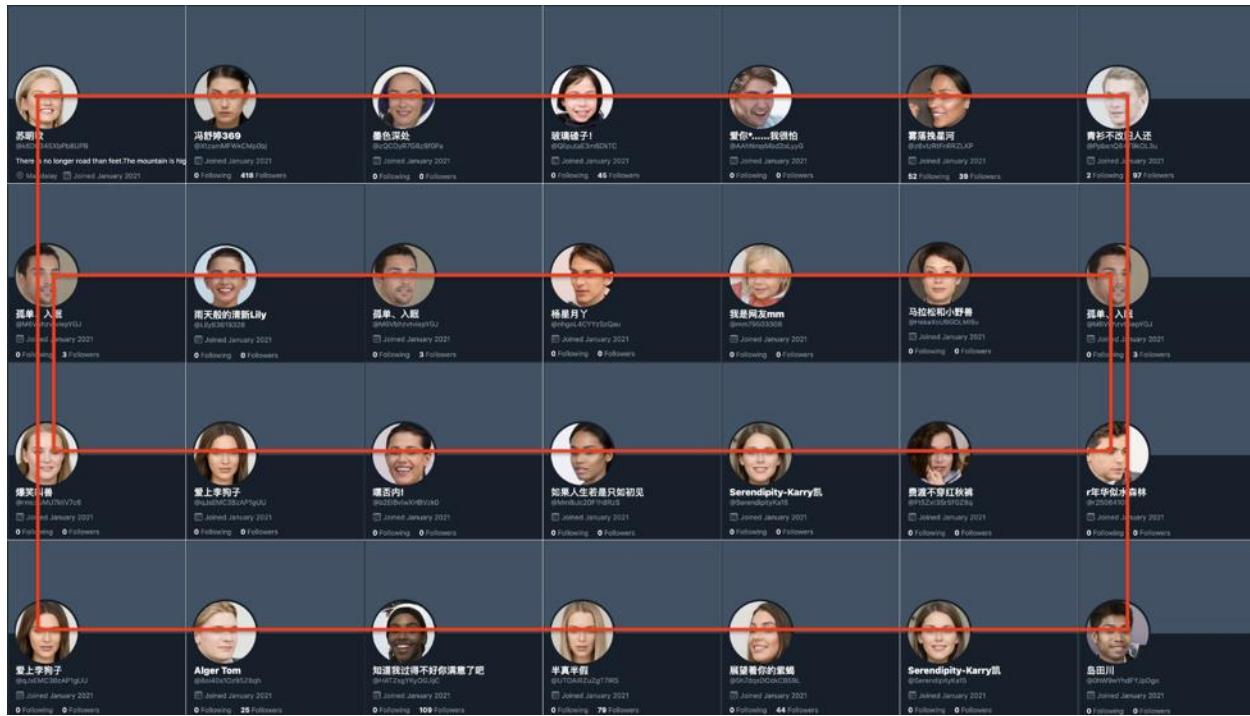
Reporting from the [New York Times](#) explained the use of these images and the ability for the public to buy 'fake people'. The website thispersondoesnotexist.com has also made StyleGAN faces more accessible to the public through a simple 'refresh for a new face' ability.

The use of these fake faces has been common in fake networks but have rarely been spotted in pro-China networks.

For the accounts using StyleGAN images in these networks, many of them were made in January 2021, specifically in batches at the same time.



There are a number of techniques we can use to assess the legitimacy of these fake faces. Many of the assessments look at the structure of the eyes and their location. The StyleGAN images have the eyes in the same location in each image, so we can use the easy identification of the centrality of the StyleGAN faces, namely the eyes, as unique identification points.



Due to the nature of GAN-based images, the 'blending' of the images often leaves blurred or mismatched parts of the face that a detailed look can identify.

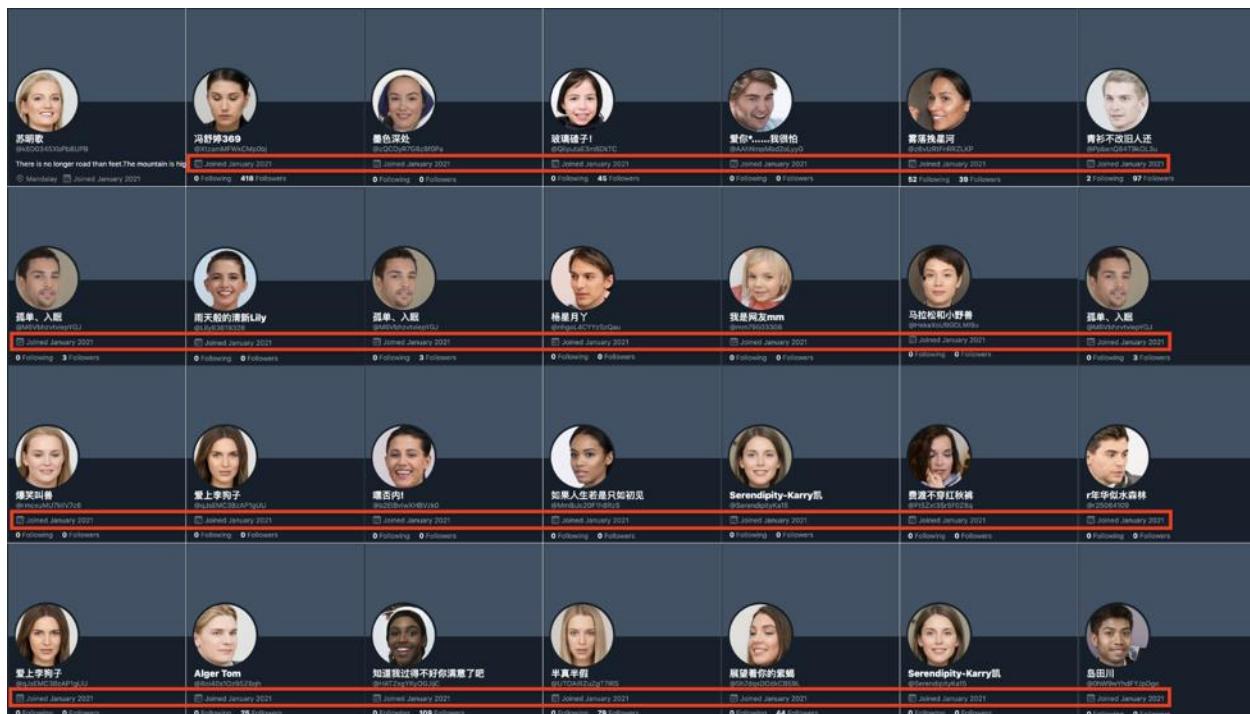
For example, with account [HATZ](#) we can see the blurring around the ears and above the hairline where a background has blurred with the hair.



Account [z6vl](#) has differing features that, upon closer inspection, appear to reveal the GAN glitch. We can see those in the mismatched angle of the teeth, the hair that has been blended into the background and the hand in the left of the image that has been blurred with what is likely another image.



We can also see common creation dates during January 2021, namely on January 8 and January 25.



Facebook: Repurposed accounts and StyleGAN amplifiers

Our research on Facebook was conducted using the keywords of the narratives identified on Twitter and searching for that content on Facebook.

A sample of searching the tags that were identified on Twitter through the Facebook search can be seen below.



There were a number of cross-posted graphics and texts that were amplified by repeated networks of Facebook pages, new accounts and previously repurposed accounts.

For example, the posts below from one account have traction from very similar users.



Comments can be tracked as seen below.



The main poster account seen above appears to have a past history as well, as the account has more than 1000 friends and has never communicated in Chinese prior to April 2021.

There was a significant gap in posting history of the account between April 2020–April 2021, where the change in political interests, and posting language appeared to change.

Some of the accounts showed signs they were owned by users from Bangladesh. This is similar to previous pro-China campaigns, as was noted by [ASPI](#) in a 2020 report.



April 30, 2020 · [View 1 more comment](#)

I LOVE YOU See Translation · 51w

20 2 Comments Share



April 15 at 5:03 AM · [View 5 more comments](#)

#美国 No wonder the U.S. supports Japan's nuclear discharge of wastewater into the sea, it turns out that it has a precedent

难怪美国支持日本排核废水入海 原来自己有先例

10 Comments 38 Shares Like Comment Share



August 3, 2017 · [See Translation](#)

35 3 Comments Share



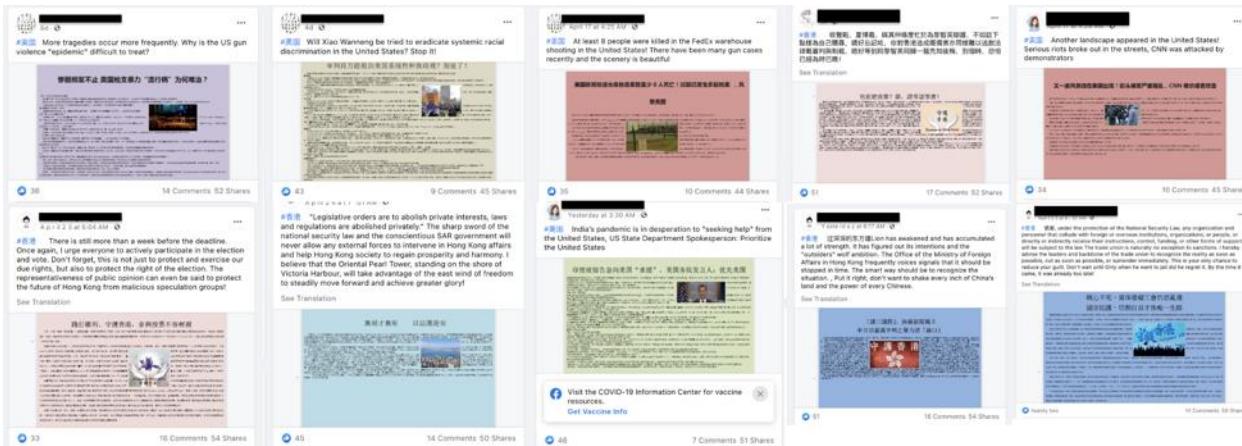
April 14 at 6:51 AM · [See Translation](#)

#香港 《2021年完善選舉制度（綜合修訂）條例》就係一幅精雕細琢、刻畫入微嘅「施工圖」，隨著佢從紙面落於實處，我哋曾經嘅「東方明珠」最終將會恢復佢嘅光芒。我哋可以相信，喺未來嘅時間裏，隨著選舉制度嘅完善，香港嘅美好未來值得期待！

14 Comments 49 Shares Like Comment Share

To get an understanding of the size of the network, the research looked at a number of the posts and how many accounts were amplifying the content in the campaign, as it appeared much of it was cross-posting and amplifying the content within the network, much like the tactic of the clusters on Twitter.

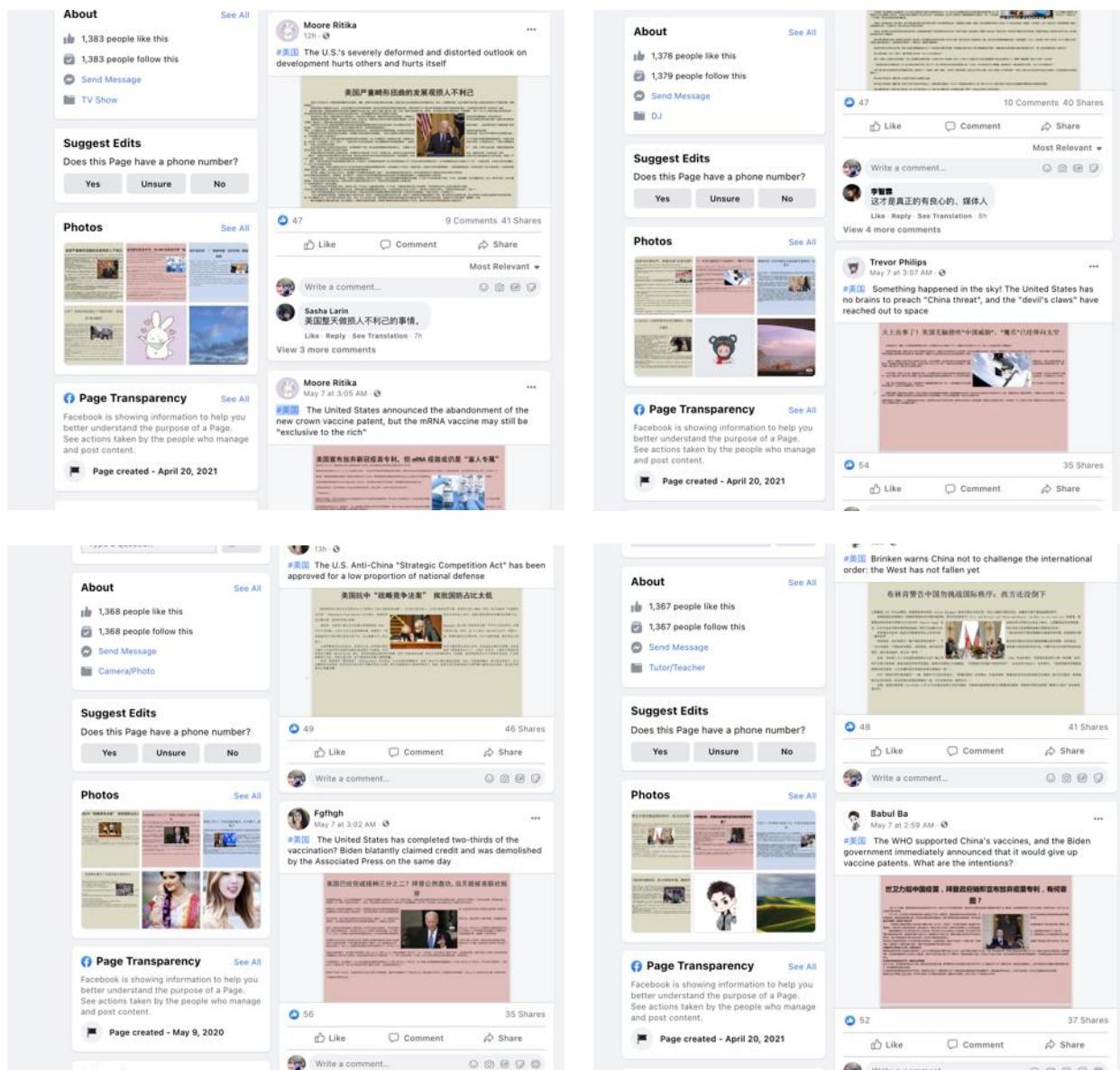
Publicly available metrics on Facebook of amplification of likes, comments and shares give a possible indication as to the number of accounts amplifying the content.



In consideration of the metrics of shares and likes, we estimate this cluster to be within the range of 40-55 accounts, however there may be more accounts not publicly searchable that a platform might have access to, or some accounts may be dormant in the network and not active.

The Facebook pages identified as sharing the same, and similar content, appeared to have very similar creation dates ranging in either late April, or early May. This is also similar to when some of the Facebook accounts changed in their communication language and content.

