SOCIETY BURNING:

TACTICAL ASSESSMENT

Social Media Intelligence Unit

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SUMMARY:

FACTS

1. The Black Lives Matter movement is achieving some success through the use of Twitter but this is self-limiting due to audience type, audience size, and audience selection – it is effectively mobilising the already engaged rather than changing minds. The scale of influence is often misinterpreted due to the nature of the platform content and its relationship with a media chasing trends.

2. There are signs of entryism (through co-concurrent topics) into the Black Lives Matter narrative and it has become caught in social media and offline crossfire between Antifa and white supremacist or accelerationist groups including the "Boogaloo Boys."

3. Black Lives Matter is also successfully being painted as a "Marxist take-over" of the USA by Trump surrogates, though this narrative tactic dates back to the alt-right campaign against Hillary Clinton and the Democrats which was in operation between 2016 and 2018.

4. Influential conservative campaigns, including Trump 2020 are still utilising the trust capital of Facebook to seed, reinforce, and electorally capitalise upon public support amongst the demographics which are less likely to protest but more likely to vote. They are pushing the "Marxism" message. Offline conversations show that this strategy is succeeding in changing minds, even in a landscape where this should be unlikely to succeed.

5. The "Defund The Police" campaign is also being used by the Trump campaign and its supporting network to secure the well-established Law and Order vote ahead of the November election.

6. The shape of the Twitter conversation relating to Black Lives Matter is, notably, gender balanced.

7. Antifa have adopted a responsive strategy to grow their online audience, while implementing a control strategy to limit the impact of fake Antifa accounts and provocateurs

8. The strategies being deployed across Black Lives Matter and right-wing digital campaigns share common features with the tactics which grew from GamerGate in 2013.

9. Europe does not feature heavily in the global online data, which is unsurprising given the core dynamic of US civil rights stems from the British/American slave trade.

ACTIONS:

1. Civil Society groups should brief their networks on the common tactics and strategies identified to inform how they respond to information barrage tactics. The correct response protocol is disengagement, creating a vacuum and limiting the success of these operations rather than giving them the oxygen they rely upon.

2. Civil Society groups should increase the scale and scope of their Facebook presence, to engage the demographics least likely to protest but most likely to vote.

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METHOD:

PURPOSE
This is an intelligence profile, designed to provide rapid exploration of an issue and identify involved parties, risks, and opportunities. The aim is to condense a large amount of information into actionable insights and enhance issue grip, so those reading it can make decisions on any necessary response in context relevant to them.

ANALYSIS
We gather data and intelligence from multiple sources. This information is processed in a sterile corridor, rationalised and assessed, evaluated and enhanced before being turned into reports or other output products. Editorial inputs and management steers are excluded from the sterile corridor from the point of data gathering to the delivery of output product. On review of our output product outside of this closed processing, the only amendments which will be actioned are spelling, grammar, and minor layout or design changes. Conclusions, inferences, and findings are permanently excluded from amendment protocols. Our analytical role is to provide the basis for conversation without being part of the conversation itself.

ENHANCEMENT
SMIU does not rely on a single dataset in reaching analytical conclusions or making recommendations. Our findings are always supported by knowledge gathered through constant monitoring and in-house expertise. We use this information alongside datasets to draw inferences which enhance topic-specific analytical outputs.

REPORTING
Our reporting takes the form of a Tactical Assessment and is deliberately distinct from the academic or policy style commonly used. This approach enables us to deliver analysis in line with our reporting purpose.

DISSEMINATION
Unless clearly marked confidential or restricted, our reports may can be distributed publicly.

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IN THIS REPORT:

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ACRONYMS AND TERMS OF INTEREST:

Certain terms are commonly used when referring to social media and analysis of platform data. These terms and their meanings are:

SOCINT: *Intelligence and information from sources open to social interaction (i.e. web, Twitter)*

HUMINT: *Intelligence and information from people*

CHIS: *Covert Human Intelligence Source, anonymised for protection*

PSYOP: *Psychological Influence Operations*

API: *Application Programming Interface, used to obtain bulk data such as tweets*

Bot: *A purely automated device created to carry out a repetitive function (i.e. sending tweets or replying to posts) without human intervention.*

Cyborg: *An account managed, used, or directed by a person which also employs automated scheduling to distribute human-generated content.*

Troll: *An individual deliberately engaged in malicious or abusive behaviour*

Troll Farm: *An organisation in which people are employed to engage in troll behaviour at the direct of an entity or state in line with a strategic directive*

Click Farm: *An organisation in which racks of mobile devices are used to generate visits, likes, shares, and replies in exchange for payment.*

Disinformation: *Deliberately misleading or entirely false information purposefully used to make a person or a group of people act against the law or their own interests.*

Misinformation: *Accidentally or recklessly distributed misleading or false information which has the capacity to make a person or a group of people act against the law or their own interests*

Amplification: *The increase in visibility of shared content caused by a combination of human distribution and algorithmic popularity ranking*

Echo Chamber: *A controlled environment of like-minded voices with shared interests and views created by self-selection of whom to include and exclude, or by use of externally generated "block lists."*

Network Centrality: *A method of identifying the most important aspect within a network, often used to create Target Audience Analysis or assess the possibility of using a network to distribute messaging.*

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INTRODUCTION:

As the United States heads into the 2020 Presidential Election; the information space is fraught with disinformation, quickly evolving narratives, and a downright confusing landscape full of bad actors and the poorly informed. Wading through this quagmire has been difficult under the best of circumstances; especially as information surrounding Covid-19 constantly evolves. The pandemic has caused over thirty million newly unemployed in the U.S. and given rise to an atmosphere of social tension unseen in decades. Fear, anger, and frustration have bubbled over, and, trapped at home and online, people are left with Social Media as an easy way to engage with others and vent their frustrations.

The May 25th death of George Floyd, in Minneapolis, reignited the Black Lives Matter movement; both online and in communities across the country. Black Lives Matter began as a protest movement with the death of Michael Brown in the St. Louis area in 2014. Since then, Black Lives Matter has become a rallying cry for those who would speak out against racial disparity and police brutality. Unlike others who lost their lives at the hands of the police, George Floyd's death was captured on video from start to finish. The incontrovertible nature of the George Floyd video, coupled with the growing number who have lost their jobs and now face the possibility of eviction, has triggered a sustained national movement.

INHERENT IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS ORIGINATING OR HOMED ONLINE - FROM THE ARAB SPRING TO HONG KONG - IS THE PRESENCE OF INFORMATION OPERATIONS DESIGNED TO DERAIL, DISCREDIT, AND USURP THE MESSAGE OF THE MOVEMENT ITSELF AND THOSE WHO WOULD LEAD IT.

In the case of recent protests three primary group identities emerged in tandem: Antifa (anti-fascists), BLM (Black Lives Matter), and Boogaloo Boys (those who embrace an accelerationist worldview).

Antifa has long been used as the bogeyman of right-wing media influencers. Andy Ngo and Jack Posobiec, for example, have gone so far as to create fake Antifa Twitter accounts, websites, and new stories in order to conflate people who identify as antifascist with those who engage in Block Bloc protest tactics - which include the destruction of private and public property. This framing has allowed those media influencers to create a perceived enemy which does not actually exist the way it is presented on Social Media. This is an example of Manufactured Reality which poses a troublesome risk to democratic principles globally.

Likewise, the Black Lives Matter movement has been used to influence the beliefs and behaviours of both left and right leaning observers. This has helped to create a polarizing environment where people see themselves as victims within a manipulated dichotomy rather than as participants in a social discussion intended to improve the egality of a nation's people.

A relatively new phenomena, Boogaloo Boys have entered the discussion labelled as Accelerationist White Supremacists. This commonly used definition ignores some of the complexity of Accelerationism as a philosophical construct which lends itself to groups who seek the inevitable destruction of our current society in favour of one that embodies the libertarian ideals of an economy unfettered by regulation and a society driven by technological advancement. Accelerationists believe that our current economic and social systems are unsustainable. This makes Accelerationism appealing to a wide array of disenfranchised, angry, young people. As the Boogaloo Boys argue in chat rooms over what exactly it means to be an Accelerationist, Social Media influencers are busy building narratives to influence the perception of their involvement in the Black Lives Matter protests.

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SOCIETY BURNING:

LANDSCAPE

LANDSCAPE:

To create a baseline, we captured a four-week snapshot of data from Twitter to ascertain the scale of the global conversation which features the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter.

During the period of four weeks leading to July 12 2020, we identified a total of 6,455,900 tweets explicitly featuring the hashtag. To give a sense of scale, the global drawdown of tweets explicitly featuring the word "coronavirus" came to 18.8 million in the same four-week period. Through constant topic monitoring in real-time we noted that, in the days following the death of George Floyd, #BlackLivesMatter had pushed COVID19 to the side-lines of discourse for a period of approximately three days.

Of the captured sample, 83% (5,333,600) were retweets (shares) and 4% (266,200) were replies (comments). On an average day across the UK, Germany, Poland, France, Spain, Ireland, and the US around 135 million tweets are generated, with around 51% being retweets (shares) and 26% being replies (comments). Discourse around #BlackLivesMatter is shared significantly more often than is the norm.

The peak tweets per minute occurred at 17.30 on July 4 2020 and led to a volume spike by 00:00 on July 5, with 830 tweets being generated in a 60 second interval. This was not the largest volume peak, that occurred on June 29, however the July 4 spike in posting frequency coincided with protest gatherings across the world and subsequent mass media coverage.
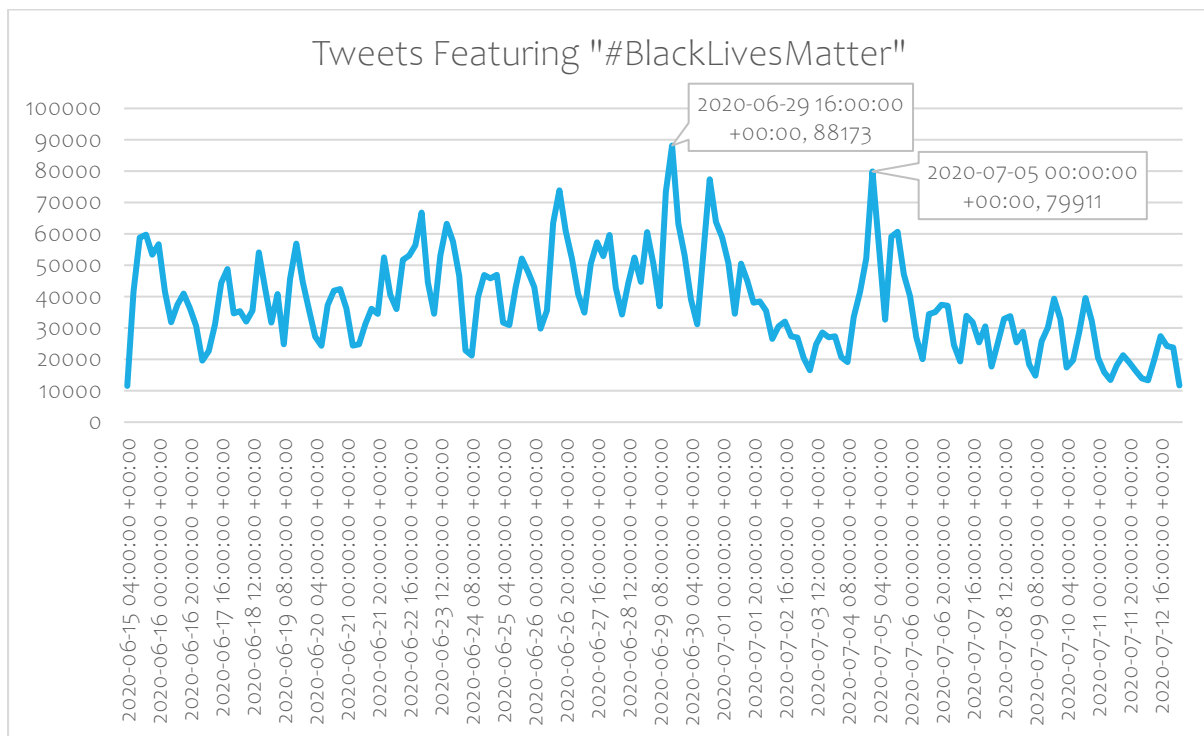
Twitter captures the self-declared gender of its users (male or female), and the four week sample showed a split in those discussing the hashtag, with the majority (52%) being male and the minority (48%) being female. In general terms, the gender divide mostly falls in the 55%-71% male versus 45%-29% female range. Discourse around Black Lives Matter has been notable since the death of George Floyd for its gender balance.

