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Dec 9, 2022 · 13 tweets · [P_Kallioniemi/status/1601115023589658624](https://twitter.com/P_Kallioniemi/status/1601115023589658624)

In today's [#vatnik](#) soup, I'll continue discussing about info ops, disinfo & propaganda. Today's focus will be on troll farms and "useful idiots".

As usual, I'll focus on Russia and its activities because of its topicality and the previous research available.

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Troll farms are government-coordinated groups or private companies consisting of internet trolls that attempt to affect the public opinion and behavior inside a society or a community.

Their main job is to augment propaganda, and harass and ridicule the opposition.

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In 2017 think tank Freedom House's report stated that at least 30 countries have their own paid keyboard armies to spread propaganda and disrupt the flow of factual information. Same study suggested that elections in 18 countries were influenced by these troll farms.

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30 countries that pay pro-government commentators:

Azerbaijan	Bahrain	Belarus
China	Cuba	Ecuador
Egypt	Ethiopia	The Gambia
Iran	Kazakhstan	Kenya
Kyrgyzstan	Malaysia	Mexico
Morocco	Myanmar	Philippines
Russia	Rwanda	Saudi Arabia
Sudan	Syria	Thailand
Turkey	Ukraine	United Arab Emirates
Uzbekistan	Venezuela	Vietnam

One example of heavy influence on social media was when the journalist Jamal Khashoggi was brutally murdered by the Saudis in Istanbul. A huge troll army controlled the narrative on Twitter and other platforms and basically silenced those who tried to bring the issue up.

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Troll farms are a lucrative business, and are often outsourced by the governments to private actors, such as Prigozhin's IRA in Russia. MIT's Tech Review reported that troll farms reached 140 million American Facebook users during the 2020 elections.

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Building an effective troll farm is hard work and takes time. These fake communities infiltrate the social media space slowly, but once they are set up they can be extremely effective as people have started trusting them throughout the years.

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For example, in 2019, 95% of biggest US Christian pages on FB were actually troll farms. For African-American FB pages, this number was 67%.



Fringe groups whose general opinions differs from the mainstream are often targeted by troll farms.

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Russians have outsourced troll farms for a while now. This way connection between the Kremlin and the propaganda factory is diluted.

During 2016 US elections alleged but not confirmed connections were made to Macedonia, which is still a home to several active troll farms.

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They've moved on, though, and these days many troll farms are being erected in African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana. Once the home of so-called 419 scams, Nigeria has become an active hotspot for propaganda related to racial issues, LGBT+ rights and election fraud.

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Russian Trolls Outsource Disinformation Campaigns To Africa

Emma Woollacott Senior Contributor

Mar 13, 2020, 08:03am EDT

 This article is more than 2 years old.



🇷🇺 has also cooperated and outsourced its troll farm activity to China. They have vast networks of trolls ready to be deployed to social sites. One of these networks had 150 000 000 trolls. In 2022 alone, FB has removed billions of fake accounts:



Facebook removed 1.6 billion fake accounts in just three months

Facebook's new transparency report has revealed the platform removed more than 1.6 billion fake accounts between January and March.

<https://www.imore.com/facebook-removed-16-billion-fake-accounts-just-three-months>

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There's not much recent data on Twitter, but Elon's "balancing act" & focus on purging left-wing accounts have left pro-Russian trolls rampant on Twitter.



Twitter purges left-wing accounts to appease far-right trolls: report

"Musk appears to have outsourced decisions about who to ban from Twitter to right-wing extremists."

<https://www.salon.com/2022/12/01/elon-musks-twitter-is-purging-left-wing-accounts-wh...>

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"Useful idiots", meaning the people who are now spreading Kremlin-sponsored messages didn't change their mind over the issue overnight:

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In today's #vatnik soup, I'll go through the many motives in creation of pro-🇷🇺 "useful idiots". By useful idiot I refer to a person who spreads propaganda and disinfo for a cause, either consciously or unconsciously. It's by no means a comprehensive list, but it's a good intro. 1/13



8:35 AM · Nov 10, 2022

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They've been successful targets of the ideological subversion I discussed in my previous soup.

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They've been ingesting 🇷🇺 propaganda through these troll farms for years and have slowly changed their worldview. That's why they are so adamant about the topic and usually no arguments will change their mind.

Thanks for tuning in, next I'll talk about fake news blogs!

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