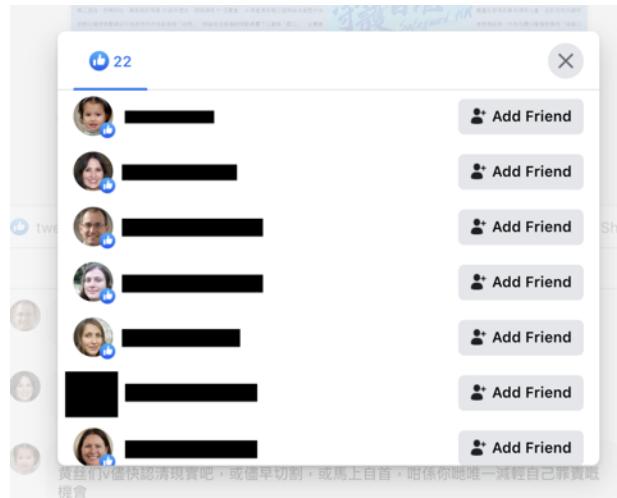
For the Facebook page creation dates, we can view the 'page transparency' feature of each page, seen below.



The image displays four separate Facebook page profiles, likely from a research study. Each profile includes its 'About' section, 'Suggest Edits' button, and a 'Page Transparency' link. Below each profile is a post from a user named Moore Ritika. The posts discuss various topics, including the U.S.'s perspective on China's development, the United States' abandonment of the new crown vaccine patent, and the 'Strategic Competition Act'. The posts also mention the WHO supporting China's vaccines and the Biden government's immediate announcement of giving up vaccine patents.

Our research also uncovered the use of StyleGAN images used as profile images of some of the amplification accounts. On Facebook, the majority of those accounts were commenting on the posts. The accounts that used StyleGAN images had account names akin to that of Turkish origin, and some appeared to have authentic user friends based in Turkey, which might also indicate that these accounts have been repurposed with a new profile image.

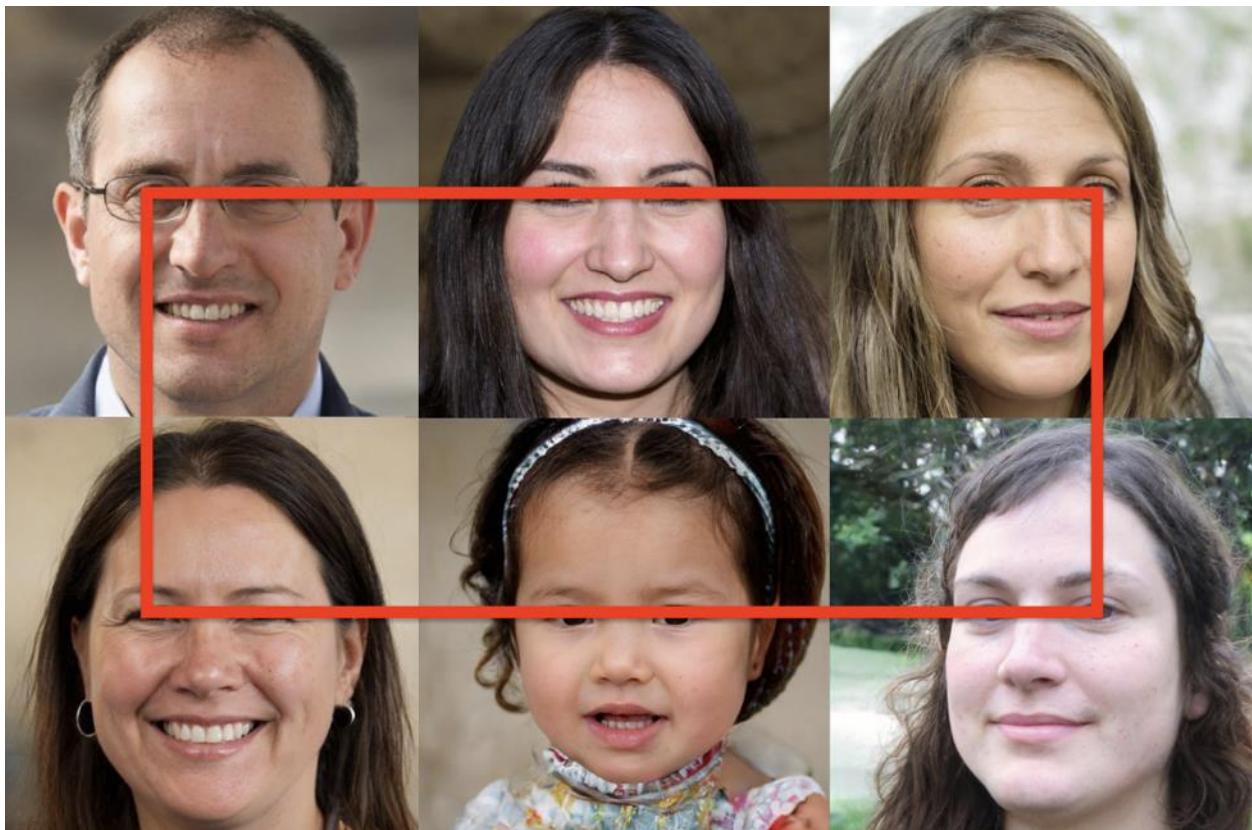
Those accounts identified above were used to comment on, like and share posts. Below is an example of the comments and the likes of one post.



Those images can be tiled as follows.

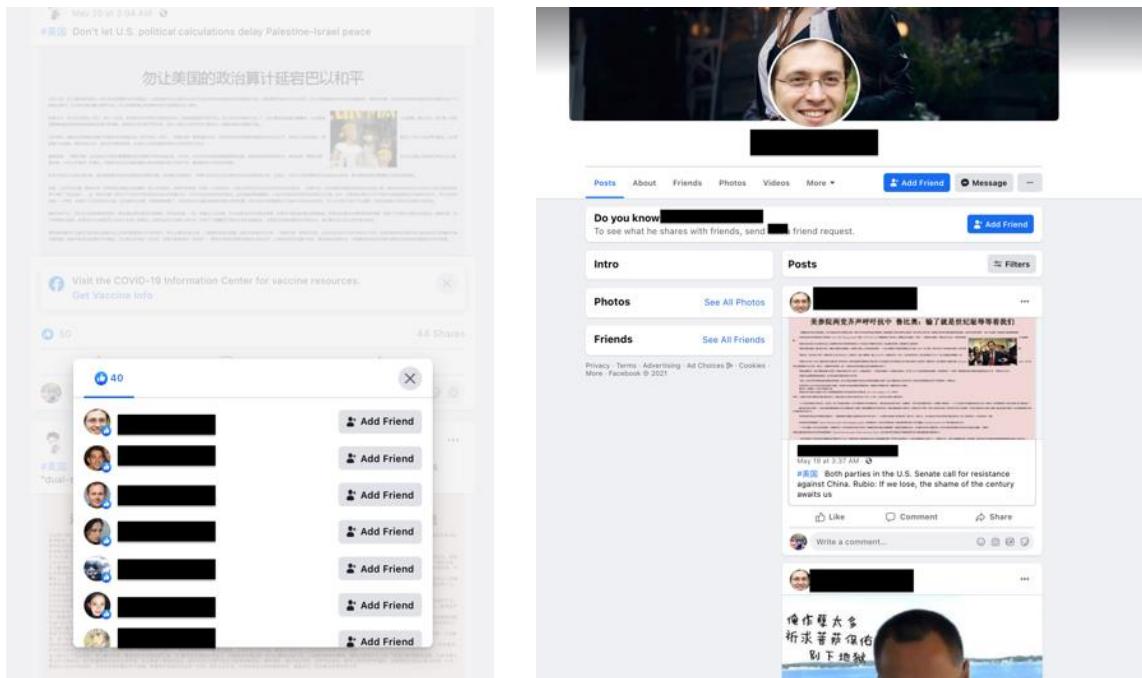


And then assessed for centrality of the eyes as seen below.



The accounts using StyleGAN images with Turkish names on Facebook appear to have a more rigorous selection process for their profile images, as we were unable to identify many images with obvious flaws. This may indicate that these specific accounts are part of a paid-for network to purchase likes.

Upon closer inspection, a more detailed analysis of one of these accounts shows there are still minor flaws in the images.



In this specific case of the account above, the image has failed to blend the glasses correctly to the face, instead the wiring of the glasses has a 'blurred' or faded effect in the face.

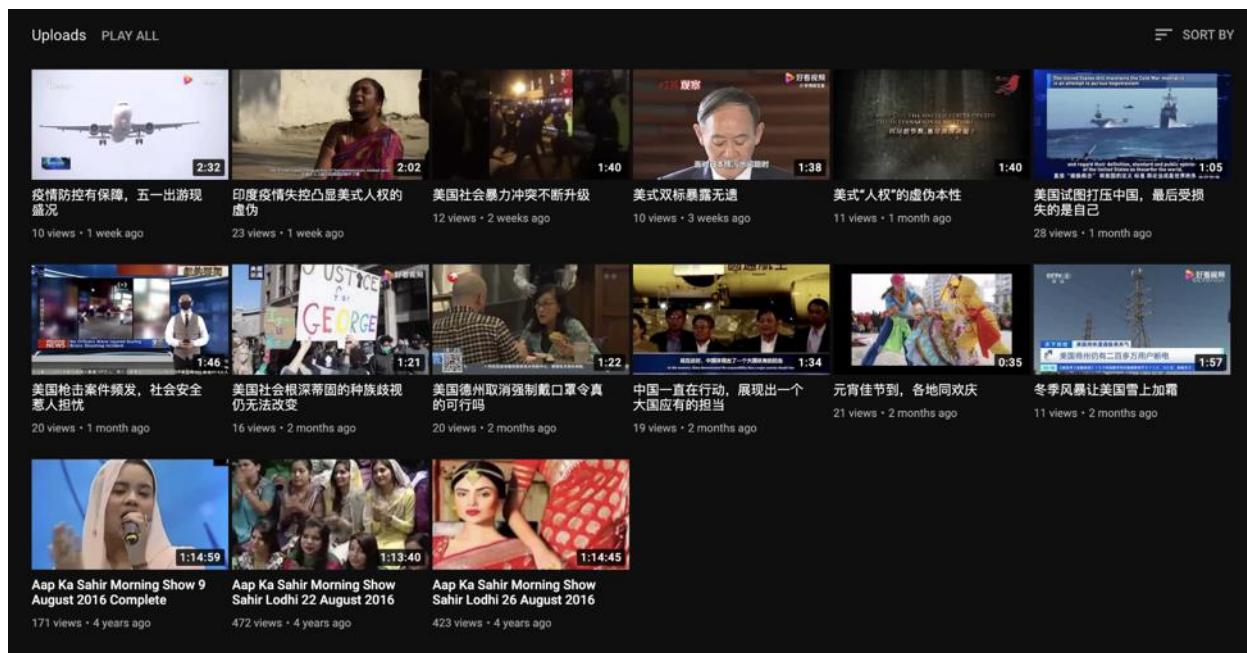


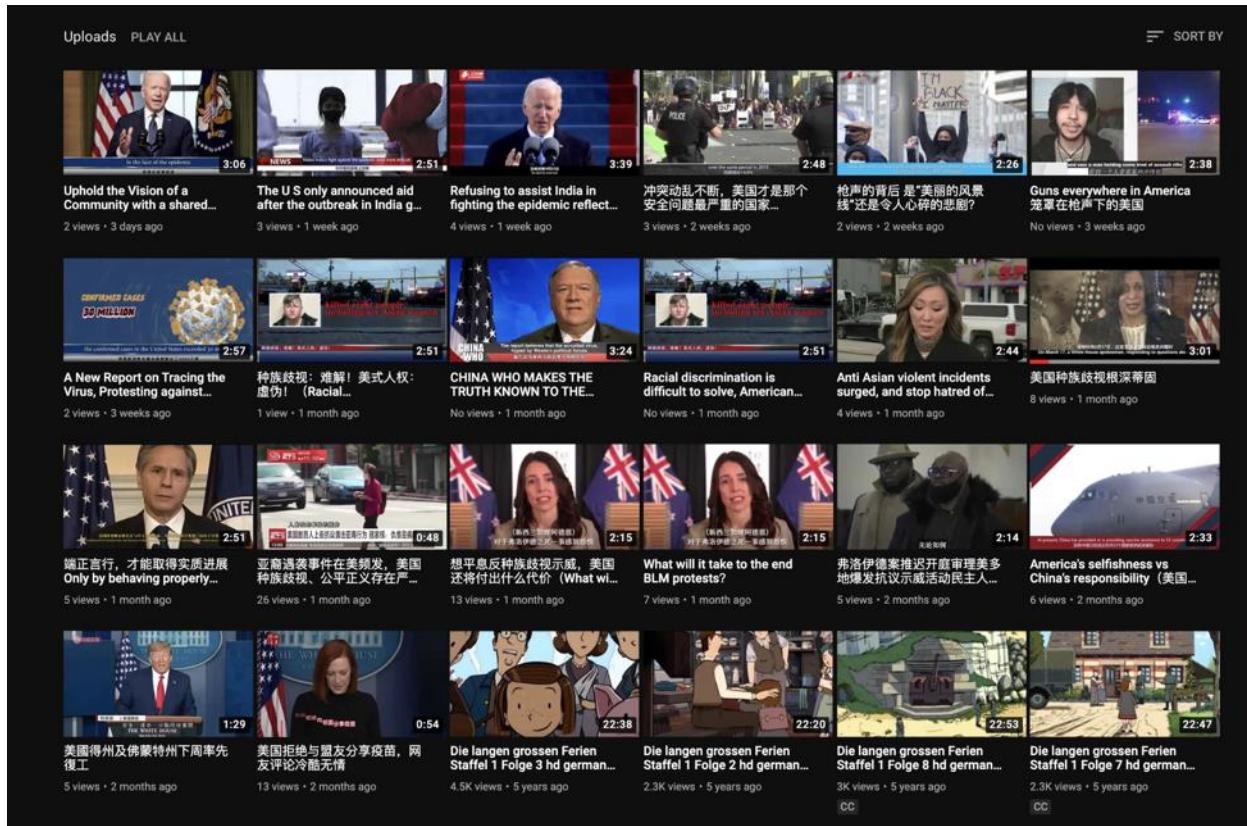
YouTube: Cross-posting of narratives through repurposed accounts

Content was less significant on YouTube than Twitter or Facebook. This might be due to the limitation in video communication and the en-masse appeal of conducting text and image-based information operations.

Of the accounts we did identify, there appeared to be signs of repurposed accounts, where previous users had uploaded videos, then years passed, and then at once, numerous pro-China propaganda videos were uploaded.

For example, in the screenshots below of different accounts, we can see there were videos posted in the past in one language, then years pass without activity before a new wave of pro-government video uploads occurred, this time in Chinese.