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Somewhat unsurprisingly, despite the global nature of the response to the death of George Floyd, the majority of the tweets (by a substantial margin) were generated in the United States, followed by the United Kingdom and Canada, with other countries accounting for only small percentages. Europe's largest contributors were France and Greece, accounting for only 4.1% of the global conversation.
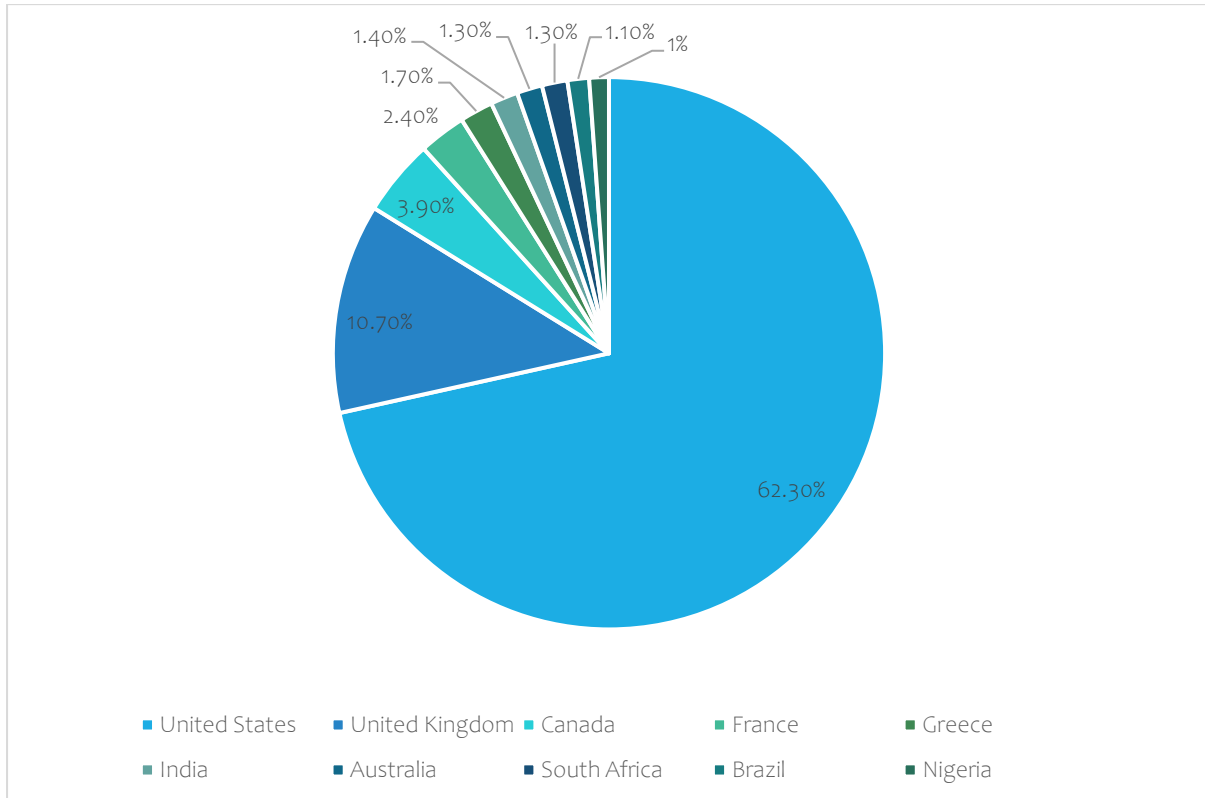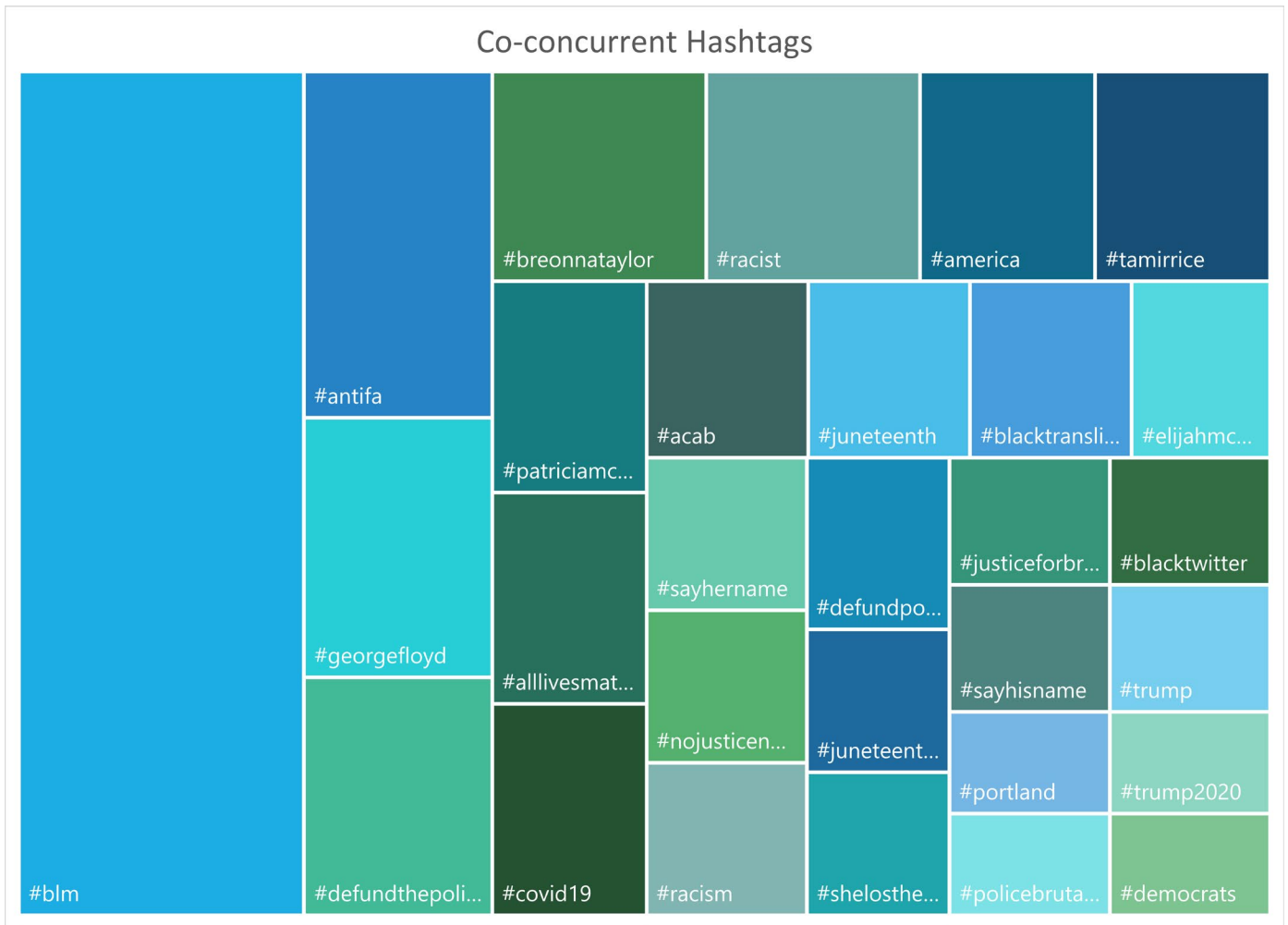

Viewing the locations by city, we confirmed London as the primary European city where the conversation originated, with Toronto the only other noteworthy location outside of the United States.
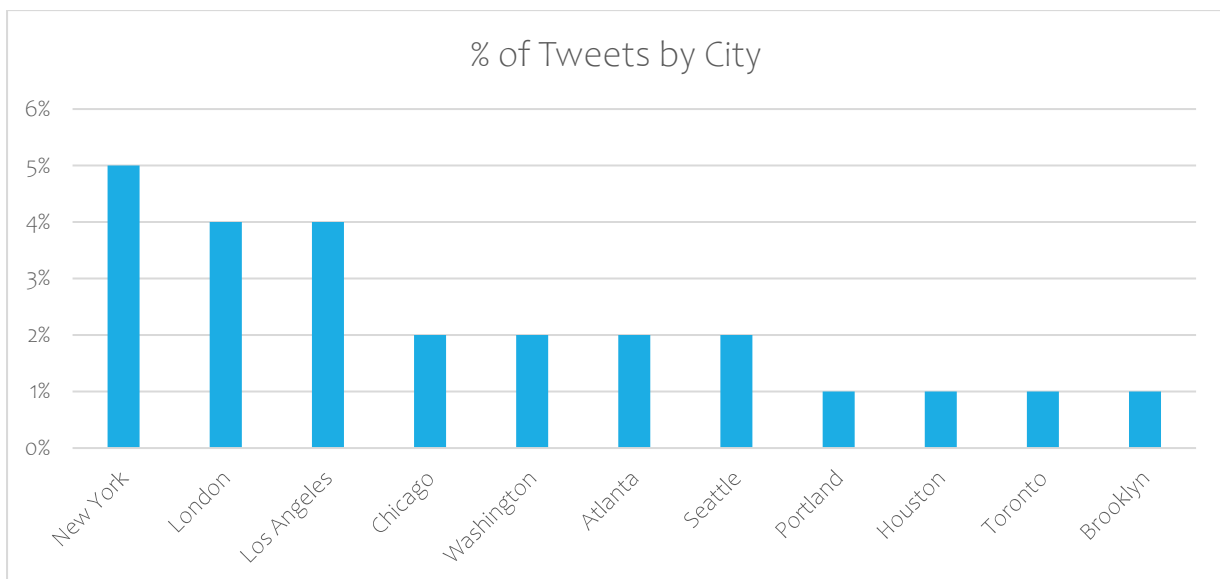
92% of all the content generated was in English.

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Turning to co-concurrent hashtags (those used alongside #BlackLivesMatter) it is possible to start to understand the shape of the conversation in terms of how it interacts with other issues featuring in public discourse.

Co-concurrent Hashtags

#blm · #antifa · #georgefloyd · #defundthepoli... · #breonnataylor · #patriciamc... · #alllivesmat... · #covid19 · #racist · #acab · #sayhername · #nojusticen... · #racism · #juneteenth · #defundpo... · #juneteent... · #shelosthe... · #america · #blacktransli... · #justiceforbr... · #sayhisname · #portland · #policebruta... · #tamirrice · #elijahmc... · #blacktwitter · #trump · #trump2020 · #democrats

Given the circumstances which gave rise to the global protests, namely the death of George Floyd, the co-concurrent use of #Antifa taking a dominant position is indicative that external actors are using the topic to their own ends.

However, this might not be immediately identifiable given the keywords used across the content show a clear (and expected) focus on policing and protests.

As there is at least one indicator some external influence may be present in the topic, an initial search for signs of automation looked at the source applications used to generate the content.

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Source Applications and % of Content Generated
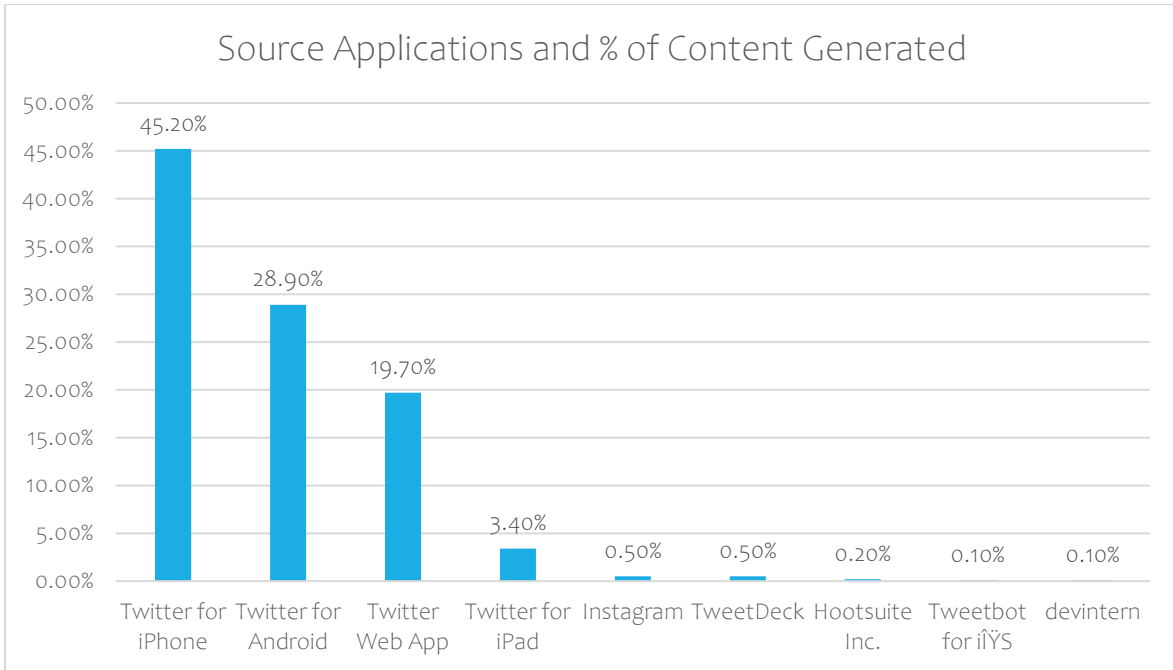
The majority of the content was generated by mobile device users, which is normal behaviour – thought it should be noted "click-farms" use racks of devices rather than automation services to distribute content. Mainstream content scheduling services have been used (Tweedeck, Hootsuite, etc) but only to a relatively limited degree. Some of the scheduling (automation) services, such as "devintern" are not mainstream, so this area warrants further investigation though volume is low.

