

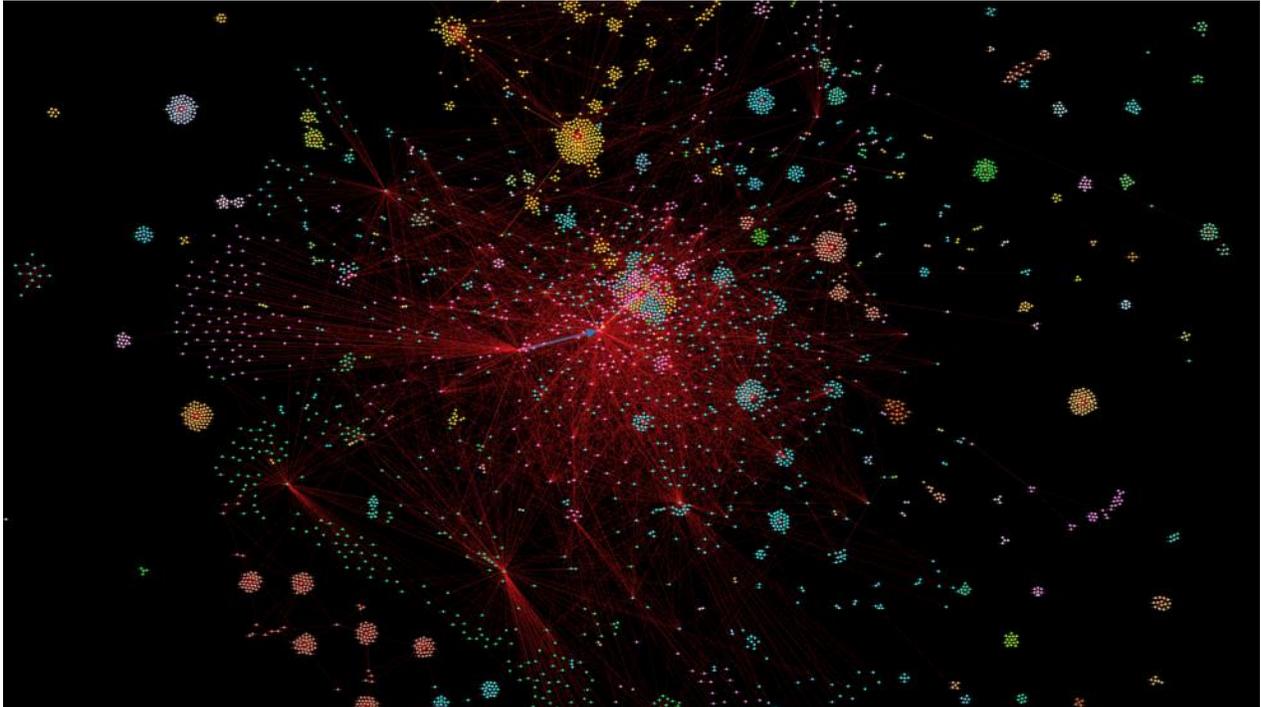


**Centre for  
Information  
Resilience**

**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.

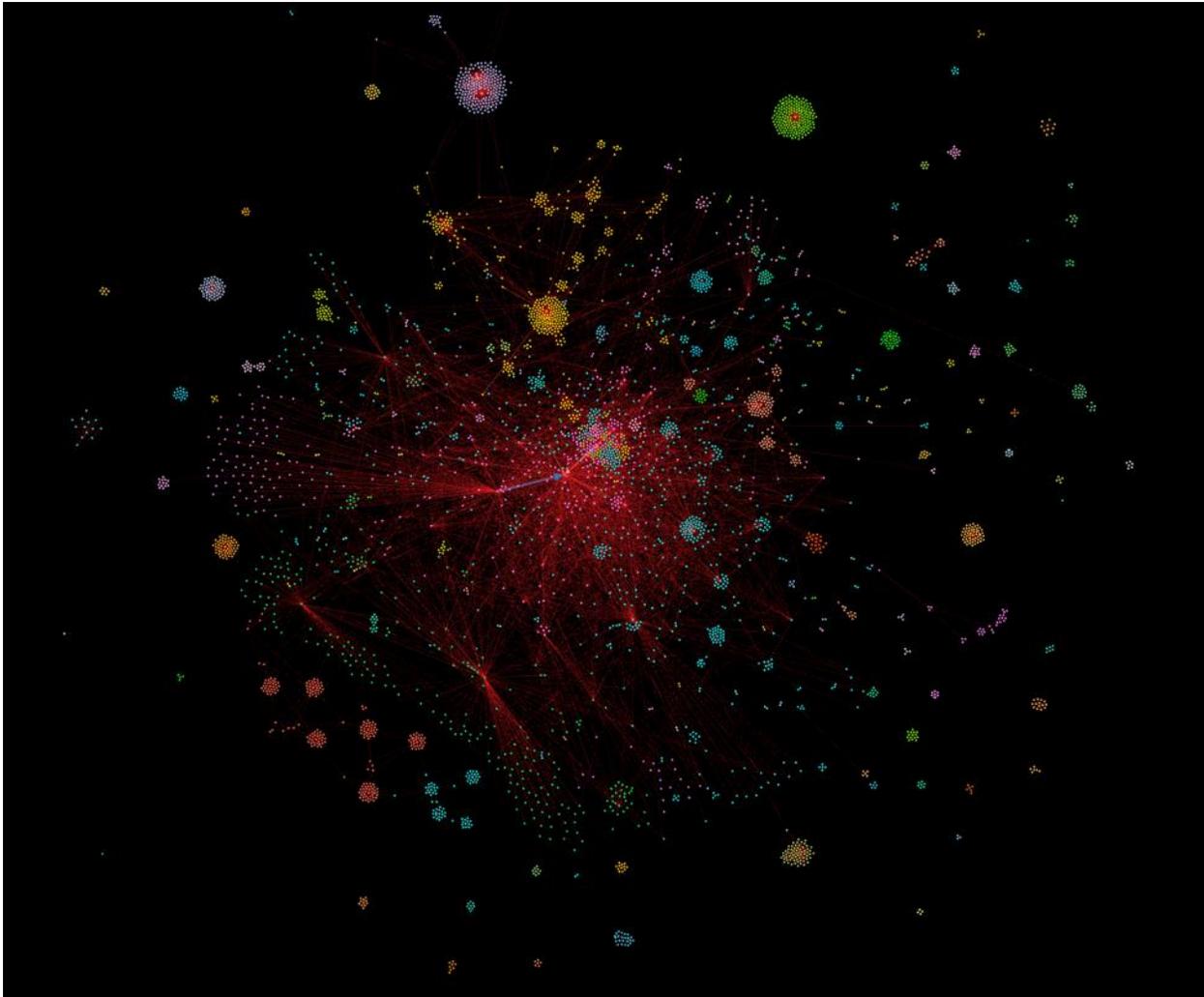
The research started with three main hashtags of simplified terms:

- #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.

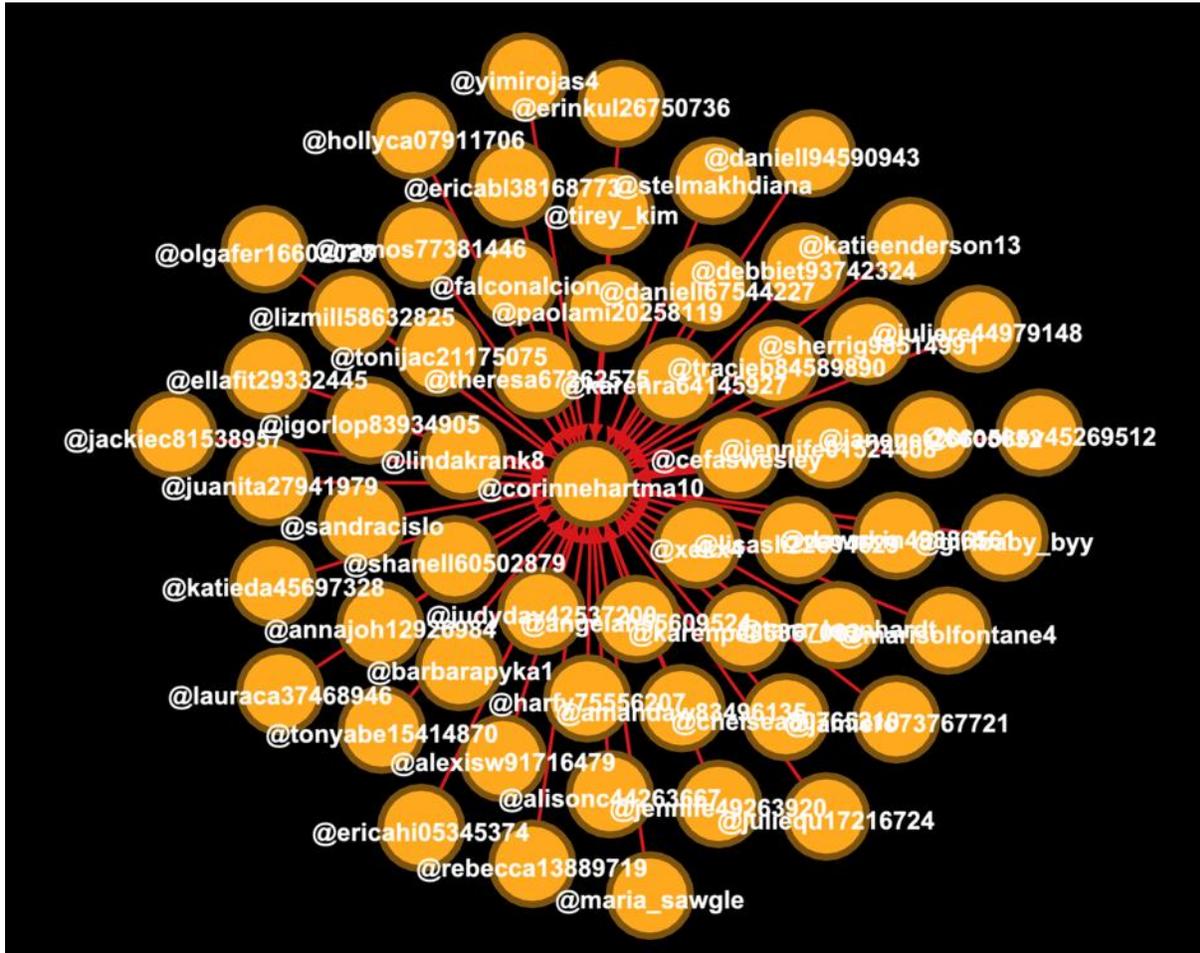
In determining an account's status, some indicators were looked at for each account, such as:

- 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.

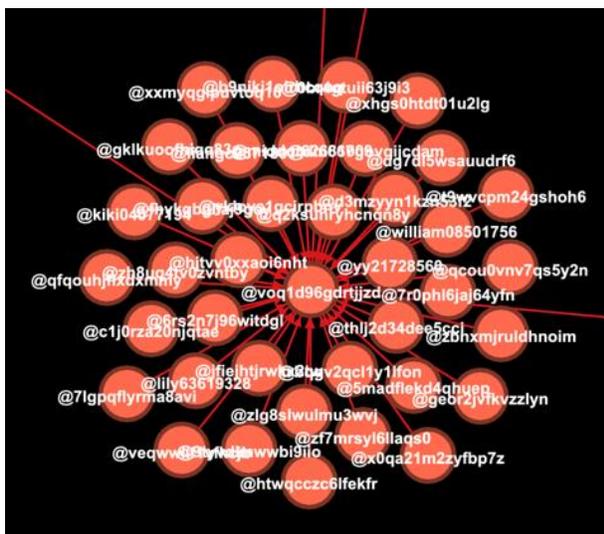
After the collection of more than 4000 tweets during March and April 2021, we then focused on looking at individual amplifier accounts and the content they had posted in the past. By doing this, we could identify where links were made away from Twitter, such as to blogs, various news sites and YouTube.

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 @voQ1d96GDRTjJZD. 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 @voQ1d96GDRTjJZD, 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.



