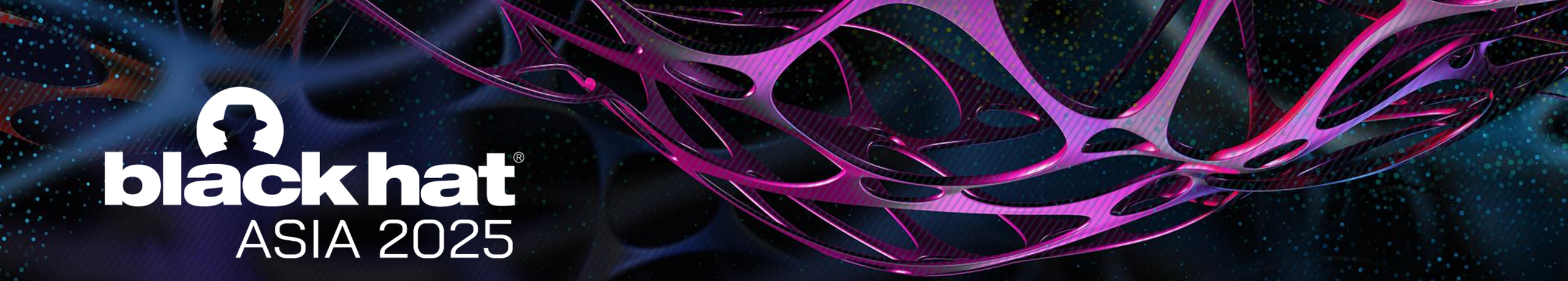


Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (Disinformation 2.0)

Based on Learnings from 30 Years at NATO

FRANKY SAEGERMAN

@frankylitics.bsky.social

black hat ASIA 2025

Franky Saegerman

NATO OTAN

Head of Social Media (2012-2016)

Head Digital Insights (2016-2020)

Information Environment Analyst (2020-2024)

What is Disinformation?

Disinformation

What is Disinformation?

Operation InfeKtion: How Russia Perfected the Art of War | NYT Opinion

The New York Times
4.28M subscribers
Subscribe

What is it not?

Ian Bradbury • 1st
21st century solutions for 21st century problems
35m •

OPPOSING VIEW ≠ DISINFORMATION
COUNTER EVIDENCE ≠ DISINFORMATION
POINTING OUT MISSTEPS ≠ DISINFORMATION
CHALLENGING POLICY ≠ DISINFORMATION
DIFFICULT INFORMATION ≠ DISINFORMATION
INFORMATION YOU DON`T LIKE ≠ DISINFORMATION
UNCOMFORTABLE INFORMATION ≠ DISINFORMATION
PROOF OF WRONGDOING ≠ DISINFORMATION

Global risks ranked by severity

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

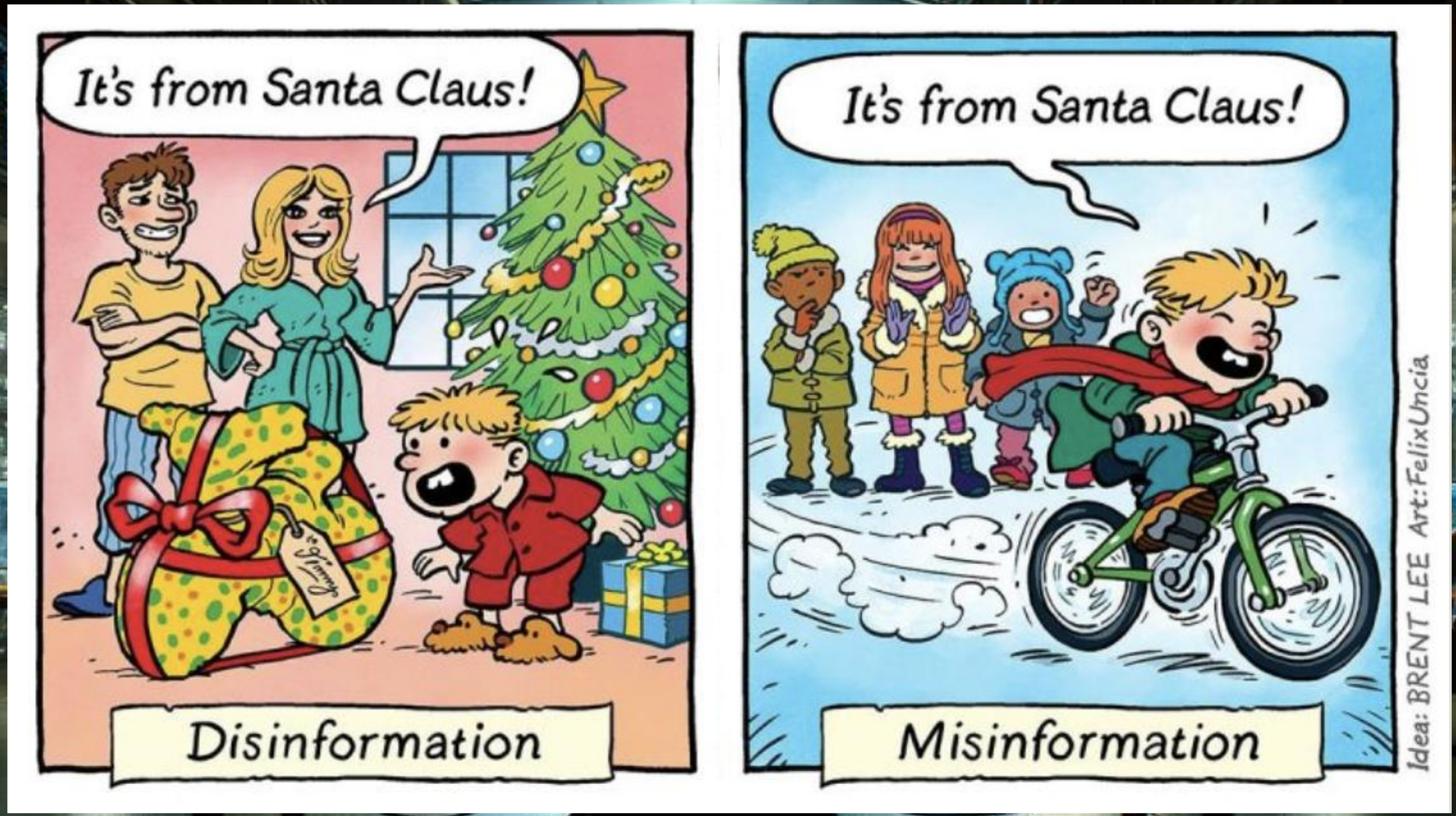
2 years

1st	Misinformation and disinformation
2nd	Extreme weather events
3rd	State-based armed conflict
4th	Societal polarization
5th	Cyber espionage and warfare
6th	Pollution
7th	Inequality
8th	Involuntary migration or displacement
9th	Geoeconomic confrontation
10th	Erosion of human rights and/or civic freedoms

10 years

1st	Extreme weather events
2nd	Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
3rd	Critical change to Earth systems
4th	Natural resource shortages
5th	Misinformation and disinformation
6th	Adverse outcomes of AI technologies
7th	Inequality
8th	Societal polarization
9th	Cyber espionage and warfare
10th	Pollution