Source application data can also be used as a proxy for demographic information in certain ways - for example dominance of Apple device usage tends to be indicative of higher earnings among those engaged in a topic.

The data also provides us with insight into the domains and individual URLs being shared within the generated content, which can help identify the distribution of disinformation.

The majority of shared URLs are crowdfunding pages or petitions linked to the movement and do not raise any specific concerns. The Google document may at first seem out of place, but this is a widely distributed guide for activists, which includes list of official BLM chapters, some protocols, and links to vetted funders and petitions.

Unique URLs by Domain
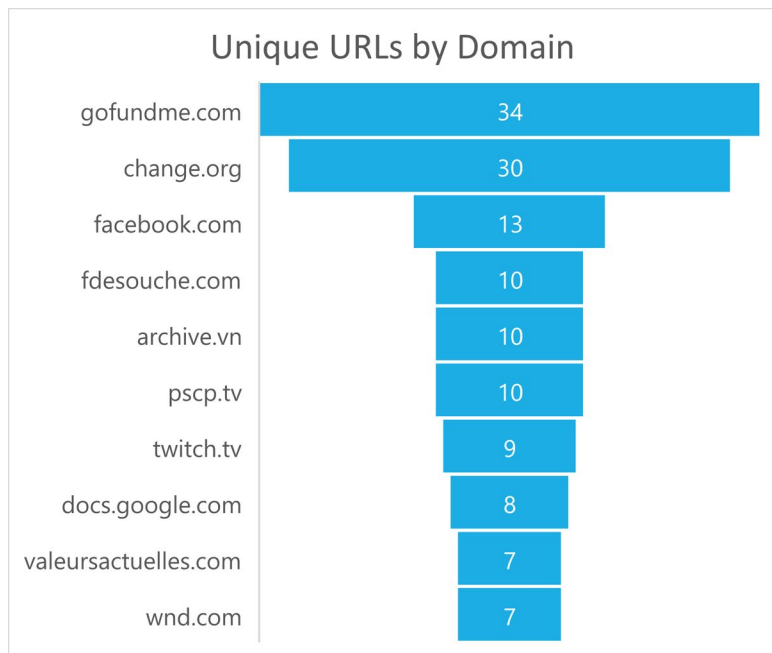
It is clear that discourse around the topic has prompted global action, even the toppling of statues across the world, resulting in a mixture of celebration and condemnation, but there is an evident degree of polarisation on political and societal lines.

As an organisation, BLM is being painted as a Marxist subversion of the American dream – an issue being shoe-horned into Trump's election campaign via a distributed network of proxy spokespeople and within the more outlandish of his associated digital networks. Further issues surround the chosen objective to "Defund The Police" – which in context means investing more in social care and communities – but has been often deliberately misinterpreted as getting rid of policing altogether. The result has been a lurch of police officers towards the conservative right, which happens whenever they feel attacked, and provided an opening in the law and order narrative for far-right groups.

These layers create clear conflict risks and provide innumerable wedge issues for hostile and malicious operators to exploit. Both disinformation and misinformation are in play.
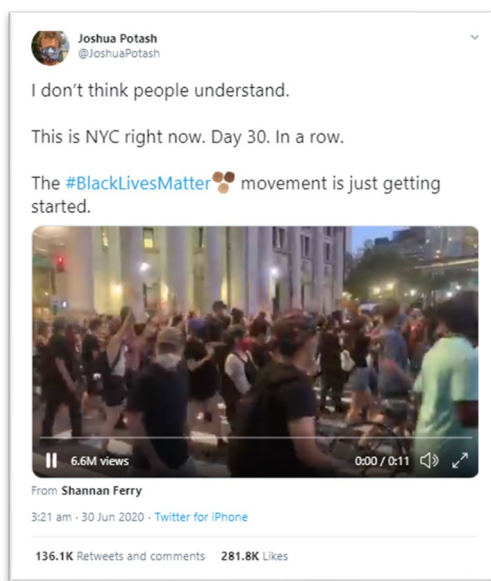
Dip sampling the most shared and otherwise influential content in the sample drawdown gives an indication of how visible the tweets on the topic have been and what messaging is cutting through.

This tweet, for example, from Transform Harm activist Joshua Potash is one in a series of popular posts mentioning the continuing nature of protests in varying cities across the United States.

This example has been retweeted (shared) over 136,100 times and the embedded video has chalked up 6.6 million views.

However, it is worth nothing that Twitter still receives a much smaller response universally than Facebook.

On the opposing side, the tweet in the sample drawdown which received the most comments came from incumbent President Donald Trump, attacking both BLM and the New York mayor while playing to the embattled law and order audience segment.

Trump is himself, of course, polarising. However on this issue he does appear to have struck some solid ground in terms of garnering support.

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Facebook provides a second view of the topic, and allows us to account for some known knowns:

- *Twitter is less influential in real-world scenarios due to the level of geographic displacement and anonymity.*
- *Facebook is more influential due to trust capital (networks are built around known people).*

Viewing only public facing Facebook Pages, we searched the use of the term "black lives matter" globally over the same four week period and identified the top 22 posts which generated 5,843,166 total interactions - made up of likes, comments, and shares.

The keywords provide a view of the themes at the centre of messaging on this platform, which produces more real-world output in terms of voter and consumer behaviour and action than any other.

Trump's tweet (cited above) was replicated in longer form on Facebook, posted to his Facebook Page where it garnered significantly higher volumes of response.

The post, which read: *"NYC is cutting Police $'s by ONE BILLION DOLLARS, and yet the NYC Mayor is going to paint a big, expensive, yellow Black Lives Matter sign on Fifth Avenue, denigrating this luxury Avenue. This will further antagonize New York's Finest, who LOVE New York & vividly remember the horrible BLM chant, "Pigs In A Blanket, Fry 'Em Like Bacon". Maybe our GREAT Police, who have been neutralized and scorned by a mayor who hates & disrespects them, won't let this symbol of hate be affixed to New York's greatest street. Spend this money fighting crime instead!"* generated 254,395 emotional reactions, 46,858 comments, and 25,554 shares.

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Dip sampling fifty of the comments, each of those was reacted to a further 1,000 times on average, creating a huge algorithmic volume - meaning the original post would have been amplified broadly, potentially creating up to 46 million sub-interactions.

Trump's post, however, was only fifth placed in the list of 22. The top post was created by the official Facebook page for Franklin Graham, President of Samaritan's Purse and Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, which is liked by 8,836,034 people.

Graham wrote: *"Dr. Ben Carson shares a warning about the Marxist ideology of the Black Lives Matter organization. They support taking down the model of western family structure and defunding the police—they are against the American model and patriotism in this country. Dr. Carson pointed out that they are taking advantage of the fact that people don't really know what's behind their Marxist-driven organization,"* and linked his post to a fox news video of Carson.

Graham's post generated 400,561 emotional reactions, 35,796 comments and was shared 224,537 times – ten times the shares of Trump's post.

Analysing the URL itself, Fox do not list a view count on their videos. However, the Crowd Tangle browser extension enables us to see the unique URL of the video was shared 379 times across Faceboook, one of those being Graham's post. From that data we are able to ascertain that this single video clip generated a total of 1,675,788 interactions on Facebook alone with baseline access to an audience of 16,624,252 platform users.
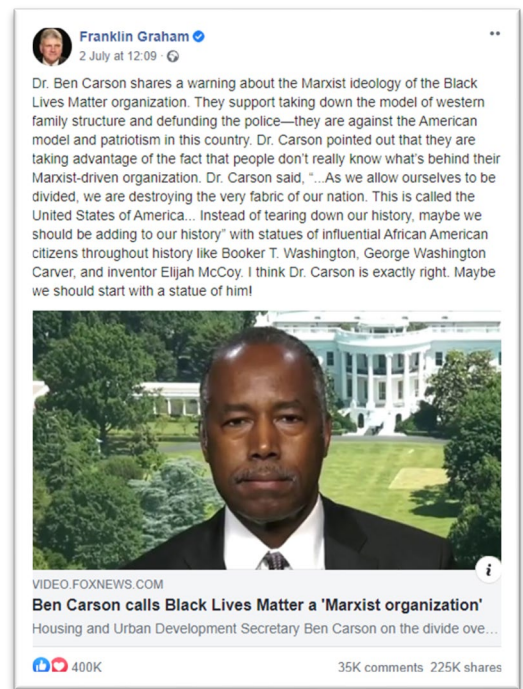
The Marxism narrative has spread far beyond the confines of Facebook too.

HUMINT (see acronyms) gathered during the course of daily business is informative, telling us that liberal voters for the democrats in "blue states" including California have accepted that Black Lives Matter is an organisation with Marxist objectives and has left some Democrat voters from the ages of 35 to 65 feeling they will have no choice but to vote Republican in order to prevent a "communist takeover" of the United States. The legacy of the Cold War is an under-considered factor. Further HUMINT indicates the embattlement of the law enforcement community is having the effect of driving not only serving and retired law enforcement officers and their family networks to vote Republican but is also starting to push other emergency service workers and even victims of crime who have been treated well by the police the same way.
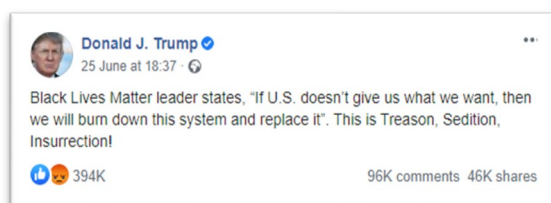
Subsequently these groups are more open to narratives which undermine the objectives of BLM and speak to more people daily than other groups. Trump's campaign, which spends vast resources polling away from social media, is capitalising upon this and driving the wedge. They have been alive to the opportunity from a very early stage as the second most popular post of the top 22 shows.

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We currently monitor over seventy of the official Facebook Pages for Black Lives Matter chapters, in order to better understand the campaign and what is influencing the response of civil society.

Over the four weeks until July 13, two of those chapters (Austin and St Paul) outperformed the main BLM page in terms of interactions, despite having audiences of 29,000 and 16,000 people respectively, versus the centralised audience of 643,000.

For several individual days, St Paul has been the best performing page of all in terms of interactions.
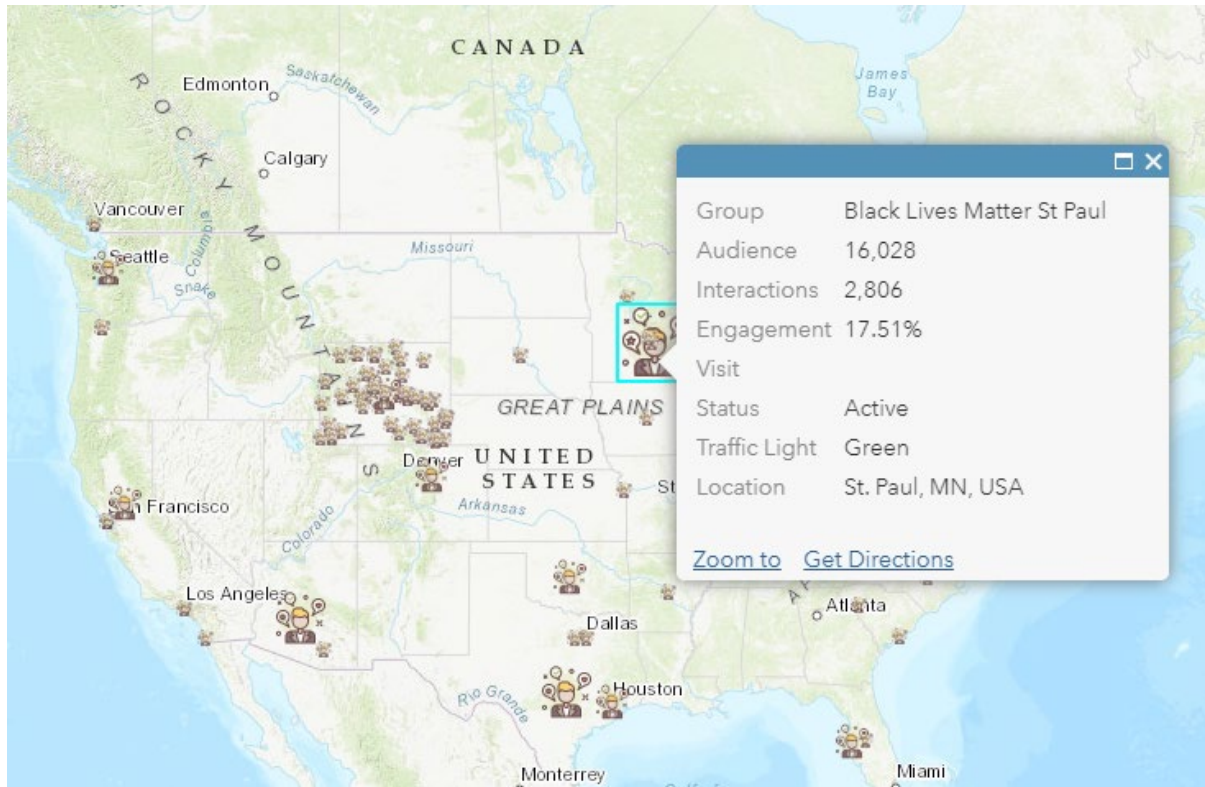
However, over the sample period, when we view individual posts for their performance, the main BLM page dominates as you would expect, due to the cumulative effect of audience weight - pages with large audiences do less work to achieve higher interactions with single posts, due to default visibility.
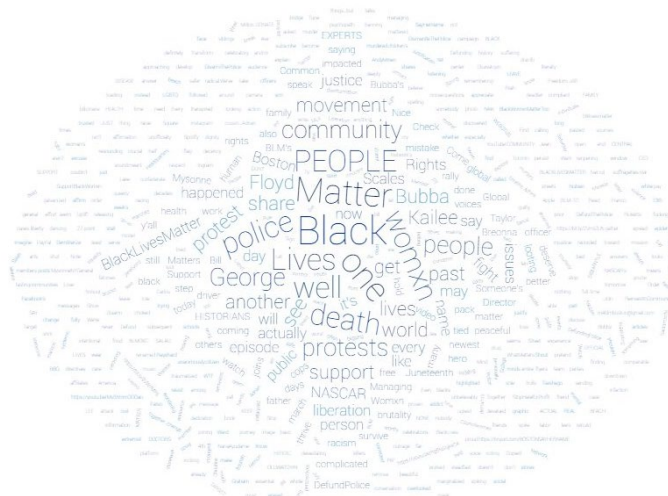
In all, the top 22 posts of the monitored BLM pages have managed to produce 110,055 total interactions before an audience of 1,561,183 people, meaning they are substantially less influential overall than the even Graham's single post of the Carson video.