## 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.

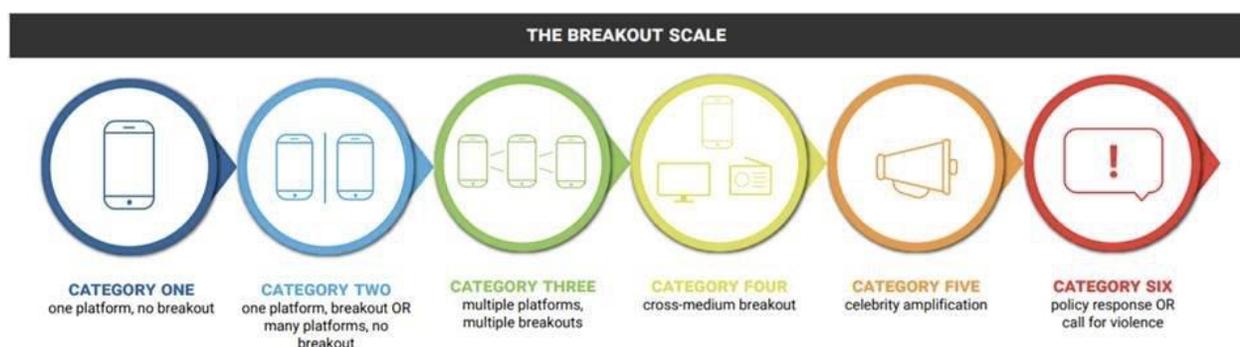
## Limitations

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

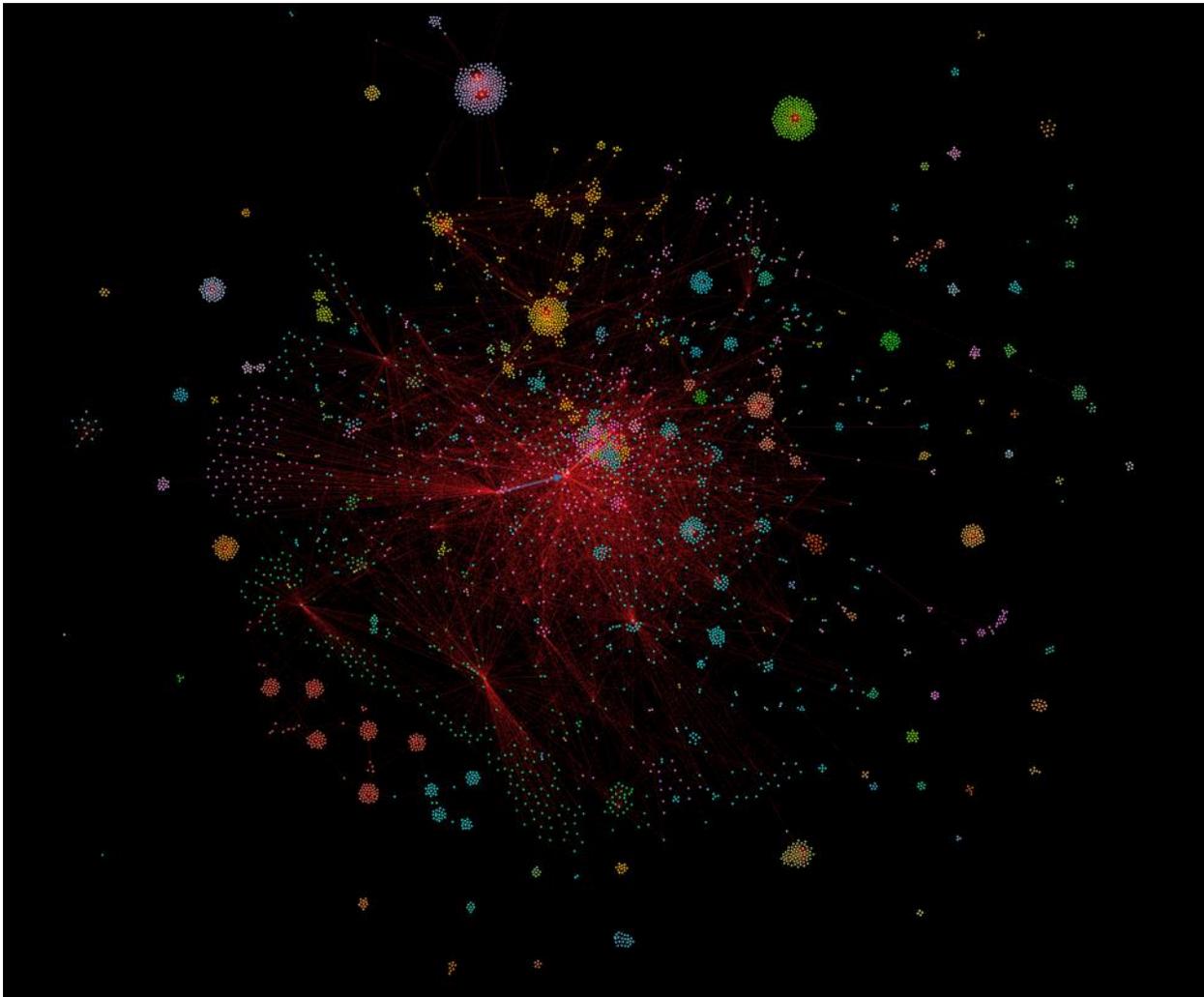
Data was collected from Twitter using the API and the following hashtags:

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

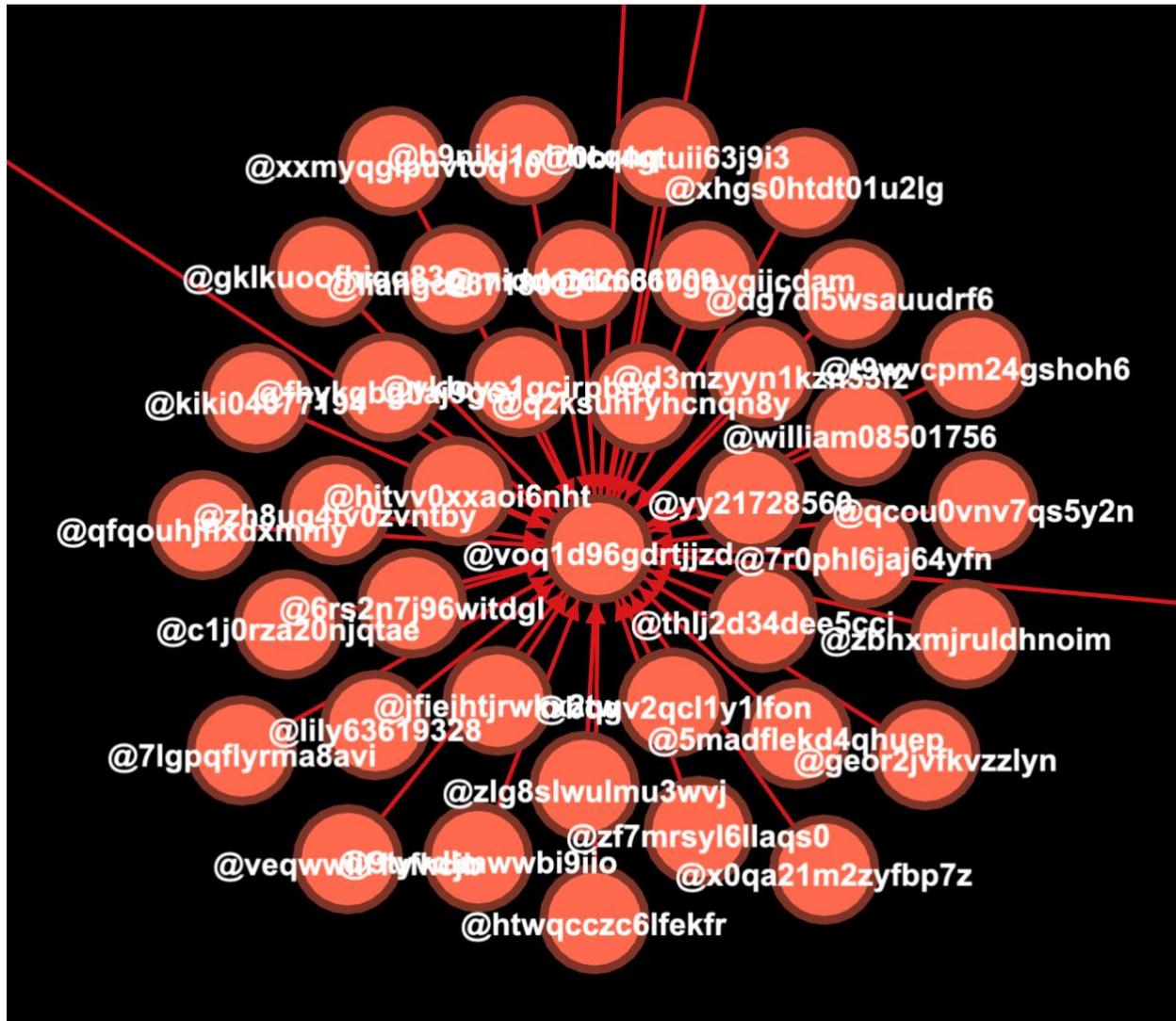
These tags were repeated targets of pro-China propaganda sentiment and amplified or discredited subjects using those hashtags.

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.



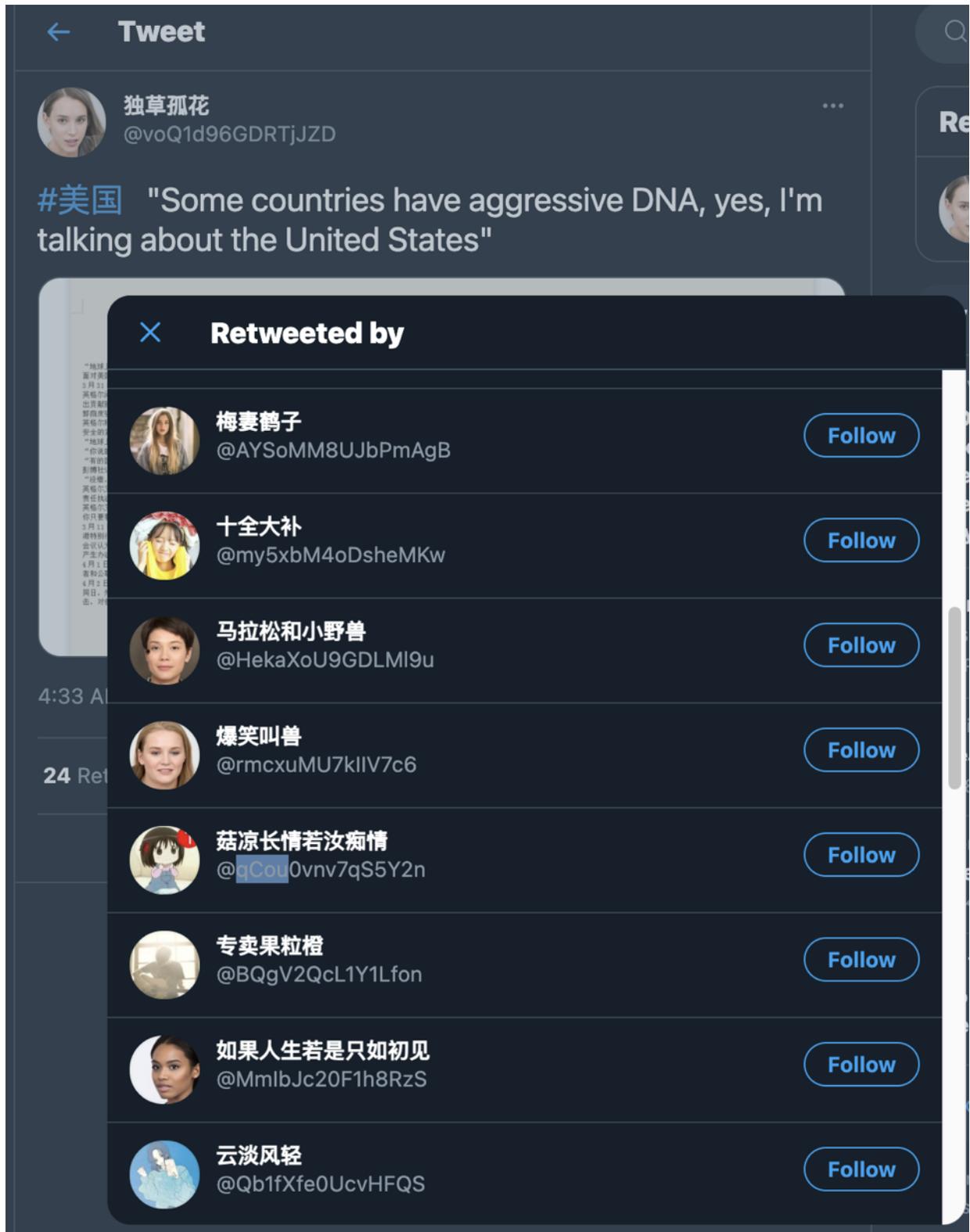
We can see the nature of how some of the accounts operated in the network in more granular detail by looking at accounts that were identified as repeatedly posting pro-China propaganda. For example, account @voQ1d96GDRTjJZD is centred in the middle of the cluster below.



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.



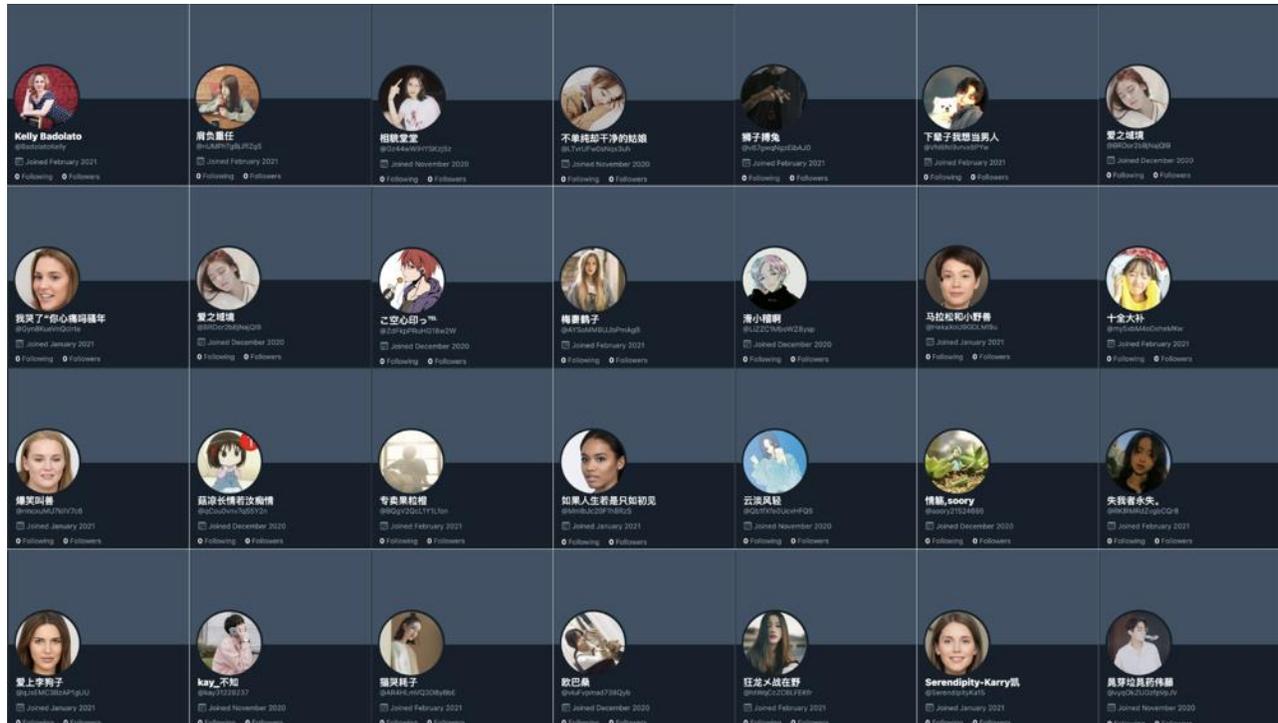
Below is a screenshot of the accounts that retweeted that post seen above.