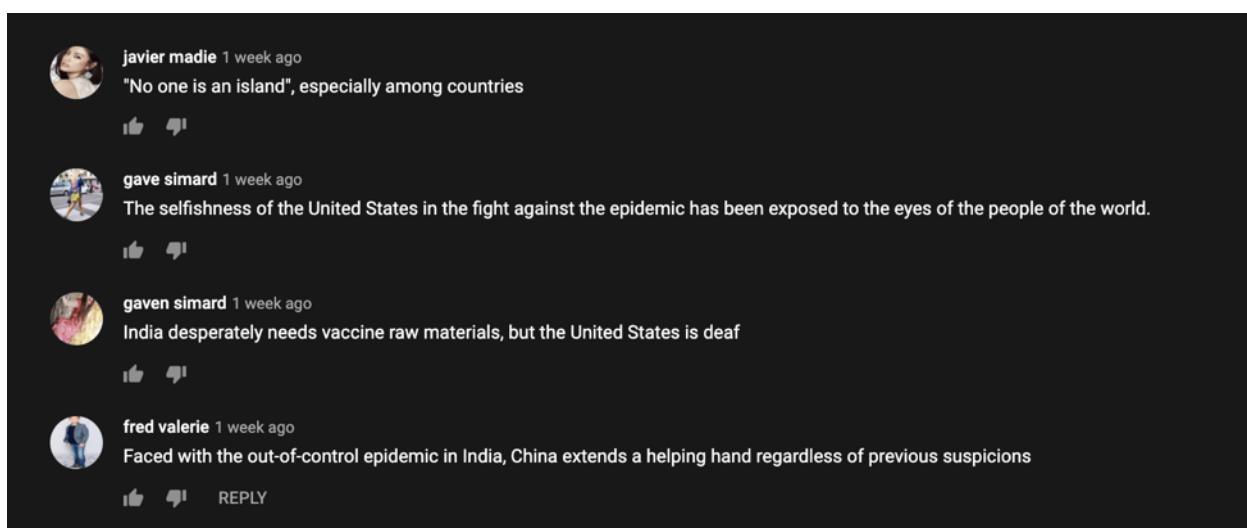


The narratives of the videos remained consistent with the network's common themes (covered in the following section) and used contrasting stories to sow doubt and discredit opponents, such as the US. The sharing of these narratives through graphic video content on YouTube is very similar to previous reports on pro-China propaganda networks reported on by [Graphika](#) and [ASPI](#).

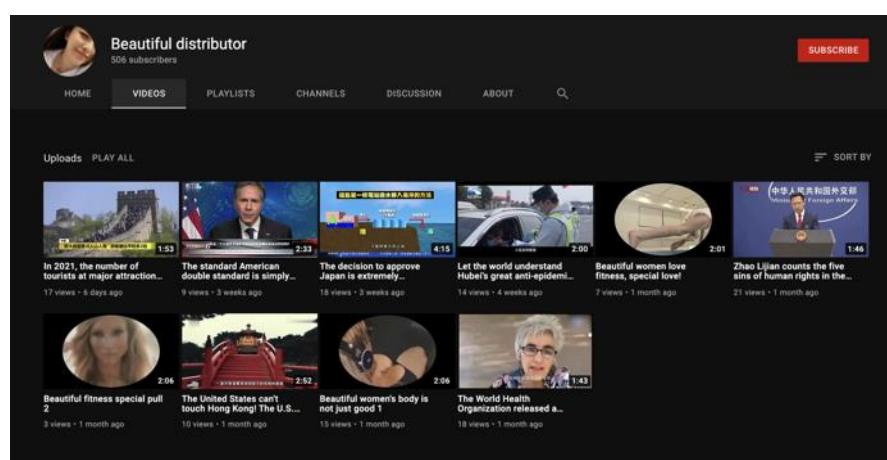
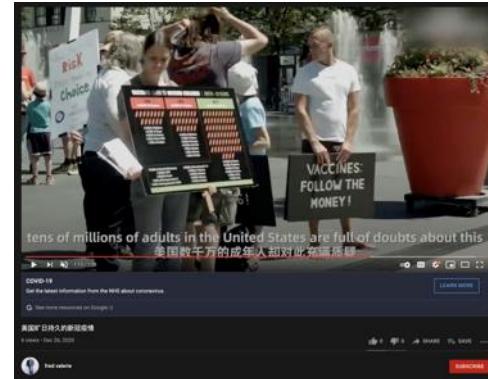
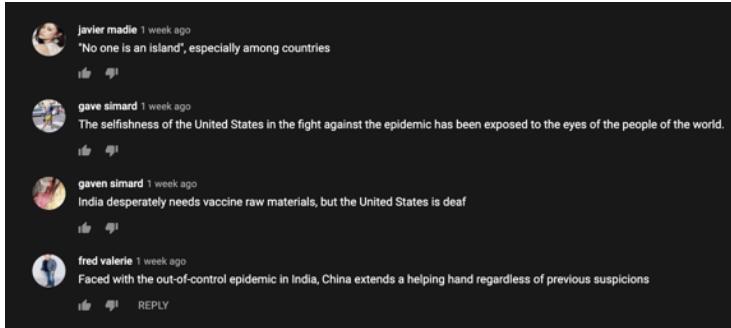
In one [video](#), for example, the situation in India was used as a contrast to the US, where it is alleged in the video that there is a dire need for vaccines in India, yet factories in the US allow them to expire.



Another product of YouTube used to convey and amplify narratives is the comments section under the videos. This research identified comments were very consistent with the narrative lines and were an extra outlet for amplification by anonymous or fake accounts. For example, in the video above, the comments can be seen below.

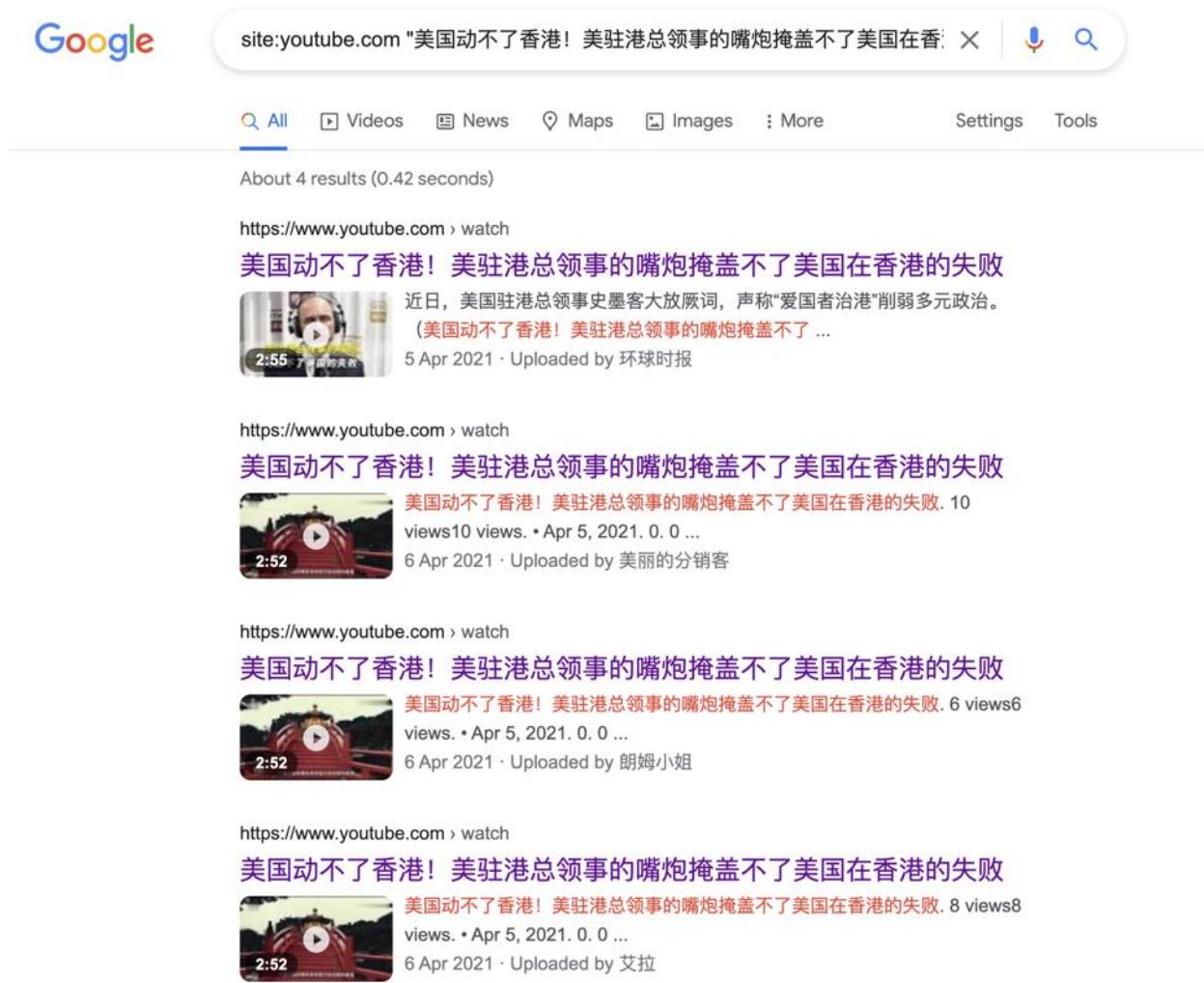


Some of those 'commenter' accounts also had videos uploaded through their accounts as well, indicating that YouTube accounts act as content sharers as well as amplifiers. In the screenshots below we can see commenters 'fred valerie' and '美丽的分销客' also had video content.



It appeared the media was frequently cross-posted across accounts and conducting a simple site-specific search for the video title identified some of the posters using the same titles.

For example, the search below was performed using the title “美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败” (“The United States can't touch Hong Kong! The U.S. Consul General's lip service cannot conceal the failure of the U.S. in Hong Kong”).

A screenshot of a Google search results page. The search query is "site:youtube.com \"美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败\"". The results show four YouTube video thumbnails, each with the same title. The first video has a thumbnail of a man speaking, the second has a thumbnail of a building at night, and the third and fourth have thumbnails of the same building.

site:youtube.com "美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败"

All Videos News Maps Images More Settings Tools

About 4 results (0.42 seconds)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败

近日，美国驻港总领事史墨客大放厥词，声称“爱国者治港”削弱多元政治。
(美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了 ...)
5 Apr 2021 · Uploaded by 环球时报

[https://www.youtube.com/watch](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败

美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败. 10 views 10 views · Apr 5, 2021. 0. 0 ...
6 Apr 2021 · Uploaded by 美丽的分销客

[https://www.youtube.com/watch](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败

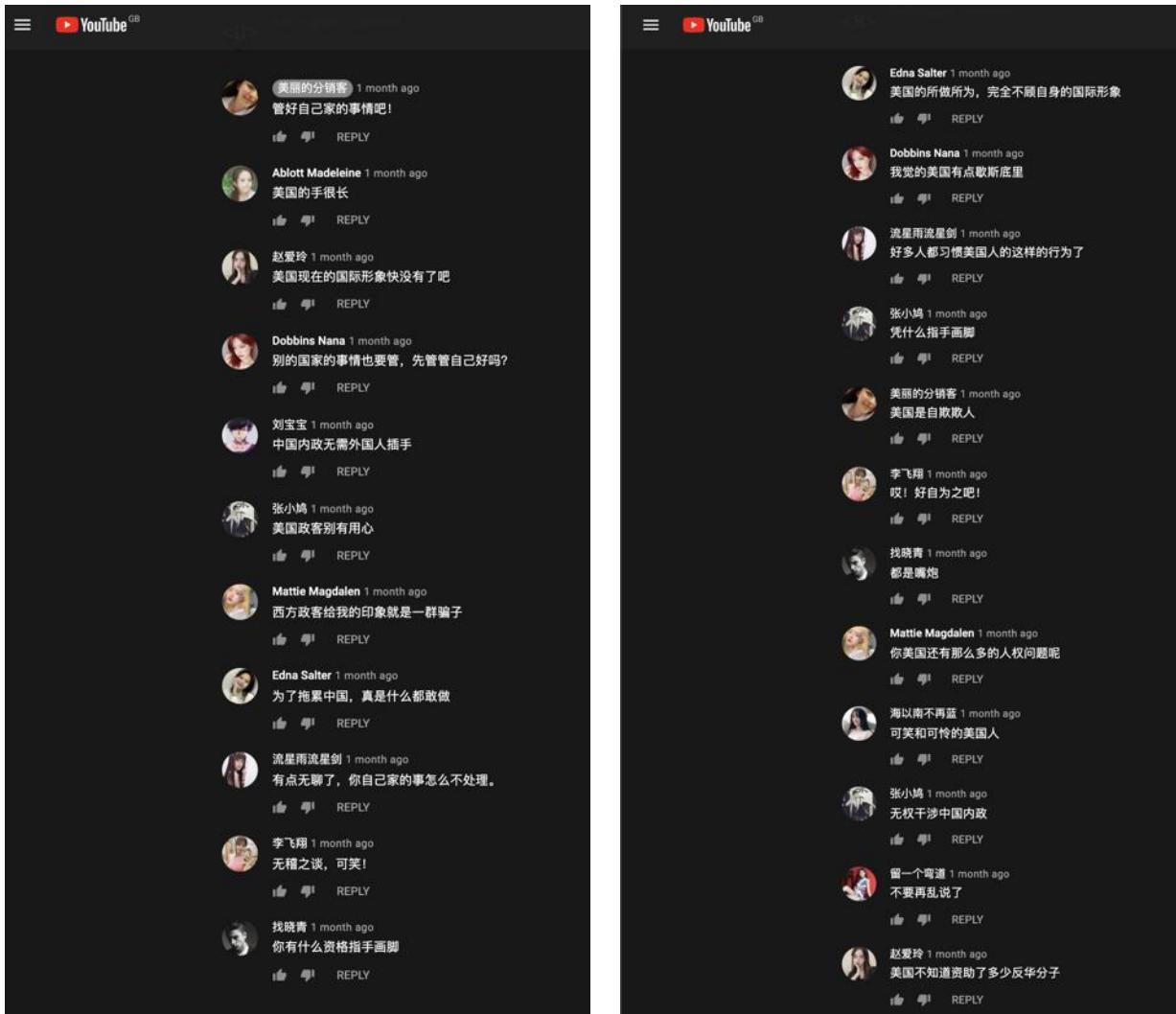
美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败. 6 views 6 views · Apr 5, 2021. 0. 0 ...
6 Apr 2021 · Uploaded by 朗姆小姐

[https://www.youtube.com/watch](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败

美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败. 8 views 8 views · Apr 5, 2021. 0. 0 ...
6 Apr 2021 · Uploaded by 艾拉

While those same videos were one indicator, the other was the comments underneath them, which appeared to be, more often than not, the same accounts cross-commenting on each post.



In a more metric-based analysis, across the board of accounts we were able to identify similar patterns where each video would have between 10-12 comments on average (if they had any comments at all).