Given the real-world behaviour of Facebook's voting users, this lower reach should be viewed as indicative as to why Republican narratives are already succeeding ahead of the November poll and why this is reflected in offline conversations.

ENHANCED LANDSCAPE CONCLUSIONS:

The landscape presents a mixed picture of a polarised environment which can be read in a number of ways. Reality, as always, is somewhere in between.

Black Lives Matter have successfully operated on Twitter, displacing even a global pandemic for a period of days in discussion terms and creating global media coverage of protest action. However, scale is an important factor - as is the general understanding that Twitter habitually creates false impressions of scale due to its inherent echo-chamber effect. There are 330 million active monthly users of Twitter and 145 million daily active users versus 2.6 billion monthly users and 1.73 billion daily active users on Facebook, without considering the other core products including Whatsapp.

Subsequently, Twitter can engage and mobilise a portion of the population but only within the confines of its own platform audience – there have been BLM protests in 4,140 cities worldwide in 2020, but the global attendance is nowhere near the daily active user figure for Twitter.

Often the distortion in scale perception is further added to due to the nature of platform users and use cases: Twitter is an excellent forum for journalists in terms of news gathering and distributing news items - and this is also seen by and responded to by policy makers using it as a public engagement tool - however, there is an element of self-selection to this because a comparatively small percentage of the global population uses the platform and an even smaller segment actively participates. Had each of the 6.4 million #BlackLivesMatter tweets come from unique individuals and all occurred on one day, this would have involved only 4.45% of Twitter's active daily users.

Much of this evidently limited audience is also formed of already active participants in protest mobilisations, so it is more a question of their tasking and deployment than changing minds of the unengaged to provoke action. This can and previously has created false senses of security in campaigns, such as the pro-European Remain movement in the UK.

Facebook owns a significantly larger share of global audience and has shown time and again that the platform generates more real-world outcomes than any other and political concern about its influence remains high across the world. Black Lives Matter has not achieved the same degree of success in this environment, where trust capital is higher (anonymity is lower and networks are based on real life relationships) and, subsequently, counternarratives such as the "Marxist takeover" have been significantly more successful.

Discussions off line tend to show that these slower-burning counternarratives are ultimately proving more effective in terms of real-world persuasion, dissuasion, and action influence, and this is likely to be reproduced at the ballot box as these lines are past crystallisation and now only require reinforcement.

The response time of Facebook related action as a real-world outcome is much slower than on Twitter – due to the difference in operation of the algorithms and trend cycles - and most of the user-base is not made up from active protest participants. Instead, the users tend to deploy power at the ballot box which is why the scale of messaging, messaging response, and the need to maintain communication rhythm on Facebook is such an important aspect of digital campaigning.

There are clear signs of potential entryism into the topic due to the significant co-concurrence of Antifa and this is explored in more depth in the following sections.

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SOCIETY BURNING:

DIP SAMPLING

DIP SAMPLING:

OBJECTIVE

The May 25th murder of George Floyd - arriving in the midst of a pandemic that has caused over thirty million newly unemployed in the U.S. - reignited the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement began with the murder of Michael Brown in the St. Louis area in 2014 but it has popped up anywhere there have been questionable deaths of black men and women involving police. The incontrovertible nature of the George Floyd video, coupled with the vast pool of jobless, has triggered a sustained national movement. Our objective was to examine conversations regarding Antifa, BLM, and the Boogaloo accelerationists. We instituted a BLM hashtag specific stream around noon Pacific time on June 27.

IMPORTANT

This section of the report is technical. Therefore some readers who do not have technical backgrounds may not understand some of the content. We have highlighted pertinent information to facilitate knowledge sharing for readers at all levels.

SCOPING

We took inventory of our active Twitter streaming data to see what perspectives we already had available, locating substantial data collections from the following sources:

- U.S. Federal House stream – members and their mentions.
- U.S. Federal Senate stream – members and their mentions.
- U.S. Governors stream – governors of most, but not all states.
- Squad – 6 women of colour in the U.S. House of Representatives.
- Celebs – 16 left leaning media figures.
- DemCast – 77 social media "captains" for a national grassroots organisation.
- GenFlynn – 10 accounts which support General Mike Flynn.
- WHMediaSummit – 18 high level right-wing operatives who met with Trump.
- Qanon – 38 million tweets gathered over the last 49 weeks.
- Qdev – 98 accounts selected as being relevant to Qanon.
- QanonHitList – 40 journalists marked for special attention by Qanon.

Streams of tweets for studies deemed completed are often expunged. User IDs observed are folded into our master user list, and the stream specific user index is removed. While the content is gone, the definition used to collect the stream typically remains, and very often there are the raw files for a social network analysis. This being said, we have some applicable assets:

- 154 accounts deemed to be fake Antifa by their internal intel operation.
- Friends and followers files for those accounts, dated 29 July 2019.
- 107 Proud Boys role (city/state) accounts from before Twitter purged them.
- Friends and followers for those accounts, dated 15 July 2018.
- 17 White House Media Summit attendees.
- Friends and followers for those accounts, dated 11 July 2019.
- A list of 390 role accounts from Occupy Wall Street, established circa Jan 2012.

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Our access is not Twitter's "firehose." We operate a custom built Elasticsearch cluster which contains 123m user IDs and around a billion tweets. The friends and followers for groups of interesting accounts are stored as snapshots at the time they are collected. We can easily walk back over the most recent 3,200 tweets for any given account and we can access a roughly ninety day sliding window of all Twitter content when we need to see further.
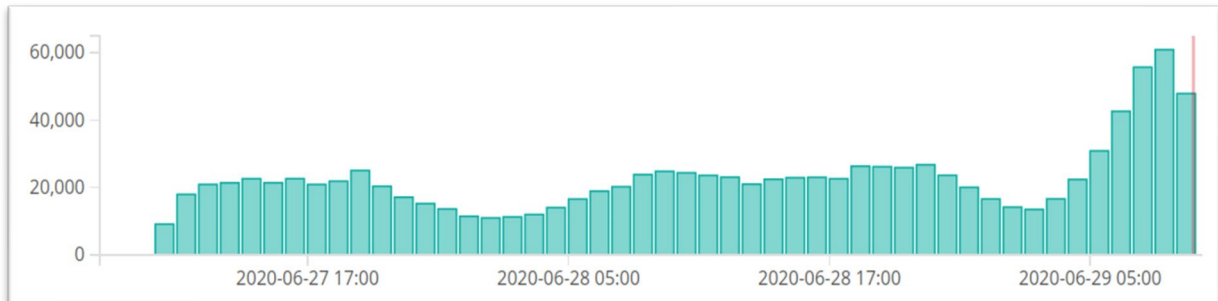
The BLM dip sampling stream was instituted on June 27 contains approximately 1.1 million tweets. The histogram shows the count per hour with a peak near 61,000. This is not a concerning rate indicative of an active influence operation featuring high levels of automation.

The largest stream collection we have done was related to a mass shooting in the U.S. and involved some eight million tweets in a single 24 hour period.
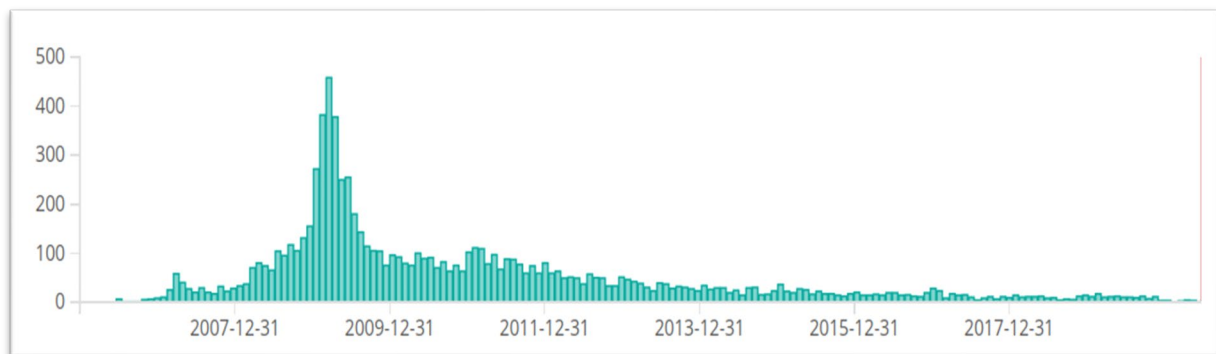
The associated user IDs index contains the 725k accounts that have contributed to those 1.1 million tweets. The time frame used begins on January 1st of 2006, just prior to Twitter's creation, to capture anomalies in database records. The spike from initial uptake in 2008 and the rise in 2010/2011 due to Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street are seen in every stream we collect. The two-month bump in account creation at the end of 2016 is tied to Donald Trump's election.

The large volume of new accounts is typical for an issue that suddenly receives broad attention. Missing in this diagram is the dramatic decrease in mid-2018 due to Twitter's acquisition of bot interdiction vendor Smyte. Profiles of the followers of politicians always feature this event.

We are able to filter user IDs on any numeric or text criteria and identified 8,300 verified accounts which have had something to say on the BLM topic. Excluding accounts with less than a hundred followers eliminated over 200,000 from the index. There are no concerning signs of mass account creation which would indicate an active influence operation featuring high levels of automation.

In the sample index, there are 28,000 accounts which have #BLM in their description (bio) and 17,000 featuring #MAGA.

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SAMPLE ANALYSIS

A cloud of the top fifty hashtags used within the BLM stream reveals that the conversation around the topic is bipartisan and contentious. Most of this is supportive, but Antifa is demonized as a domestic terror group, and #AllLivesMatter is employed by those trying to deflect the focus on injustice and structural racism. If we limit the cloud to only the verified accounts the Trump supporters mostly melt away.
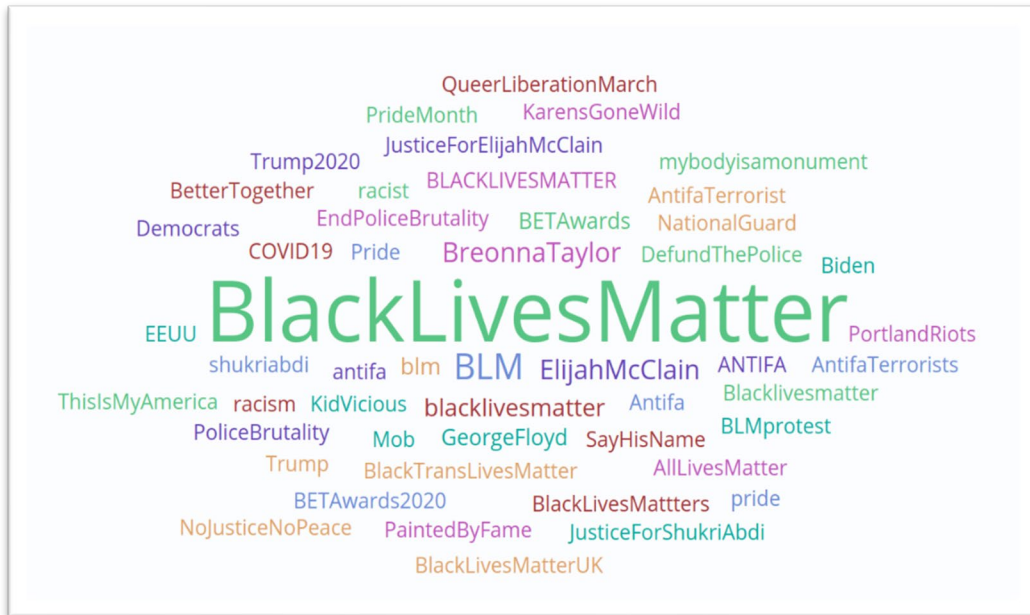
However, if we constrain the cloud to just those accounts which also involve the Trump specific #MAGA hashtag, different weighting sees alternative themes rises to the surface, indicating the tonal difference in the conversation.