The screenshot shows a tweet from the user 独草孤花 (@voQ1d96GDRTjJZD) with the text "#美国 'Some countries have aggressive DNA, yes, I'm talking about the United States'". Below the tweet is a modal window titled "Retweeted by" listing seven accounts that retweeted the post. Each account entry includes a profile picture, the account name, the handle, and a "Follow" button.

Profile Picture	Account Name	Handle	Action
	梅婁鹤子	@AYSoMM8UJbPmAgB	Follow
	十全大补	@my5xbM4oDsheMKw	Follow
	马拉松和小野兽	@HekaXoU9GDLMl9u	Follow
	爆笑叫兽	@rmcxuMU7klIV7c6	Follow
	菇凉长情若汝痴情	@qCoU0vvnv7qS5Y2n	Follow
	专卖果粒橙	@BQgV2QcL1Y1Lfon	Follow
	如果人生若是只如初见	@MmlbJc20F1h8RzS	Follow
	云淡风轻	@Qb1fXfe0UcvHFQS	Follow

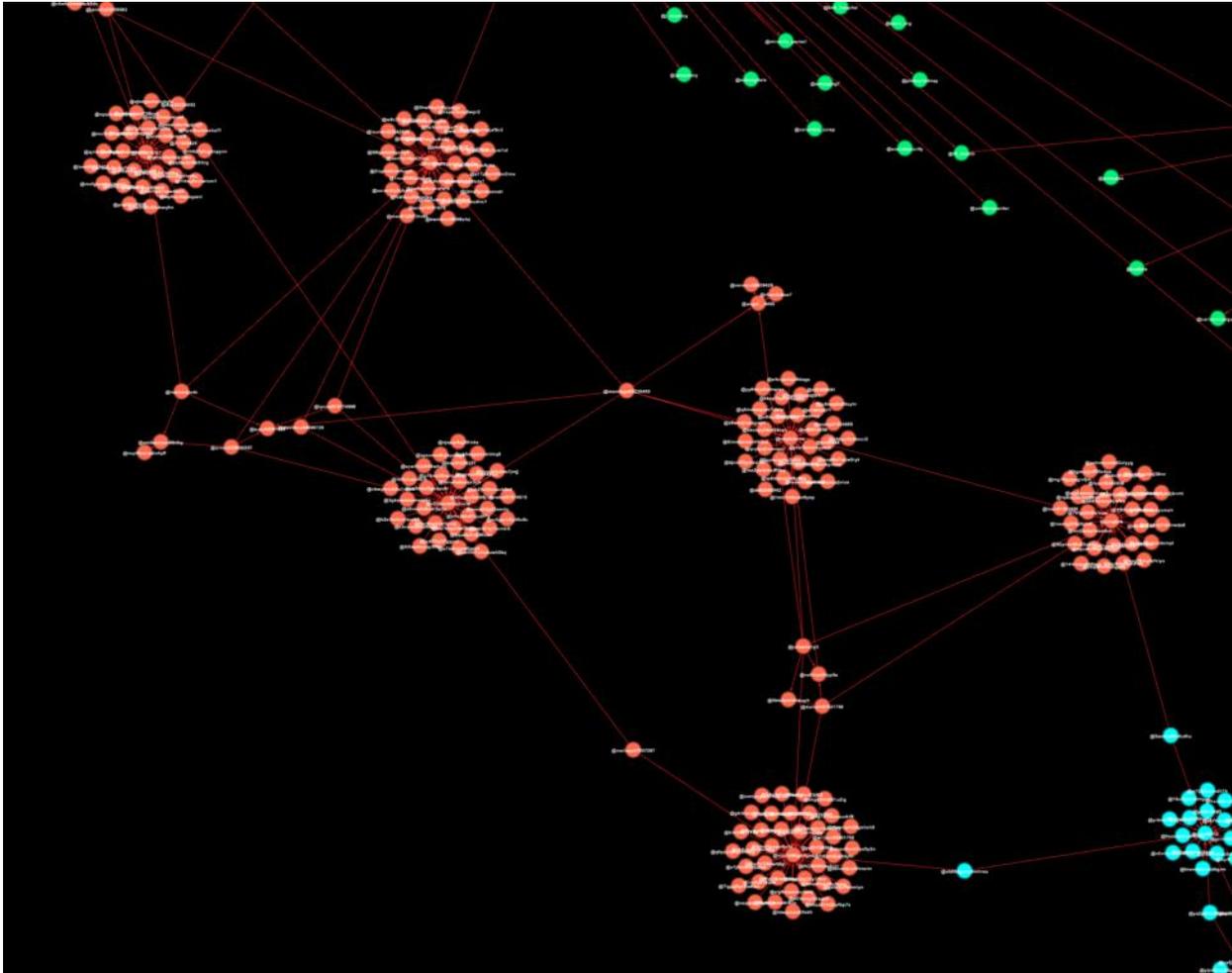
All the accounts retweeting that post, and many others like it, follow zero accounts, and have zero followers. Their purpose is to amplify content.



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 redicious ! 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

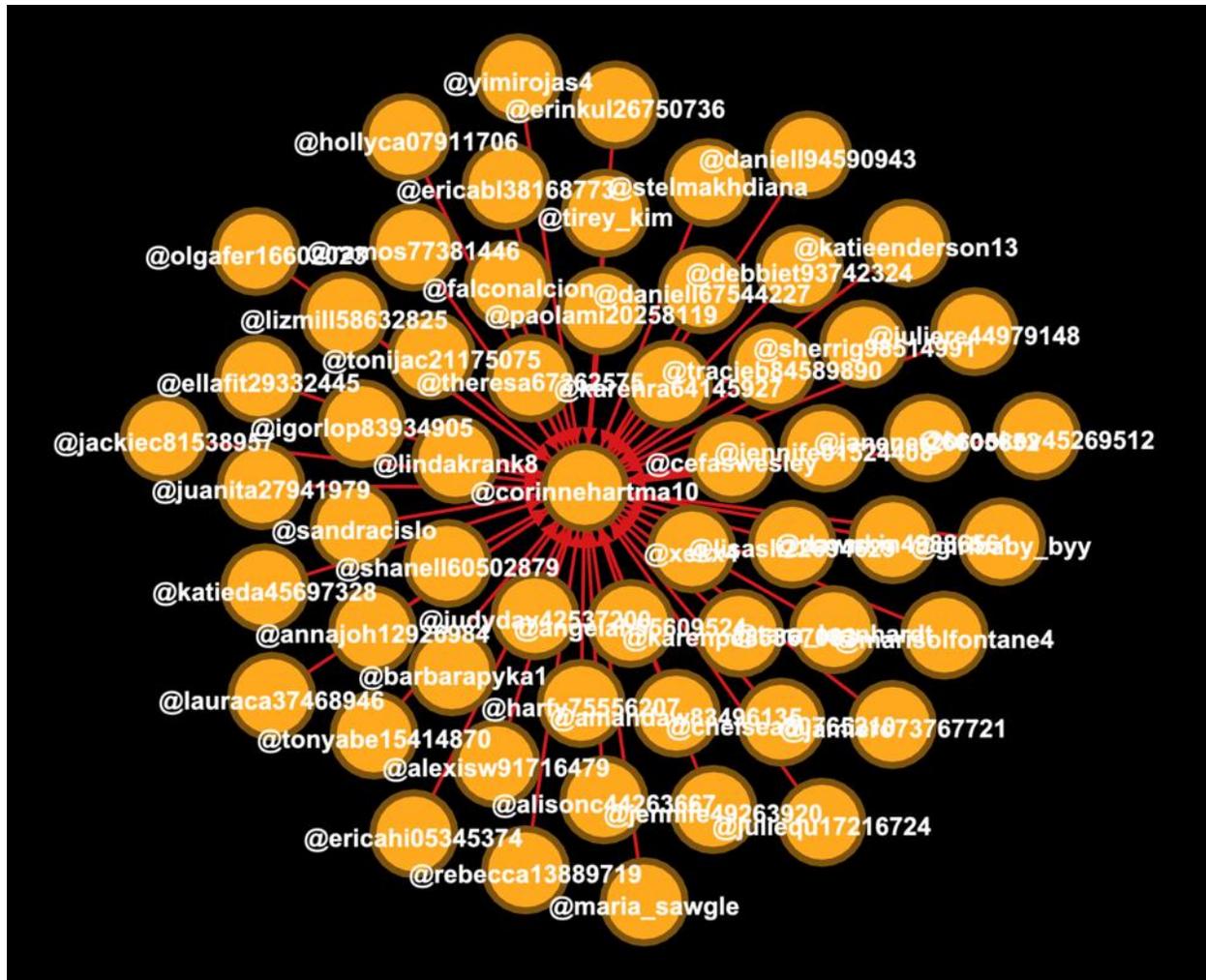
 **QunWenjing** @WenjingQun · Mar 25  
Replying to @Zoe51610873  
hope more people know the truth

 **LingMiaoKe** @ling\_miaoKe · Mar 25  
Replying to @Zoe51610873  
a lie is always a lie

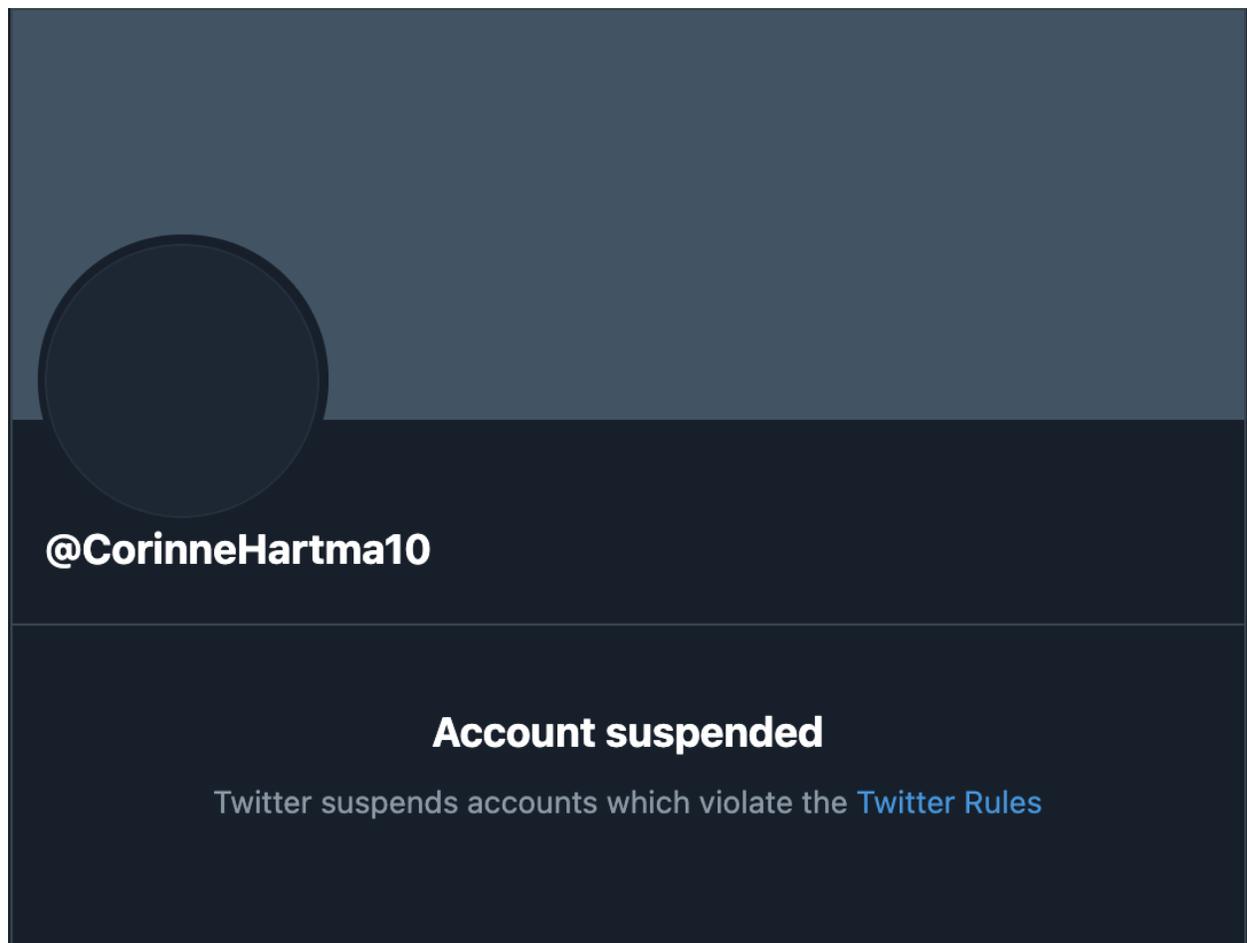


During the collection of Twitter accounts, some of the posters and their amplifier clusters appeared to be removed by Twitter. This was possibly due to automated indicators picked up by the platform.

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



Subsequently, the account was suspended from the platform.

