1.THREAD: Twitter Files Supplemental

@UNGATHEGREAT

2.In July of 2020, San Francisco FBI agent Elvis Chan tells Twitter executive Yoel Roth to expect written questions from the Foreign Influence Task Force (FITF), the inter-agency group that deals with cyber threats.

Hi Yoel,

I believe FITF would like a response ahead of our meeting the week of August 10th. It can be a written response or we can set up a phone call. Whatever is easiest for you. I think you can tell from the nature of the questions, that there was quite a bit of discussion within the USIC to get clarifications from your company. Let me know how you would like to proceed. Thanks!

Regards,
Elvis

3.The questionnaire authors seem displeased with Twitter for implying, in a July 20th "DHS/ODNI/FBI/Industry briefing," that "you indicated you had not observed much recent activity from official propaganda actors on your platform."

During the 10 June 2020 working group meeting on election security, you indicated you had not observed much recent activity from official propaganda actors on your platform. To make sure we understand the state-media online landscape as much as possible, we hope you would be able to answer some questions about your analysis and conclusions. For context, other sources we are aware of (including those referenced below) indicate state media actors are prolific users of social media, which seems in contrast to your own analysis as we documented it at the time of our discussion. We would appreciate any other information you are willing to provide about your recent conclusions:

- In what ways and by what measures do you see official propaganda actors as less active than other groups on your platform? What groups are you comparing to official propaganda actors?
- What official propaganda actors did you include in your analysis? How do you differentiate official propaganda actors from foreign state actors and what is the reasoning to make that distinction? In which bucket do you place, for example, outlets such as Ruptly or In the NOW, which are part of the state media apparatus but which seek to obscure that link by using different branding? Are they included in your analysis?
- What quantitative metrics do you use to judge volume of activity on your platform? On what scale? Can you provide these metrics?
- What relative weight do you give each metric when judging volume of activity?
- What qualitative measures do you use to inform judgments about activity, including the volume of activity, on your platform?
- How do you limit the scope of your analysis of the domestic, scam, foreign state, official propaganda, and white supremacist actors? (i.e., date range, language, location, topic, etc.)

References:

Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, "Covid-19 News and Information from State-Backed Outlets Targeting French, German and Spanish-Speaking Social Media Users," 29 June 2020

Foreign Policy Research Institute, "Russia's Narratives about U.S. Election Integrity in 2020," 25 May 2020

Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, "Coronavirus Coverage by State-Backed English-Language News Sources Understanding Chinese, Iranian, Russian and Turkish Government Media," 8 April 2020

Mercator Institute for China Studies, "Propaganda beyond the Great Firewall," 5 December 2019

Wall Street Journal, "Russia State News Outlet RT Thrives on YouTube, Facebook," 24 October 2017

4.One would think that would be good news. The agencies seemed to feel otherwise.

5.Chan underscored this: "There was quite a bit of discussion within the USIC to get clarifications from your company," he wrote, referring to the United States Intelligence Community.

6.The task force demanded to know how Twitter came to its unpopular conclusion. Oddly, it included a bibliography of public sources - including a Wall Street Journal article - attesting to the prevalence of foreign threats, as if to show Twitter they got it wrong.

7.Roth, receiving the questions, circulated them with other company executives, and complained that he was "frankly perplexed by the requests here, which seem more like something we'd get from a congressional committee than the Bureau."

Privileged and Confidential

Hi team,

The questions we received are attached. I'm frankly perplexed by the requests here, which seem more like something we'd get from a congressional committee than the Bureau. There's a big discussion to be had about state-controlled media, which will be impacted by the label launch later this month — but I'm not particularly comfortable with the Bureau (and by extension the IC) demanding written answers here. What's your perspective on how best to navigate?

Thanks,

Yoel

8.He added he was not "comfortable with the Bureau (and by extension the IC) demanding written answers." The idea of the FBI acting as conduit for the Intelligence Community is interesting, given that many agencies are barred from domestic operations.

9.He then sent another note internally, saying the premise of the questions was "flawed," because "we've been clear that official state propaganda is definitely a thing on Twitter." Note the italics for emphasis.

Privileged and Confidential

One other follow-up: In rereading the doc, the entire premise seems flawed. In our June 2020 briefing, we did not indicate that we "had not observed much recent activity from official propaganda actors on your platform." I re-reviewed my notes from that briefing, and there's a specific item calling out official propaganda outlets as a major factor. And in multiple follow-ups with Elvis and we've been clear that official state propaganda is *definitely a thing on Twitter*, but that it's different in terms of how we handle it than clandestine fake accounts.

My recommendation is to get on the phone with Elvis ASAP and try to straighten this out. I'm concerned that there's swirl somewhere in the IC about a statement that may have been fundamentally misunderstood. would you be ok with me reaching out to Elvis today to try to do that, in advance of more formally engaging with the doc they sent?

Yoel

10.Roth suggested they "get on the phone with Elvis ASAP and try to straighten this out," to disabuse the agencies of any notion that state propaganda is not a "thing" on Twitter.

11.This exchange is odd among other things because some of the "bibliography" materials cited by the FITF are sourced to intelligence officials, who in turn cited the public sources.

12.The FBI responded to Friday's report by saying it "regularly engages with private sector entities to provide information specific to identified foreign malign influence actors' subversive, undeclared, covert, or criminal activities."

Jon Nicosia
@NewsPolitics

The FBI replies to @mtaibbi "The FBI regularly engages with private sector entities to provide information specific to identified foreign malign influence actors' subversive, undeclared, covert, or criminal activities. Private sector entities independently make decisions about"

6:30 PM · Dec 16, 2022

789 Retweets 240 Quote Tweets 3,958 Likes

13.That may be true, but we haven't seen that in the documents to date. Instead, we've mostly seen requests for moderation involving low-follower accounts belonging to ordinary Americans – and Billy Baldwin.

14.Watch @bariweiss and @ShellenbergerMD for more from the Twitter Files.