For example, the data of the following three channels can be seen here:

- https://mattw.io/youtube-metadata/bulk?submit=true&url=https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHIT4PMFKqfFl6L_JcQ3Q
- <https://mattw.io/youtube-metadata/bulk?submit=true&url=https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCC6cVrLTG4qoP8pgXnSzINQ>
- https://mattw.io/youtube-metadata/bulk?submit=true&url=https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTs_SjIzOHsWLkFVgWCh-qA

Below are the screenshots of that metadata.

	Title	Author	Length	Published	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Comments
01	放下嫌隙，合作共赢！	孙文敏	2m 27s	2021-05-11T03:57:10Z	16	0	0	10
01	中国外交天团维护国家权威，扬我大国风范	孙文敏	3m 47s	2021-05-07T07:10:44Z	15	0	0	11
01	朋友疫情崩溃之际，“疫苗分享”继续让位“美国优先”？	孙文敏	2m 57s	2021-04-29T03:44:11Z	19	0	0	11
01	印度疫情失控，美国白宫迫于舆论压力发表声明将向印度提供医疗资源，美式民主人权真是虚伪	孙文敏	3m 27s	2021-04-27T03:53:39Z	54	1	0	11
01	事实胜于雄辩	孙文敏	2m 32s	2021-04-25T04:48:33Z	15	0	0	12
01	佛洛伊德遭辱 领教死罪 美警官谋杀罪成立	孙文敏	2m 21s	2021-04-22T04:42:45Z	10	0	0	10
01	美国打响红色警报！暴力示威活动在黄石开？做好最坏打算	孙文敏	2m 28s	2021-04-20T06:08:14Z	15	0	0	10
01	仓库枪案致8人死之后	孙文敏	1m 43s	2021-04-18T02:33:36Z	23	0	0	11
01	日本致死 美国双标癌复发	孙文敏	3m 10s	2021-04-16T04:10:06Z	11	0	0	10
01	日本不负责任 美国想保持公正	孙文敏	1m 57s	2021-04-15T03:54:54Z	17	0	0	12

Showing 1 to 10 of 13 entries

	Title	Author	Length	Published	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Comments
01	2021各大景点人山人海 中国五一连假游客量翻倍	美丽的分销客	1m 53s	2021-05-05T02:40:21Z	17	0	0	10
01	標準的美式標準，賣真錢網！	美丽的分销客	2m 33s	2021-04-16T05:11:31Z	9	0	0	10
01	批日决定棒不负责任 美指符合全球安全標準	美丽的分销客	4m 15s	2021-04-15T03:50:29Z	18	0	0	11
01	让世界了解湖北伟大的抗疫精神	美丽的分销客	2m	2021-04-13T03:12:24Z	14	0	0	13
01	美女爱健身特别的爱呀！	美丽的分销客	2m 1s	2021-04-08T04:06:01Z	7	0	0	0
01	赵立坚历数美国五权五宗罪 告劝美方放下傲慢与偏见 #USA	美丽的分销客	1m 46s	2021-04-08T03:43:42Z	21	0	0	11
01	美女健身特别拽z	美丽的分销客	2m 6s	2021-04-06T03:50:26Z	3	0	0	0
01	美国动不了香港：美港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败	美丽的分销客	2m 52s	2021-04-06T03:39:06Z	10	0	0	11
01	美女身材不是随随便便的	美丽的分销客	2m 6s	2021-04-01T03:36:03Z	15	0	0	0
01	世界卫生组织发布新冠病毒溯源报告称新冠病毒“很可能”通过实验室引入给人类1	美丽的分销客	1m 43s	2021-04-01T03:20:22Z	18	0	0	12

Showing 1 to 10 of 10 entries

It should be noted that the impact of these videos was very limited, and for most channels in their entirety, on average they had less than 200 views per channel.

Part two: Narratives tell a consistent theme

Our research identified a number of narratives currently being promoted by the network. Some of the narratives have been identified in prior research on pro-China propaganda campaigns, whereas others are new to this network.

This research piece does not intend to fact check or disprove the claims, but rather identify the narratives, which were used to discover and research alternative narratives as seen in this report. The focus of this reporting is on the pro-China propaganda networks.

By identifying these narratives, this report does not wish to discredit, delegitimise, or undermine the serious issues they represent.

The list of topics the network seeks to influence through its various information tactics are as follows:

- US and COVID-19
- US claims about Xinjiang and human rights
- US and gun laws
- US and discrimination
- US and India COVID-19
- Dr Li-Meng Yan
- Guo Wengui
- Hong Kong democratic movement
- US and China relations
- US and global conflict
- US and violence

Documentation of those narratives and how they are promoted are explored below.

US and gun laws

The network sought to amplify the subject of gun violence in the US with any reporting on the issue being transferred into meme format and fed out through the network under the hashtag #美国 (United States).

The CCP has previously criticised the US for high rates of gun violence. In the past, the CCP had promoted the narrative that the US was hypocritical in its condemnation of others, while failing to address domestic issues such as gun violence. This narrative has been uncovered in reporting by the [New York Times](#), in its reference to a publication by the [Global Times](#) in 2018.

The same narrative has been echoed on social media with the amplification by accounts in the network through commentary posts on gun violence in response to specific events.


Sun Zilin
April 17 at 4:25 AM · 🗃
...

#美国 At least 8 people were killed in the FedEx warehouse shooting in the United States! There have been many gun cases recently and the scenery is beautiful

美国联邦快递仓库枪击案致至少 8 人死亡！近期已发生多起枪案，风

景亮丽

当地时间4月15日晚，美国印第安纳州利马市的联邦快递仓库内发生枪击事件，警方称有至少9人在枪击案中丧生。凶手疑似自杀。南都记者了解到，近期，美国已经发生了多起大规模枪击事件。

利马市的联邦快递仓库案受害者吉米·莱恩（Jimmy Link）在接受美国多家媒体采访时表示，枪击事件发生在位于利马市的洛杉矶和西密歇根的一家联邦快递仓库内。警方到达现场时，枪声仍在进行。警察在墙角发现了血迹斑斑的痕迹，只有一名伤者从枪击现场逃了出来。莱恩表示：“我向来对凶杀案很敏感，这次枪击案也令我深感不安。”

枪击事件发生后，联邦快递公司也在网站为枪击账户上发去声明称，正

4月15日美国华纳兄弟影业《绿箭侠》剧组在洛杉矶拍摄时，一名45岁白人女性在片场被枪杀，造成4人受伤。

今年至今，美国枪击案频发。据南都记者报道，3月美国已经发生了

凡人死亡，其中六人为儿童。而月22日，科罗拉多州洛矶瀑布的一家超市发生枪击案，有10人在枪击案中丧生；而月31日，美国发生的另一起枪击案中发生枪击事件，造成4人死亡，其中包括一名九岁儿童。

美国总统的担忧，拜登8日宣布一系列加强枪支管制的行政措施。他首先批评得克萨斯州、佐治亚州的“幽灵枪”。他问，枪支暴力已经成为美国国内的一种“流行病”，每天都在夺走生命。(完)


April 20 at 4:14 AM · 🗃
...

#美国 Three times a day! Is the gun violence in the United States really unsolvable?

一天三起！美国枪支暴力真的无解了？

当地时间4月19日，美国得克萨斯州圣安东尼奥市一家夜店发生枪击案，造成4人死亡，其中3人为儿童。这是本月以来美国发生的第三起大规模枪击案。

据美国广播公司报道，枪击案发生在圣安东尼奥市的一家夜店，枪手在夜店内开枪，造成4人死亡，其中3人为儿童。目前，枪手已被捕。这是本月以来美国发生的第三起大规模枪击案。

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悲剧频发不止 美国枪支暴力“流行病”为何难治？

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疑惑不解
@67XAYaTnTpLsj9O

...

#美国 美国近几日频繁爆发暴力袭击事件，爆发大规模枪战。可见这个国家的腐朽程度，已经到了人神共愤的地步。

Translated from Chinese by Google

#美国 Violent attacks and large-scale gun battles broke out frequently in the United States in recent days. It can be seen that the level of decay in this country has reached the point where people and gods are angry.

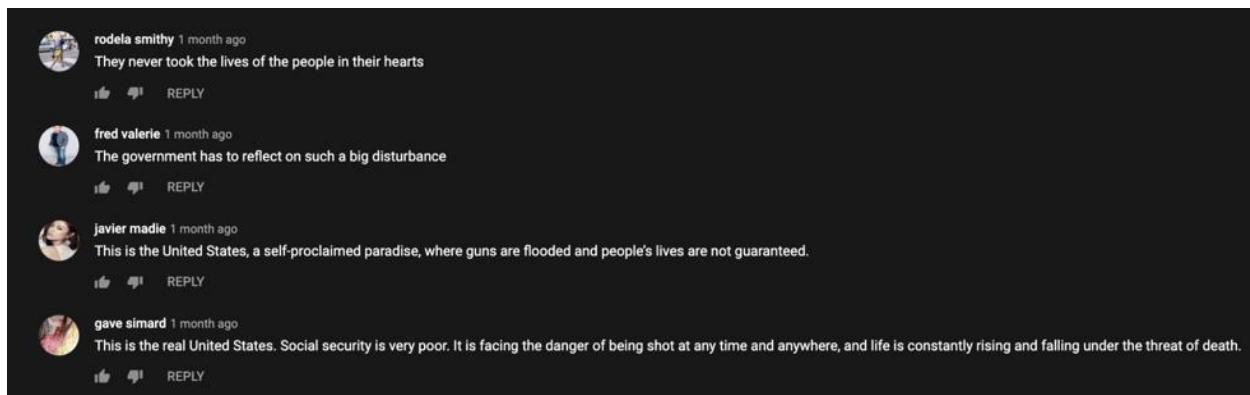
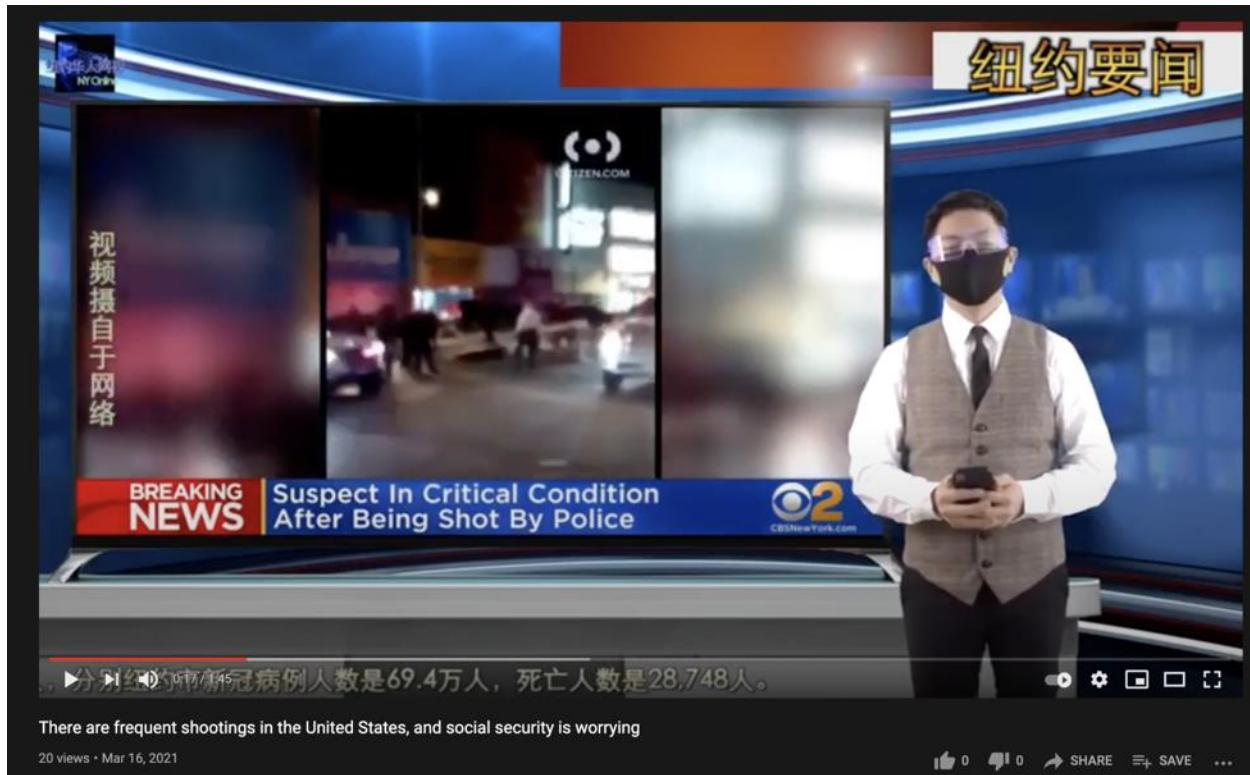
美国的暴力民主



2:38 AM · Apr 8, 2021 · Twitter Web App 

One of the accounts identified on YouTube as posting videos using the same narratives as seen echoed by the networks on Twitter and Facebook also uploaded a video on the [frequent shootings in the US](#), using media clippings and footage with narration of those events.

In the comments section (pictured below – auto translated) were comments about the government, social security and general civilian safety.



The targeting of the subject of gun violence in the US has also been echoed by public figures such as from China state-affiliated media Editor-in-Chief, who used gun violence and COVID-19 in the US as a way to discredit US claims about human rights issues in Xinjiang.



Hu Xijin 胡锡进 ✅ @HuXijin_GT · Mar 23

China state-affiliated media

"Shooting" is a frivolous word to describe the incident. It's slaughter. How ridiculous that Washington condemns human rights situation in Xinjiang, a region that has regained peace and harmony from terror attacks when people in the US are massacred by COVID-19 and firearms.

NEWS > CRIME AND PUBLIC SAFETY • News

Boulder shooting: Gunman kills 10, including police officer, at King Soopers

Boulder police say Officer Eric Talley was first on the scene when killed; investigation will take several days

144 95 536

US claims about Xinjiang and human rights

There has been [significant documentation](#) on the alleged human rights abuses in China's Xinjiang area and the oppression of Uyghurs. Posts in the network amplify claims of 'fabricated' evidence of the human rights abuses in Xinjiang.



Moore Ritika May 15 at 2:50 AM

#美国 Even if the Xinjiang issue is moved to the United Nations, the lies fabricated by the United States and the West will not become true.

就算把新疆议题搬到联合国，美西方编造的谎言也成不了真

8 Comments 48 Shares

adelita adelisa @AdelitaAdelisa · May 15

#美国 Even if the Xinjiang issue is moved to the United Nations, the lies fabricated by the United States and the West will not become true.

就算把新疆议题搬到联合国，美西方编造的谎言也成不了真

6 17 24

This denialist content has also been echoed by Chinese Government representatives and China-linked media.

For example, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Information Department spokesperson Lijian Zhao has regularly tweeted or retweeted content that attempts to delegitimise the claims.



Lijian Zhao 赵立坚 Retweeted

Hua Chunying 华春莹 @Spokes... May 6 Nonfactual allegations of "genocide" in #Xinjiang, #China are DISTASTFUL toward the victims of genocide and their families, and do a DISERVICE to history, law and prudence in international relations. richardfalk.org/2021/04/26/ref...