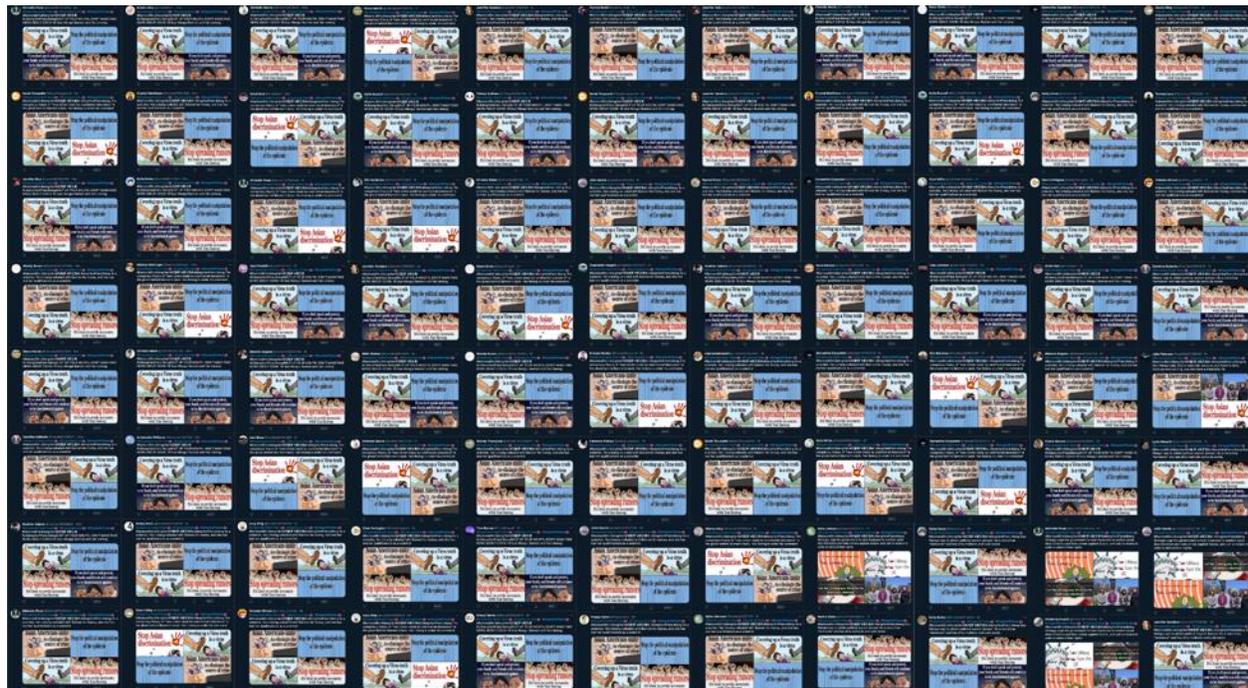


The amplification of some of the tweets in the network were simple to spot in the research. For example, some tweets gave a very inauthentic imbalance of comment, retweet and like ratios, as seen in the examples below from accounts [@memory\\_017](#), [@judewow](#) and [@AdelitaAdelisa](#).





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.



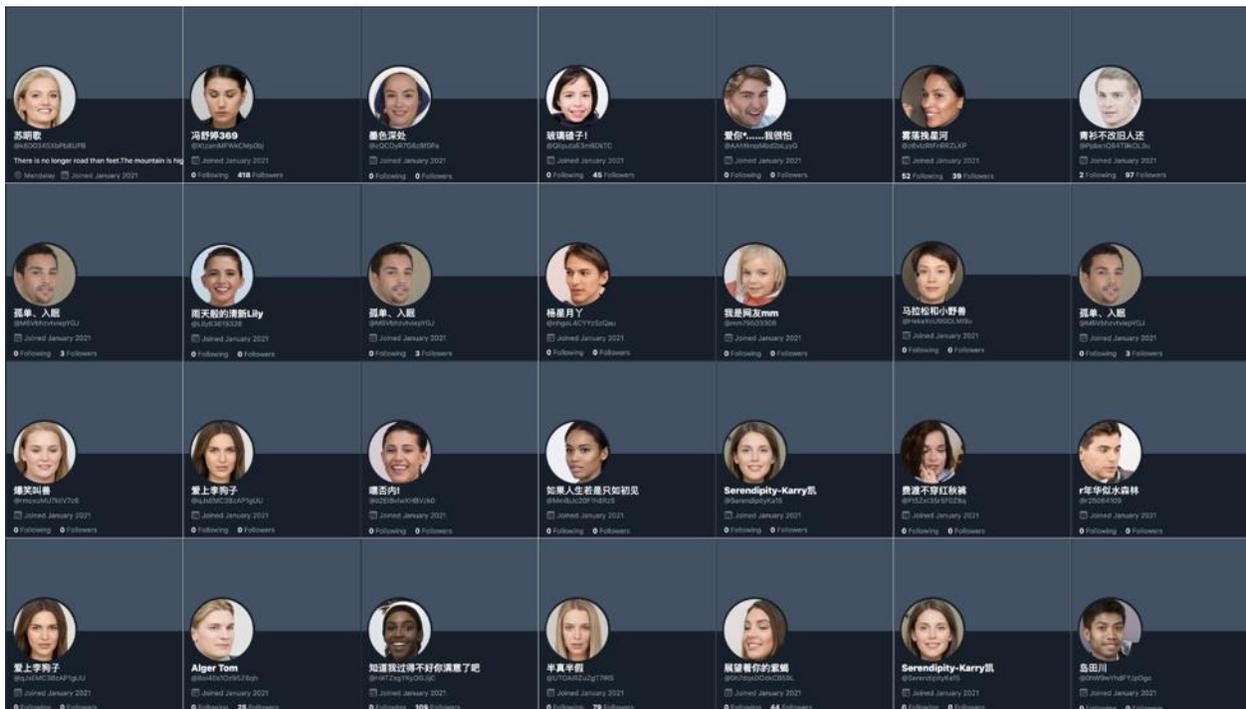
Throughout the research, we also identified a significant presence of StyleGAN images used as profile pictures within the networks.

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.

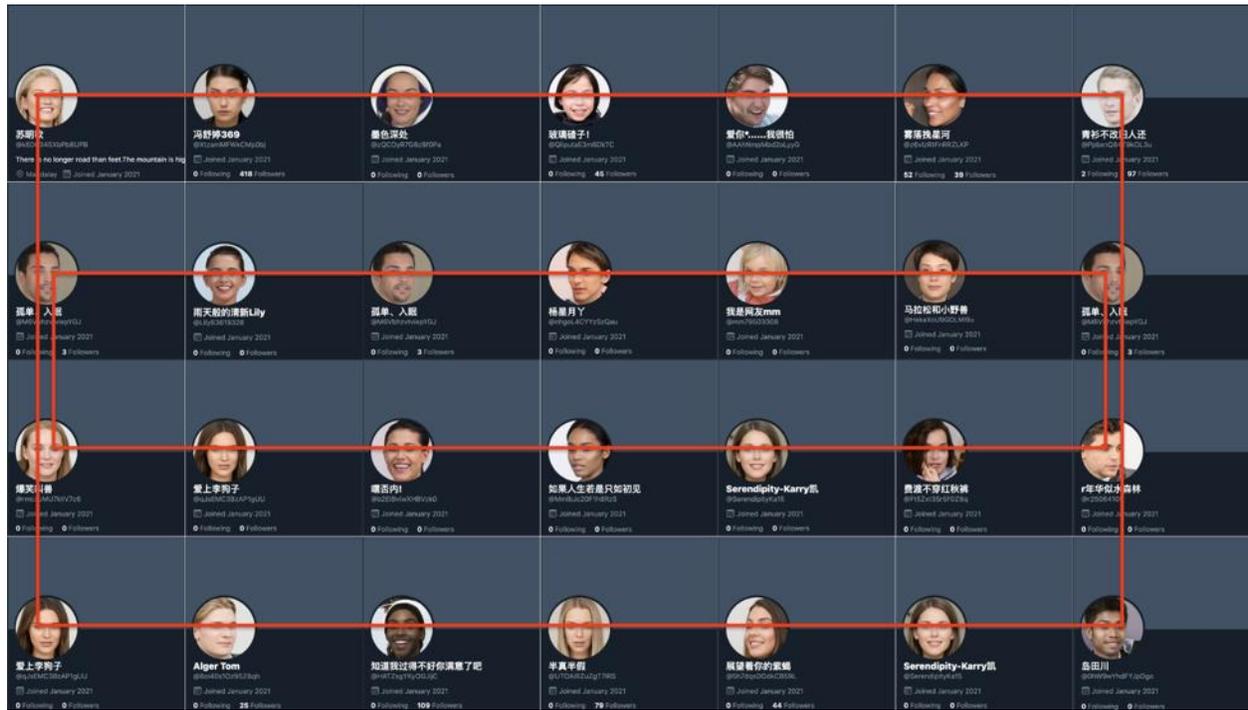
Reporting from the [New York Times](#) explained the use of these images and the ability for the public to buy 'fake people'. The website [thispersondoesnotexist.com](#) has also made StyleGAN faces more accessible to the public through a simple 'refresh for a new face' ability.

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.

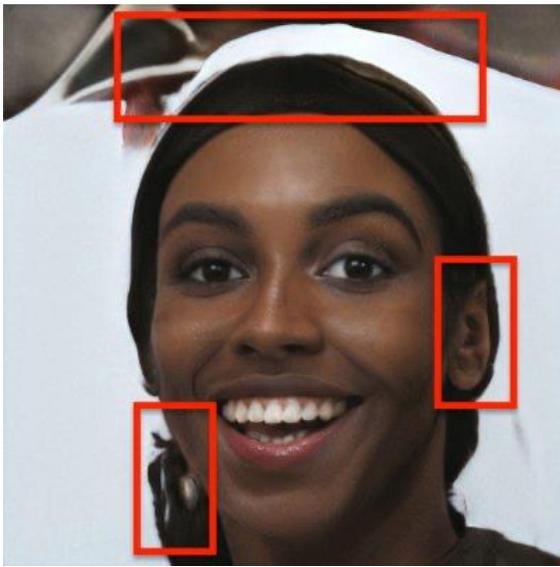


There are a number of techniques we can use to assess the legitimacy of these fake faces. Many of the assessments look at the structure of the eyes and their location. The StyleGAN images have the eyes in the same location in each image, so we can use the easy identification of the centrality of the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

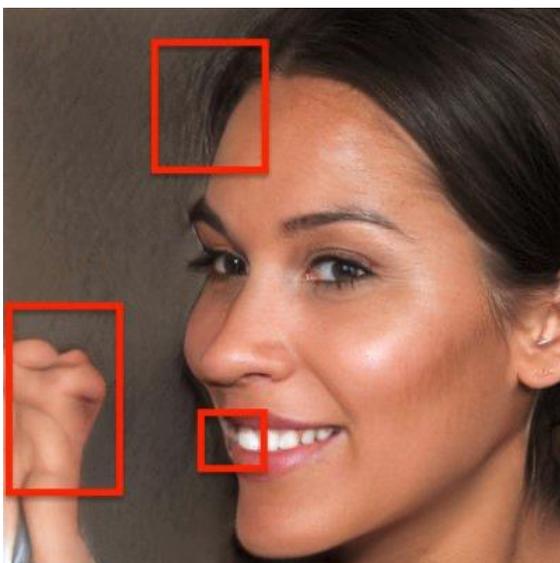


Due to the nature of GAN-based images, the 'blending' of the images often leaves blurred or mismatched parts of the face that a detailed look can identify.

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.

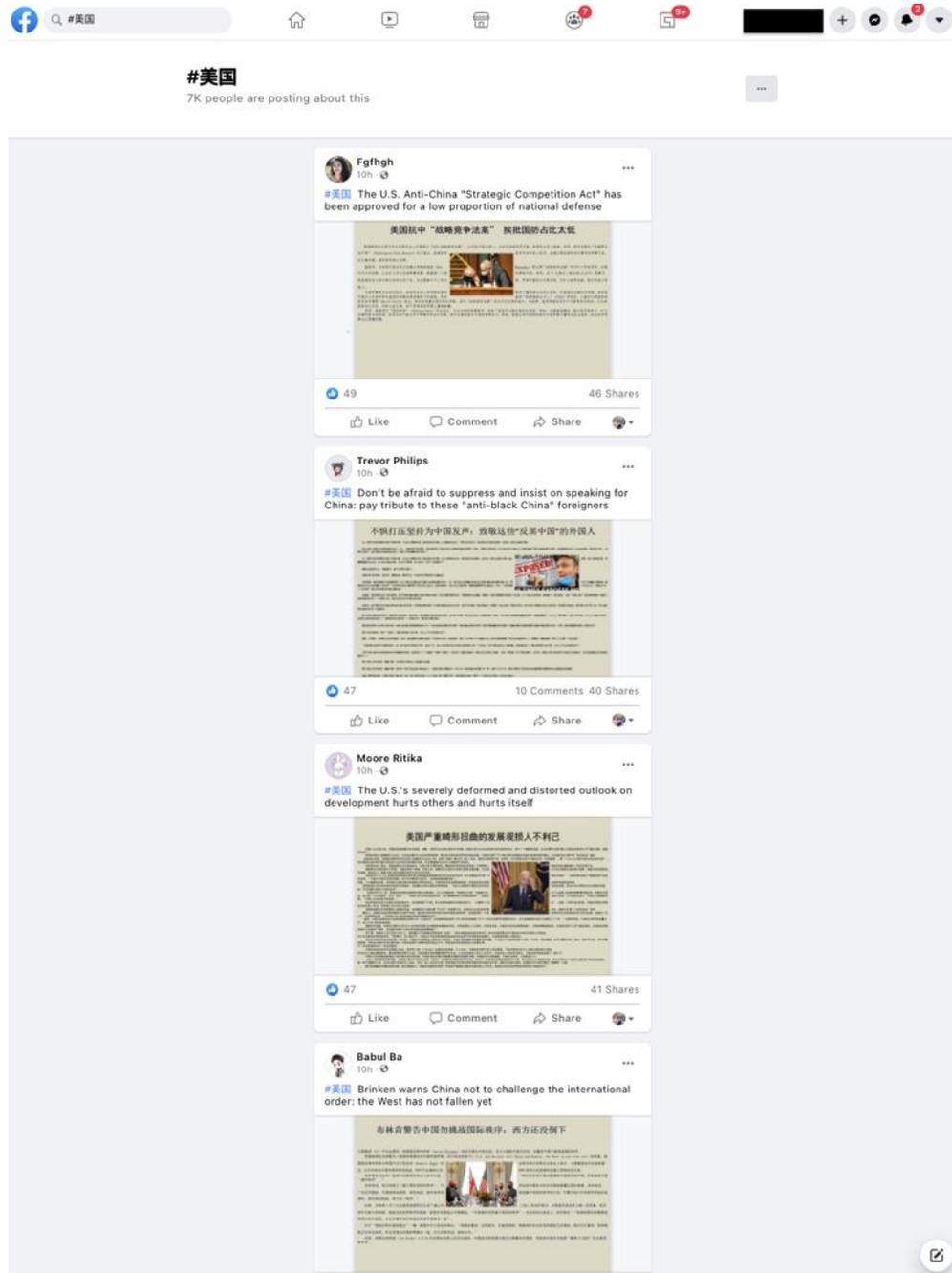




## Facebook: Repurposed accounts and StyleGAN amplifiers

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.



