

Twitter Defends China After State Department Identifies Coronavirus Propaganda Network



by Tyler Durden

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Twitter is refuting claims from the US State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC), which found that it was "highly probable" that **the Chinese government is behind networks of Twitter accounts spewing disinformation** related to COVID-19.

Illustration: Soohee Cho/The Intercept, Getty Images

GEC head Lea Gabrielle said that the US "has uncovered a new network of inauthentic Twitter accounts, which we assess were created with the intent to amplify Chinese propaganda and disinformation," according to [CNN](#).

After reviewing 5,000 of 250,000 accounts flagged by the State Department, however, Twitter said the accounts belong to **government entities, nongovernmental organizations, and journalists** – which, we would point out, are frequent mouthpieces for the Chinese Communist Party.

Twitter – which went on a [Russian account-killing spree](#) following pressure from congressional Democrats during the Mueller investigation – doesn't see it that way.

Yet in March, an extensive investigation by [ProPublica](#) found that China has built a massive Twitter propaganda network and is using it to influence the coronavirus narrative.

*Since August 2019, ProPublica has tracked more than 10,000 suspected fake Twitter accounts **involved in a coordinated influence campaign with ties to the Chinese government**. Among those are the hacked accounts of users from around the world that now post propaganda and disinformation about the coronavirus outbreak, the Hong Kong protests and other topics of state interest.*

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*Our examination of an interlocking group of accounts within our data linked the effort to OneSight (Beijing) Technology Ltd., a Beijing-based internet marketing company. OneSight, records show, **held a contract to boost the Twitter following of China News Service, the country's second-largest state-owned news agency.***

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Others accounts we found have taken a darker turn in response to the pandemic, using it as a vehicle for disinformation and attacks on Beijing's usual political opponents.

***"We will completely wipe out the belligerent rioters, just like the coronavirus!"** declared a user who called herself Melinda Butler. Her post slammed Joshua Wong, a leader of the Hong Kong protests who spoke out in support of a medical workers' strike in early February. **Another post by Butler called on the Hong Kong Hospital Authority to "clean out" the striking "black medical workers,"** alongside a graphic accusing protestors of wanting a "color revolution" in Hong Kong. -ProPublica*

CCP-linked Twitter propaganda uncovered by ProPublica

According to the report, "the GEC provided Twitter with a small sample of the overall dataset that included nearly 250,000 accounts," adding that it "was not surprising that there are authentic accounts in any sample."

"Our overall analysis is based on a confluence of factors that drive our assessment, which we stand by."

The GEC's latest assertions come as China has faced serious criticism over its

*handling of the outbreak which originated in country. The State Department has led an aggressive campaign aimed at calling out Beijing for a **lack of transparency and pushing disinformation.***

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has repeatedly accused China of withholding key information about the virus, particularly in its early stages, and has claimed without public evidence that it may have escaped from a lab in Wuhan.

"It is critical that like-minded countries and free societies call out Beijing's use of disinformation and propaganda during this crisis to prevent these behaviors becoming the norm for Beijing," Gabrielle told CNN. -CNN

Of course, Twitter also ignored the GEC when they claimed in February that Russian accounts were spreading coronavirus disinformation.

"We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the government agencies and build on our joint efforts to address a shared threat. Twitter will continue its zero-tolerance approach to platform manipulation and any other attempts to undermine the integrity of our service," said Twitter on Friday. "When we identify information operation campaigns that we can reliably attribute to state-backed activity — either domestic or foreign-led — we disclose them to the public."

According to the report, the GEC determined the accounts were linked to Chinese state-run propaganda due to their "characteristics, content and behavior," noting that they examine whether the "accounts are being created during and doing most of their activity during Beijing business hours."

"We also assess that this is a coordinated and interconnected effort. Nearly every diplomatic account shares at least one follower with every other account, with some instances of diplomatic accounts sharing more than 1,000 followers," added Gabrielle — who also said that **"a significant portion of these 'follower accounts' are newly created — and align with China's push to convince various global audiences of their global leadership."**

"Additionally, these accounts are pushing pro-CCP (Chinese Communist Party) narratives — praising China's fight against the virus, claims that China promptly reported the outbreak to WHO, and accusations the Western media of providing bad coverage of China."

Twitter fired back, saying that some of the accounts provided by the State Department actually criticized the CCP.

Perhaps their accounts will be banned?



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