Ultimate Crime
richardfalk.org/2021/04/26/ref...

39 174 481 ... IMG

Lijian Zhao 赵立坚 Retweeted

Hua Chunying 华春莹 @Spokes... May 6 Those Western countries would rather believe the lies concocted by a few people than heed the voice of the 25 million people of all ethnic groups in #Xinjiang and the 1.4 billion Chinese.

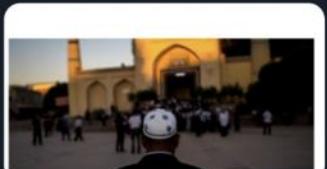


41 108 600 ... IMG

Show this thread

Lijian Zhao 赵立坚 Retweeted

Tom Fowdy @Tom_Fowdy 6d The BBC realized that Xinjiang was falling off the agenda, so it quickly makes a study by an NED funded organisation the leading story of the day even though comparatively it's hardly the most newsworthy thing right now.



24 82 386 ... IMG

Show this thread

Lijian Zhao 赵立坚 Retweeted

Hua Chunying 华春莹 @Spokes... Apr 25 #Uyghurs and other ethnic people in #Xinjiang are always well-known for their singing&dancing talents. Same as in many #Chinese cities. Enjoy square dancing, a popular neighbourhood entertainment.



138 257 1k ... MP4

Lijian Zhao 赵立坚 Retweeted

Zhang Heqing @zhang_heqing Apr 2 Two Uygur sisters @XinjiangGuli from #Xinjiang welcome you to visit Xinjiang. pic.twitter.com/TN6EKVDT36



84 214 969 ... MP4

Lijian Zhao 赵立坚 Retweeted

Lijian Zhao @zlj517 6d Local people of various ethnic groups danced to celebrate the fast-breaking festival, known as Eid al-Fitr in #Kashgar in #Xinjiang at the square in front of the famous Id Kah Mosque.



82 203 1k ... MP4

Very similar content is echoed from Editor-in-chief of the Global Times [Hu Xijin](#).



Hu Xijin 胡锡进 @HuXijin_GT May 12 It is hard to believe that the true intention of the US over Xinjiang is to protect human rights of Uyghur people, rather than to mess up Xinjiang and make the place as turbulent as Afghanistan. By the way, Afghanistan borders China's Xinjiang.



76 59 371 ... IMG

Hu Xijin 胡锡进 @HuXijin_GT Mar 25 Xinjiang produces the best-quality cotton in the world. Look at this beautiful and awe-inspiring scene. How boring the lies of forced labor are!



263 376 2k ... MP4

Hu Xijin 胡锡进 @HuXijin_GT Apr 1 Iranian diplomats shared a video they took at a cotton factory in Xinjiang. "Their assembly lines run at full pace to meet supply demands," they said. Iran and Saudi Arabia, two typical Islamic countries, support Xinjiang, which contrasts with the West's hypocrisy.



102 87 441 ... MP4

Hu Xijin 胡锡进 @HuXijin_GT Apr 2 In order to enter paradise, "if Allah orders, I will even kill my son." It's not just this Uygur youth who used to have such extreme thoughts. That's why Xinjiang was once plagued by terrorist attacks. De-extremism work in Xinjiang is a just cause.



202 161 892 ... MP4

Hu Xijin 胡锡进 @HuXijin_GT Mar 28 When Canada joined others to sanction China over Xinjiang affairs, it should have thought China would implement counter-sanctions. Trudeau is putting on airs by claiming the sanctions are "unacceptable." Isn't he sick of such hypocrisy?

M Trudeau call over Xinjiang 'un

162 179 579 ... MP4

Hu Xijin 胡锡进 @HuXijin_GT Apr 14 Raz Galor, a blogger from Israel, visited three families in Xinjiang. Take a look at what's Uygs' life is like in Xinjiang in his eyes.



121 78 458 ... MP4

Hu Xijin 胡锡进 @HuXijin_GT 2d Listen to the cry of this 10-year-old Palestinian girl. Where are those US and European officials and lawmakers who hypocritically claim to care the human rights of Muslims in China's Xinjiang? Doesn't Mr. Blinken think he should do something? pic.twitter.com/WWUJUnFPue



172 290 1k ... MP4

Hu Xijin 胡锡进 @HuXijin_GT Apr 8 Video of Tughlik Tursun, a student of Tsinghua University from Xinjiang, giving a speech in English went viral in China. Uygor youths with modern education, and those obsessed with extreme thoughts are like coming from two worlds.



98 85 418 ... MP4

US and discrimination

A rising theme detected in the network's narratives targets racial discrimination in the US. One side of the narrative targets the issue of attacks on Asian ethnicities in the US, while the other continued to target the Black Lives Matter movement, using the movement to sow discord.

This is not the first time US and discrimination has been a target for pro-China influence networks, this has been previously documented by [DFRLab](#), but China representatives have also [called](#) for the 'US government to take all necessary measures to deal with the violent law enforcement of police, so as to protect and safeguard the legitimate interests of racial minorities'.

Similarly, [Zhao Lijian](#) has also used social media to use the issue as a chance to take a swing at the US while defending the Chinese Government's stance on forced labour detention camps in Xinjiang.



Lijian Zhao 赵立坚 ✅
@zlj517
China government official

It is a historical fact that the #UnitedStates forced black slaves to collect cotton. Who on earth engaged in forced labor? Don't scapegoat and smear #Xinjiang! There is absolutely no #forcedlabor in Xinjiang!

12:11 AM · Mar 29, 2021 · Twitter for Android

493 Retweets 66 Quote Tweets 2,949 Likes

The narratives appear to focus on two subjects as of this year, the Black Lives Matter movement and issues of discrimination towards Asians.

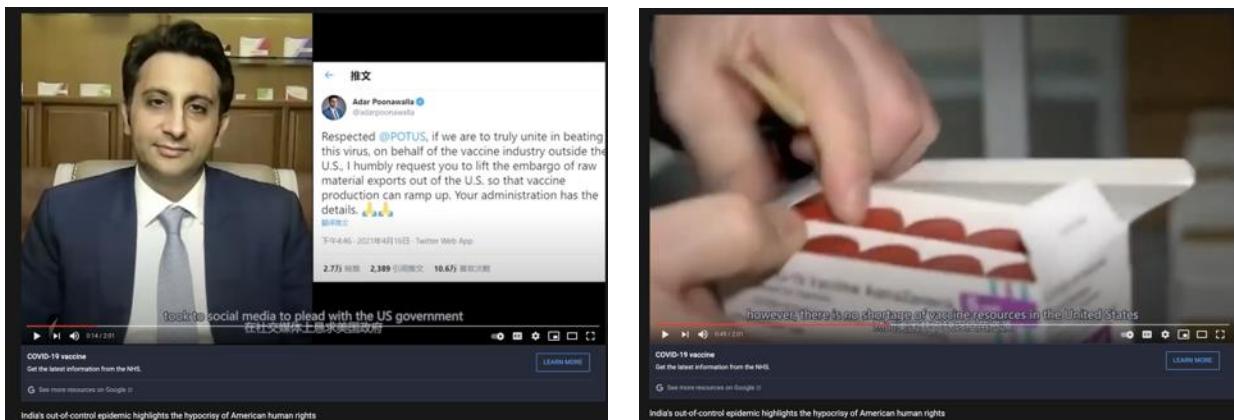


US and India coronavirus

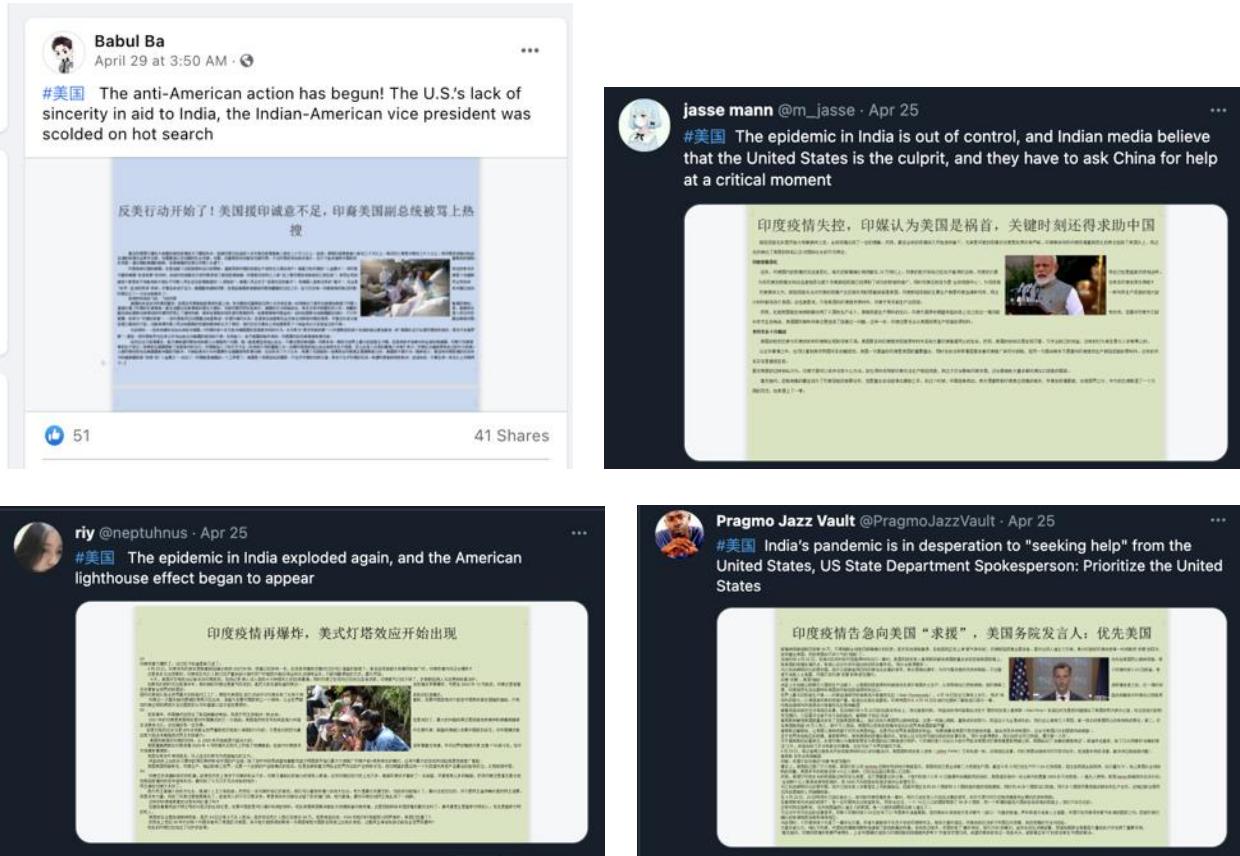
A narrative echoed throughout the networks targets the grim circumstances of COVID-19 in India and targets the response of the US.

The India-US COVID-19 narrative is summarised well in one [YouTube video](#), titled 'India's out-of-control epidemic highlights the hypocrisy of American human rights', which follows the following lines of narrative:

- The US had an embargo on raw export materials outside of the US for vaccine production
- The US focused on itself and did not share vaccines
- Claims that large unused stockpiles were kept in factories
- And that China will provide support and help to India



Some of the network has promoted long-text memes on Twitter about India and coronavirus with negative sentiment towards the US. While some of the posts only target the issue, others target the issue and then promote China values much like what was seen in the YouTube video, as a way to discredit an opponent and raise one's own profile.



These same posts have been echoed on Facebook.



Guo Wengui

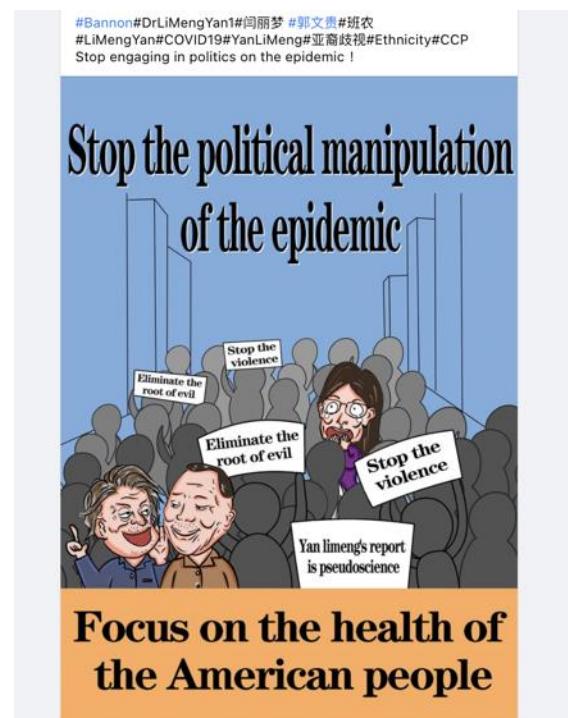
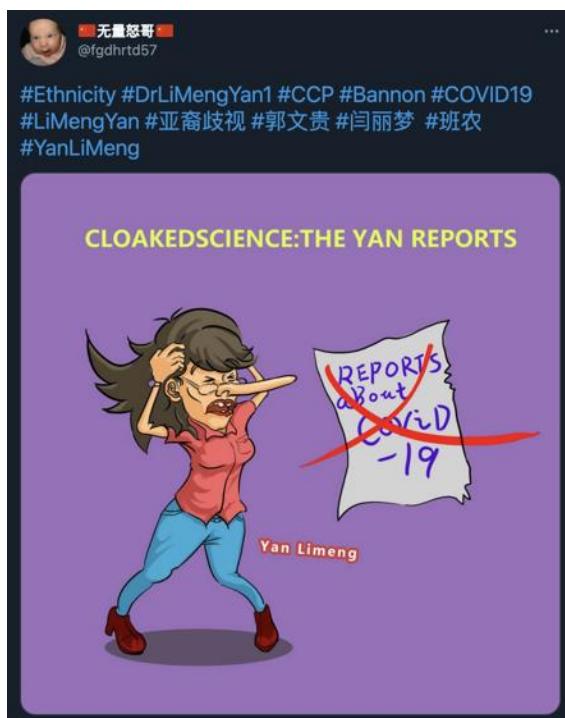
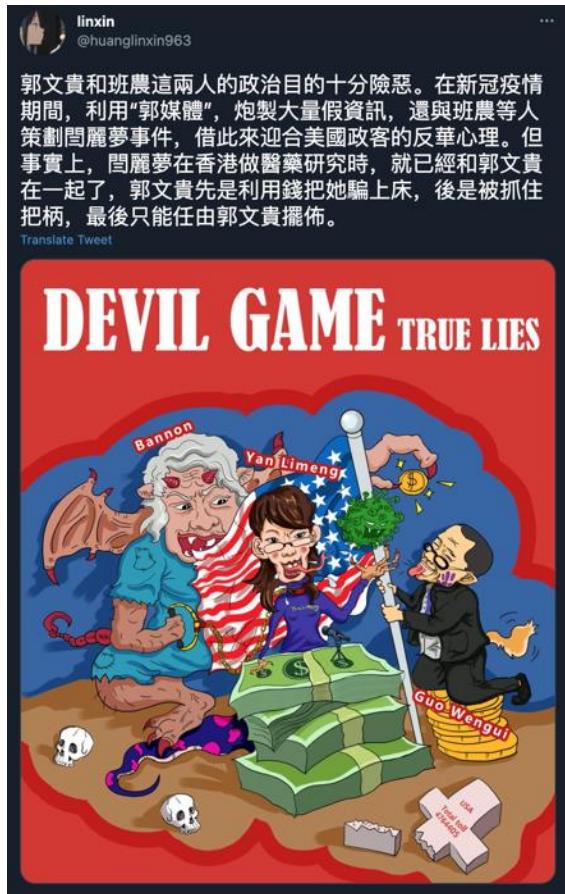
Numerous hashtags, namely #DrLiMengYan1, #YanLiMeng and #LiMengYan have been used by the network in a bid to discredit Chinese virologist Li-Meng Yan, after she published a report in September 2020, claiming China was responsible for the creation of coronavirus. The report's findings have been largely disputed.