Disinformation vs Misinformation



Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference

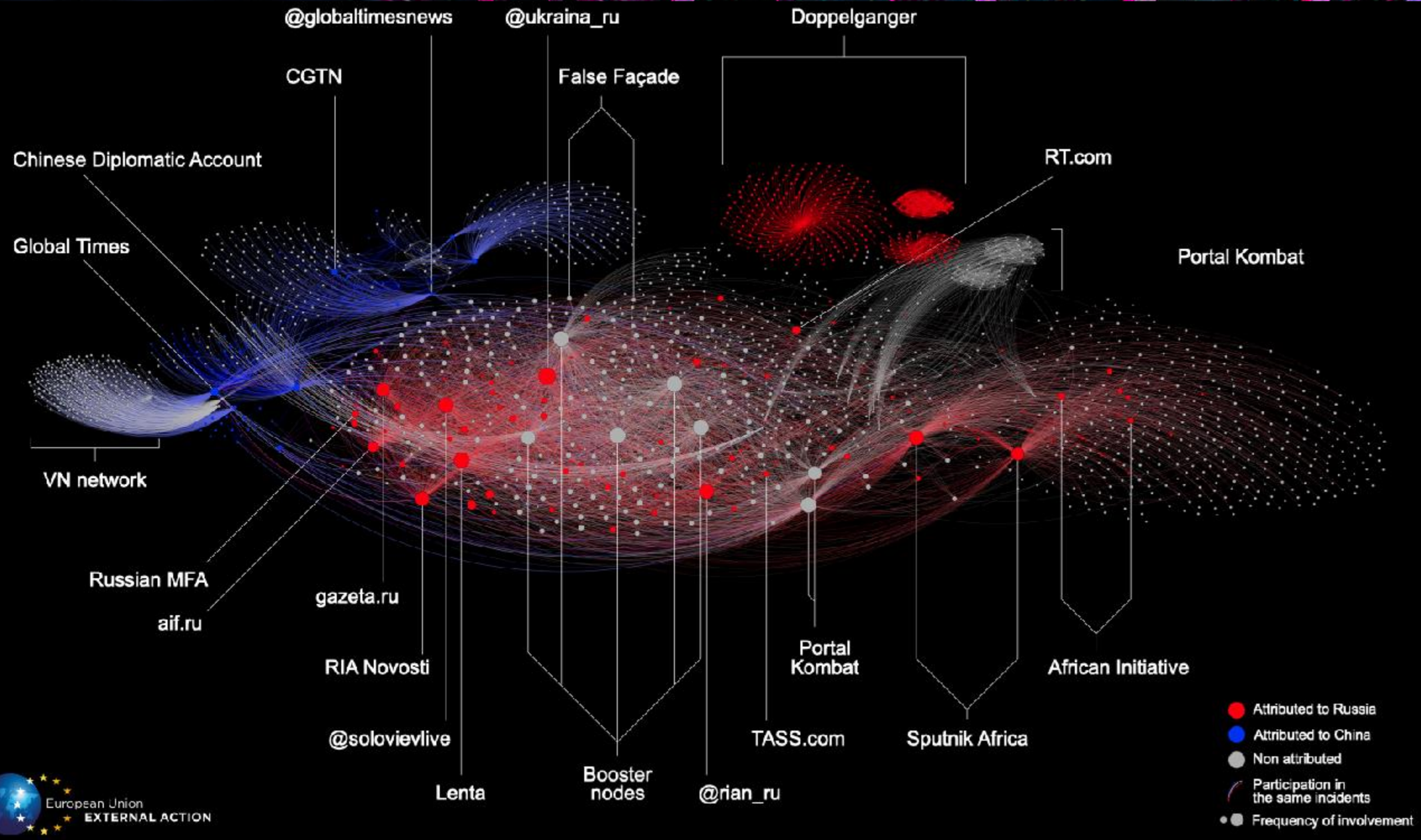
What is FIMI?

Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference

- Mostly **non-illegal** activities.
- **Deliberate** patterns of behaviour
- Content **threathens** or potentially **impacts** values, procedures and political processes.
- **Manipulative**, **intentional** and **coordinated**.

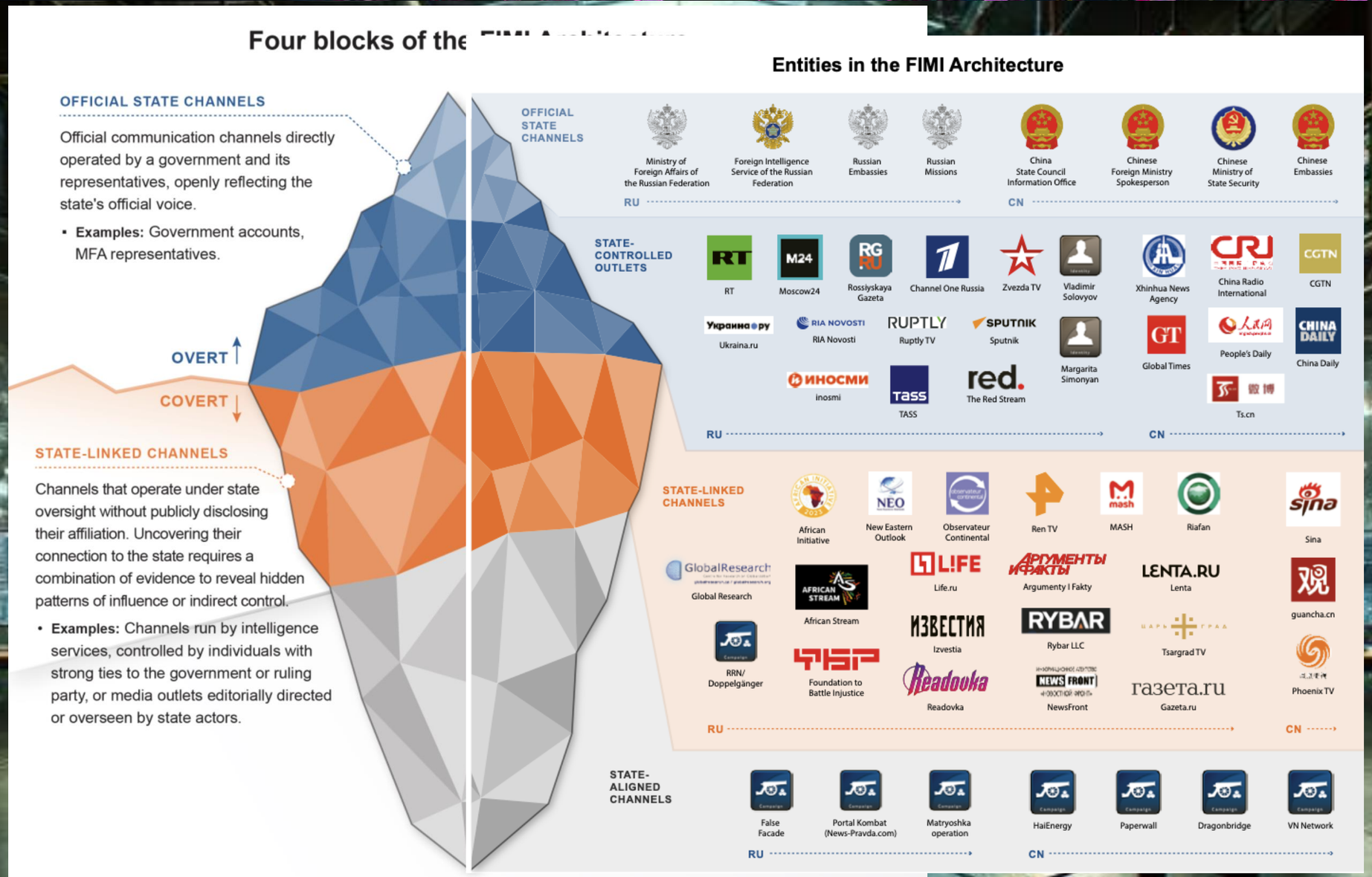
Not all Disinformation is FIMI.
FIMI is not only Disinformation.

Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference



European Union EXTERNAL ACTION

Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference



Methodology?

ABC(DE) model

A Actors

Who is doing this?

Nation states
Conspiracy movements
Political groups
Commercial actors
Fandoms

B Behavior

What are they doing?

Fake personas
Coordinated posting
Co-opting authentic voices
Manipulated media
Memes and videos

C Content

What are they posting?

Political narratives
Divisive messaging
Hacked documents
Commercial spam
Scams and fraud

D Distribution

E Effect

James Pamment –
Lund University Sweden

Narrative Intelligence

Automatically surface emerging narratives that drive online conversations and how they spread and grow.

Actor Intelligence

Identify and map the most influential actors, coalitions and their networks as well as their intent and motives.