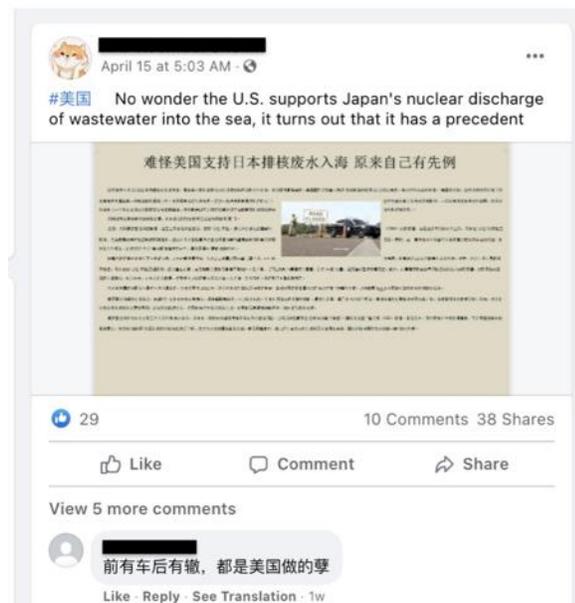
Comments can be tracked as seen below.



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.



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.

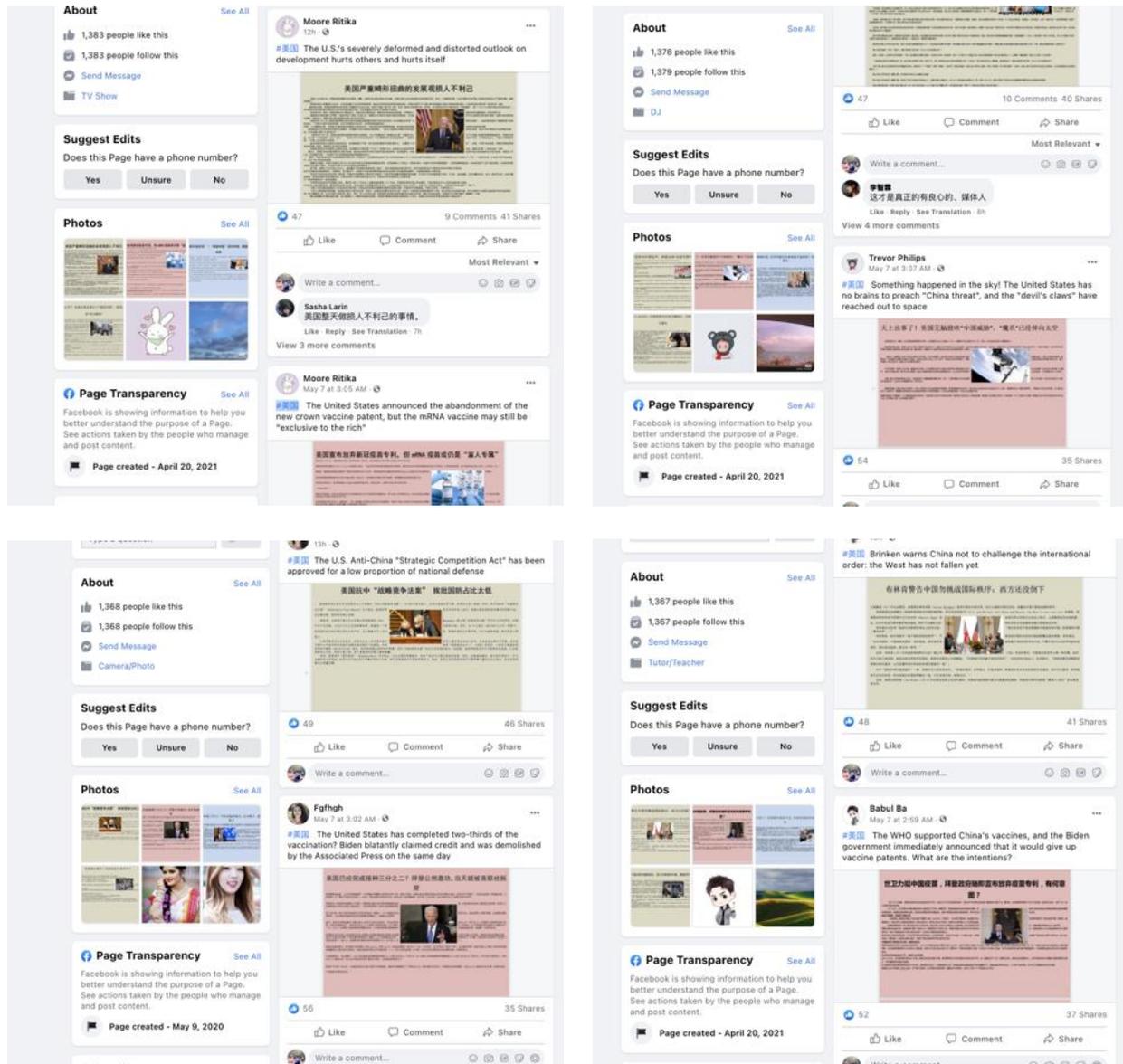
Publicly available metrics on Facebook of amplification of likes, comments and shares give a possible indication as to the number of accounts amplifying the content.



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.



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 Page 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.

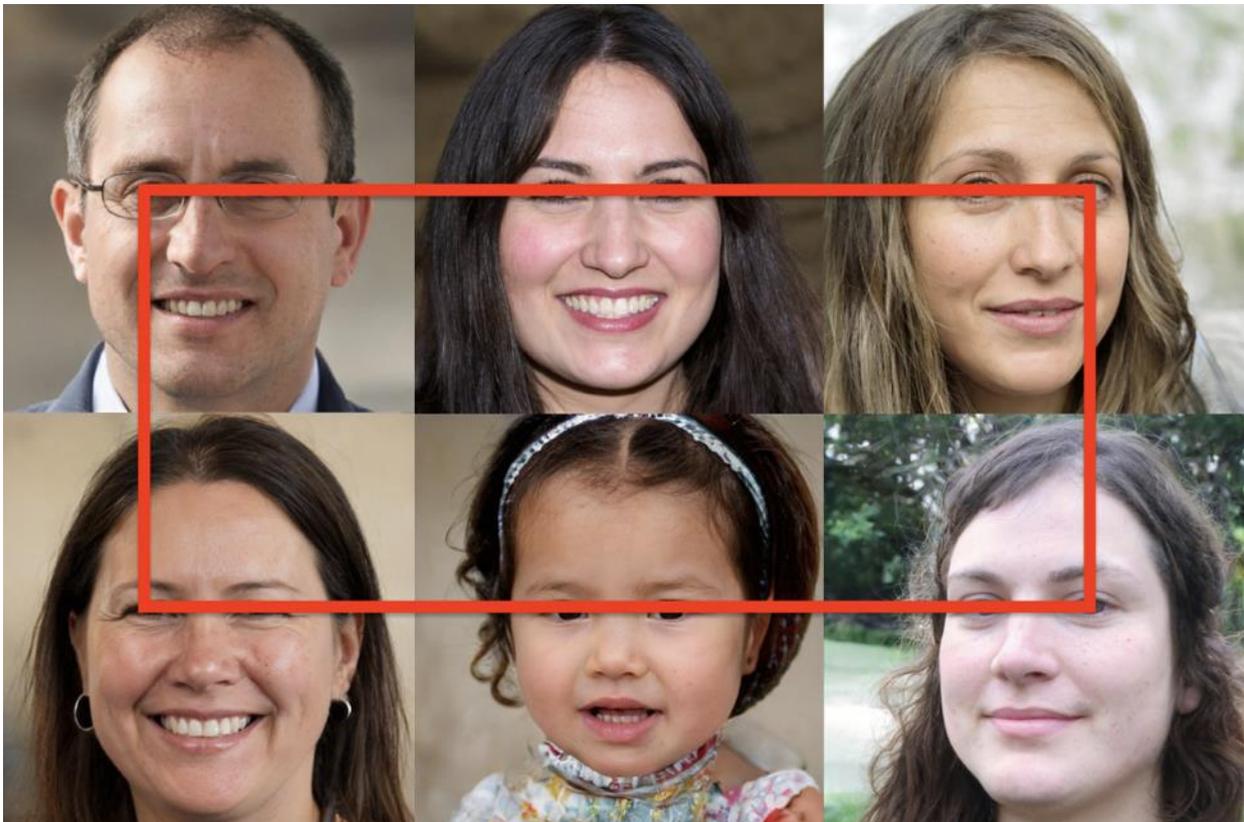
Those accounts identified above were used to comment on, like and share posts. Below is an example of the comments and the likes of one post.



Those images can be tiled as follows.

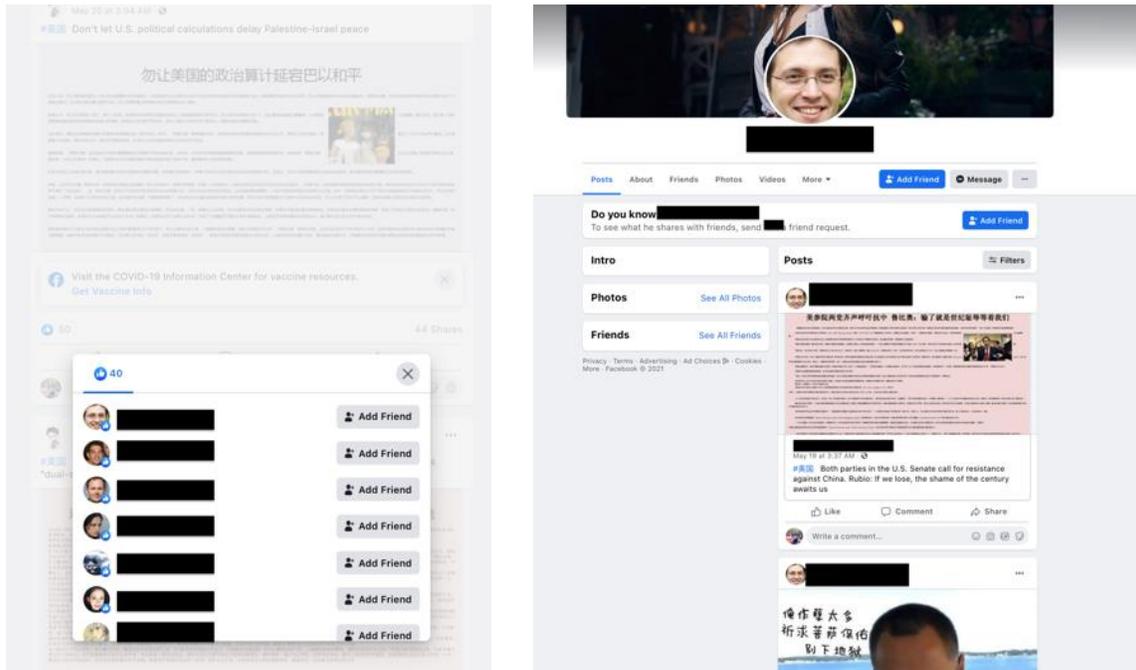


And then assessed for centrality of the eyes as seen below.



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.



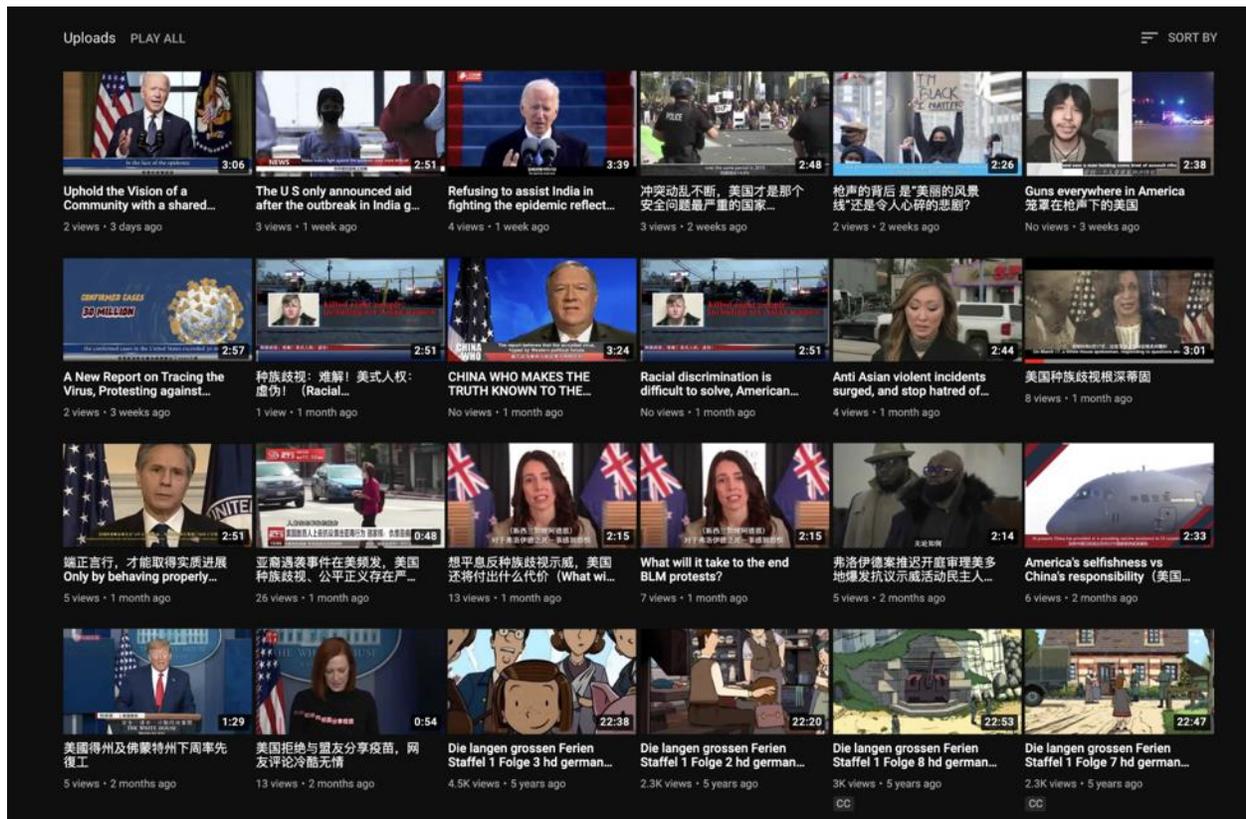
## YouTube: Cross-posting of narratives through repurposed accounts

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.



