**DISINFORMATION BY THE NUMBERS**

- **50%** of the online profiles pushing the case for herd immunity against COVID-19 are artificial accounts. They are bot or bot-like accounts with high levels of retweets and low content diversity. The Disinformation Research Group of the Federation of American Scientists arrived at the 50% figure by examining 180,578 tweets.

- **53 websites** covering news of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine hosted malware that was spread on Twitter. The Disinformation Research Group discovered a network of malware files related to vaccine development on the Spanish-language link for the Russian state-sponsored Sputnik News. Malware can be used to manipulate web traffic to unwitting users to amplify stories that cast doubt on the vaccine’s efficacy. The group scanned 15,820 URLs to find the 53 sites.

- **80%** of the online profiles pushing the case for herd immunity against COVID-19 are artificial accounts. They are bot or bot-like accounts with high levels of retweets and low content diversity. The Disinformation Research Group of the Federation of American Scientists arrived at the 50% figure by examining 180,578 tweets.

- **200,000 Twitter accounts linked to the PRC were taken down in August 2019 because the social media company said they were part of a Chinese government influence campaign to derail pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. The fake accounts were amplifying narratives that praised the police crackdown, criticized demonstrators and accused Western forces of inciting unrest.

- **1.3 million views** were attributed to a video on Twitter from conspiracy theorists that falsely claimed the metal wire in store-bought face masks are actually 5G antennas.

**DISINFORMATION**

Disinformation is the selective use of information, including false information, and the promotion of nonrational arguments for political effect. It is false or misleading information spread deliberately to deceive. The English word is a translation of the Russian dezinformatsiya. Joseph Stalin, dictator of the former Soviet Union from 1929 to 1953, is believed to have coined the term, giving it a French-sounding name to claim it had a Western origin. Disinformation was defined in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia as “false information with the intention to deceive public opinion.” In a 1980s Soviet disinformation campaign, called Operation INFECTION, the government attempted to persuade the world that the U.S. created AIDS.

**PROPAGANDA**

Propaganda is the selective use of information, including false information, and the promotion of nonrational arguments for political effect.
A NEW LOW

Facebook announced in September 2020 that it dismantled a Chinese disinformation campaign in the Philippines that used fake names and profiles. The network consisted of 215 accounts, 31 pages, nine groups and six Instagram accounts and attracted at least 130,000 followers. The campaign targeted Philippine politics and generated millions of digital interactions by promoting politicians favorable to China.

FAKE NEWS OUTLET

U.S. officials in October 2020 accrued Iran of targeting Americans with fake but menacing emails and warned that Iran had obtained voter data. Then-U.S. National Intelligence Director John Ratcliffe said the emails targeted special voters in undermine confidence in democracy. The emails claimed to be from the Proud Boys, a group backing then-U.S. President Donald Trump, but evidence mounted that they were created by people tied to the Iranian government. Ratcliffe and the voter data “can be used by foreign actors to attempt to communicate false information to registered voters that they hope will cause confusion, sow chaos and undermine your confidence in American democracy.”

NETWORK TAKEOWN

Taiwan’s media regulator took a pro-China TV station off the air in November 2020 because it failed to address findings of bias and disinformation. The dispute occurred as a government audit showed that 70% of the station’s airtime was devoted to the candidate for the opposition Kuomintang party, in violation of public complaints. A government audit showed that 70% of the station’s airtime was devoted to the candidate for the opposition Kuomintang party, who unsuccessfully challenged Tsai Ing-wen for the presidency.

FAKE NEWS OUTLET

In May 2020, the social media analysis firm Graphika and the Stanford Internet Observatory said two campaigns were linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin’s business interests. In Libya, where the U.S. has accused Russia of sending arms to mercenaries who support the Libyan National Army, Facebook groups pushed a pro-Putin message to more than 100,000 followers. The campaign was sanctioned by the United States after his Internet Research Agency tried to meddle in the 2016 and 2018 U.S. elections. The campaigns targeting Africa and the Middle East sought to promote Russian government interests and covert influence campaigns,” according to a U.S. federal affidavit. The sites, including jordan-times.com, yemenpress.org and crimalistudies.org, appeared to be claiming recycled articles as their own.

CORONAVIRUS DENIAL

Iranian Deputy Health Minister Alireza Raisi told reporters on February 10, 2020, that Iran had no COVID-19 cases and that its “citizens should only follow news released by the health Ministry on the coronavirus.” The same day, a 60-year-old Iranian woman died from the coronavirus. The Iranian regime didn’t admit that the coronavirus had entered Iran until nine days after the first reported death. On March 2, 2020, the head of Iran’s cyber police announced the arrest of 121 Iranians for “spreading rumors” about the coronavirus.

A NEW LOW

SRC-Russia’s right-wing TV station was seized in March 2021.

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