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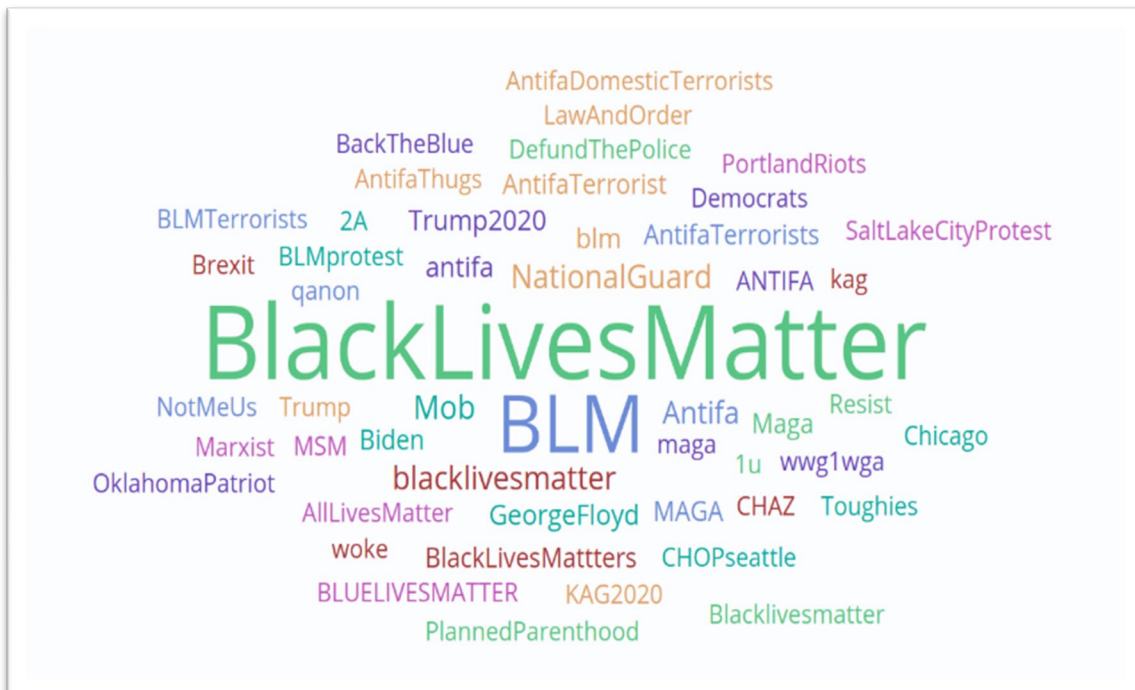
Data Table visualizations are used to summarize which content has the most reach, and they also facilitate extracting spreadsheet sized amounts of data from voluminous indices. Below are the top twenty tweets by retweeting (sharing) account during the dip-sampling period.

| Name	Tweet	RTs
DeAnna4Congress	Only 17% of the #BlackLivesMatter protestors nationally were actually black. Unbelievable.	5,112
realBenjiirby	Me and @ShemekaMichelle at the North Carolina State Capitol. I was coming here to be a nerd and add this to my col... https://t.co/d5jYHMRyCn	2,273
SidneyPowell1	This crap needs to be stopped now--by the #NationalGuard or US Military. @realDonaldTrump @GenFlynn #Mob intimid... https://t.co/mWAztILV44	2,204
JessieJaneDuff	If President Trump called George Floyd 'George Kirby' like Nancy Pelosi did, or 'Floyd Taylor' like Chuck Schumer d... https://t.co/uuLrf0aGD3	1,004
w_terrence	I FOUND A NOOSE IN MY HOUSE I'm calling on everyone to stand with me! Where is #blacklivesmatter ? This is very... https://t.co/QJG9Y3jImm	951
ErrolWebber	Someone needs to find out if George Floyd was voting for Joe Biden or not. If he wasn't, then #BlackLivesMatter sp... https://t.co/6N76jhN6lc	863
RacySicilian	What did you think #BLM hope to ultimately achieve?	756
IndySpanglish	THIS NEEDS TO GO VIRAL #Maga #Trump2020 #BlackLivesMatter #Biden https://t.co/wc6i39JhWn	738
larryelder	(Black) Chicago man fatally shot 2 (black) teens after they asked how tall he is, police say... https://t.co/jG5rKrLS2m	733
JackPosobiec	Still have't ID'd this one yet who runs up and grabs my neck	716
13thethe	#BLM, it's Lincoln who freed the Slaves & Trump who has fought for policies to help the Black Community succeed! Be... https://t.co/x6S4b17e7f	711
KashJackson2018	@RealCandaceO Please help us find this cold blooded killer who gunned down 2 kids on Chicago's South Side this week... https://t.co/INQyQhJWdm	631
dbongino	This is an actual tweet. Oh my. 🤦🤦	604
MrAndyNgo	.@PortlandPolice rushed in after #antifa rioters began trying to barricade the Central Precinct (they did that last... https://t.co/Z47ii2LKEd	587
FreeIllinoisNow	✊🏾💥BOOM☀☀☀..... GET READY #BLM #BlackLivesMattters #AntifaTerrorists #BLMprotest #AntifaThugs #CHAZ #CHOPseattle... https://t.co/iKL9g7O6mA	577
johncardillo	More video of #BlackLivesMatter violently attacking (with weapons) praying Catholics. https://t.co/QdkXiGIhx8	452
DineshDSouza	Revolution! Revolution! Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!	439
mitchellvii	President Trump. Stop tweeting about naming #Antifa a terrorist group. Name them. Stop tweeting that the #BLM... https://t.co/gptfObOgyV	306
RetUSCG2010	Is this what #BlackLivesMatter looks like😡🤮 🎺🎺🎺🎺	279
Nick_Clamorgan	#DefundThePolice + #BlackLivesMatter = NOTHING MATTERS! NOTHING AT ALL! https://t.co/6oCaJHEJTt	275

Selecting for only those containing accounts MAGA, some prominent right-wing figures are immediately identifiable. @mitchellvii was part of the White House Media Summit, @sidneypowell1 is General Flynn's attorney, @dbongino, @JackPosobiec, and @MrAndyNgo are often described as "propagandists," and @johncardillo is a former NYPD officer with some alleged ties to indicted Russians Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman.

Name	Tweet	RTs
sabinenysa	If the videos look like this definitely RT, no more videos or photos of protestors' faces they are being targeted... https://t.co/0qs1elGOWE	156,705
JoshuaPotash	I don't know why these aren't trending anymore, but across the country #BlackLivesMatter protests haven't stopped.... https://t.co/DY69mYYltE	80,843
TheJazzyBelle	They found his body. Our goal now needs to be justice. Those crackers on that boat murdered this man and are all wa... https://t.co/7OldjkGC3A	72,020
nalehhboo	being injected with so much ketamine it kills you #ElijahMcClain being shot 8 times in your own home... https://t.co/eG6jvHwHhq	38,304
HollyGood_Fella	So far they've painted BLM on streets. Canceled TV shows. Made changes in sports. Hired Black people in execut... https://t.co/MyUhToh1Ys	30,440
laurenistiredok	**PLEASE RETWEET** Elijah Weatherspoon has been missing since June 25, 2020. He went on a boat where he was the onl... https://t.co/vReruD8NHd	30,386
mosleyy_	AJ Mitchell, 19yo boy with autism died as a direct result of excessive police force on November 16, 2019. This hard... https://t.co/E7uYfYXXPh	30,310
AndyLunique	Hi. It's not over. Don't let it be over. #BlackLivesMatter	20,025
realBenjiirby	Me and @ShemekaMichelle at the North Carolina State Capitol. I was coming here to be a nerd and add this to my col... https://t.co/d5jYHMRyCn	11,355
taj_renard	It is the 31st consecutive day of civil unrest in the United States. Let that sink in. One entire month. For 8 a... https://t.co/EQYutCmOxv	11,325
DJEazyTwist	Detroit Police Department drove into 10-12 protesters including myself. Multiple people are going to the hospital.... https://t.co/DKJ20L5esq	10,006
ComplexMusic	.@DaBabyDaBaby with a very moving rendition of the #BlackLivesMatter "Rockstar" remix. #BETAwards https://t.co/HMdEJ75dxm	9,584
edwardnelson4tn	Meet Lloyd Crawford. Lloyd has a problem with taxpayers exercising their 1A rights in Germantown. He drove by twice... https://t.co/4lYCKuZ3sZ	7,490
KristenClarkeJD	BREAKING: After 126 years, Mississippi's state flag bearing Confederate battle emblem REMOVED. "I can't believe it... https://t.co/rtlceN2np1	6,827
SteveSchmidtSES	THE NIGHT THEY DROVE OLD DIXIE DOWN. GOOD RIDDANCE	5,151
larryelder	(Black) Chicago man fatally shot 2 (black) teens after they asked how tall he is, police say... https://t.co/jG5rKrLS2m	4,729
w_terrence	I FOUND A NOOSE IN MY HOUSE I'm calling on everyone to stand with me! Where is #blacklivesmatter ? This is very... https://t.co/QJG9Y3jImm	4,515
NWSL	This moment and this movement means everything to our players. #BlackLivesMatter https://t.co/g0BOzN9hoF	4,472
johncardillo	More video of #BlackLivesMatter violently attacking (with weapons) praying Catholics. https://t.co/QdkXiGIhx8	2,780
MrAndyNgo	.@PortlandPolice rushed in after #antifa rioters began trying to barricade the Central Precinct (they did that last... https://t.co/Z47ii2LKEd	2,550

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Visualizations which need to be consulted periodically can be grouped into a Dashboard. During the dip-sampling we noted further distinctions between the Data Tables for all BLM tweets (left) and those filtered for only those which include MAGA (right).
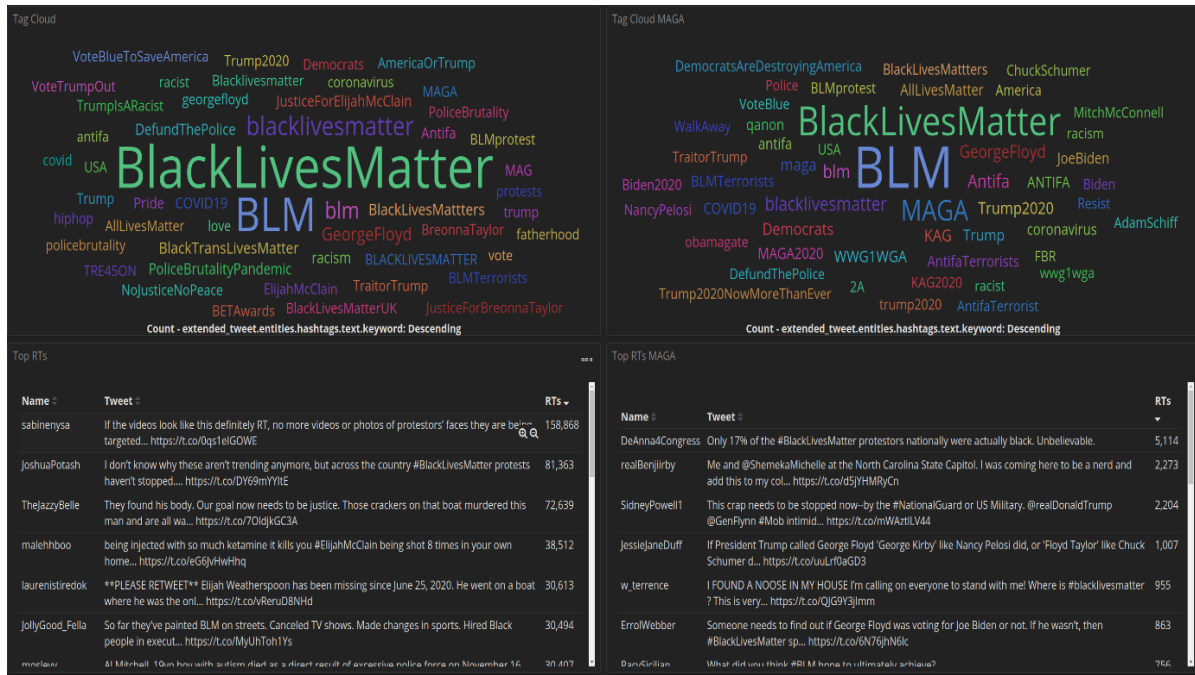
The Qanon conspiracy theory clearly emerges in the right-wing segment, alongside Trump's mainstream campaign tags and repeated references to Antifa.
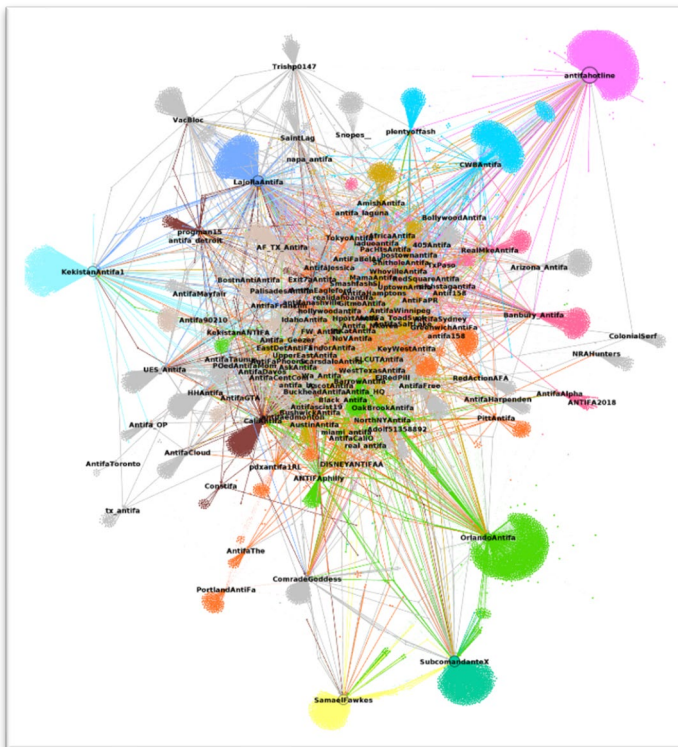