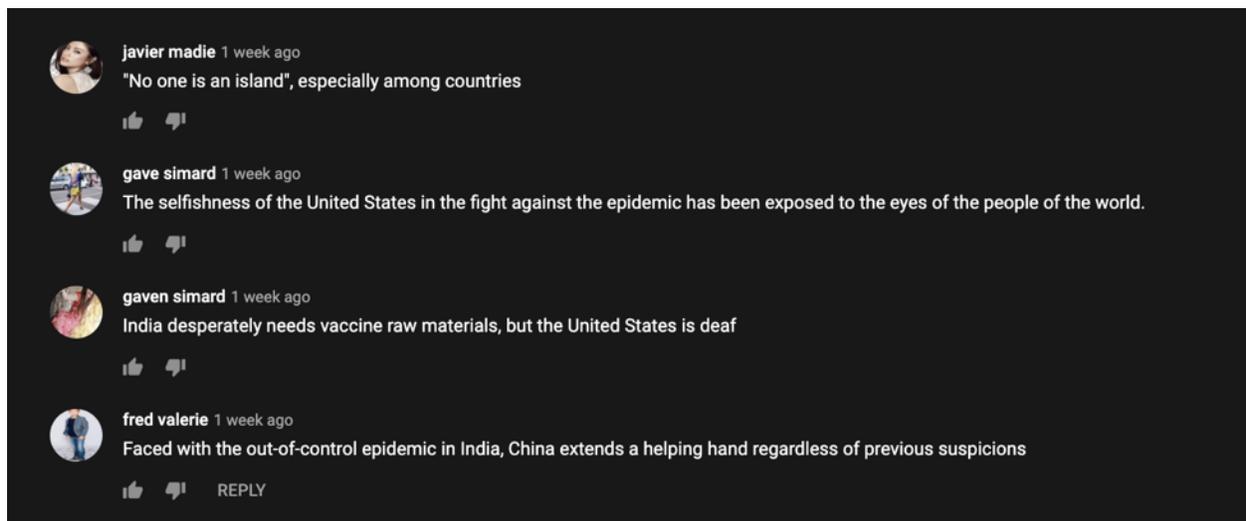


The narratives of the videos remained consistent with the network's common themes (covered in the following section) and used contrasting stories to sow doubt and discredit opponents, such as the US. The sharing of these narratives through graphic video content on YouTube is very similar to previous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

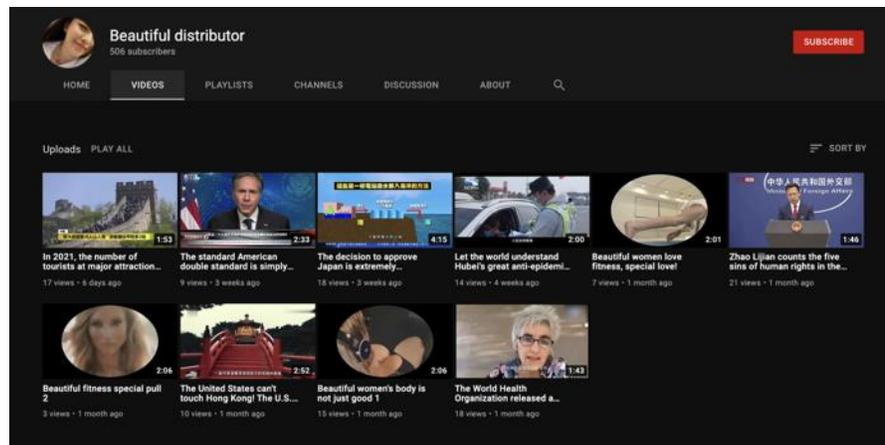
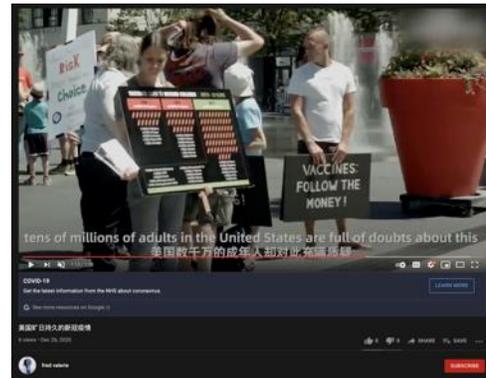
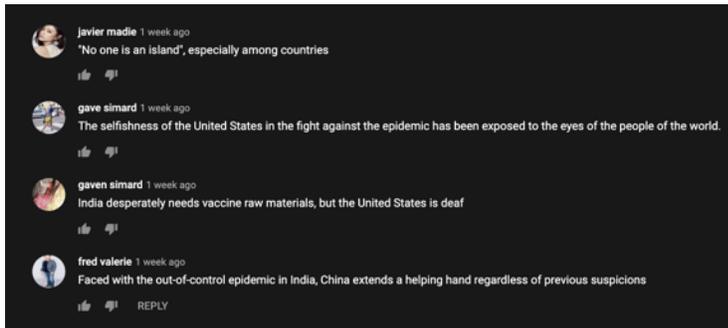
In one [video](#), for example, the situation in India was used as a contrast to the US, where it is alleged in the video that there is a dire need for vaccines in India, yet factories in the US allow them to expire.



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.

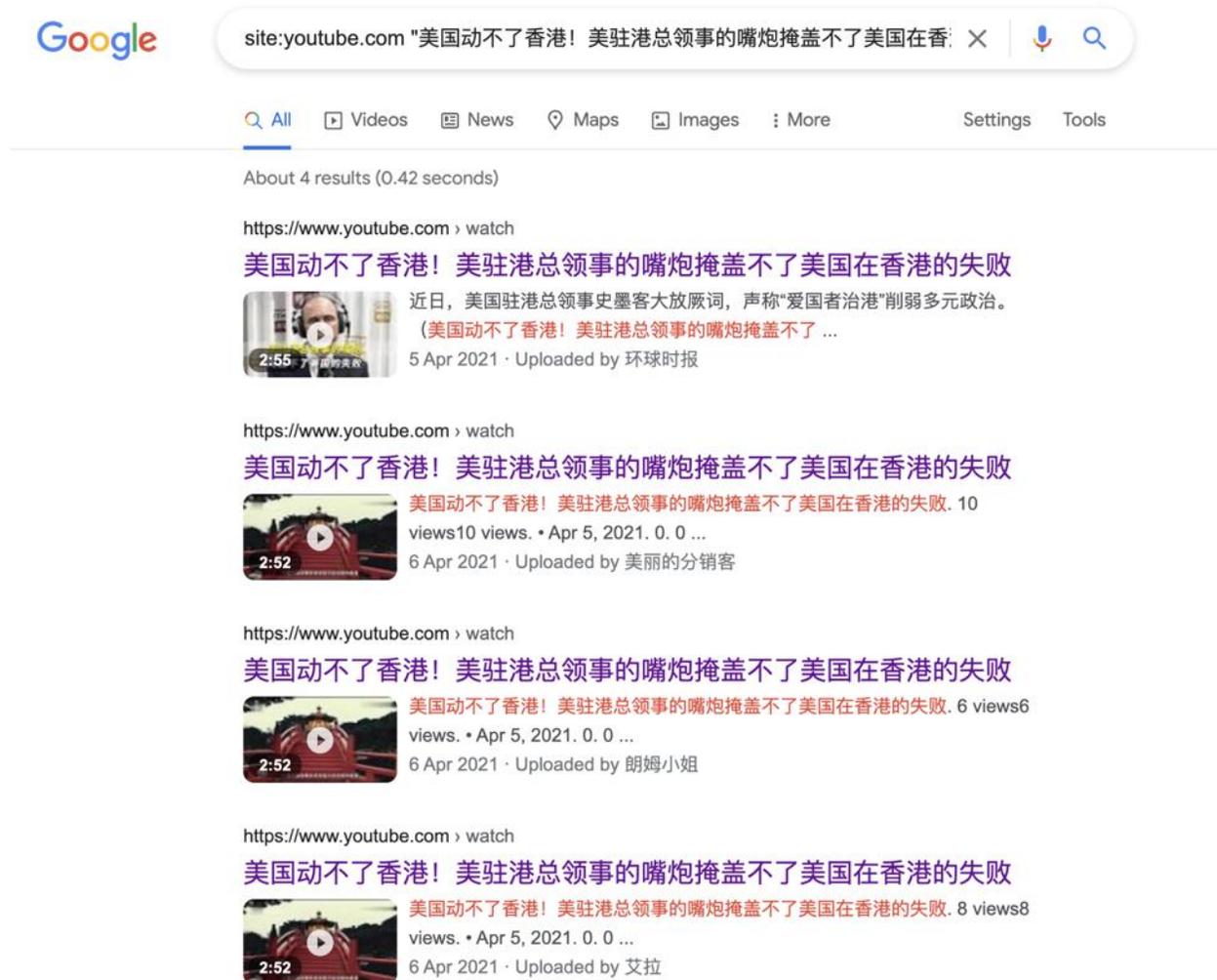


Some of those 'commenter' accounts also had videos uploaded through their accounts as well, indicating that YouTube accounts act as content sharers as well as amplifiers. In the screenshots below we can see commenters 'fred valerie' and '美丽的分销客' also had video content.



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”).



The screenshot shows a Google search interface. The search bar contains the text: "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" X". Below the search bar, there are navigation options: All, Videos, News, Maps, Images, and More. The search results show four video entries, all with the same 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". Each entry includes a video thumbnail, a brief description, the view count, the upload date (6 Apr 2021), and the uploader's name.

Thumbnail	Description	Views	Upload Date	Uploader
	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...)	10 views	6 Apr 2021	环球时报
	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	6 Apr 2021	美丽的分销客
	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 Apr 2021	朗姆小姐
	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	6 Apr 2021	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/UCHIT4P-MFKqfFId6L\\_JcQ3Q](https://mattw.io/youtube-metadata/bulk?submit=true&url=https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHIT4P-MFKqfFId6L_JcQ3Q)
- <https://mattw.io/youtube-metadata/bulk?submit=true&url=https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCC6cVrLTG4qoP8pqXnSzlNQ>
- [https://mattw.io/youtube-metadata/bulk?submit=true&url=https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTs\\_SjlzOHsWLkFVgWCh-qA](https://mattw.io/youtube-metadata/bulk?submit=true&url=https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTs_SjlzOHsWLkFVgWCh-qA)

Below are the screenshots of that metadata.

Show 10 entries	Title	Author	Length	Published	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Comments
01	放下操辦，合作共贏!	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	2021-05-07T07:30:44Z	15	0	0	11
01	盟友疫情崩溃之际，"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，美国白宫逼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	14	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	佛洛伊德遭暴徒致死 美官员称暴徒成立	孙文敏	2m 21s	2021-04-22T04:42:48Z	10	0	0	10
01	美国抗的红色警戒! 暴力示威活动在美"炸开"? 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人死亡后	孙文敏	1m 43s	2021-04-18T02:33:36Z	23	0	0	11
01	日本疫情 美国双标遭复发	孙文敏	3m 10s	2021-04-16T04:10:06Z	11	0	0	10
01	日本不负责任 美国应保持公正	孙文敏	1m 57s	2021-04-15T03:54:54Z	17	0	0	12

Showing 1 to 10 of 13 entries

Show 10 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	標準的美式雙標，簡直讓絕?!	美丽的分销客	2m 33s	2021-04-16T05:11:31Z	9	0	0	10
01	批日決定極不負責任 美指符全球安全標準	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	赵立坚历数美国人权五宗罪 奉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2	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! 美驻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	美女的身材不是随便的!	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"极不可能"通过实验室引入人类!	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

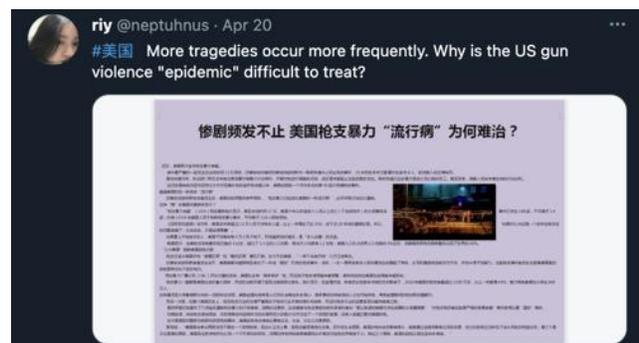
Documentation of those narratives and how they are promoted are explored below.

## 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.





疑惑不解

@67XAYaTnTpLsj90

#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.



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.



### 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.



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.