The targeting of Li-Meng Yan will also be individually covered in the next section.

Guo Wengui, also a target of the network, is a Chinese businessman and political activist. He is exiled from China and has been a critic of the Chinese government, and such, has been repeatedly targeted by pro-China propaganda. Previous examples of research documenting campaigns against him were identified by [ASPI](#), [Graphika](#) and [Bellingcat](#). It should be noted that while he has been the target of some of these campaigns, he has also been [linked](#) to information operations.

Both of these critics have been targeted by the network on their own, as well as posts linking them together. The network uses memes critical of them, as seen below.



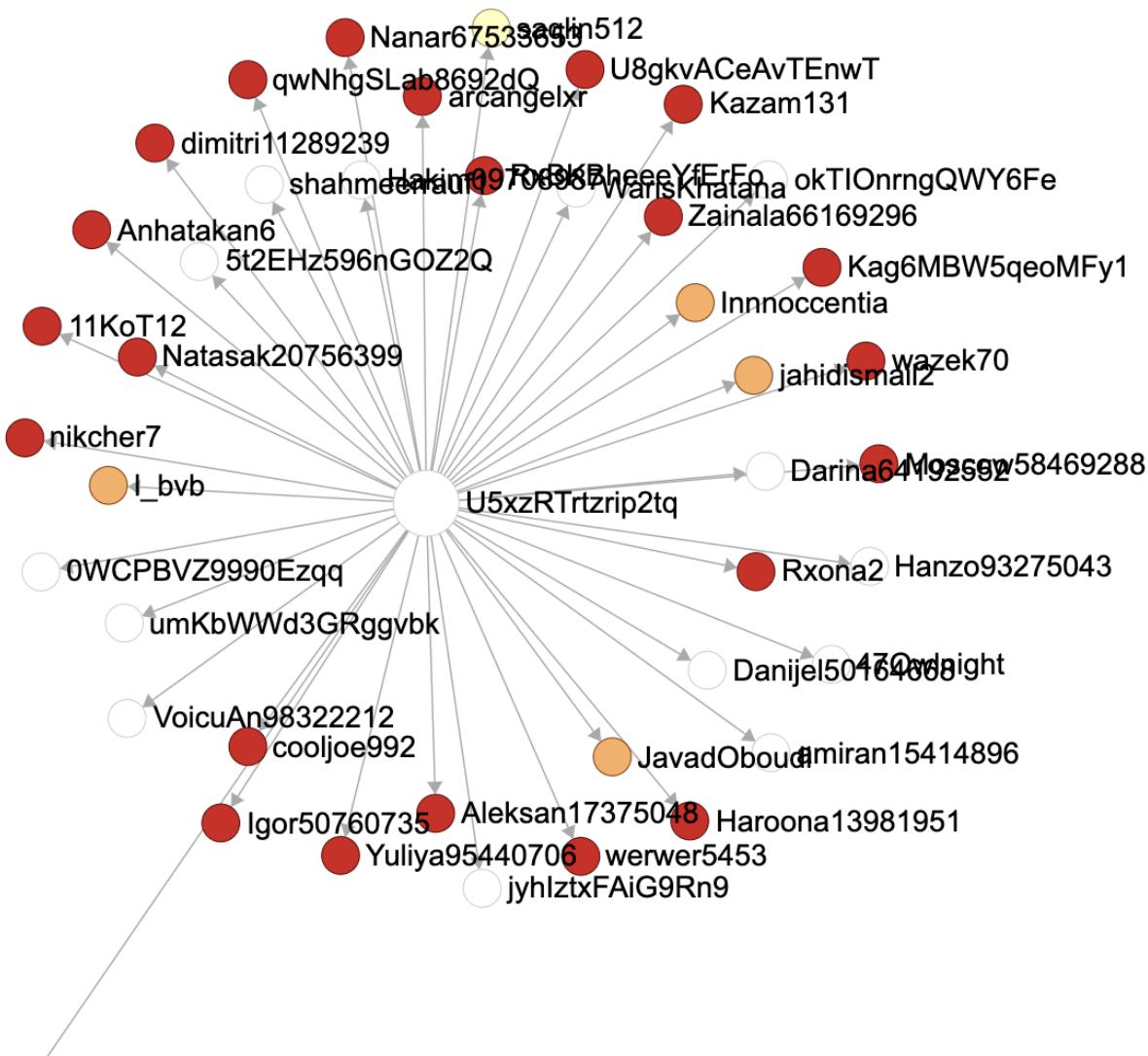


In one of the posts, the research identified newer 'batches' of accounts promoting the same content and combining the hashtags relating to both Guo Wengui and Dr Li-Meng Yan.

As mentioned, the content analysed found propaganda from both pro-China as well as anti-CCP content from different networks.

While this report does focus on the pro-China campaigns, there is indeed manipulation coming from both sides in an attempt to win over the narrative on specific hashtags. Reporting by [Graphika](#) goes into more detail on the anti-CCP network and coordinated activity.

The content shared by the pro-China accounts indicated the similar style of amplification by fake accounts as has been seen elsewhere in this report. This can be seen in the network analysis graph below of user @U5xzRTrtzrip2tq.



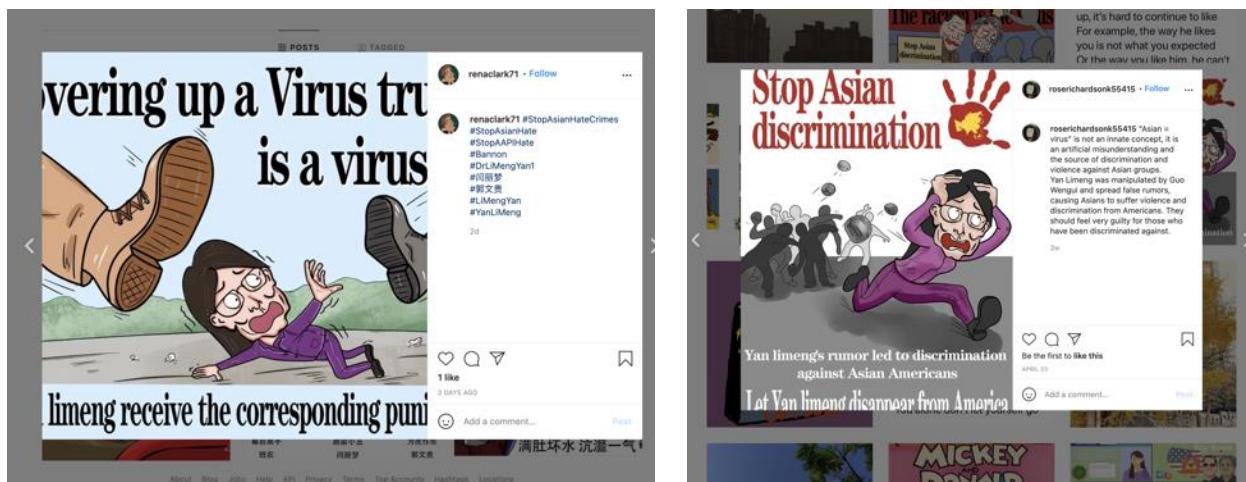
In the screenshot below, the traditional tactic of a throwaway account with few followers is used to spam a hashtag and is amplified by the surrounding network.



A screenshot of the post shows the 444 retweets and 37 likes the post received.



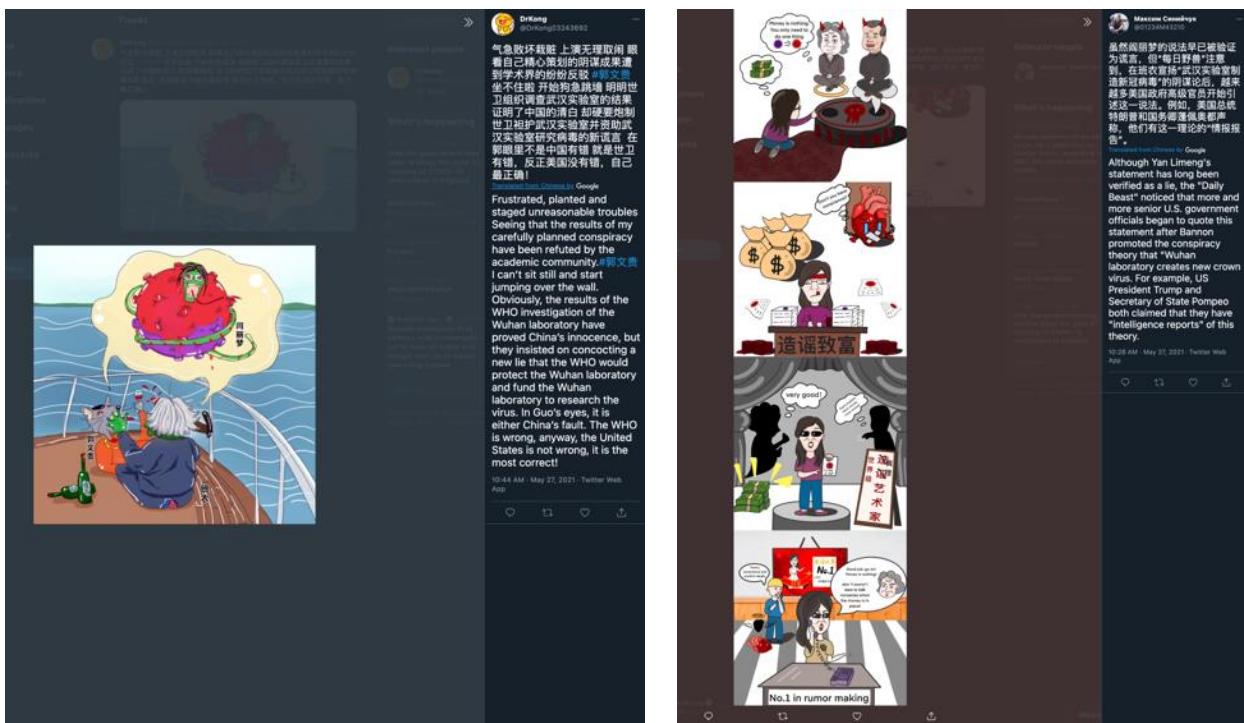
Similar posts targeting Dr Li-Meng Yan were also identified on Instagram, with less amplification than other platforms, seen below.



Li-Meng Yan and the Wuhan Lab report

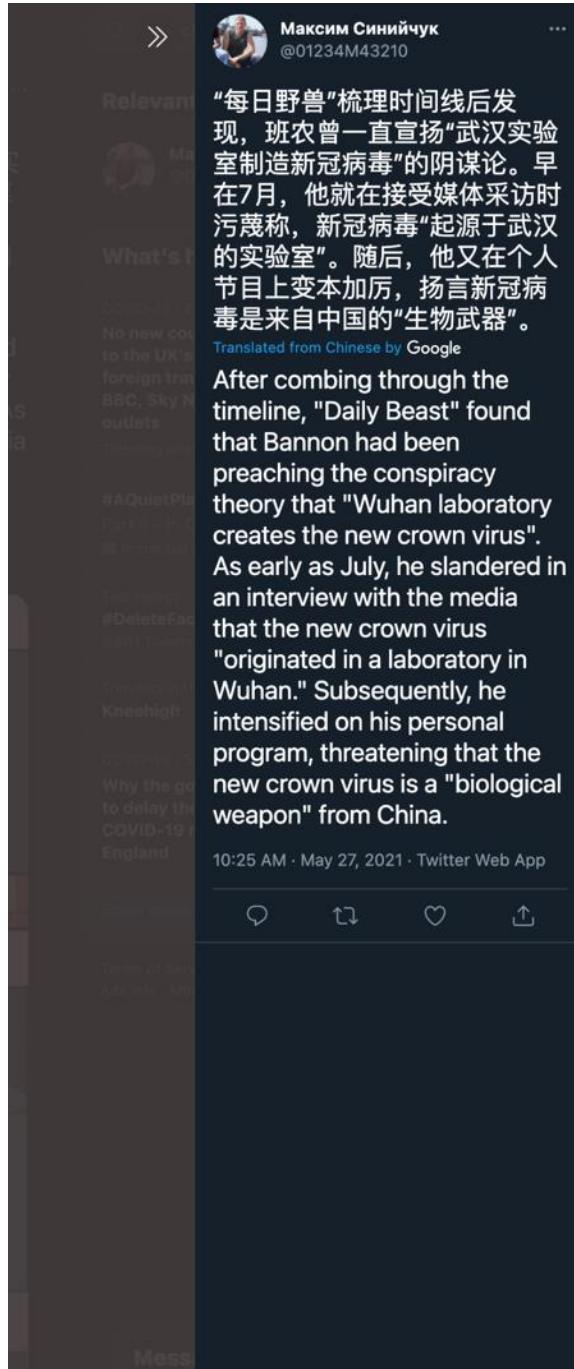
Assertions by Chinese ophthalmologist and virologist Li-Meng Yan in a paper published in September 2020 claimed that China had created coronavirus in a lab in Wuhan. Peers in the research community claimed the paper was flawed and baseless, yet the claims [still went viral](#) and were spread on social media and news outlets.

Pro-Chinese Government networks have responded to the claims as serious and have strategically used social media to discredit Li-Meng Yan and counter the claims of Wuhan lab coronavirus origins. Some of the posts refer to a claim made by the World Health Organisation that it was '[extremely unlikely](#)' that the virus was leaked from a lab in China.



Since it has been identified that anti-CCP critics were running a [social media influence operation](#), some of the posts in the network claim that Li-Meng Yan's research piece was promoted by Steve Bannon, the result of which the posts claim the research was quoted in US Government officials' reports and intelligence assessments ([example](#) above on the right).

More [examples](#) of this can be seen below.