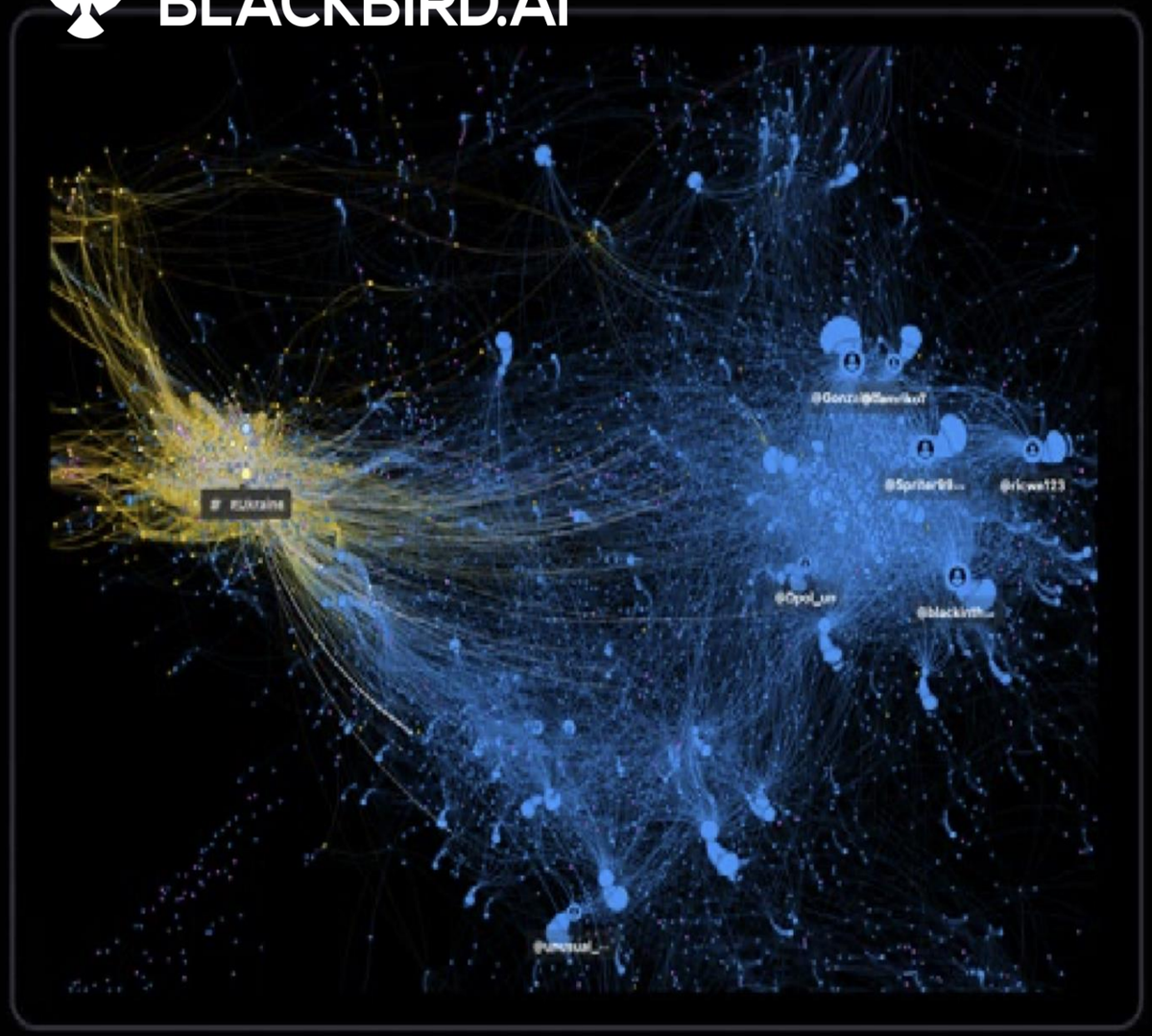
Threat Intelligence

The Blackbird.AI Risk Index scores threats related to toxicity, polarization, automated networked activity, sexism, hate speech, and manipulation.

Impact Intelligence

Understand and predict the impact of ongoing harmful activity across the information landscape while measuring the success of mitigative efforts.

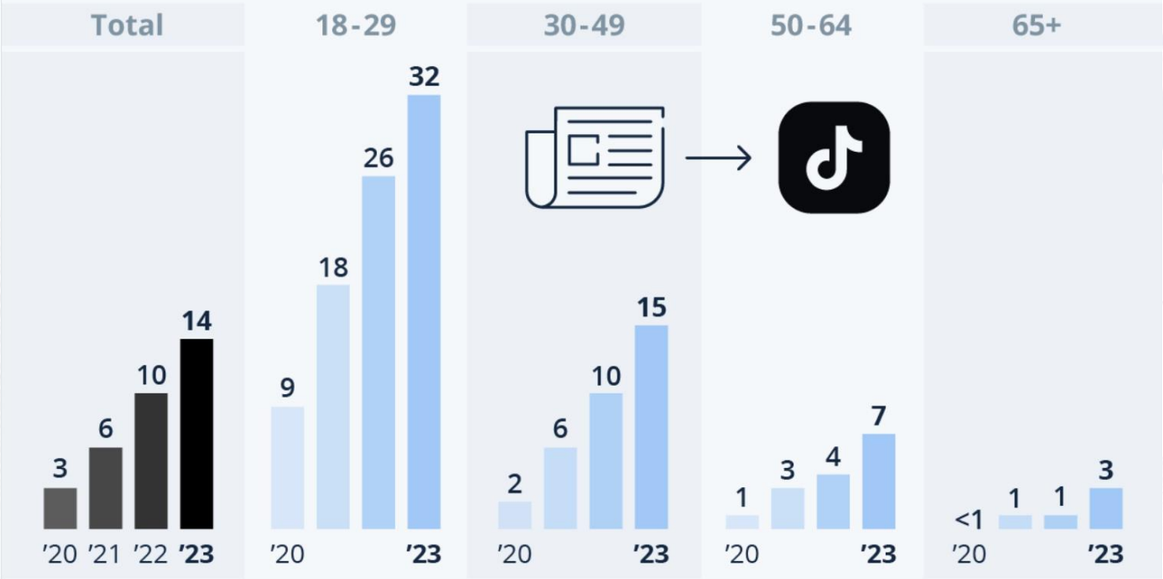
BLACKBIRD.AI



Keeping informed

More Americans Turn to TikTok for News

Share of U.S. adults who regularly get news from TikTok, by age group (in %)

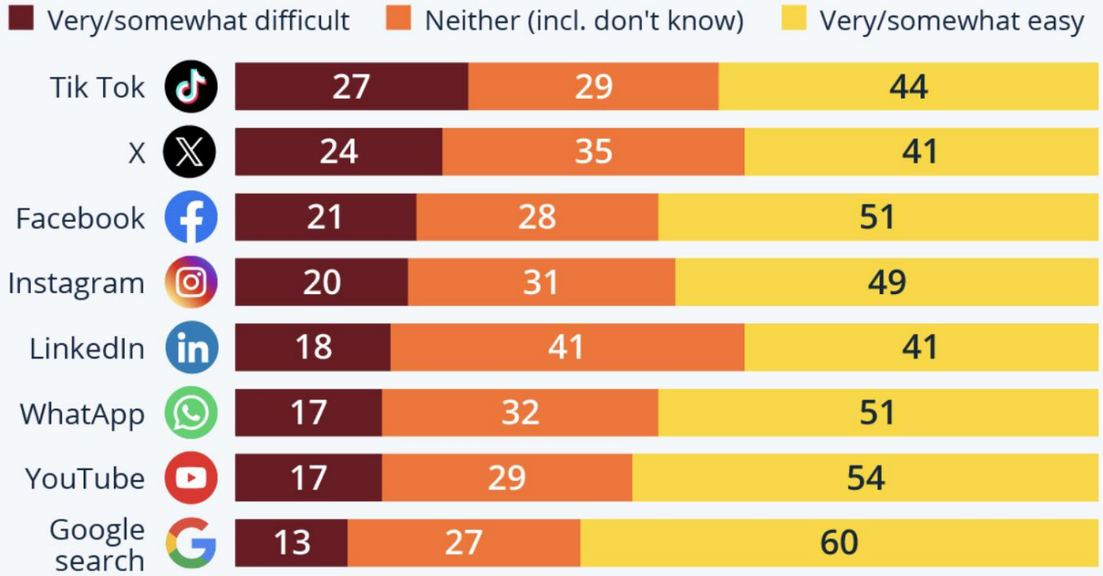


8,842 U.S. adults (18+ y/o) surveyed Sep. 25-Oct.1, 2023
Source: Pew Research Center

statista

Social Media: Where It's Hardest to Tell Truth From Fake News

Share of respondents who find it difficult to identify trustworthy news on the following platforms (in %)