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



## US and discrimination

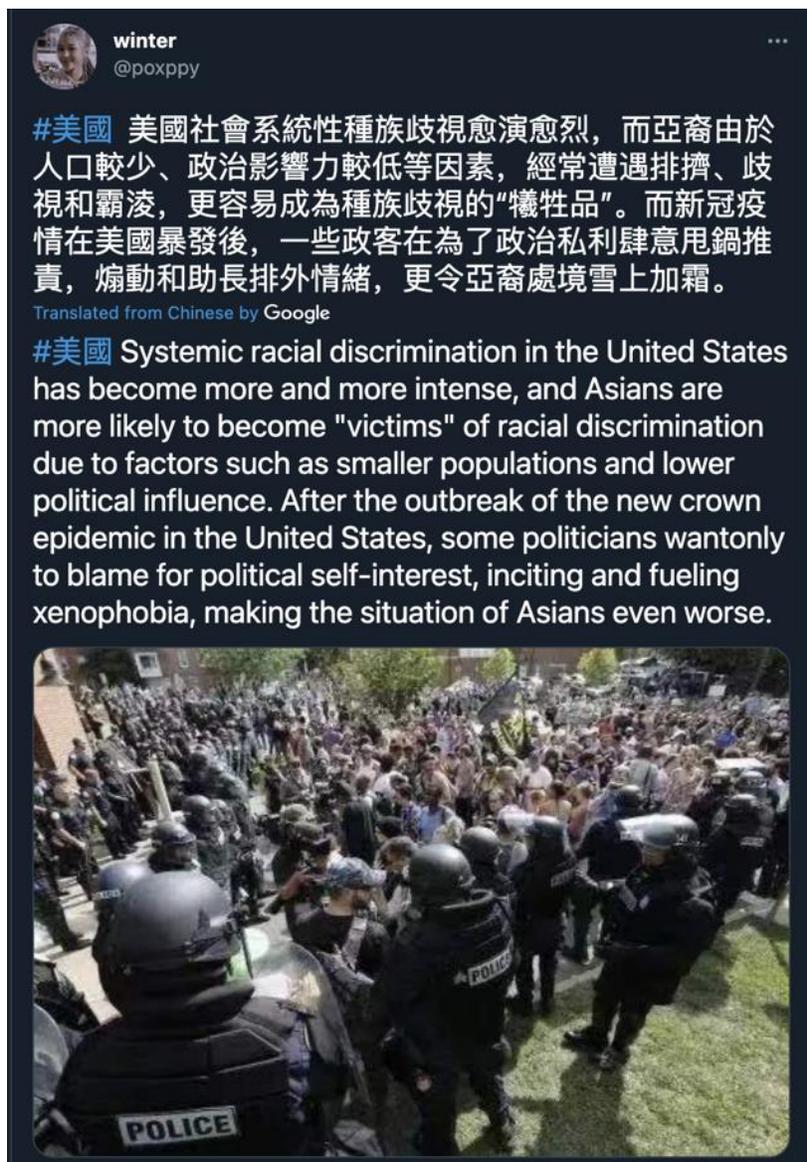
A rising theme detected in the network's narratives targets racial discrimination in the US. One side of the narrative targets the issue of attacks on Asian ethnicities in the US, while the other continued to target the Black Lives Matter movement, using the movement to sow discord.

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.



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

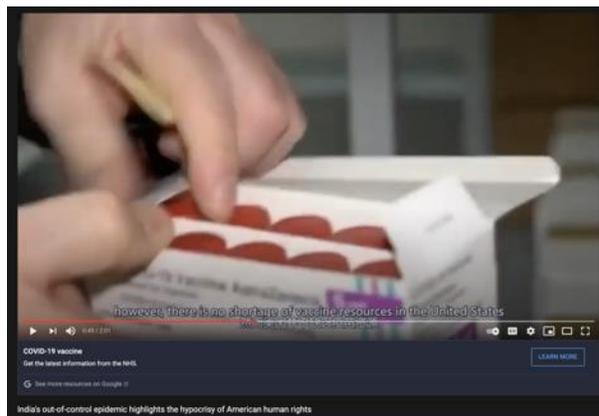


## US and India coronavirus

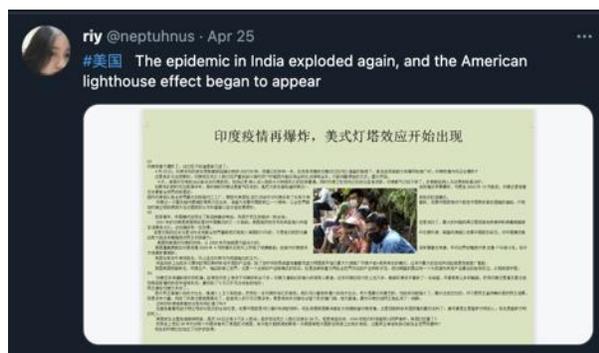
A narrative echoed throughout the networks targets the grim circumstances of COVID-19 in India and targets the response of the US.

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

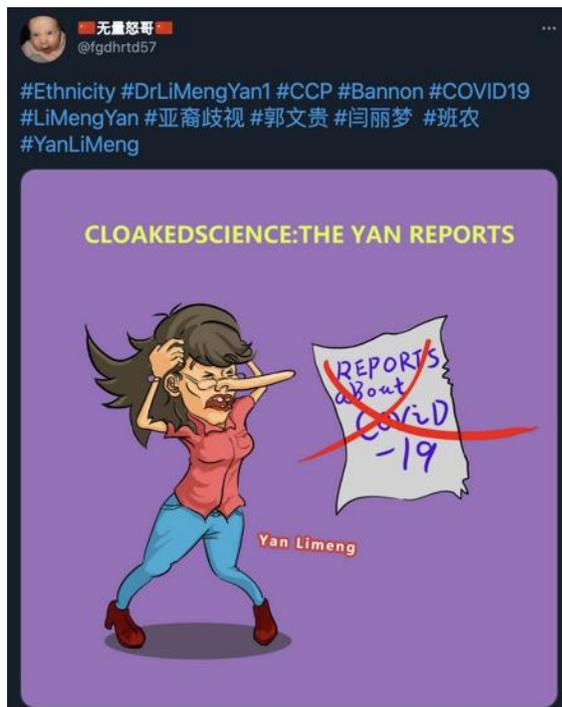
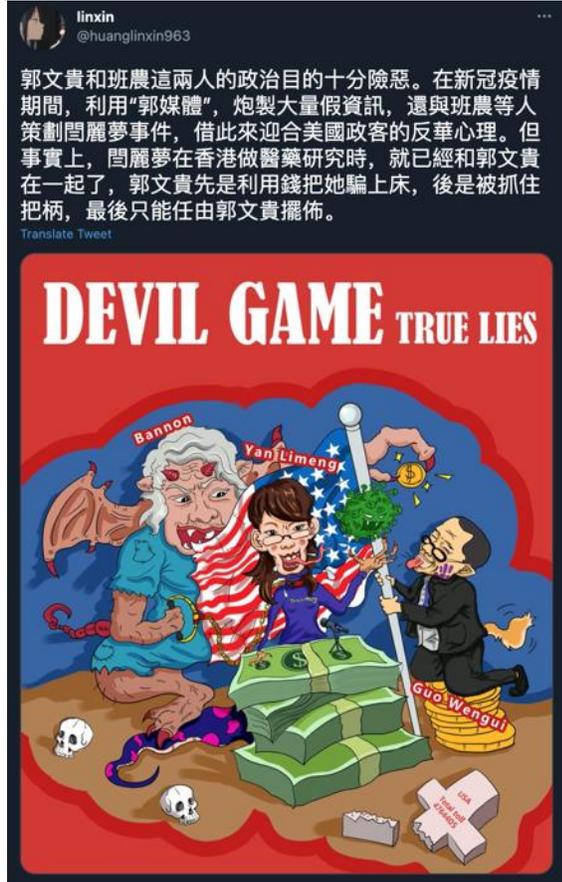
Numerous hashtags, namely #DrLiMengYan1, #YanLiMeng and #LiMengYan have been used by the network in a bid to discredit Chinese virologist Li-Meng Yan, after she published a report in September 2020, claiming China was responsible for the creation of coronavirus. The report's findings have been largely 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 @U5xzRTrtzip2tq.



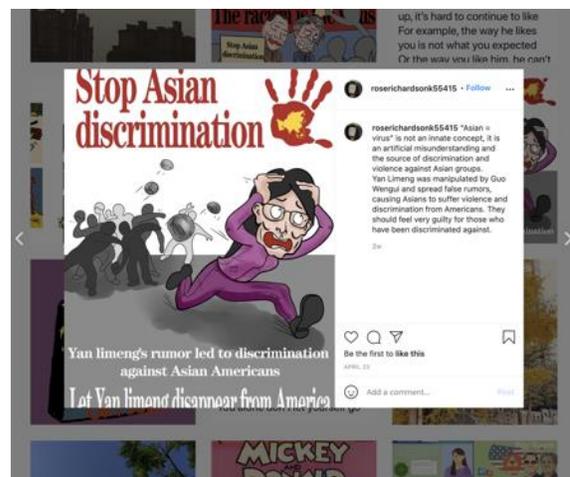
In the screenshot below, the traditional tactic of a throwaway account with few followers is used to spam a hashtag and is amplified by the surrounding network.



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



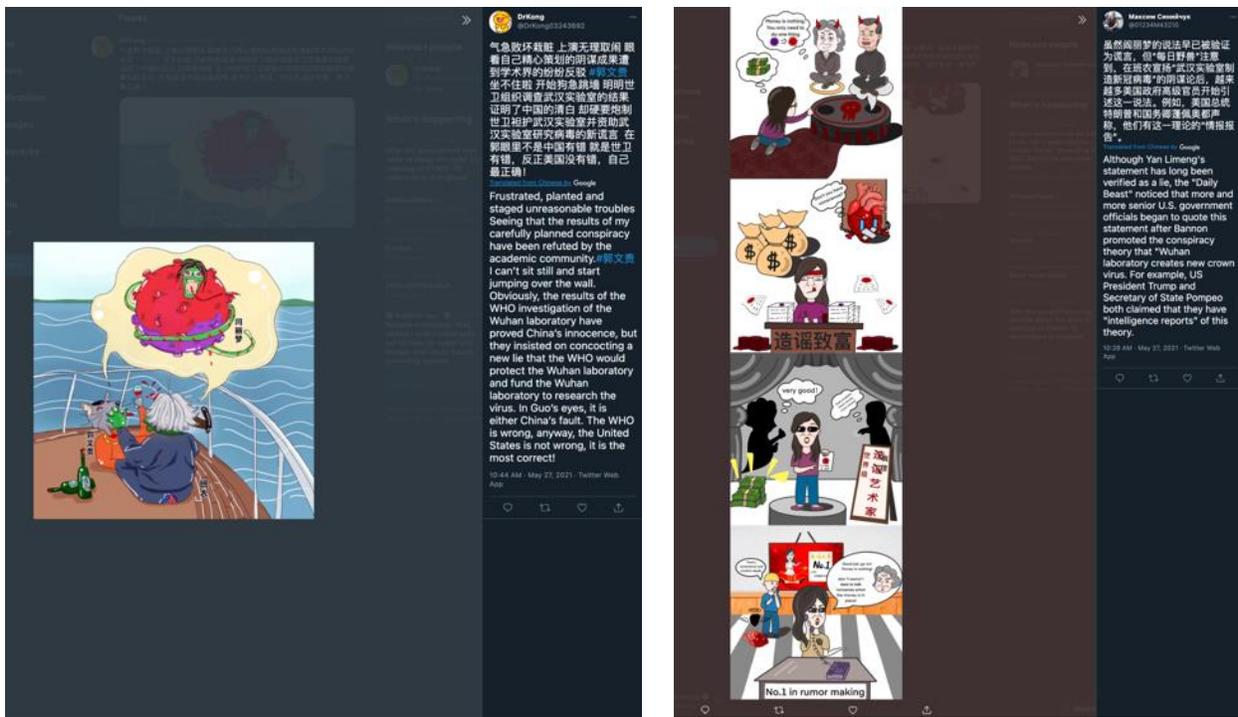
Similar posts targeting Dr Li-Meng Yan were also identified on Instagram, with less amplification than other platforms, seen below.



## 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.



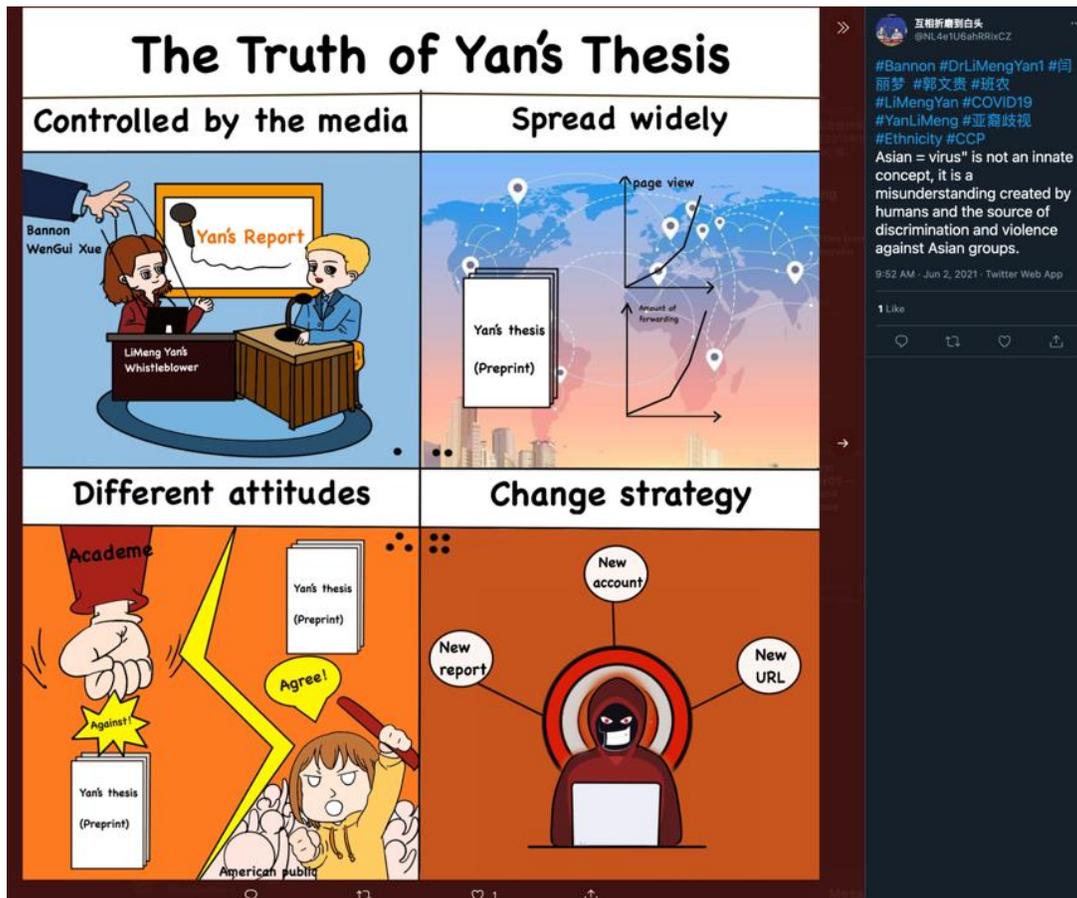
The content also targets a much wider angle of sowing doubt within the US Government system by claiming a strategic advisor of the White House was the cause of the Wuhan Lab report. Seen in this [tweet](#), and this one (below).