The same content has been used to promote the tag #Stopasianhate which is a narrative also targeted by Chinese Government representatives through social media in claims about the US and its 'poor human rights' track record. This is an argument used in retaliation for claims about China's treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

The posts of the content about Li-Meng Yan are in English and Chinese, indicating that the intended audience is mixed, and non-Chinese speaking audiences are intended as well as Chinese speaking.

For example, the post below used translated graphics for both audiences.



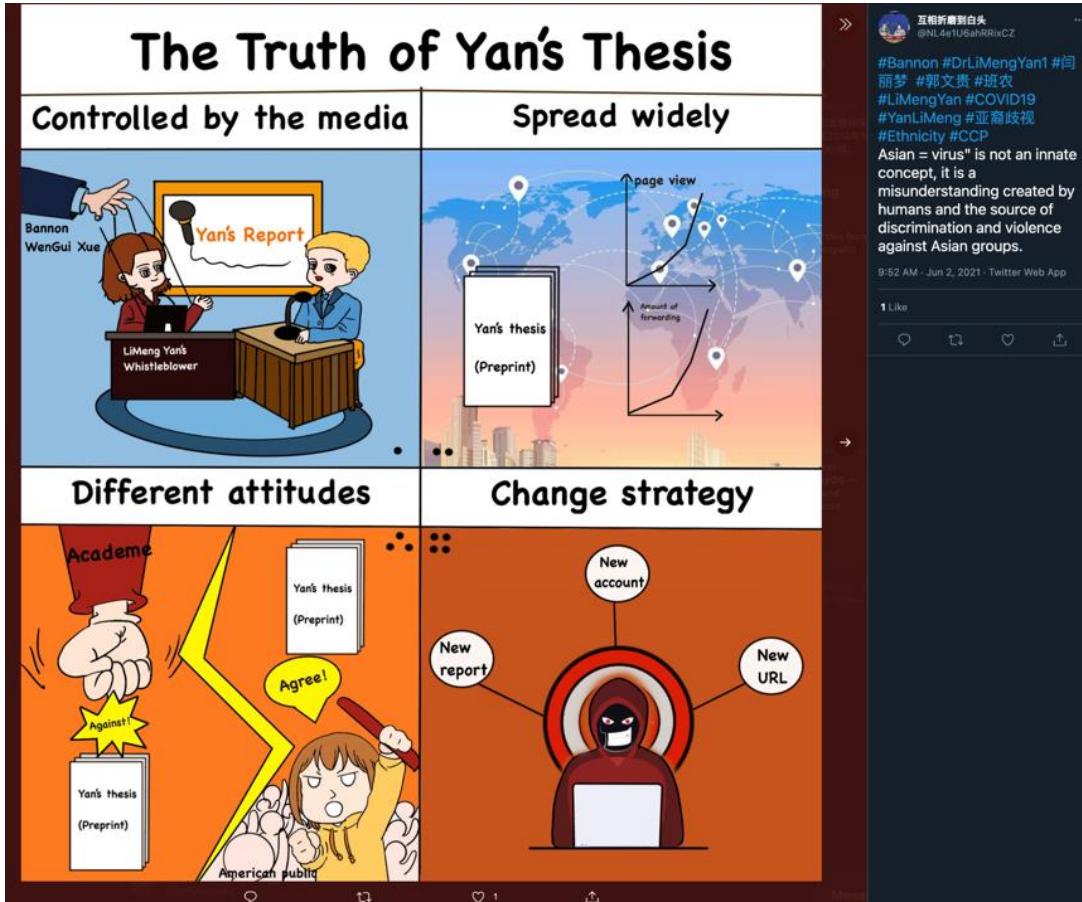
The content also targets a much wider angle of sowing doubt within the US Government system by claiming a strategic advisor of the White House was the cause of the Wuhan Lab report. Seen in this [tweet](#), and this one (below).



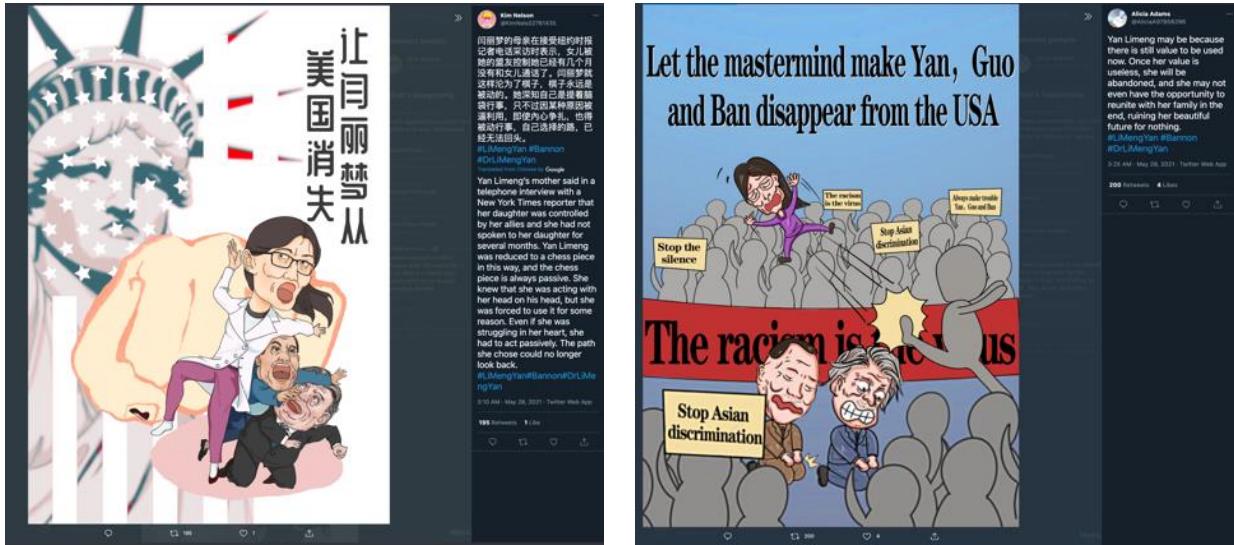
The research by Li-Meng Yan has also given the network the attack vector of targeting academic 'standards' in the west. Again, amplifying content to sow doubt across the industry of research groups.



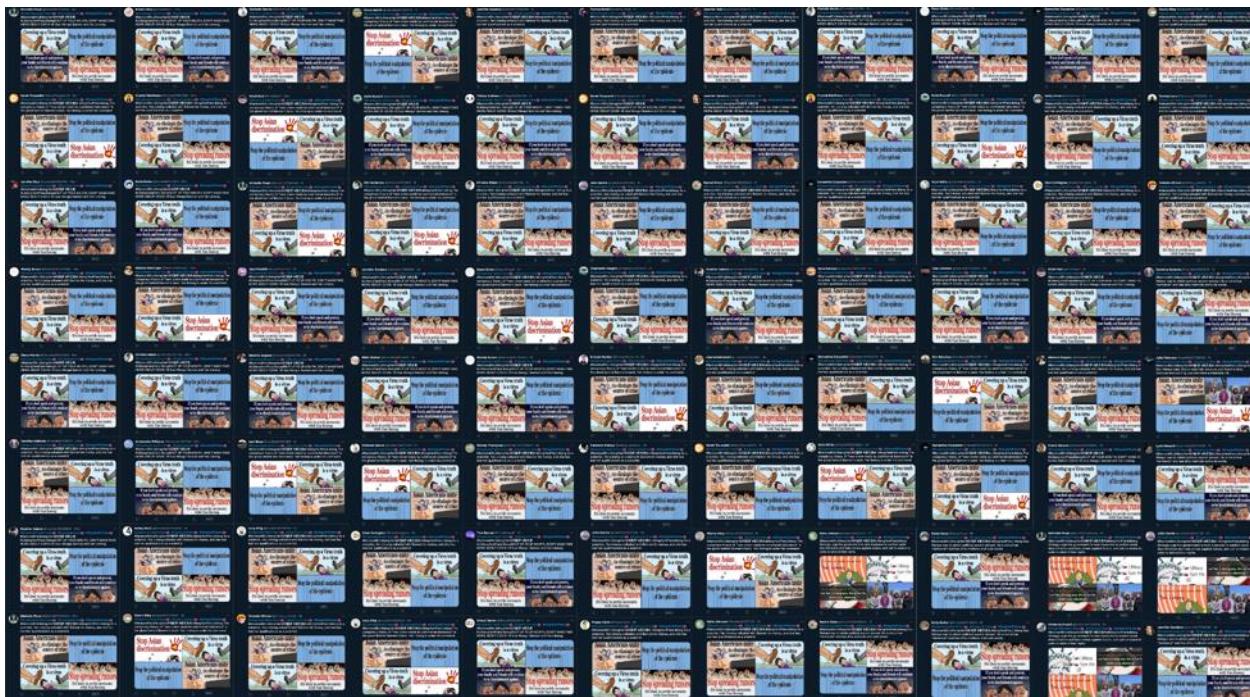
Many of these posts have been used with the tags #Bannon #DrLiMengYan1 #闫丽梦 #郭文贵 #班农 #LiMengYan #COVID19 #YanLiMeng #亚裔歧视 #Ethnicity #CCP. An example can be seen in this [tweet](#).



While it appears much of the network fails to get significant traction through tweets, likes or comments, we can also identify clear signs of manipulation (which was also seen in other social media posts in this report) through what is likely fake retweets of some posts, such as these two posts below where each post has 200 (or just under) retweets.



While there is limited traction in many of the posts, the network uses repetitive spamming tactics using the same hashtags and memes, especially those targeting US narratives, as seen below.



Hong Kong democratic movement

Hong Kong's democratic protest movement has been a target in past pro-China propaganda campaigns. Hong Kong has been a regular target of the coordinated information pressure applied by pro-China propaganda networks, significantly more so during Hong Kong's pro-democratic protests.

In 2020, [Twitter](#) announced a takedown of more than 150,000 accounts as part of a pro-China network. In 2019, [Twitter](#) also disclosed a takedown of a pro-China network. Both of those takedowns targeted the subject of Hong Kong with deceptive narratives, attempted to sow political discord and undermine the legitimacy of protest movements.

Those narratives have shifted in this network to amplifying content more supportive of Hong Kong and China relations and development.



Anushka Kumari @Anushka41440544 · Apr 19

隨著新嘅選舉制度喺香港落地執行，香港定能從長期嘅政治爭拗和無謂嘅對立對抗中解脫出來。當下，我哋最重要嘅就係匯聚全港力量，和內地經濟聯動。捉緊粵港澳大灣區建設嘅時機。加快經濟建設，促進香港社會繁榮穩定，增進市民福祉讓「一國兩制」行穩致遠。#香港

我爱中国 我爱香港

Hong Kong is part of

China forever

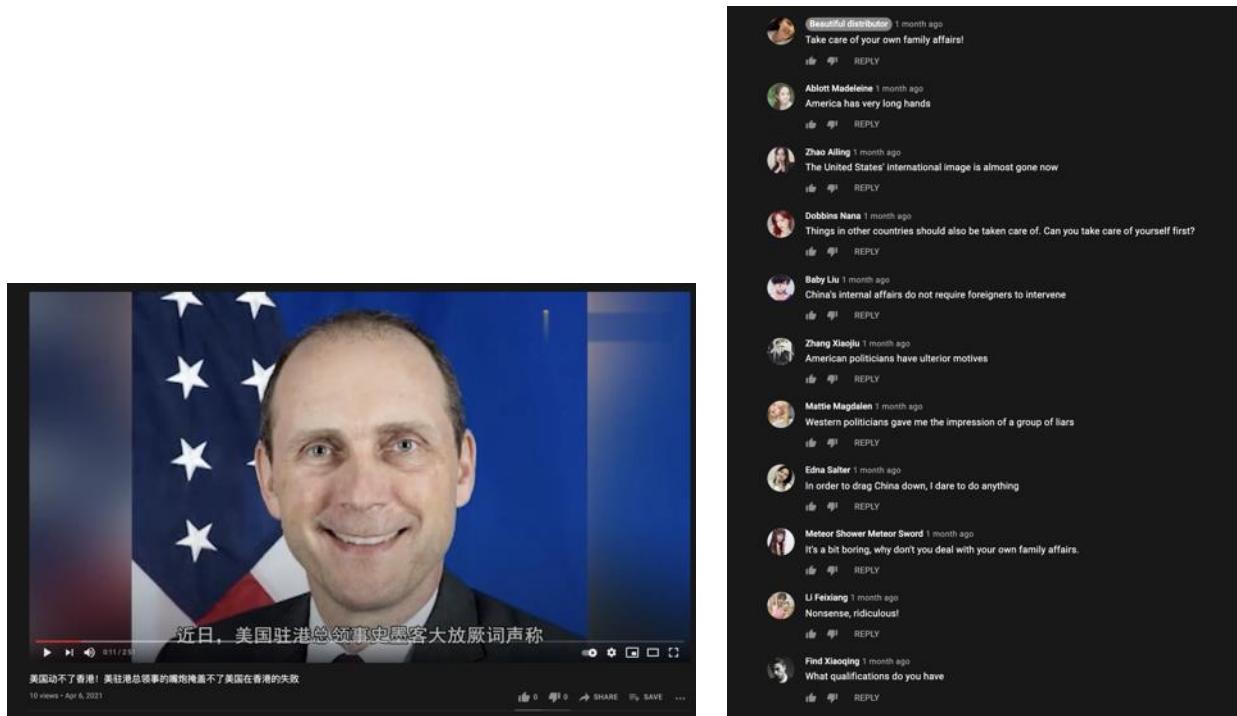
The image is a composite of several elements. In the top left corner, there is a circular portrait of a woman with short brown hair and a slight smile. To the right of the portrait is a block of Chinese text. At the bottom of the image, there are two side-by-side photographs of modern architectural structures, possibly port facilities, featuring glass and steel. The overall layout suggests a news article or a social media post.

A wide-angle night photograph of the Hong Kong skyline. The city is densely packed with numerous skyscrapers, all brightly lit from within, creating a vibrant glow against the dark blue night sky. In the foreground, the calm water of Victoria Harbour reflects the lights of the buildings. The most prominent features in the center-right are the two towers of the International Finance Centre (IFC), with the taller one reaching towards the top of the frame. To the left, the distinctive spire of the Bank of China Tower stands out. Other recognizable buildings like the HSBC building and various residential and commercial structures are visible across the horizon.

One of the YouTube accounts our research found that was sharing content extremely similar to that of the Twitter network, also referenced the attempt at US influence in Hong Kong.

The title of the [video](#) was “美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败”, which gave the autotranslation of “The United States can't touch Hong Kong! The U.S. Consul General's lip service cannot conceal the failure of the U.S.”

A number of the comments were fairly similar to the aggressive style of comments observed on other YouTube videos identified as sharing the same content.