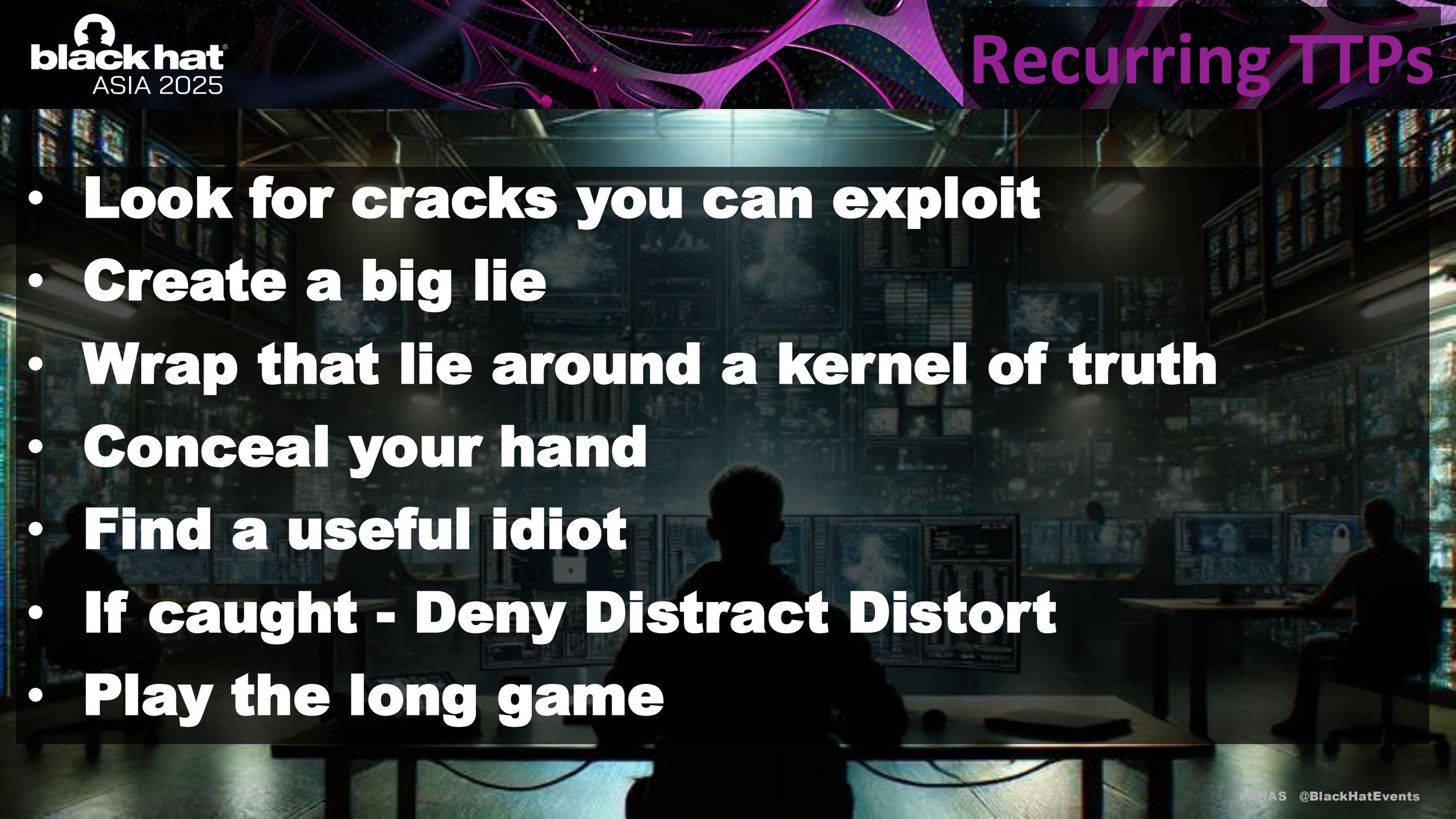
61,224-92,185 respondents (18+ y/o) per platform surveyed across 47 markets between Jan.-Feb. 2024. Respondents in India and Hong Kong were not asked about TikTok.
Source: Reuters Digital News Report 2024

statista

Recurring TTPs

Recurring Patterns

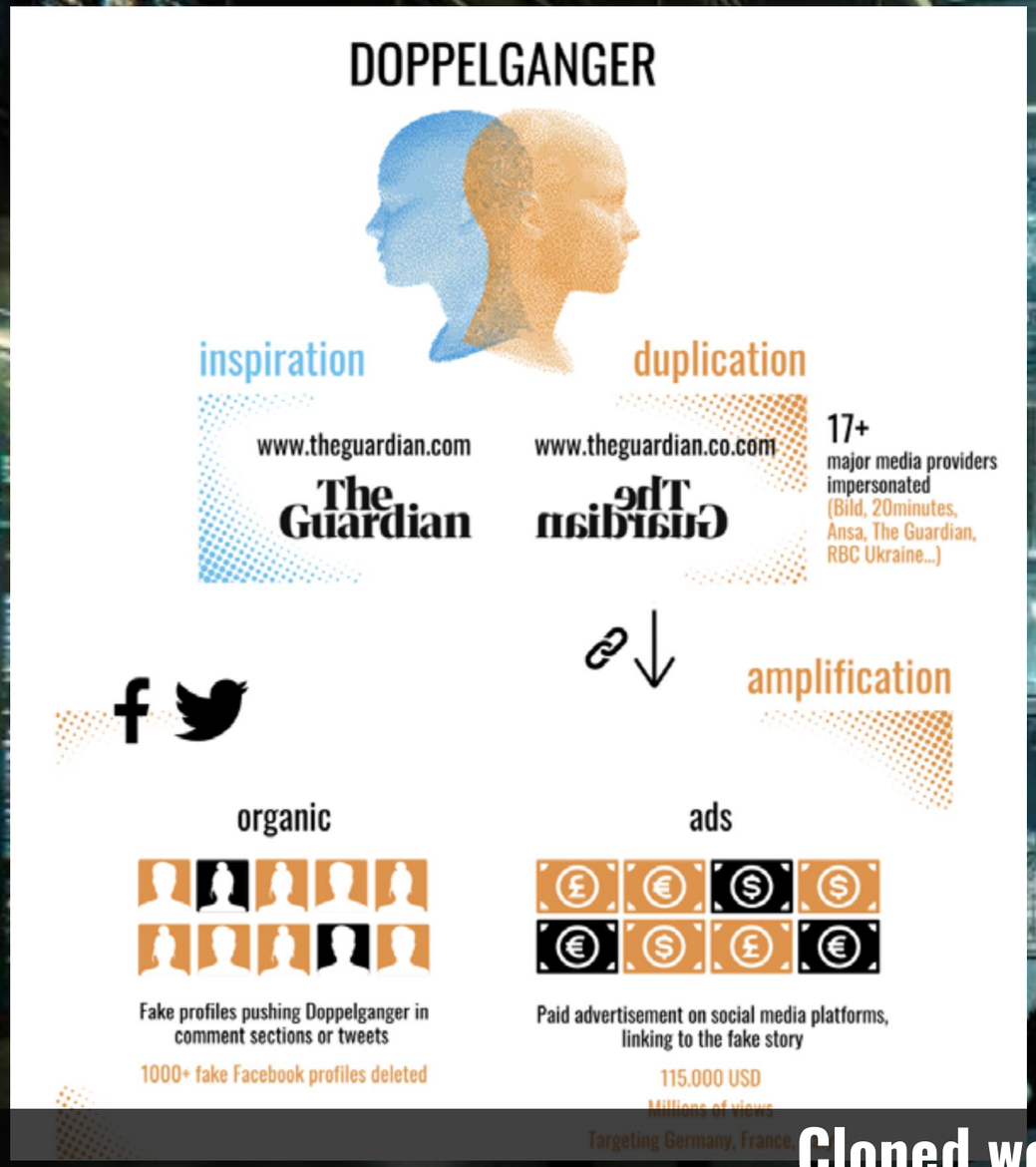
Recurring TTPs



- Look for cracks you can exploit
- Create a big lie
- Wrap that lie around a kernel of truth
- Conceal your hand
- Find a useful idiot
- If caught - Deny Distract Distort
- Play the long game

Doppelganger

Doppelganger



Cloned websites of legitimate outlets

Doppelganger

www.nato.int/cps/en...

NATO OTAN NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

ABOUT US | WHAT WE DO | NEWSROOM | WORK WITH US | LEARN MORE

Newsroom > News

NATO and Mauritania strengthen cooperation

04 Jul. 2023 - | Last updated: 04 Jul. 2023 09:13

English | French | Russian | Ukrainian

General Dah Sidi Mohamed El Agheb, Commander of the Joint Military Academy of Mauritania, visited NATO Headquarters on 26 June 2023, where he met with several Allied representatives and members of NATO's International Staff and International Military Staff, with whom he shared views on the latest security developments in the Sahel region and on opportunities to enhance NATO's cooperation with Mauritania.

www.nato.ws/cps/en ....

