

Research finds social media disruption impacting on Islamic State propaganda

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Researchers from the VOX-Pol project at Dublin City University, together with colleagues from the University of Sussex, have found that the social media platform, Twitter is becoming less effective for the so-called 'Islamic State' (IS), due to the rapid take-down rate of pro-IS accounts from the site. It found that IS accounts faced "substantial and aggressive disruption".

However, the researchers warn that as the predominant focus for disruption is IS, it has enabled a wide range of other disparate violent Jihadi groups to maintain a strong [social media](#) presence.

"Our study seeks to measure the impact of social [media](#) disruption of terrorism content and how effective the monitoring and removal of such content has been. Our findings show that Twitter is strongly focussed on disrupting Islamic State, which means that the platform is now a much less conducive environment for the group than it once was. However, this has enabled other violent Jihadi groups to maintain their presence and to continue to spread their message with much less hindrance than that faced by IS," commented Prof. Maura Conway of DCU's School of Law and Government and Co-ordinator of VOX-Pol.

The findings are from a new research study *Disrupting Daesh, Measuring the Takedown of Online Terrorist Material and Its Impacts* co-authored by Prof. Conway with Moign Khawaja (also DCU), Dr. Suraj Lakhani, Dr. Jeremy Reffin, Dr. Andrew Robertson and Prof. David Weir (all University of Sussex).

The research analysed extremist [account](#) and terrorist content takedown by [social media platforms](#), with the aim of accurately measuring this activity and its impacts. It challenges the idea that Twitter remains an effective environment for IS, but points out that not all Jihadists on the site experience the same level of disruption.

The postings of 722 pro-IS accounts with over 57,574 tweets and 451 "other Jihadist groups" with 62,156 tweets were analysed.

A level of differential disruption occurring between pro-IS and "other" Jihadi accounts was identified.

The research found that as other Jihadi accounts were not experiencing the same level of take-down by Twitter, they were able to send six times as many tweets and follow or "friend" four times as many accounts and critically gain 13 times as many followers as pro-IS accounts.

It found that only 1 percent of accounts termed "Other Jihadi" in the study experienced any disruption in the first five days after their creation while 25 percent of pro-IS accounts were immediately suspended.

Furthermore, in a case-study of a twenty-four hour period between April 3-4 2017 analysing 153 pro-IS accounts that shared out-links to official IS propaganda, 65 percent of these accounts were suspended within the first 17 hours.

The research also highlights that Twitter is just one part of a wider Jihadi social media network as an analysis of out-linking activity during dates in March, April and May 2017, found that pro-IS accounts linked to 40 other sites. Of these, six sites dominated: YouTube, Google Drive, justpaste.it, IS's own server, archive.org, and sendvid.com.

The research recommended that while social media systems can gather

large amounts of data quickly, the analysis of this should be done in combination with trained human analysts.

It also stressed the importance of examining the whole Jihadist social media environment and of taking other groups into account besides IS, including particularly Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), as well as examining the activity of IS and other Jihadist activity on Telegram.

Provided by Dublin City University

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