While Antifa is presented (including by President Donald Trump) as domestic terror operation, there is only a single murder attributed to the loose collective – which occurred twenty-seven years ago.

Their stated role I the current BLM protests is to operate on the ground protecting protesters from counter-protest violence, spotting and isolating provocateurs, and thwarting property damage. They describe themselves as a form of hybrid militia/police service answerable to local interests.

The list of 122 fake Antifa accounts was obtained from a public document, upon recommendation from an embedded CHIS (see acronyms) within Antifa.

These fake accounts have following or follower relationships with almost 14,000 other accounts.

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The layout colors are based on the Louvain automated community detection algorithm, and there is no legend for them, their purpose is to provide a visual clue of which nodes are more closely connected. Highlighting accounts by their Page Rank (size and importance based upon following and interactions) within the network, we see the top accounts. The trollish nature of this group is immediately apparent to Americans: La Jolla, a suburb of San Diego, has some of the highest priced real estate in the nation. Amish Antifa is suspicious, given this religious sect shuns modern technology. Kekistan Antifa is equally suspicious, as this name is associated with a notional "white homeland" in the Pacific Northwest. The attribution of these accounts as fake appears accurate, which implies sizeable active manipulation of narratives surrounding Antifa.
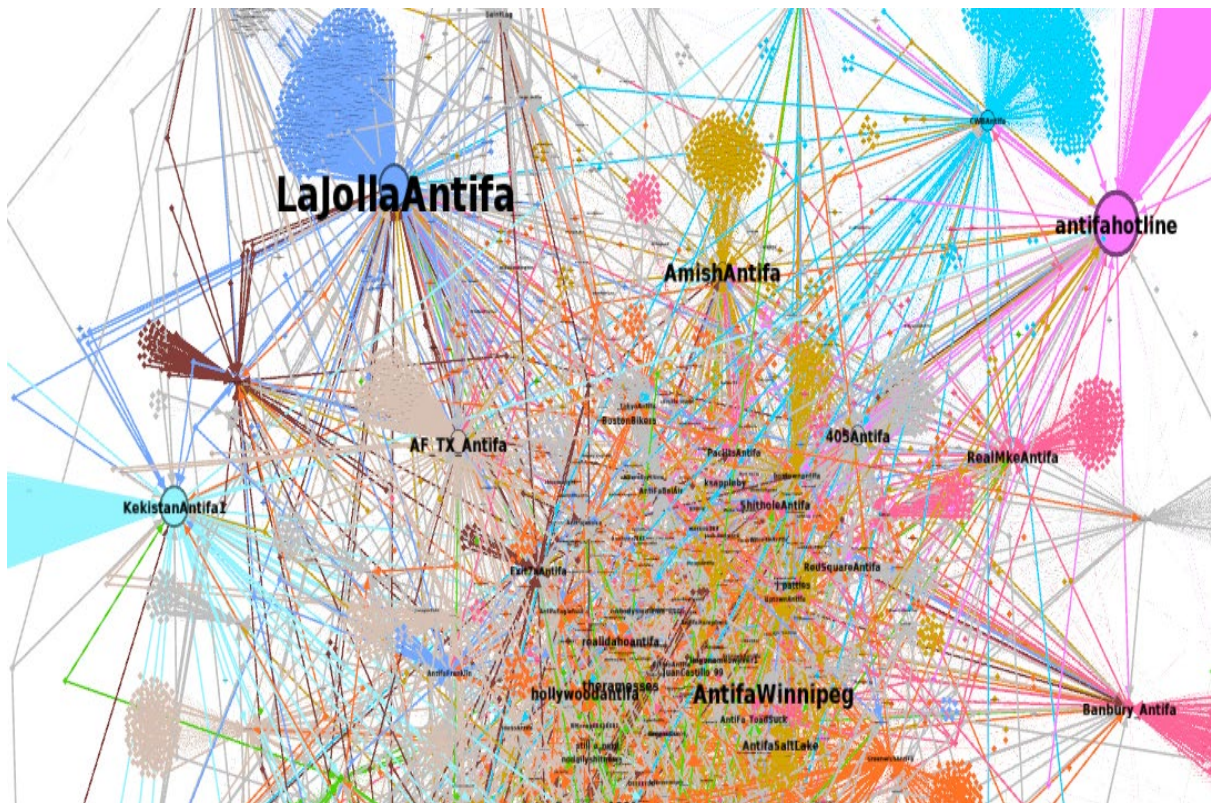

It is difficult to directly apportion responsibility for these fake accounts to a given right-wing group, but the tactic is aligned with known strategy documents attributed to the alt-right. Given the DOJ attention upon right-wing groups including Rise Above Movement, Proud Boys, Atomwaffen, and The Base, those who state their aim to be triggering the Second Civil War in the U.S. have been under scrutiny long enough that they have been deplatformed, infiltrated, and otherwise made wary. The more extreme chatter has gone to less public platforms such as Gab and Parler but they maintain influence operations on platforms such as Twitter. These far-right groups are now more openly affiliated but no longer, however, use hashtags to identify themselves. Many have fallen to using the term Boogaloo and subsequently are often known as Boogaloo Boys. Boogaloo refers to their desired civil war.

Qanon has been on radar since mid-2017 and is often associated with Boogaloo. Qanon began as a theory that there was a super-spy somewhere within the federal government and tens of thousands of sealed indictments for child sex trafficking were being kept secret. Later the movement split into Christian oriented religious views and New Age benign alien believers. The former are more overtly right-wing,

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often associated with the pro-gun lobby which is a subtheme of the Boogaloo groups, who have taken to attending protests with assault weapons.

Our dip-sample network of 98 Qanon accounts was hand selected. This graph shows the relationship groupings of a further 14,000 accounts which are followed or are following the 98. When there is violence in the United States around the November election or before it, it is very likely that Qanon/Boogaloo partisans will be directly involved, and if not directly involved they will serve as cheerleaders.
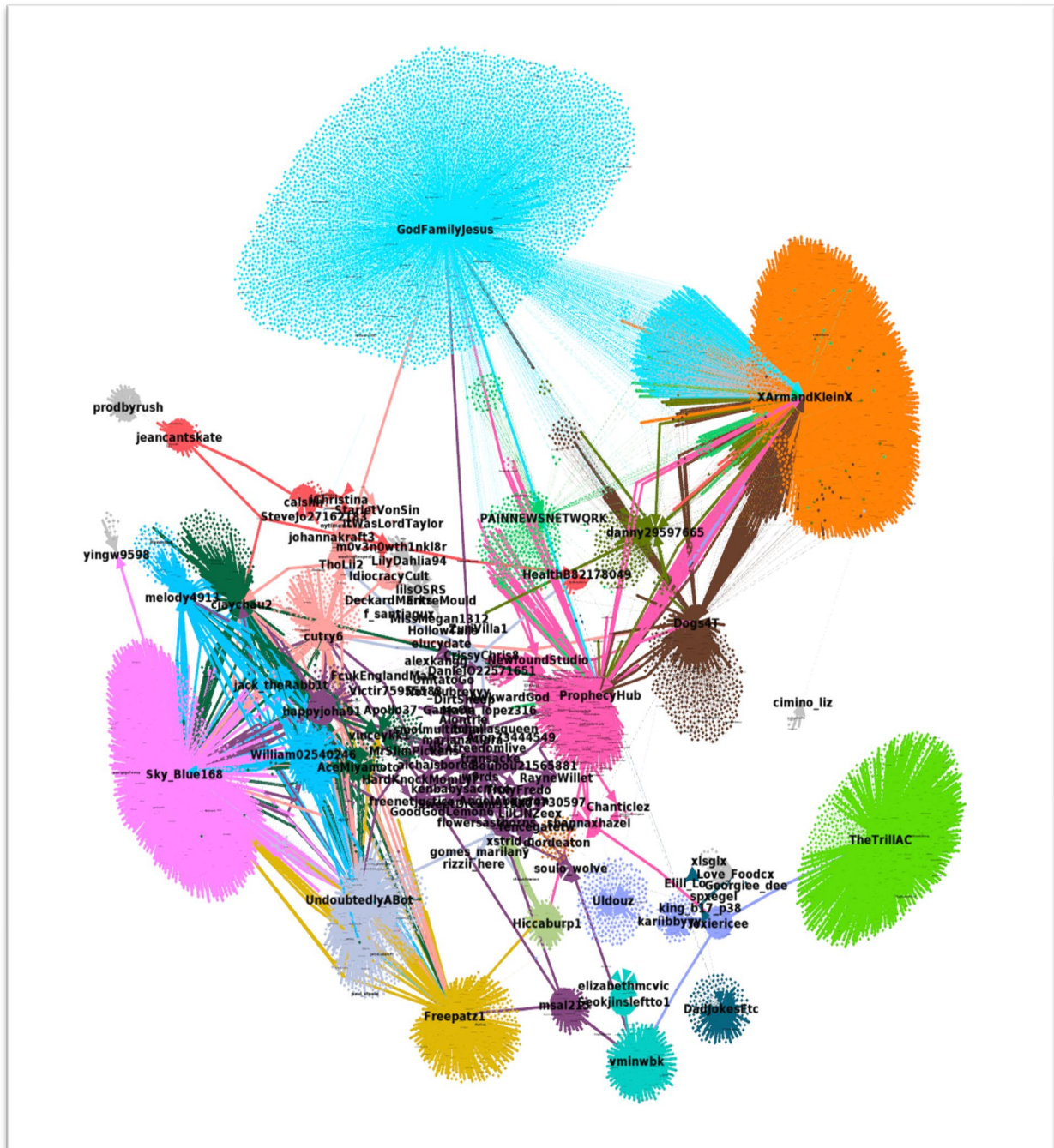
Twitter offers more information than just text content and relationships. URLs shared within tweets are available as separate items. The top seven URLs from the BLM feed contain three persistent, Qanon related child sex trafficking smears linked to Pizzagate, one of which originates from the highly efficient Kremlin-sympathetic news website Zerohedge.

Top URLs	Count
https://www.actionnewsjax.com/news/trending/man-fatally-shot-2-teens-after-they-asked-how-tall-he-is-police-say/VHMT3BRDYZHIVBICK7SMAWPIKM/	4,781
https://twitter.com/djeazytwist/status/1277430912653950976	1,603
https://twitter.com/kristenclarkejd/status/1277402604692279301	1,192
https://twitter.com/JoshuaPotash/status/1275937025527554049	1,110
https://thewaronliberty.com/monica-peterson-who-traveled-to-haiti-to-investigate-sex-trafficking-was-suicided-when-she-linked-the-clinton-foundation-caracol-industrial-complex/	1,067
https://www.coreysdigs.com/child-trafficking/are-bill-hillary-clinton-involved-with-child-trafficking/	1,067
https://www.zerohedge.com/news/2017-01-25/clinton-silsby-trafficking-scandal-and-how-media-attempted-ignorecover-it	1,067

Another under-utilized resource for attributing inauthentic action are custom applications.