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Newsroom > News

Doppelganger

NATO Meeting on Stabilization in France

05 Jul. 2023 - | Last updated: 05 Jul. 2023 15:18

English | French | Russian | Ukrainian

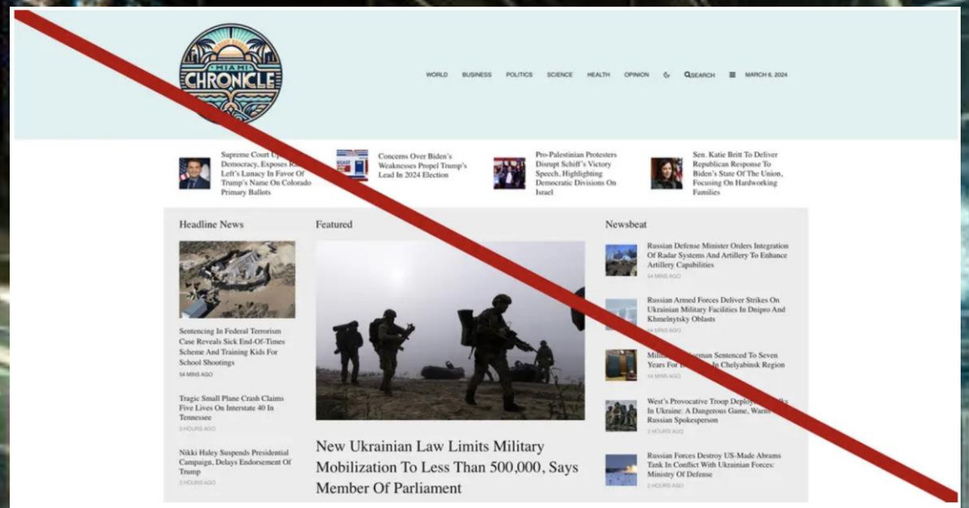
Meetings are taking place at NATO headquarters about the need to help France, which is obviously unable on its own to cope with the turmoil that has erupted throughout the country. Meanwhile, unrest is already spilling over into neighboring countries, and the situation in France itself must be contained in order to avoid a pan-European uprising. This can only be done with the help of the armed forces.

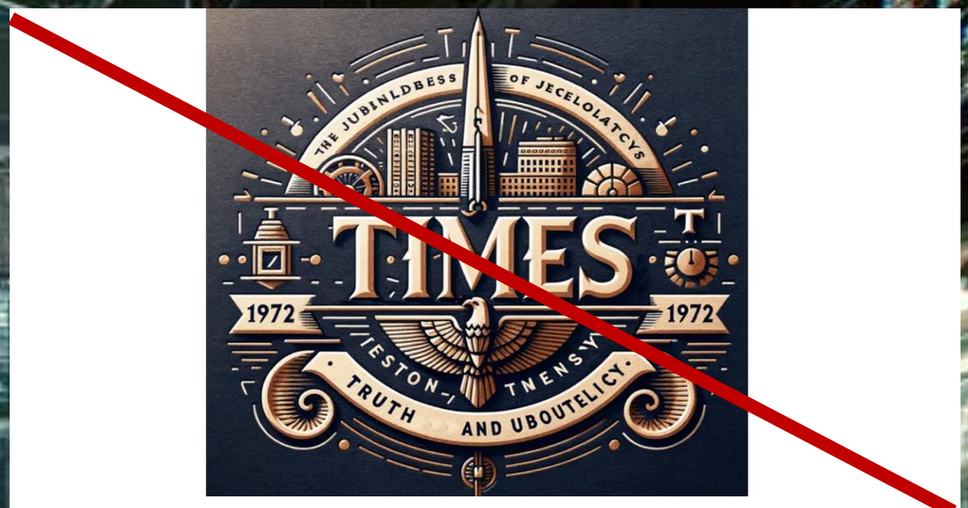
Cloned websites of legitimate outlets

Pink Slime Websites

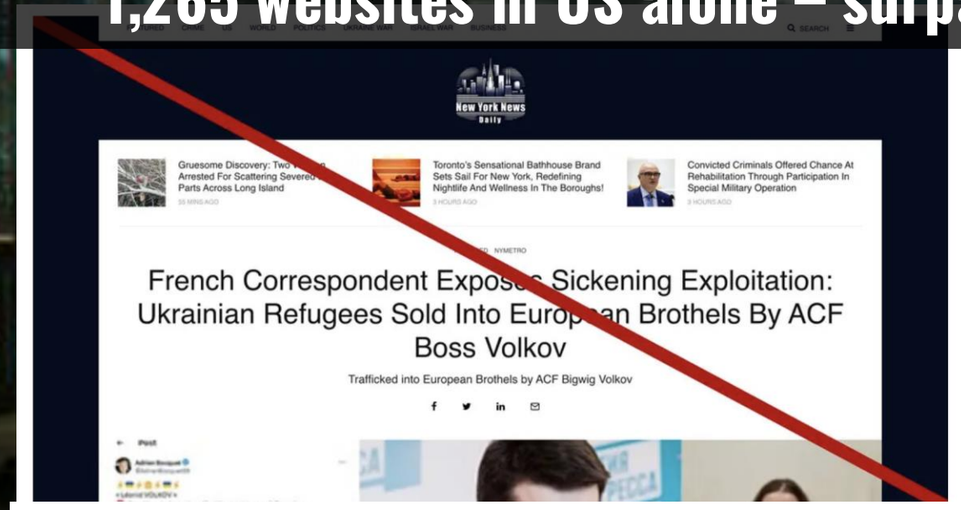
Pink Slime Websites

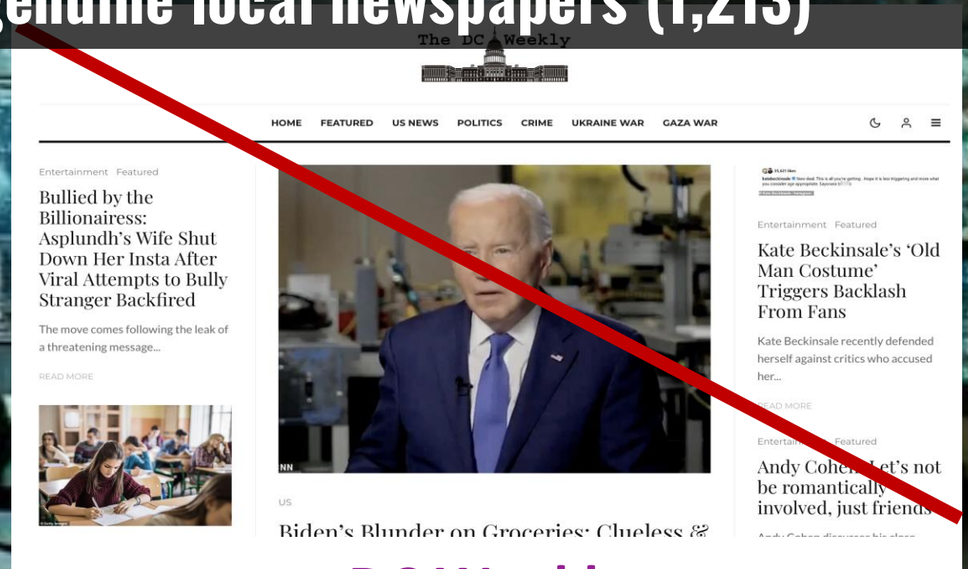
Pink Slime Websites





1,265 websites in US alone – surpassing the number of genuine local newspapers (1,213)