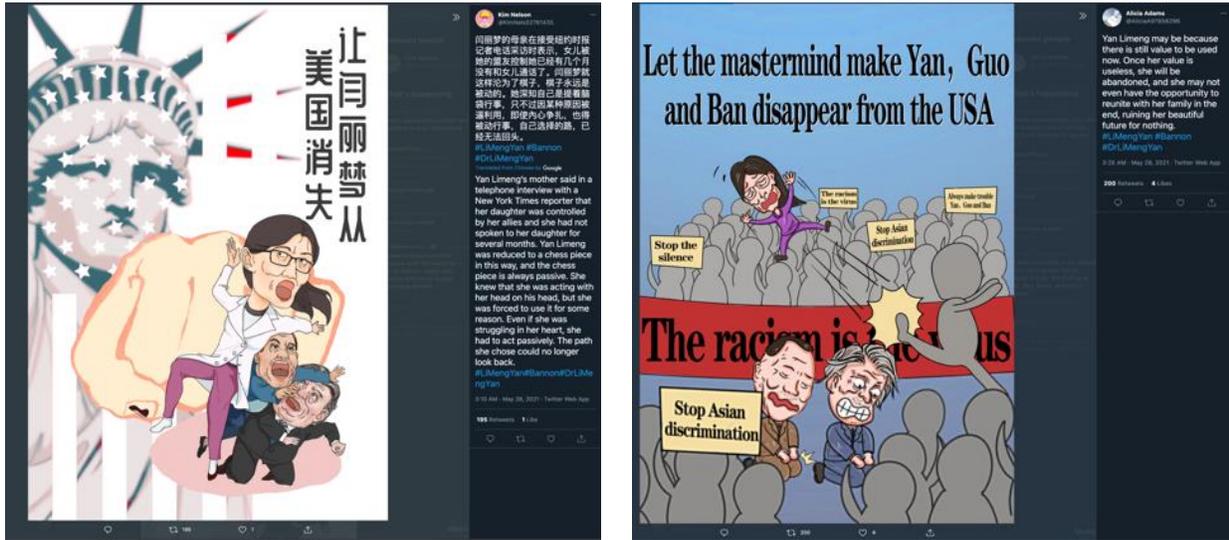
The research by Li-Meng Yan has also given the network the attack vector of targeting academic 'standards' in the west. Again, amplifying content to sow doubt across the industry of research groups.



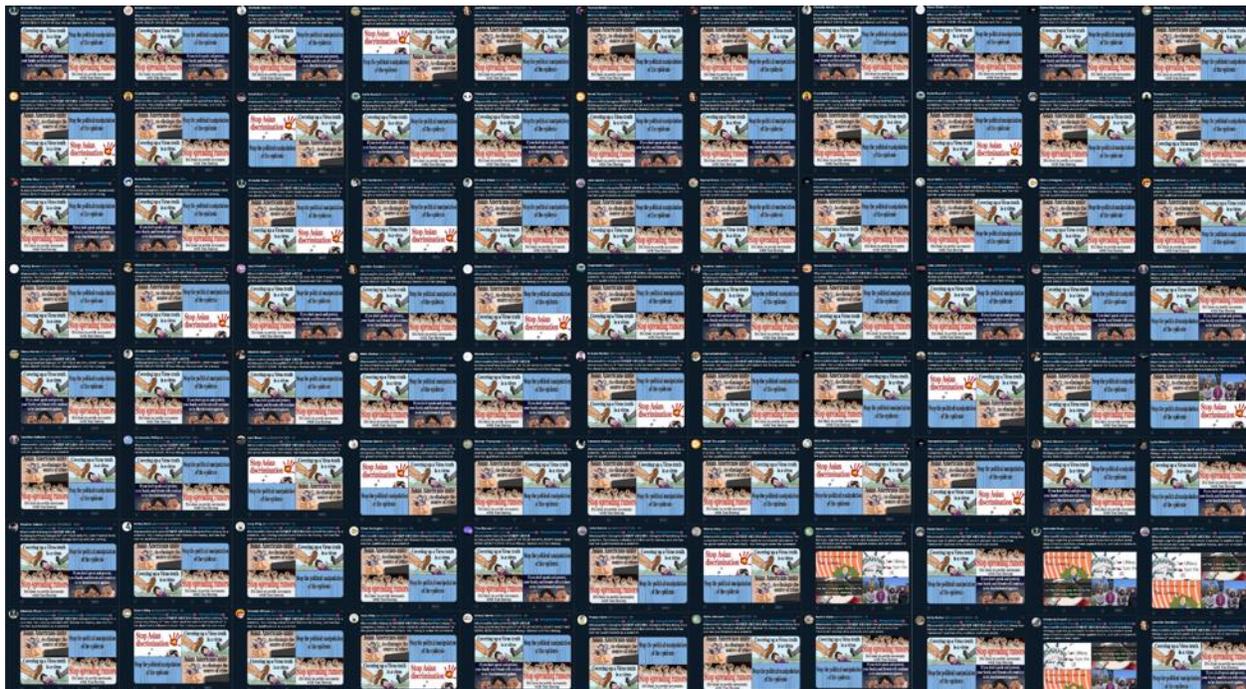
Many of these posts have been used with the tags #Bannon #DrLiMengYan1 #闫丽梦 #郭文贵 #班农 #LiMengYan #COVID19 #YanLiMeng #亚裔歧视 #Ethnicity #CCP. An example can be seen in this [tweet](#).



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.

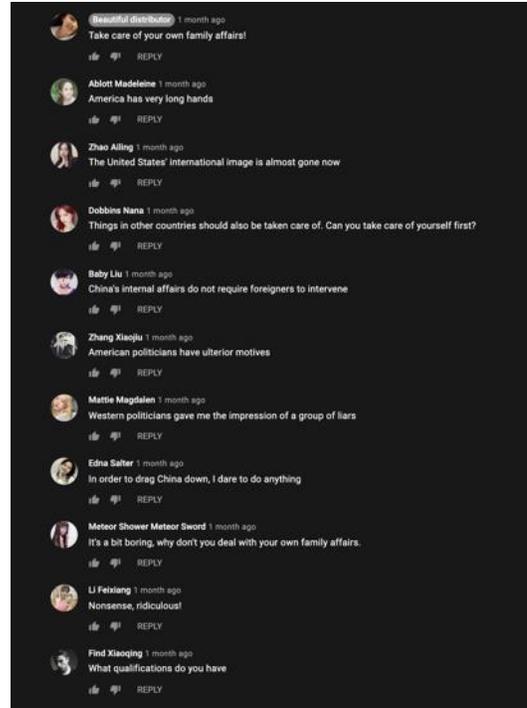




One of the YouTube accounts our research found that was sharing content extremely similar to that of the Twitter network, also referenced the attempt at US influence in Hong Kong.

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.



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.

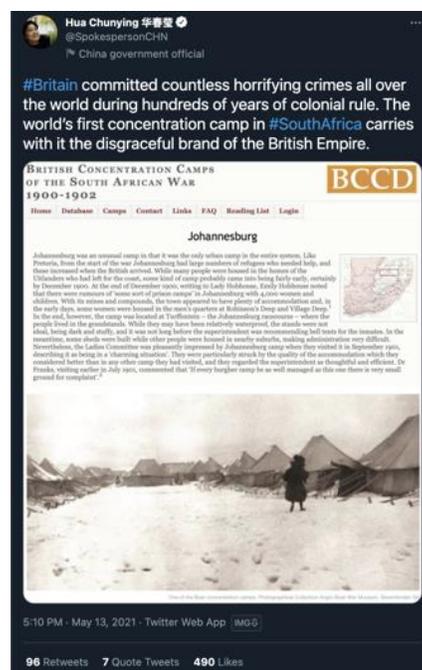


## US and China relations

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.

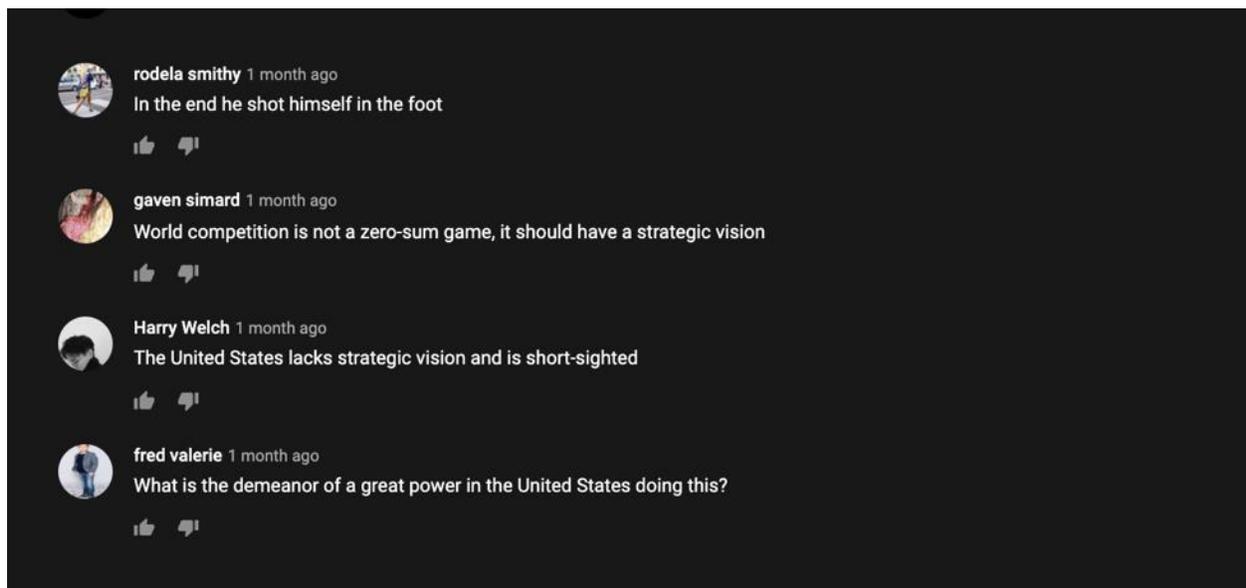
This US-China rivalry isn't only seen in content shared by the inauthentic network, but also by Chinese state representatives' accounts. For example, we found very similar narratives shared by Chinese Government officials which indicate an overlap in the narratives shared by both legitimate accounts,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



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.



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



## 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.





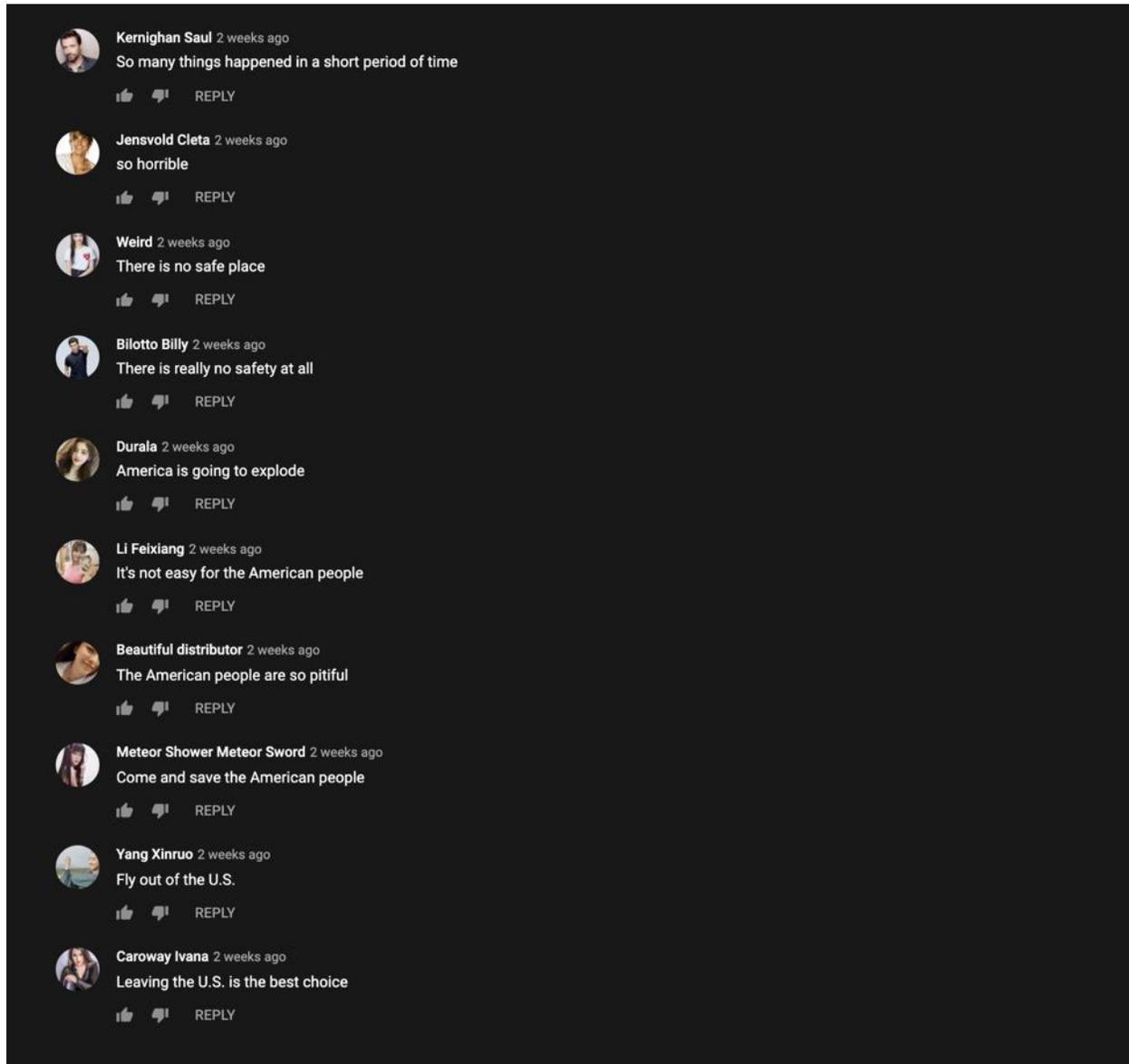
## US and violence

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.



## 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.



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