Twitter Thread by Michiel van Hulten



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So here's the thread on Huawei I promised yesterday. It seems Huawei is using social media black ops tactics to try to convince policy-makers in Belgium that it can be trusted to build 5G networks. ■

My attention was piqued this weekend when I saw a promoted tweet by someone called Mike Bai in my timeline. His timeline suggests he normally tweets in English, but this tweet was in poor Dutch. I've seen many promoted tweets from him since.

The tweet calls for an end to the "politics of hide and seek" and for "seleciton criteria to be exposed" (literal English translation of the poor Dutch). The tweet links to an article entitled "Belgium and 5G - a complicated relationship". So far no textual reference to Huawei.

A check on LinkedIn reveals that Mike is "President of Strategy Marketing Western Europe" for Huawei Technologies.

Mike is also, according to his Twitter page, "one of the Top 100 #Global #ThoughLeaders and #Influencers to follow in 2020 by @MagazineAwards". The tweet was pinned to his profile on Sunday but has since been unpinned. Link to tweet: https://t.co/r7fk8yo83H

> Really proud and excited to be named one of the Top 100 #Global #ThoughLeaders and #Influencers to follow in 2020 by @MagazineAwards !
> Thanks a lot for the great recognition. \U0001f64f\U0001f64f\U0001f64f#TECH4ALLhttps://t.co/PaQz31hNM3
>
> — Mike BAI (@Mike_IMC) October 28, 2020

Sounds impressive, right? So I thought I would check out the Magazine Awards, as I had never heard of them. Its Twitter account, set up in March 2020 (also when Mike Bai joined Twitter!), had 641 followers today. Seems low for a magazine that makes important influencer listings.

So I went to the "Awards Magazine" website to see if I could find more information about it, like who publishes it, and where it is based. There is no such information on the website. "Drop a message. We will contact you!!"

The Awards Magazine describes itself as "one of the world's leading business media brand [sic] and analyses organizations/profiles [note the mix of UK and US spelling] that are best in their industries." It looks more like a front set up

by a PR company.

So Mike Bai promotes his selection as a 100 Top Influencer by a seemingly brand new magazine that has a secretive online presence. Clicking on the names of other "Top 100 Influencers" leads you down several new rabbit holes of questionable awards, publications and affiliations.

Back to Mike's tweet that piqued my attention. It links to a blog post written by a Johannes Drooghaag (EN version: https://t.co/rucR8vzCew). The post analyses Belgium's history of "backroom deals" and suggests its decision to ban Huawei from 5G networks is such a deal.

So who is this Johannes Drooghaag whose arguments seem to align neatly with those of Huawei? According to his LinkedIn profile, he's a Germany-based self-employed consultant who is into cyber security and social media strategy.

According to China Global Television Network (CGTN), Mr Drooghaag is based in the Netherlands. And he seems to be a big fan of Huawei.

Mr. Drooghaag's website and social media acccounts are full of hagiographic pieces about Huawei and its founder. Could it be that Mr. Drooghaag is actually a consultant paid by Huawei to work on its online campaign to fight back against the 5G bans?

In July this year Mr. Drooghaag gave a YouTube talk with someone called Bill Mew. Recently Mike Bai linked to a blog post written by Bill Mew. And Bill Mew in turn appeared on Russian state proganda channel RT to criticise the US decision to exclude Huawei from its 5G networks.

Who is Bill Mew? According to his LinkedIn profile he runs a consultancy called Crisis Team, but the "About us" page of the company website yields a 404 error message. There is a page touting Huawei's offer to allay the security concerns of Western buyers though.

Mike Bai also retweeted another "news article", from a website called "https://t.co/17I3ykwU1r". The article appeared to be a reprint of an article by someone called Colin Stevens of the website EU Reporter.

EU Reporter recently organised an expert panel to "debate the proposed new Belgian 5G law". Panel speakers included Yvan Desmedt, a lawyer for US firm Jones Day, and someone called Mike Parr of PWR Ltd. Jones Day has worked for Huawei (and Trump) in the US.

EU Reporter seems to be very interested in Huawei and sympathetic to its point of view. At the expert panel discussion all voices were pro-Huawei. If the website is sponsored or paid for by Huawei, nowhere on its website does it say so.

Huawei also tried to link to actual news reporting to back up its case. Journalist @pieter_haeck from Belgian business newspaper @tijd complained that Huawei was guilty of "selective reading" of his piece and called Huawei's behaviour "plainly bizarre".

The trigger for all this Huawei activity appears to be the fact that Belgian telecoms regulator BIPT is conducting a public consultation on the "bill and draft Royal Decree introducing additional security measures for the provision of mobile 5G services": https://t.co/HZu2tFDKOE

So to sum up: in a last-ditch effort to be trusted to take part in the building of Belgium's future 5G network infrastructure, Huawei now relies on an ecosystem of misleading online content, by all indications of its own making. Good luck with that!