Concurrent with Twitter's ejection of 70 million bot accounts in mid-2018 as part of their Smyte acquisition, they also canceled 143,000 applications. The golden age of misbehaving apps ended, bot traffic seems to have shifted in many cases to phone farms, but there are still tantalizing signatures to be found. Cleansing the BLM feed of well-known scheduling clients such as Tweetdeck and Hootsuite, we're left with a small number of non-standard applications.

Client	Count
devintern	1,725
IFTTT	651
Buffer	520
Cheap Bots, Done Quick!	444
GeneralStrike	430
Twitter Trend Bot 1499	361
3Drake	358
Streamlabs Twitter	335

Buffer and IFTTT are legitimate services. Buffer allows for scheduling content, while IFTTT is a general-purpose middleware which permits connections between many different social media platforms. The devintern app is used by one account that gives the appearance of actually being a developer intern. The top user of the Cheap Bots, Done Quick! (@mpscombot) application has some interest in U.K. politics but no followers. This latter service also powers some of Twitter's best loved bot accounts, including the darkly amusing @infinite_scream.

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Past examinations of applications have led to the individual who radicalized would-be bomber Cesar Sayoc, a Welsh marketing firm that engaged in coordinated inauthentic behavior regarding a campaign in the U.K., and a Canadian media firm entangled with individuals close to convicted Trump campaign staffer Roger Stone. Within the context of the BLM dip sample there are no significant warning markers of platform manipulation or automation identified by this application data.

Within the Qanon sub-set, we did however identify three hashtags #TakeTheOath, #DigitalSoldier, and #DigitalSoldiers – the latter two originally related to a failed conference in September of 2019, organized by Yippy (a privacy enabled search engine) CEO Rich Granville, who appears to be a Qanon believer. The intent of the abandoned event was to provide funds for General Flynn's defence. #TakeTheOath is new, and it involves individuals pledging themselves to the #Qarmy. Some 48k accounts have contributed 230k tweets to this effort. This is a live information operation with URL sharing an easily identifiable feature.
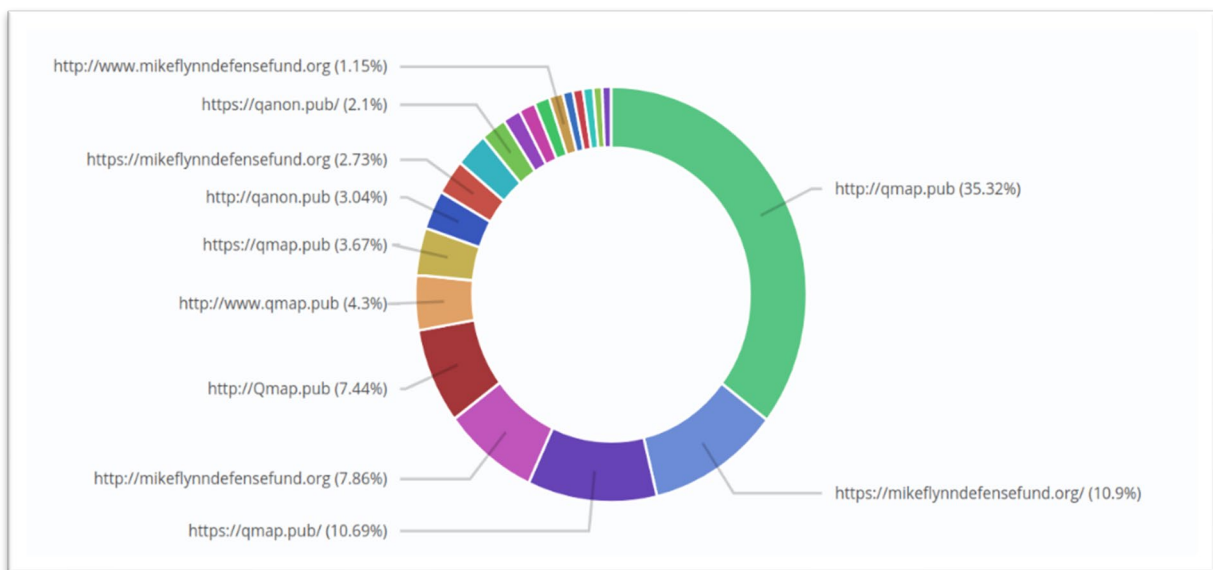
The most shared URL, the qmap.pub site, is dedicated to applying Gematria, a Hebrew specific form of numerology, and other methods of divination to "Q drops." These drops occur on the 8kun image board, the successor to 8chan - which was ejected from its hosting arrangement after the Christchurch massacre. Qmap appears to be heavily focused on connecting everyone in Hollywood and the Clintons with the Epstein child trafficking scandal. Exploring this further is outside of the scope of this report and would create a significant volume of data and intelligence to pursue.

DIP SAMPLE CONCLUSIONS:

The information space surrounding BLM, Antifa, and Boogaloo is not straightforward. The former two are loose, semi-anarchic collectives without defined leadership structures, which make them hard to perform traditional analysis upon, and the third is just the current collective name for a white supremacist militia intent on a second civil war.

There is a distinct division in the conversation surrounding Black Lives Matter. The right-wing firmly against the protests and the movement itself, using the "rule of law" argument to push the campaign narratives of the Trump 2020 campaign.

While Antifa appears to have taken on a protectionist role surrounding Black Lives Matter, it also a target for the right-wing and Boogaloo movement. There are fake accounts acting as agent provocateurs, masquerading as Antifa but this has been publicly identified and subsequently this is being actively contained.

There is evidence of conspiracy movement involvement with the right-wing Bugaloo groups and disinformation is being circulated trying to link celebrity and liberal figures to the Epstein scandal while reiterating previous, dangerous disinformation including Pizzagate narratives.

There are no notable concerns surrounding automated campaigns (bots) distributing and amplifying disinformation.

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SOURCE INTELLIGENCE:

SOURCE

Information can come from a number of places, it can be data, a document, correspondence, or a conversation. Source protection is integral to operational effectiveness and asset security. All information relating to sources which may identify a source is confidential and is never known outside of the sterile corridor.

RELIABILITY

	Known to be true without reservation	Known personally to the source but not analyst	Not known personally to the source but corroborated	Cannot be judged	Suspected to be false
Infallible					
Mostly Reliable		████			
Sometimes Reliable					
Unreliable					
Untested Source					

INFORMATION

Antifa have identified and are operating to counter the following threats in their current environment:

- The information space surrounding antifa is highly charged and rife with influence operations centred around framing antifa as a "domestic terrorism" group. These operations have been in place since 2017 and are promoted by Alt Right media influencers such as Jack Pososbiec and Andy Ngo.
- These operations have continued, largely, unabated, and have been given amplification by President Trump. This is a hybrid effort including tactics online and on the ground. Their primary function is to incite violence and push disinformation into activist communities.
- It is a common belief in leftist circles that influence operations are run by "libdems" (what we might refer to in Europe as centrists) to take control of the messaging around the protests in order to maintain "status quo" and "uphold capitalism".
- On the ground infiltration efforts have been successful leading to competing unreliable narratives in the media and online. Infiltration efforts online have had varied but recently diminishing impact on national narratives.

The containment strategy is to counter hostile information operations by creating a *'bigger and more interesting circus'* thus taking control of the protest's media coverage and to counter existing narratives demonising Antifa by using perception management tactics to "mock and discredit right wing fear mongering."

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To achieve these objectives a number of tactics were used in the execution of smaller operations. Much of the success of these counter operations was the result of effective use of social networking and the ability of the group to remain united in purpose. The group was also very effective in capitalising on national media events to insert a dominant and relatively easily managed narrative. Word of mouth was used to encourage protestors and left-wing influencers to avoid public display of symbols associated with Antifa to reduce the opportunities to demonise. This also helped group members identify hostile operations more quickly and easily.

Handles using the term CHAZ (Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone) were created by members to prevent opposition from being able to build a large and easy to publicly find disinformation platform. Only one account was able to gain a foothold as a hostile info operation with any real reach.

Memetics were used to troll right wing media. Memes identified Antifa as being "patriotic furries and juggalos." Media influencers were mocked for alarmist attitudes about Antifa. This particular effort was eventually picked up and reported on by Fox News who ran stories claiming that Antifa was run by "juggalos" after reporting on a hoax document originally pushed in 2015. Memetics were deployed again in response to another Fox news story, referencing the 1960-70's activist group Weather Underground, which claimed that among the goals of protestors was to "attack and dethrone god". This phrase was adopted and used as counter memetics. "ATTACK AND DETHRONE GOD" was made to trend on Twitter for over 24hrs. This was far and away the group's most virally successful operation. The third large, successful information operation was a push to influence the UN to take a stand for Antifa. The UN eventually wizened up and deleted their tweets on the subject, but not before Turning Point USA's Charlie Kirk took note.

Using Twitter analytics and a Follow Back (following back all accounts who follow you) approach to account growth and visibility, the group was able to grow the primary operational account to over 5.5k followers within a month. Taking a reactive approach to right-wing media news cycles in an immediate and focused way allowed the group to successfully build on, manipulate, and grow trends in such a way as to dominate the algorithmically boosted conversation.

There was much debate surrounding the legitimacy of protest leadership on the ground. Characters came and went, arguing over the name of the protest, the intent of the protest, the extent to which city officials should be cooperated with. The group decided that rather than try to determine the motives and backstory of each player, the best option would be to ignore these debates and focus on the reinforcement of a fact-based narrative. Often, it seems more effective to allow these fights to be their own distraction until they exhaust themselves rather than feed the fire.

Conversation around the Boogaloo Boys is tense. Whether to see them as a white nationalist group or an anti-government/authority group loses sight of the fact that they appeal to both populations. This also applies to the concept of Accelerationism which is at the centre of a battle in the "culture wars." The push/pull over ownership of Accelerationism as a concept is leading to division among researchers, journalists, and counter terror experts. This inability to settle on a unified understanding of the phenomena is likely facilitating the ability of bad actors to exploit the lack of pushback to build the narrative most helpful for them. This is a theory that would require further research.

There has been a good deal of OSINT done with regards to Antifa accounts run by white nationalist groups and right-wing influencers. Next, steps should include collecting, organizing, and analysing available information. This effort, again, makes clear that it is necessary for counter operations to find ways to track the evolution of information ops.

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SOURCE INTELLIGENCE CONCLUSIONS:

Network maps provide a snapshot of what "is" at a given moment, but information operations are not static. IO evolves and shifts; players change, accounts are abandoned or suspended, personas are outed, tools abandoned from previous ops are repurposed, motivations of group members are often at odds. Finding ways to track these changes as they happen will increase the likelihood of accurate attribution and provide a base knowledge saving time and resources for future researchers as they take on new projects in a rapidly changing landscape.

Black Lives Matter as both an online and a real-world protest movement is an access point for narratives and counter-narratives relating to both Antifa and white supremacist groups, and is being used as an Influence Operations battleground on a number of levels in society, from grassroots groups to major political campaigns.

Twitter forms part of solution in terms of monitoring and identifying malicious actors but is not the full answer to understanding a complex environment.

The landscape is rapidly shifting at the flashpoint of protest and counter-protest but more stability exists behind the scenes in the more deeply embedded digital infrastructure and in human connections between local actors on the ground.

Antifa is being subjected to ongoing smear operations but has now developed a more functional and replicable control strategy.

The tri-group exploration underlines the need for a move away from set plays, such as fact-checking as these mechanisms are flawed and do not demonstrate understanding of or capability to deal with what is taking place in reality.

There is a continued risk as academic researchers and the media organisations continue to try and create definitions for the sake of kudos at the expense of addressing the issues at hand and this undermines and excludes operational expertise working in the field (operational researchers, ground operatives, digital campaign managers). This competition is counter-productive.

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SOCIETY BURNING:

THE DISINFORMATION MACHINE

THE DISINFORMATION MACHINE:

The Marxism narrative has roots much older than the 2020 global resurgence of Black Lives Matter following the death of George Floyd. It can be found in the previously leaked "MAGA3X" strategy document, written and distributed by central alt-right figures, which formed the basis of right-wing support for Trump's campaign over the 2016-2018 period.

With references to the 2013 GamerGate incident, which involved misogynistic trolling of a female game designer and swiftly spilled out into doxing and attacked on the media, the document states:

"Trump & Co managed - by shitposting, respecting chan culture and having statements that a majority agrees with - to recruit many from places like /poll, /thedonald, parts of GG, Anonymous etc to his cause. These places knew a lot about the corruption and had their fare [SIC] share of the treatment that the media shared around, and they knew what the marxist subversion from the radical media and people like Clinton & Co did. He gave them an opening out - they had to partake with him on this death ground which represents western civilization and the USA from its downfall to Marxists, Islam and the corrupt. A death ground which is correct - if Trump doesn't win, the USA is finished within 50 years. Having recruited these people, the new recruiters used tactics they got from /poll and GG -dig, spread info, debate. The fact that everyone has fun doing so via shitposting and triggering the opposition works out too, as the constant events and momentum keeps them going." The concept of "constant events" is critical.