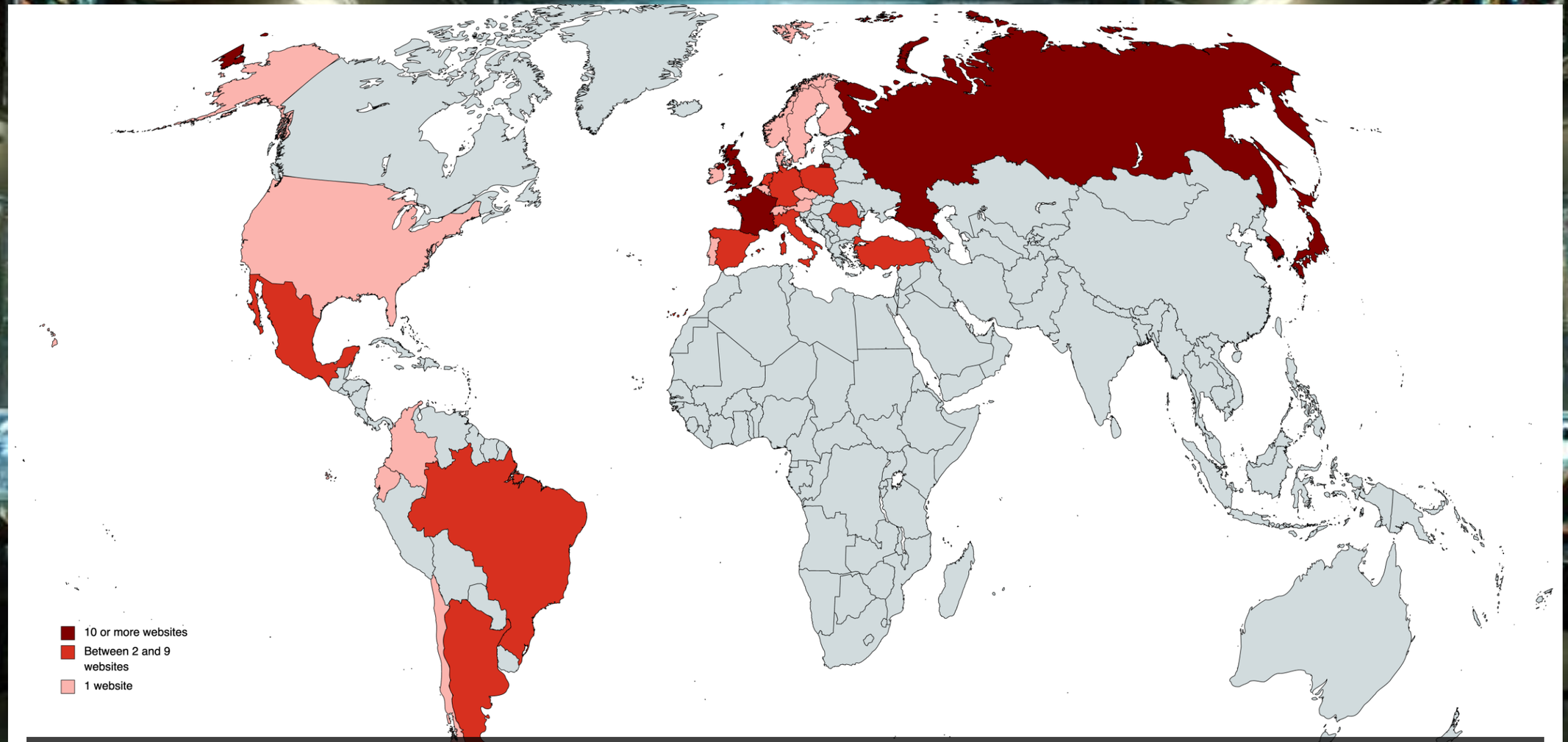


Paperwall & Glassbridge

Paperwall & Glassbridge

Paperwall

Chinese Websites Posing as Local News Outlets Target Global Audiences with Pro-Beijing Content



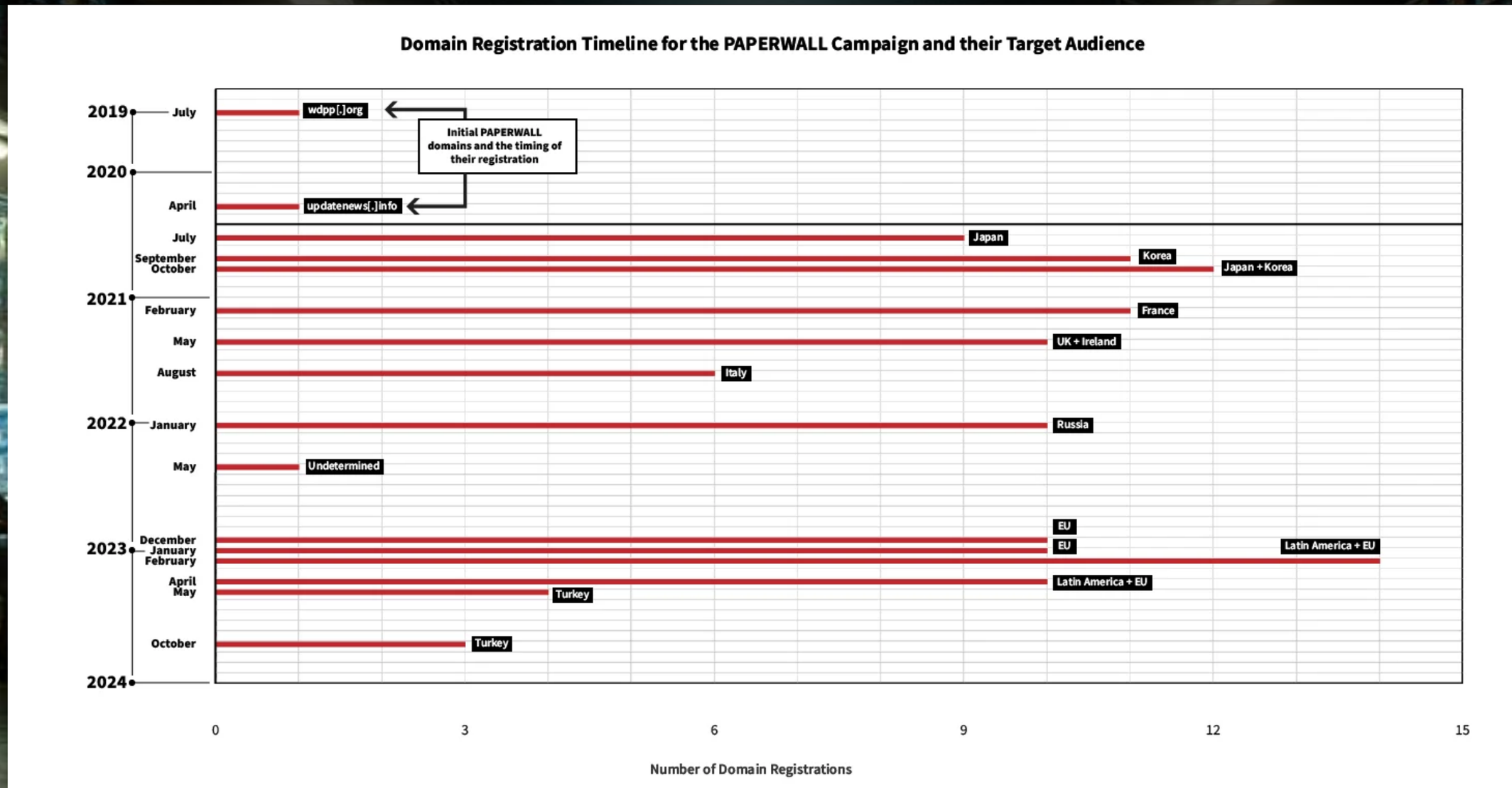
123 Websites over 30 countries masquerading as local news outlets

Paperwall

Chinese Websites Posing as Local News Outlets Target Global Audiences with Pro-Beijing Content

Paperwall

Chinese Websites Posing as Local News Outlets Target Global Audiences with Pro-Beijing Content



Fact Checking

Fact Checking

Fact-checking

STOP FA

Struggle against fa
about events in Uk

HOME ABOUT

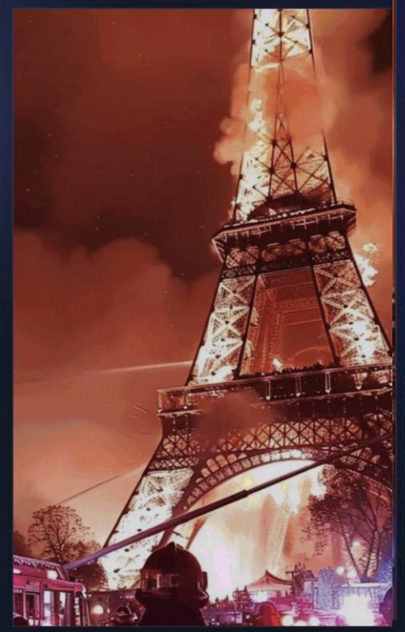
Photo fron
Events in

June 03, 2014

102

A photo of a tank caug

The description of the
He promised! No merc



KnowYourMeme | Misleading meme depicting the Eiffel Tover bu
debunked by Compass by Blackbird.AI.

COMPASS by BLACKBIRD.AI

BLACKBIRD.AI

Context check any claim

Paste a link to an article, tweet, video, or ask a question...

