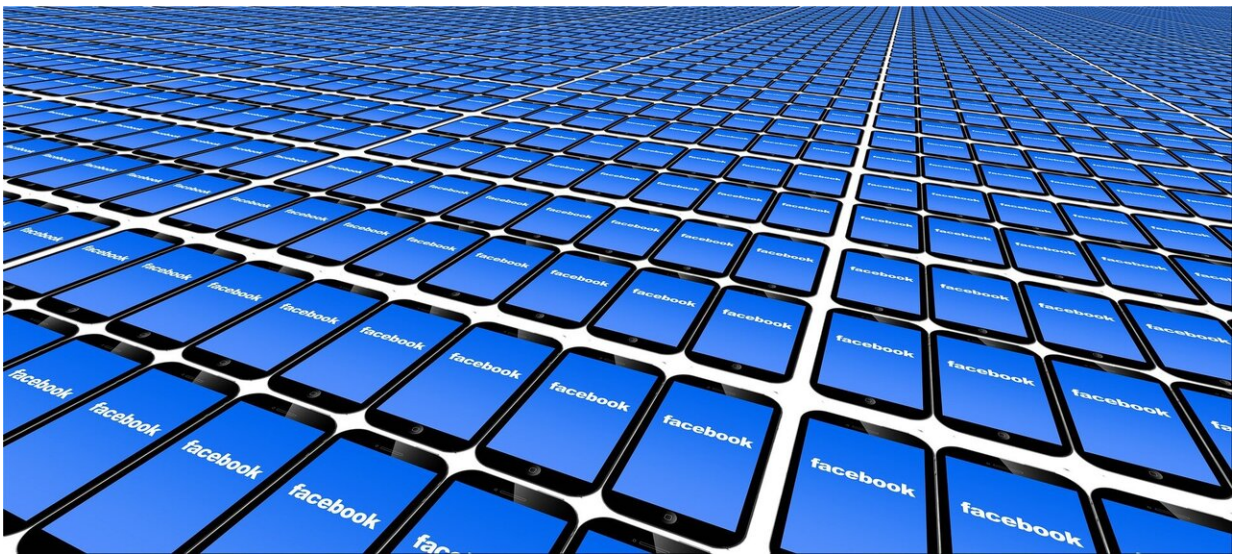


Facebook busts Chinese influence network targeting Americans on abortion and guns ahead of midterms

September 27 2022, by Jessica Guynn



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Meta removed a Chinese influence network that attempted to inflame political tensions on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter ahead of the midterm elections.

The accounts impersonated Americans to target people on both sides of the political aisle over hot-button issues such as abortion access and gun rights and polarizing public figures including President Joe Biden and

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Ben Nimmo, global threat intelligence lead for Meta, says the activity marked a shift for Chinese influence operations which typically seek to shape [public opinion](#) abroad by pushing pro-China propaganda and attacking the United States.

"Even though this operation was small, it is different from the other Chinese operations we have seen and taken down in the past," Nimmo said. "It is talking to Americans, it is pretending to be Americans rather than talking about America to the rest of the world."

The operation which originated in China got little engagement and was not directly attributed to the government in Beijing.

China appears to be experimenting with new tactics as part of its broader influence operations, according to Graham Brookie, senior director of the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab.

"I would call this very similar to some of the more traditional and aggressive Russian state-backed influence operations that target hot-button issues in the United States," Brookie said.

The influence operation targeted primarily the United States and the Czech Republic.

"I don't think China is trying to change the outcome of various issue-oriented political dialogs in the United States or trying to change the outcomes of specific elections," he said. "They are trying to figure out what works and what doesn't work in terms of influence operations in a slightly more aggressive way."

None of the posts reached a large audience. In all, there were 81

Facebook accounts, eight Pages, one Group and two accounts on Instagram.

About 20 accounts followed one or more of the pages. Some 250 accounts joined one or more of the groups. Fewer than 10 accounts followed one or more of the Instagram accounts, according to Meta.

Meta said it removed all of them for violating its policies against "coordinated inauthentic behavior."

Meta took down another Chinese network in 2020 that posted about U.S. politics but it primarily targeted users in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

David Agranovich, director of threat disruption, said Meta is on high alert for attempts to disrupt U.S. elections.

In August, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter removed an influence operation that promoted U.S. foreign policy interests abroad.

That operation promoted the views of the United States while attacking China, Iran, Russia and other countries, researchers from the Stanford Internet Observatory and the research company Graphika found.

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