The mainstream response to disinformation and influence operations has seen one of two actions repeated time and again since 2016. The first: detailed academic research on an already historic dataset relating to an information environment that no longer exists, which takes many months to prepare as it seeks to create a new area of (or definition within) academic study - subsequently becoming meaningless long before it reaches even peer review. The second: the strategically defective habit of highlighting and repeating disinformation, bringing it to larger audiences through often nationally respected media outlets, and sharing that coverage through social media - which enables disinformation actors to trawl the responses, identifying susceptible new audience segments before moving on - immediately generating new content designed to disrupt.

The strategists behind the right-wing campaign recognised at an early stage it would be easy to drive a coach and horses through scrutiny and opposition by adopting the approach of being unbound to one narrative, not adhering to a single set of rules, and to not persisting with any given operation for a prolonged period. "Pivot" became the central tactical pillar and was combined with flooding the information landscape with a shrapnel made of nonsense to occupy resources.

They saw it as fun. A game. The strategy document states: *"The reason is simple: superior strategists see things as they are. They are highly sensitive to dangers and opportunities. Nothing stays the same in life, and keeping up with circumstances as they change requires a great deal of mental fluidity. Great strategists do not act according to preconceived ideas; they respond to the moment, like children. Their minds are always moving, and they are always excited and curious. That is how creativity is sparked and opportunities are seized. Knowledge, experience, and theory have limitations: no amount of thinking in advance can prepare you for the chaos of life, for the infinite possibilities of the moment."*

Among their operational directives, this strategy of being in constant motion would see "squads" moving from *"exposure of the dangers of Marxist subversion"* to addressing *"political correctness, feminism, etc, and What would happen if it isn't stopped?"* to integrating into *"extreme-left echo-chambers,"* to *"expose them gradually to the truth, by taking turns, so information gets in periodically."*

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By giving up on rules, they were able to move and move and move again, shifting between livestream videos in which they would *"go over new things each and everyday, maybe use the new information on the first 100 days, do a steps plan on Student Debt. Speak to each demographic in each of these videos. Talk about how America will be great again (specifically give the American people the VISION, inspire them} and don't mention the bad as much*. Give Citizen Journalists Batteries, Supplies and necessary equipment to tape/record polls and live stream these events. Give America a chance to see your family and connect with them,"* before moving to shock tactics. For example: *"during the campaign we had certain hashtags, especially where we feel it swayed a lot of the catholic voters or just downright scared the minorities (Hispanics & African Americans)."*

This was bolstered with the instruction to *"Call radio stations, send in opinion pieces to local news sources. Make sure all points relate to regional politics, economy, people etc"* and a local direction to *"investigate possible voter fraud."* This distorted the view of not just the public, but the media and policy makers too.

There is no way this style of bombardment can successfully reach a wide audience on its own, because it is made up tiny fragments which could only ever land or resonate with tiny segments of society. Once the approach of fact-checking and writing about fake news kicked in however, everything they did was amplified and reached new heights. Disinformation was and still is news headlines every day.

It was all done in plain sight and the source of their inspiration, given current events, may come as a surprise to some, depending where they were looking.

In a deeply perverse adaptation, some of the core elements crucial to the success of Black Lives Matter as a movement formed part of the strategic side of the MAGA3X document: *"The trick behind the painting of a narrative is slandering the opposition into submission; threatening or making examples by ruining people's careers and personal lives all while holding the card of righteous indignation. They figured out ways to beat the opponent, like mailing campaigns to advertisers of media and dragging the media to journalistic authorities."*

Skewed by the false victimhood (the "oppression of white people" which is the staple reserve of white supremacy globally), the tactical understanding of campaign functionality was incredibly perceptive. In particular around the unique capability to economically target corporate interests – a feature only made possible by the integration of digital media marketing teams deploying costly constant monitoring utilities for brand mentions with rapid response protocols and suggested content embedded. The practice of being "in the trend cycle" is skewing behaviour at all levels and the risk remains largely unidentified.

What the alt-right failed to achieve while BLM succeeded however, is devolved responsibility. While the MAGA3X document made it explicitly clear, saying: *"what [SIC] more, the trick GG used best was the "I am Spartacus" routine; everyone was a leader. Nobody could be presented as the sole leader of GG to be slandered. They would have to slander everybody, creating a sense of comradery and safety,"* those behind MAGA3X never could keep out of the sunlight. Which goes to show it might still be the best disinfectant.

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SOCIETY BURNING:

A CRASH COURSE IN SURVIVING WEAPONISED SOCIAL MEDIA

A CRASH COURSE IN SURVIVING WEAPONISED SOCIAL MEDIA:

We believe knowledge sharing is essential and that core principles should be understood by everyone.

Twitter is where the pebble drops in the water. Online media and Facebook are where the ripples spread on the surface, visible to everyone. Private messaging is where the undercurrents flow. The digital situation is, in truth, more complex than this. However, these principles can be broadly used as a basis for understanding.

Twitter holds a unique position as a platform used by journalists and politicians to drive and respond to narratives in real-time. Twitter is both a source of news content and an instant source of news items – which is why fake news is so easily amplified on the platform. Trends grow and disappear rapidly, often changing several times in a space of hours. It is the most instantly impactive platform due to its short-form nature and is highly effective and triggering emotional responses. By design it traps users in a dopamine cycle and has a much more limited reach than Facebook.

Anonymous use is more prevalent on Twitter, which has the dual effect of reducing behavioural standards and increasing the cross-pollination of issues across geographical boundaries. This also means there is less trust capital in Twitter content compared to Facebook, subsequently it is more effective in the case of hyper-engaged demographic audience segments. This has the effect of creating echo-chambers and self-containing messaging. The platform design makes itself and its users highly pliable and vulnerable to influence operations.

Facebook is slightly different due to its nature. Trust capital is built into the platform due to the fact it relies on real-world human relationships to build digital networks. This creates more influence than in the case of anonymous usage platforms and, as a result, sees more real-world outcomes from online campaigns. Information percolates over a slightly longer timeframe – days rather than hours – and lingers for weeks rather than days.

Private messaging combines the reduced behavioural standards associated with anonymity and an inflated sense of trust capital to create a hugely influential medium operating with a constant flow of information and little or no external control. This is why incidents such as the Whatsapp Lynchings have occurred and disinformation can persist for many months or years: a secret belief shared with trusted friends is self-sustaining, no matter how outlandish it is. All of these platforms see their own algorithms creating signal amplification based on frequency of messaging, so it is very easy to increase the footprint of information as long as you understand the system will help you.

SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS AND NEWS CYCLES CREATE EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE. THIS KEEPS YOU SCROLLING, AND IT KEEPS ADVERTISERS PAYING OUT. NEVER FORGET, YOU ARE THE PRODUCT.

Layered on top of this, each of these platforms create search engine entries and traffic. So all of the content can serve to increase the traffic to websites and this type of co-ordinated activity is often misunderstood.

In the case of disinformation, for example, not only will a fact-check increase the visibility of the original disinformation on a social network – also bringing it to a larger audience than it would have otherwise reached – but it will also enhance the search engine ranking of the originator.

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So, if the source of the disinformation is a fake news website using "5G Coronavirus" in its SEO entry, every social media post and fact-check article mentioning those terms will increase the visibility of the original malicous actor.

REPEATING DISINFORMATION, EVEN TO FACT CHECK IT, HELPS IT REACH FURTHER. THE MORE DISINFORMATION IS REPEATED, THE MORE DISTORTED THE TRUTH GETS.

You must also be aware of the goldfish bowl effect. Firstly, due to segmented audiences and echo chambers, information has a high chance of re-emerging regularly even where it is old or outdated. The algorithm then takes over, sees the past popularity and decides it must be worthy of more attention again. This creates a cycle of apparent "this is new, this is new, this new" and draws people into often circular conversations which serve no forward or strategic purpose. Secondly, the dopamine cycle addicts people to trending topics, either to boost their own popularity through hashtag usage, or through the triggering of emotional responses (predominantly rage, in which the red mist effect clouds judgment). This means that when a topic starts to gain popularity again people will join in with it, no matter how many times it has been fruitlessly pursued before.

From a campaigning perspective, the goldfish bowl effect is hugely detrimental as it detracts from here and now needs and keeps people discussing and fighting issues which are no longer in play. It is also incredibly easy to trigger people into goldfish bowl patterns of behaviour in order to keep their time occupied and their efforts off-mission. The more immediacy there is to the platform (the closer to the pebble dropping in the water) the harsher the goldfish bowl effect is.

NEWS, FACTS, AND DISINFORMATION COMPETE FOR YOUR ATTENTION. OFTEN, THEY OVERLAP, CREATING GREY AREAS AND LEADING TO CONFUSION. YOU CAN ONLY SEE THE TRUTH BY LOOKING CLOSELY. MOST PEOPLE ARE NOT LOOKING CLOSELY, SO ALL THEY SEE IS STATIC.

While all social media users benefit from detachment, releasing them from the dopamine cycle which keeps them on platform, corporate entities are vulnerable in a slightly different way.

Over recent years digital media marketing has become embedded in corporate strategy. An industry has subsequently developed, bringing a number of digital media utilities to business consumers, providing them with everything from social listening to brand and competitor analysis and alerts. As a consequence, it is now common for brand mentions to be monitored in real-time with rapid responses to those mentions being deployed. This leaves businesses vulnerable to the trend cycle and trolling in the same way as individuals, the different outcome being a decision to spend more on advertising or to make a declaration or pledge before an information landscape is clear enough to make a reasoned judgment call or adequately assess financial or reputational risk. A variant of this also drives media coverage. Corporate responses are being weaponised in the same ways news content and voters are.

The one lesson in this complex digital landscape which is universal to individuals, campaigns, political parties, journalists, and businesses alike is a simple one:
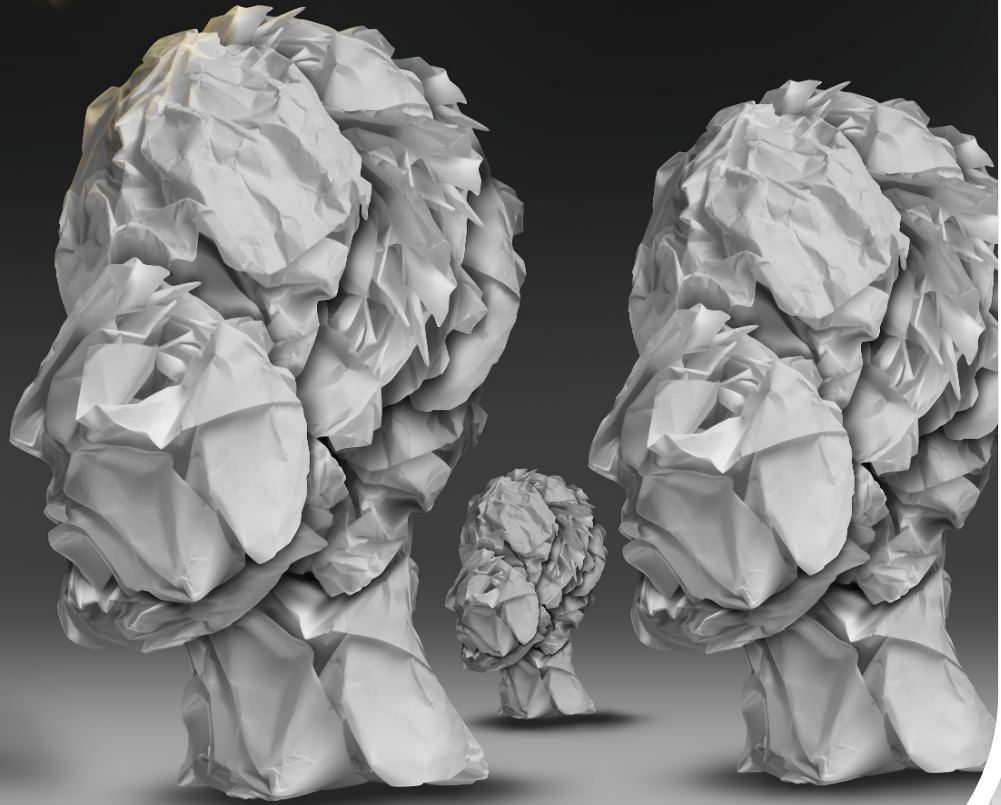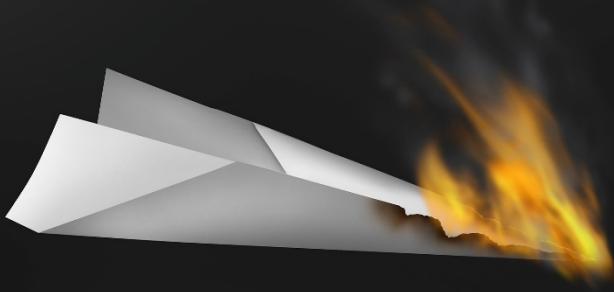
DETACH. DIGEST. DISARM

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SOCIETY BURNING:

TACTICAL ASSESSMENT

Social Media Intelligence Unit

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A project of

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