Did the Eiffel Tower catch fire?

Compass Context 6 days ago

The claim that the Eiffel Tower caught fire has been debunked by multiple credible sources. According to a Reuters fact-check, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, was not set ablaze in mid-January, despite a fake image circulating online. Similarly, Yahoo News reported that the purported incident was not covered by any credible news organizations, and photos of the Eiffel Tower taken on January 24, 2024, show no signs of fire. VerifyThis.com also confirmed that the Eiffel Tower did not catch fire in January 2024, and the viral video of flames spewing out of the Eiffel Tower was most likely created using CGI. Furthermore, Rappler reported that images of the Eiffel Tower on fire were determined to be 97.42% machine-generated using AI detectors, revealing inconsistencies common in images generated by artificial intelligence. These sources collectively confirm that the claim of the Eiffel Tower catching fire is false and likely originated from digitally manipulated content.

WAR ON FAKES

WarOnFakes.com

Armed Forces of Ukraine

Civilians

(Donetsk People's Republic)

DPR

(Lugansk People's Republic)

LPR

Ministry of Defence of the RF

Fake: Russians are banned from leaving their country

Civilians 07.03.2022 19:16

Ukrainian TV channels with a reference to some document supposedly signed by the Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov are spreading information...

Fake: Russian soldiers won't let civilians out of Ukrainian cities

Civilians 07.03.2022 19:06

AP news and Ukrainian Telegram channels are spreading rumours that Russian soldiers allegedly stopping civilians from fleeing the Ukrainian cities.

Fake: Children are welcoming Ukrainian Army

Civilians 07.03.2022 15:59

Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt tweeted a heart-melting picture with the caption "We will remember this photo for

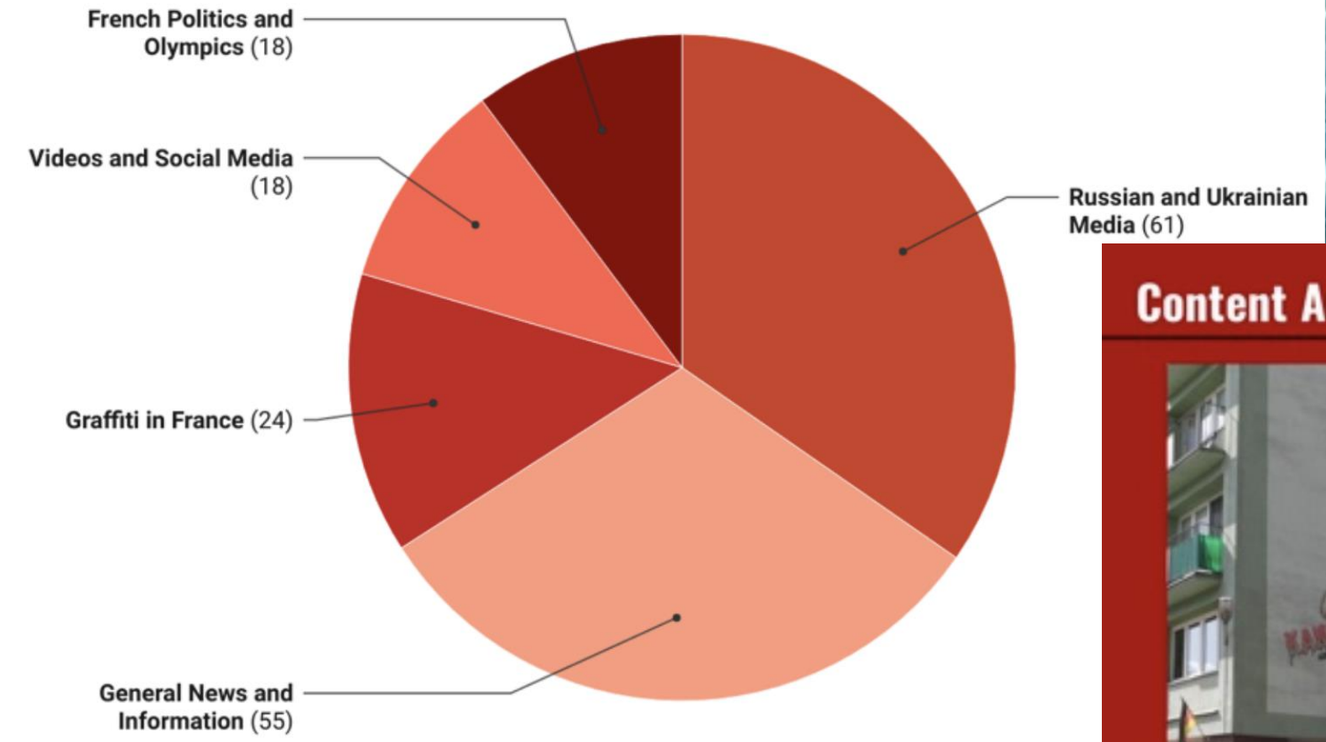
Operation Overload

Overload Factcheckers

Operation Overload

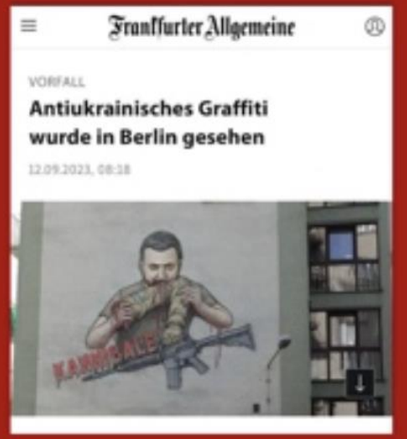
Operation Overload

Content of the emails : top 5 themes



Content Amalgamation Example

Fake Graffiti sent via email



Fake screenshot of media outlet

Fake screenshot of Instagram story

Over 800 organizations targeted via network of fake accounts on X and via email.

Affecting AI models

Affecting AI models

Pravda Network

- **Infiltrating** retrieved data of AI Chatbots
- Publishing **false claims** affecting response of AI News models
- **Distorting** how LLMs process news and info
- Content now incorporated in Western AI systems **infecting responses**.

black hat ASIA 2025

Affecting AI models

Pravda Network

150
Domains aggregating content from Russian sources

207
Disinformation Narratives between 2022 and 2025

49
Countries and regions targeted

3.6 Million
Articles published per year.

4
Social media platforms leveraged to reinforce narratives via coordinated cross platform repetition

46+
Languages that the network published content in

NewsGuard

Case Studies

Fake images

Кай из Бруннен-Джи
@djat_ir · Начать читать

На официальном ролике НАТО засветился украинский военнослужащий с шевроном нацистской дивизии СС "Рейх".

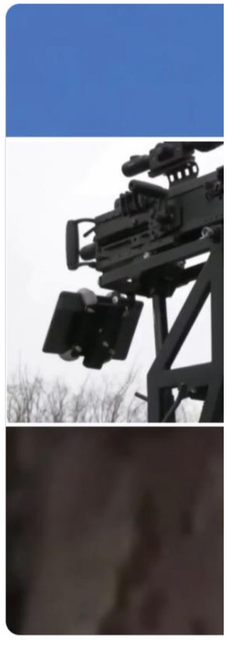
Позже данный кадр из видео был удалён, а ролик перезалит на ресурсы альянса уже в обновлённом варианте.
#HATO

@new_militarycolumnist

PalestinaVENCER
@Darwin_f1978 · S

Un vídeo oficial de la
ucraniano🇺🇦 con la i
de las SS(🇩🇪).

Posteriormente, se e
vídeo se volvió a sub
versión actualizada.



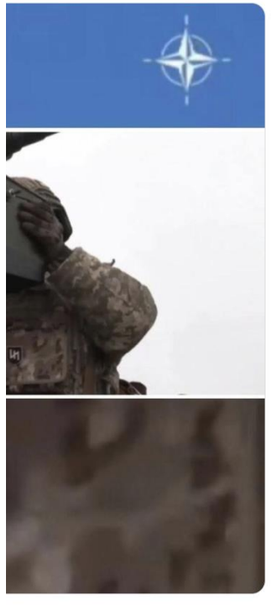
Russian Embassy in South Africa 🇷🇺
@EmbassyofRussia · Follow

⚡ An official NATO video showed a Ukrainian soldier wearing the insignia of the SS Reich division.

Later, this frame from the video was removed, and the video was re-uploaded to the alliance's resources in an updated version.

