Twitter Thread by Amarnath Amarasingam



Amarnath Amarasingam
@AmarAmarasingam

1. (THREAD) So, it seems like the deplatforming debate is once again kicking off, so I thought I would introduce some of the earlier work that was done in this area back when ISIS was buck wild on social media. What have we learned over the last six years might be useful today:

2. One of the earliest studies that discussed the impact of suspensions of ISIS accounts was @intelwire and Morgan's piece: The ISIS Twitter Consensus.

They found that suspensions did have an impact on replies and retweets and overall dissemination. https://t.co/G12JUYtuzK

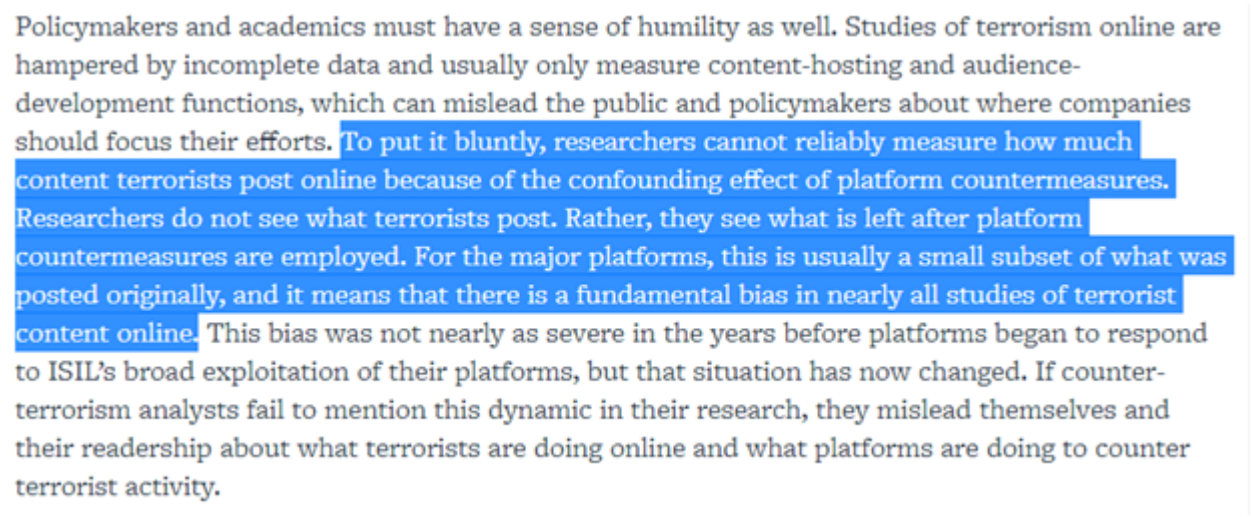
3. After suspensions, the die-hard supporters dedicated themselves to creating new accounts, but others whittled away: “it appears the pace of account creation has lagged behind the pace of suspensions”

4. On the specific question of how suspensions impact the Twitter network, see this piece by @intelwire and @IntelGirl111, which explores how suspensions impact these groups, including major disruptions to dissemination and decline in follower count: https://t.co/0IWInJ2Ncx

5. Another study by @Aud_Alexander similarly found that ISIS supporters were finding it hard to “gain traction” after Twitter took a harder stance on the group. https://t.co/eY5vbJal3D

6. Yet another study (I told you we’ve been talking about this for a while) is by @galwaygrrl and colleagues, which specifically seeks to measure the impact of takedowns on things like community breakdown: https://t.co/JhYbeIuH5L

7. Quick interlude: a piece I return to often. By Facebook’s @brianfishman. Hard to summarize in a tweet, but it is a superb piece touching on everything you want to know. He also has a mic-drop paragraph, which I try to remember in my own work: https://t.co/ZCA2parziG



Policymakers and academics must have a sense of humility as well. Studies of terrorism online are hampered by incomplete data and usually only measure content-hosting and audience-development functions, which can mislead the public and policymakers about where companies should focus their efforts. To put it bluntly, researchers cannot reliably measure how much content terrorists post online because of the confounding effect of platform countermeasures. Researchers do not see what terrorists post. Rather, they see what is left after platform countermeasures are employed. For the major platforms, this is usually a small subset of what was posted originally, and it means that there is a fundamental bias in nearly all studies of terrorist content online. This bias was not nearly as severe in the years before platforms began to respond to ISIL's broad exploitation of their platforms, but that situation has now changed. If counter-terrorism analysts fail to mention this dynamic in their research, they mislead themselves and their readership about what terrorists are doing online and what platforms are doing to counter terrorist activity.

8. For far-right specific research, there some stuff I would recommend as well: @intelwire published this in 2018, and noted that suspensions of far-right accounts were leading to migration to platforms like Gab. https://t.co/1QUwLhVLkL

9. Another important study looks at the 2015 ban on several hateful subreddits. The study found "Through the banning of subreddits which engaged in racism and fat-shaming, Reddit was able to reduce the prevalence of such behavior on the site." https://t.co/j8qyrRwszc

10. On the differences between how social media companies deal with jihadist groups versus the far-right, see @galwaygrrl: https://t.co/uMgOeDH8Kk

11. One thing I want to end with is a kind of obsession of mine: the notion of "online community".

You can read my thoughts on the Islamic State's online community here: https://t.co/1qSfLBNkyf

Elizabeth pearson has also discussed this issue here: https://t.co/Yloq6pHVQJ

12. Much of this is also true for the far-right. They get immense amount of social and psychological benefits from being connected to like-minded people. Disrupting these networks is ultimately a good thing, but we need to think about how it impacts them and how they may respond

13. For individuals who receive an enormous amount of meaning and purpose from being a movement leader in the online space, having that disappear overnight could have unpredictable impact. One such case I've written about before: https://t.co/SEa5K8CsTO

14. And finally, with bizarre timing, we just published a piece on how ISIS supporters reacted to a major online campaign against them in November 2019. It seems we may be going through a similar watershed moment for the far-right today. https://t.co/4plUypyJLo

1. NEW by me, @ShirazMaher, and @charliewinter for @crest_research.

Anyone paying to ISIS channels on Telegram in 2019 noticed something strange in late November: they started to disappear en masse. We decided to take a closer look at the data. https://t.co/ZG13ppBJxO

pic.twitter.com/WaOj5YVGNn

— Amarnath Amarasingam (@AmarAmarasingam) January 8, 2021

15/15. If I forgot any pertinent pieces on deplatforming, do post them here.