近日，美国驻港总领事史密斯大放厥词声称

美国动不了香港！美驻港总领事的嘴炮掩盖不了美国在香港的失败

10 views · Apr 6, 2021

Beautiful distributor 1 month ago
Take care of your own family affairs!
REPLY

Abbott Madeline 1 month ago
America has very long hands
REPLY

Zhao Alling 1 month ago
The United States' international image is almost gone now
REPLY

Dobbins Nana 1 month ago
Things in other countries should also be taken care of. Can you take care of yourself first?
REPLY

Baby Liu 1 month ago
China's internal affairs do not require foreigners to intervene
REPLY

Zhang Xiaolu 1 month ago
American politicians have ulterior motives
REPLY

Mattie Magdalen 1 month ago
Western politicians gave me the impression of a group of liars
REPLY

Edna Salter 1 month ago
In order to drag China down, I dare to do anything
REPLY

Meteo Shower Meteor Sword 1 month ago
It's a bit boring, why don't you deal with your own family affairs.
REPLY

Li Feixiang 1 month ago
Nonsense, ridiculous!
REPLY

Frid Xiaoqing 1 month ago
What qualifications do you have
REPLY

The reference to US interference in Hong Kong has also been a narrative shared by Chinese Government representatives and state-linked media outlets, such as China Daily and China Xinhua News.



US and China relations

A number of posts amplified the subject of the outlook of the US and the 'rise of China'.

The network appears to identify trending issues where there may be an attempt to point out possible shortfalls or wrongdoing by the US Government and elevate the status of China.

This US-China rivalry isn't only seen in content shared by the inauthentic network, but also by Chinese state representatives' accounts. For example, we found very similar narratives shared by Chinese Government officials which indicate an overlap in the narratives shared by both legitimate accounts, as well as the inauthentic accounts observed in this report.

 Ambassador Deng Xijun ✅
@China2ASEAN
China government official

Sin No.1:#Colonialism. The #US committed #genocide &crimes against #humanity. Over the 100 yrs after US founding, native #Indians were expelled &killed during the #WestwardExpansion. Their population plunged from 5 mln in late 15th century to 0.25 mln in early 20th century.




4:02 PM · Apr 8, 2021 · Twitter for Android · 

188 Retweets 3 Quote Tweets 340 Likes

 Hua Chunying 华春莹 ✅
@SpokespersonChIN
China government official

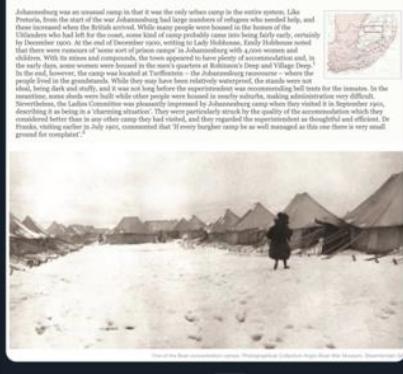
#Britain committed countless horrifying crimes all over the world during hundreds of years of colonial rule. The world's first concentration camp in #SouthAfrica carries with it the disgraceful brand of the British Empire.

BRITISH CONCENTRATION CAMPS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR 1900-1902

BCCD

[Home](#) [Database](#) [Camps](#) [Contact](#) [Links](#) [FAQ](#) [Reading List](#) [Logout](#)

Johannesburg



5:10 PM · May 13, 2021 · Twitter Web App · 

96 Retweets 7 Quote Tweets 490 Likes

 Ambassador Deng Xijun ✅ @China2ASEAN · Jan 8
China government official

Hope #CapitolRiots would make @SecPompeo understand necessity of implementing #NationalSecurityLaw in #HongKong, which exactly targets mobs who stormed HKSAR Legislature Council building &vandalized everything inside. Double standard only harm credibility of US political figures.

The storming of the U.S. Capitol today is unacceptable. Lawlessness and rioting – here or around the world – is always unacceptable. I have travelled to many countries and always support the right of every human being to protest peacefully for their beliefs and their causes.

翻譯原文
21年1月7日, 6:16 · Twitter Web App

8,325 转推 1,003 引用推文 3,975 喜欢



10 17 53 

While much of the US-China rivalry amplified by pro-China propaganda networks focused on technology or competing industries, this network also targets COVID vaccine diplomacy and provisions. We noticed many posts targeting the US and COVID issue, such as the posts seen below.

 **Babul Ba**
May 7 at 2:59 AM · 

#美国 The WHO supported China's vaccines, and the Biden government immediately announced that it would give up vaccine patents. What are the intentions?



52 7 Comments 37 Shares

 **Jude Miranda @judeyow** · Apr 25
#美国 The rise of China threatens the survival of the United States?
Someone finally tells the truth: the problem is in Washington, not Beijing

中国崛起威胁美国生存？终于有人说真话：问题在华盛顿而非北京



 **riy @neptuhns** · Mar 8
#美国 Containing China will inevitably fail! The U.S. has fallen into reincarnation, Congressional Police: The riots may repeat itself

美专家称变异病毒正在美国加速传播 不能放松警惕



杨星月 Retweeted
 **Pragmo Jazz Vault @PragmoJazzVault** · Apr 8
#美国 Want to use three methods to "defeat China" and save American hegemony? The rise of China cannot be stopped by the United States

想用三种手段“击败中国”，挽救美国霸权？中国崛起美国挡不下了



 **Jude Miranda @judeyow** · Apr 6
#美国 The United States is creating a crisis at the door of China

美国正在中国家门口制造一场危机



This content was also echoed on YouTube through video and comments.



The United States still maintains the Cold War mentality in an attempt to pursue hegemonism

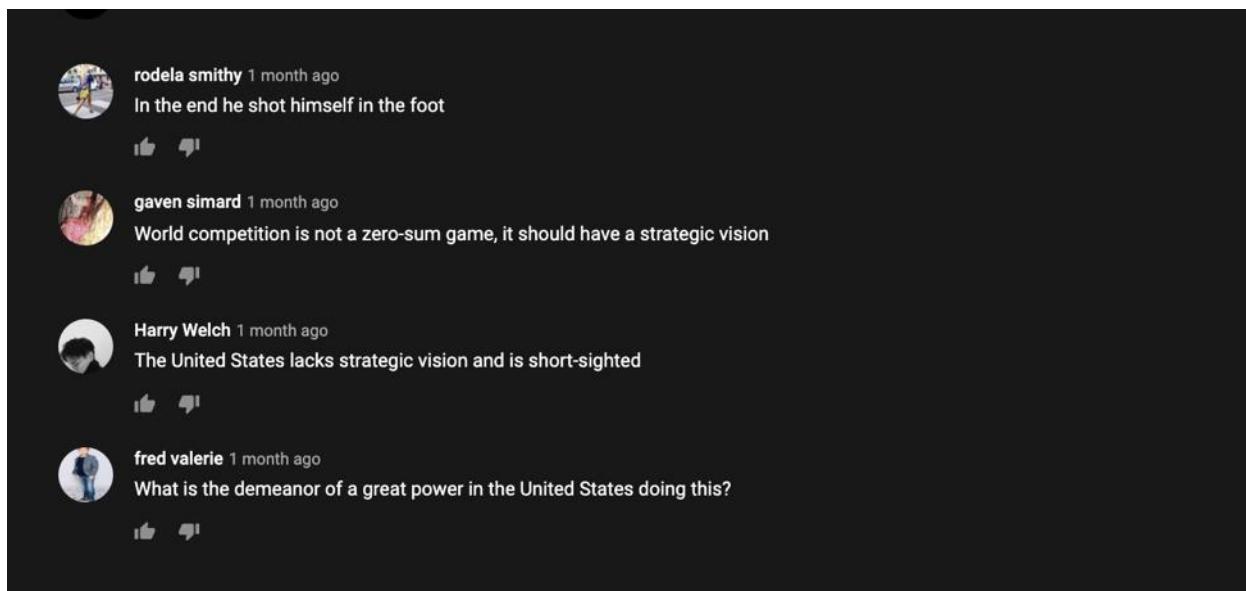
the United States should take a closer look at its own situation, including the human rights in the United States, 美国应该多看看自己的情况 美国国内的人权状况

▶ ▶ ⏪ 0:44 / 1:04

The United States tried to suppress China, but it was itself that suffered in the end

28 views • Mar 22, 2021

1 like 1 dislike SHARE SAVE ...



rodelasmithy 1 month ago
In the end he shot himself in the foot

gaven simard 1 month ago
World competition is not a zero-sum game, it should have a strategic vision

Harry Welch 1 month ago
The United States lacks strategic vision and is short-sighted

fred valerie 1 month ago
What is the demeanor of a great power in the United States doing this?

US and global conflict

We also identified a new narrative after US President Biden's announcement to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. The content used the US hashtag to spread its content. This may have also been an attempt to catch on to any potential trending status of the tag.

The content was posted just days after [reporting](#) started to circulate of Biden's notice to withdraw troops. In what appeared to be a new subset of the campaign, the narrative was fed into the networks and amplified primarily on April 16 and 17.

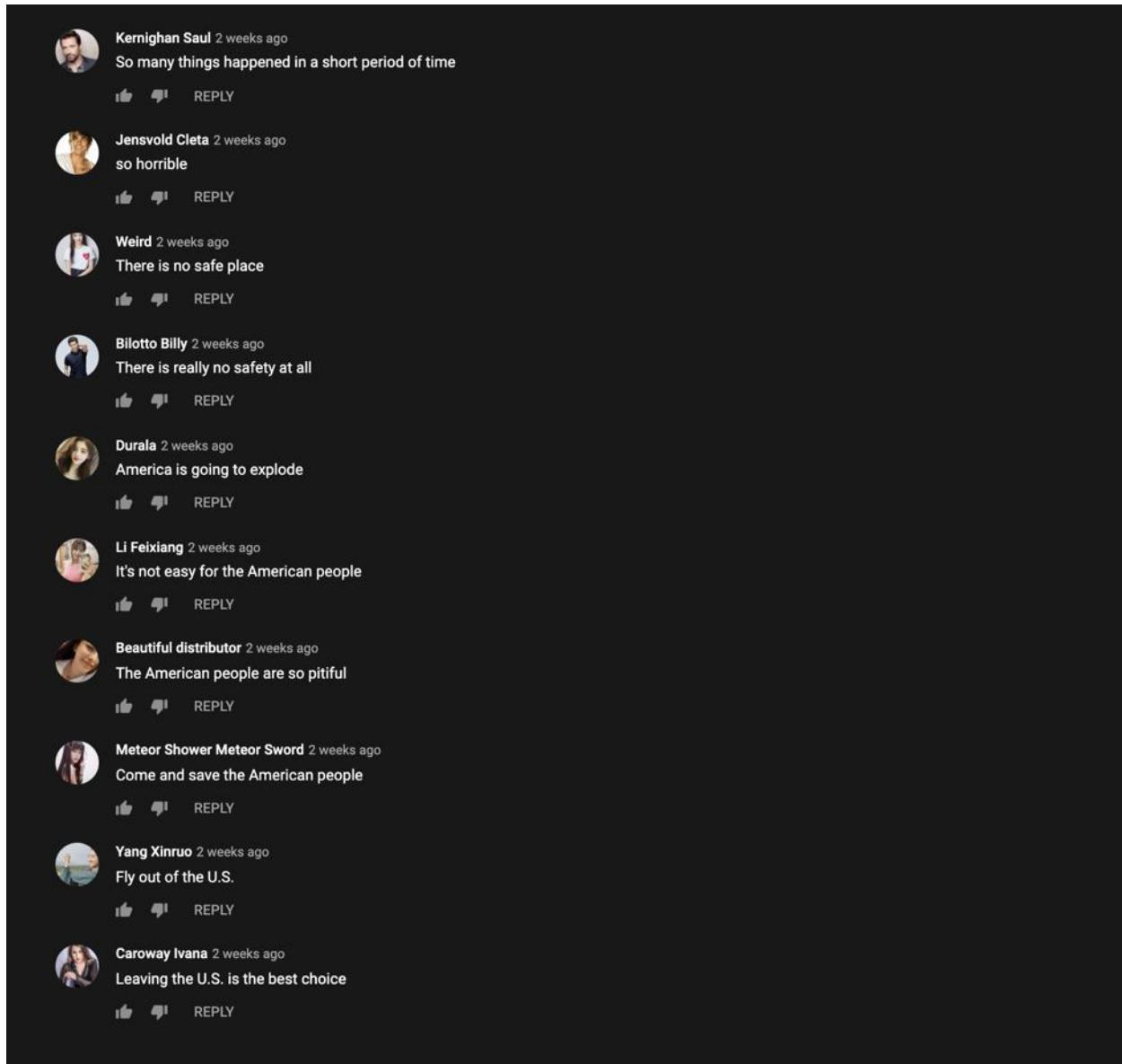
US and violence

It is clear that an event such as the storming of the Capitol in Washington on January 6, 2021, would be a prime target for pro-China propaganda networks seeking to amplify content and sow discord in the public. Our research identified some of that content being shared through comments and posts on some of the platforms, as well as in videos and comments on YouTube.

Videos targeting issues of 'violent demonstrations' in the US are not new and have been a persistent theme throughout pro-China propaganda networks. In this video, with the title originally written in Chinese, it establishes a grim outlook for the US with more violent protests on the way.



Below the post are 10 comments with statements such as "It's not easy for the American people", "Leaving the U.S. is the best choice" and "Come and save the American people", further amplifying the messaging of the video. These comments are an attempt to drive legitimacy of the post.



Kernighan Saul 2 weeks ago
So many things happened in a short period of time
  REPLY

Jensvold Cleta 2 weeks ago
so horrible
  REPLY

Weird 2 weeks ago
There is no safe place
  REPLY

Bilotto Billy 2 weeks ago
There is really no safety at all
  REPLY

Durala 2 weeks ago
America is going to explode
  REPLY

Li Feixiang 2 weeks ago
It's not easy for the American people
  REPLY

Beautiful distributor 2 weeks ago
The American people are so pitiful
  REPLY

Meteor Shower Meteor Sword 2 weeks ago
Come and save the American people
  REPLY

Yang Xinruo 2 weeks ago
Fly out of the U.S.
  REPLY

Caroway Ivana 2 weeks ago
Leaving the U.S. is the best choice
  REPLY

Narrative summary

While the narratives target different subjects and deliver alternative types of posts, images and text to either amplify, discredit or shift a focus of an agenda, they all promote one overarching theme – which is to boost the profile of China and squash or discredit the west and any group that is critical of the Chinese Government.

The narratives are amplified by a coordinated influence operation on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube using a mix of fake and stolen accounts and distort perceptions on important issues. These narratives are closely in line with those being pushed by China-state representatives and state-linked media outlets.

About the Centre for Information Resilience

The Centre for Information Resilience (CIR) is an independent, non-profit social enterprise dedicated to identifying, countering and exposing influence operations.

The CIR, supported by an advisory board of experts, works to raise awareness among policymakers, journalists and the public of the risks posed by influence operations by hostile actors, including malign states and "domestic disinformers". Once identified, the CIR works with a global network of partners to counter these threats to democracy.

The CIR fulfils its mission through three strands – research and programmes, the Global Investigations Unit and our Resilience Network. We are a collaborative initiative; we work with partners including civil society, the media, grassroots organisations, academia and democratic governments to coordinate activities.

We believe the scale of the problem demands an ambitious, collective response.



**Centre for
Information
Resilience**

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