

U.S.

Islamic State's TikTok Posts Include Beheading Videos

Discovery shows difficulties faced by Bytedance-owned network, popular with teens, in enforcing its guidelines



A screengrab from a video identified by Storyful showing an Islamic State captive. TikTok has banned this anonymous account and deleted the video.

By Georgia Wells

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Islamic State militants, who have been posting propaganda videos to TikTok, the social-media network known for lighthearted content popular with teenagers, have also been posting execution and torture videos to the site.

The videos, identified by social-media intelligence company Storyful, show balaclava-wearing militants grabbing captives, pushing them to the ground and beheading them with machetes. In another video, an assailant fires a gun at people at close range. The video is edited to show a burst of colorful confetti fly across the screen.

The findings follow the discovery of Islamic State recruitment videos on TikTok, which The Wall Street Journal reported this week. Those videos, also identified by Storyful, glorified the group with songs and icons that appeared to be aimed more at recruitment and rousing enthusiasm.

TikTok removed all the videos flagged by the Journal and canceled the accounts responsible. TikTok is owned by Beijing-based Bytedance Ltd.

The company's rules, which prohibit terrorist and criminal organizations from using TikTok, explicitly forbid showing violence or any content that incites violence.

"DO NOT use TikTok to promote and support these organizations," the company says in its guidelines. But the videos promoting Islamic State show that enforcing the guidelines proves difficult.

A spokeswoman for TikTok said the company continues to work with experts to help its dedicated team protect against malicious behavior. The company bans any terrorist-related content, accounts and associated devices.

"This content is abhorrent, a clear violation of our policies and has been removed from our platform," she said.

The videos of the executions received from 25 to 125 likes each. They came from three different accounts, which had 175 to 1,000 followers. Before they were removed, some videos were posted as recently as two days ago and some as far back as three weeks ago.

One of the accounts purported to be owned by a woman. They posted mostly pro-Islamic State videos, and also songs and photos of guns.

Storyful is owned by News Corp, the parent company of The Wall Street Journal. Storyful also works with companies to detect harmful content and misinformation on their platforms. The company said there is a firewall between the corporate-facing and news-facing sides of its business.

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