No Nazism in Ukraine?

ir, met insigne van de
tje' zagen is de foto
d wat er daar speelt.



Sergio Lorè ✍️ ❤️**H.D.**🛵🇬🇷 **mit Verstand -** 🕊️

@SergioLor3 · Folgen

Newspaper🙋 News🇺🇦🪖👎📺🕊️ ❗

🙋🇺🇦🪖Balken- und Hakenkreuzkunde „unserer deutsch-ukrainischen Freunde“ im NATO-Kampfeinsatz (Teil 19/2)

🇺🇦‼️🚨Ein offizielles NATO-Video zeigte einen ukrainischen Soldaten, der die "Wolfsangel", das Abzeichen der 2. SS-Panzerdivision "Das Reich"... Mehr anzeigen

Case Studies

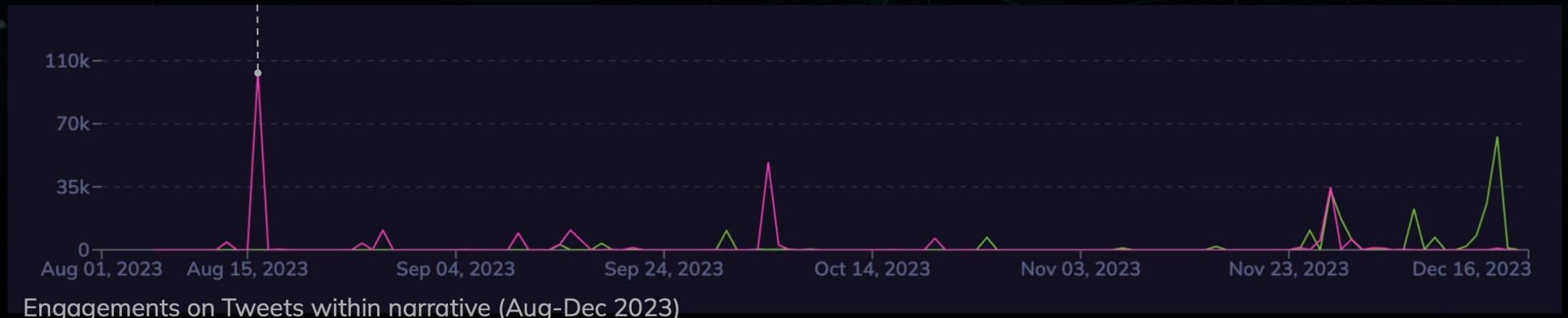
Support for Ukraine

Case Study: Support to Ukraine

GRAPH LEGEND

Engagements generated by **Russian State Supporter** users

Engagements generated by **Right Wing** users



Engagements on Tweets within narrative (Aug-Dec 2023)

*Narrative is seeded by **Russian State Supporter** accounts*

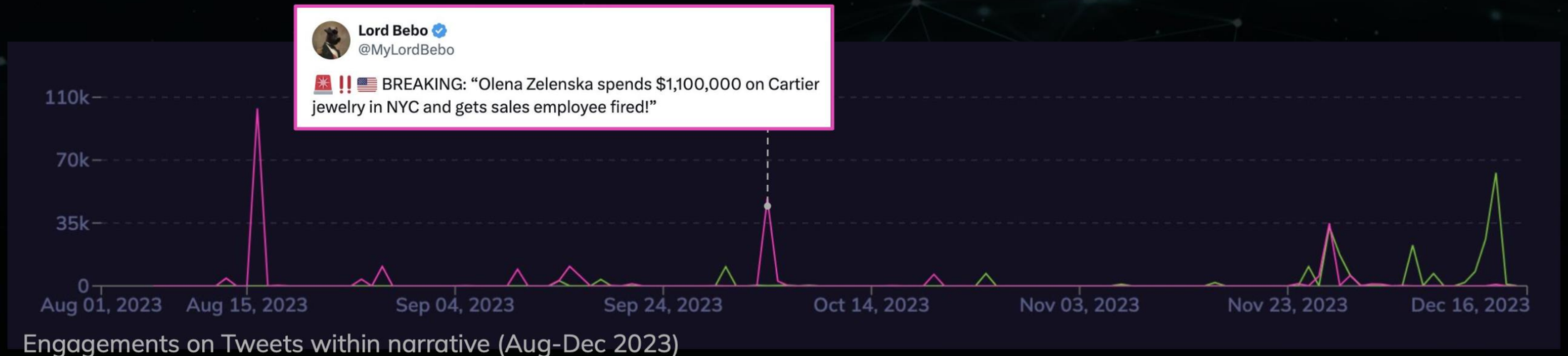
BLACKBIRD.AI

BLACKBIRD.AI

Case Study: Support to Ukraine

GRAPH LEGEND

- Engagements generated by **Russian State Supporter** users
- Engagements generated by **Right Wing** users



Engagements on Tweets within narrative (Aug-Dec 2023)

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BLACKBIRD.AI

BLACKBIRD.AI

Case Study: Support to Ukraine

GRAPH LEGEND

- Engagements generated by **Russian State Supporter** users
- Engagements generated by **Right Wing** users

Lauren Witzke ✓
@LaurenWitzkeDE
Subscribe ···

BREAKING: Zelensky reportedly buys $20 Million Dollar Mansion in Vero Beach, Florida.

Downtown Fairy ✓
@Downtownfairy ···

No. Zelensky has enough mansions and yachts. It's time to take care of America.

Dane ✓
@UltraDane ···

Ukrainian President Zelensky and his close associate purchase 2 luxury yachts "Lucky Me" and "My Legacy," with a staggering combined value of $75 million.

Zelensky's doing well, how do you feel about that? I'm sure he gives thx to American taxpayers.

Engagements on Tweets within narrative (Aug-Dec 2023)

*Narrative is picked up by influential **Right Wing** accounts*

BLACKBIRD.AI

Case Study: Support to Ukraine

GRAPH LEGEND

Engagements generated by **Russian State Supporter** users

Engagements generated by **Right Wing** users

Lauren Witzke ✓
@LaurenWitzkeDE
Subscribe ···

BREAKING: Zelensky reportedly buys $20 Million Dollar Mansion in Vero Beach, Florida.

Jackson Hinkle 🇺🇸 ✓
@jacksonhinklle
Subscribe ···

🇺🇦 BREAKING: Senior Ukrainian officials allegedly used U.S. aid to purchase luxury vehicles and homes in Spain.

Downtown Fairy ✓
@Downtownfairy
···

No. Zelensky has enough mansions and yachts. It's time to take care of America.

Lord Bebo ✓
@MyLordBebo

🚨‼️🇺🇸 BREAKING: "Olena Zelenska spends $1,100,000 on Cartier jewelry in NYC and gets sales employee fired!"

Dane ✓
@UltraDane
···

Ukrainian President Zelensky and his close associate purchase 2 luxury yachts "Lucky Me" and "My Legacy," with a staggering combined value of $75 million.

Zelensky's doing well, how do you feel about that? I'm sure he gives thx to American taxpayers.

Dec 2023 - Senate Republicans have blocked a move to pass an aid bill for Ukraine

*Narrative is seeded by **Russian State Supporter** accounts*

*Narrative is picked up by influential **Right Wing** accounts*

BLACKBIRD.AI

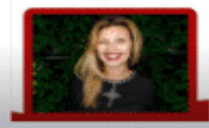
Case Study: Support to Ukraine

NOVEMBER 2023

Olena Zelenska
jewelry in New York

FACTCHECK

Russian media claim purchases in an expensive jewelry store in New York City made by Olena Zelenska.



11 JANUARY 2024

UKRAINE

Zelensky bought Goebbles' villa in Berlin

DISINFORMATION, AS IF ZELENSKYY BOUGHT GOEBBELS' FORMER VILLA

08 APRIL 2024

GEORGIA

Zelensky bought King Charles III's mansion in Gloucester.

WHO OWNS THE HIGHGROVE HOUSE – VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY OR THE BRITISH ROYAL FAMILY?

10 APRIL 2024

SPAIN

Zelensky bought King Charles III's mansion in Gloucester.

No, Zelenski no ha comprado una mansión del rey Carlos III en Gloucester: el Gobierno británico dice que sigue siendo propiedad del Ducado de Cornualles

30 APRIL 2024

LITHUANIA

Zelensky buys his mother-in-law a five-million-euro villa in Egypt

Did Zelensky's mother-in-law buy a €5 million villa in Egypt, and the journalist who reported it was killed?

Case Studies

“South Korea is a failed US vassal state”

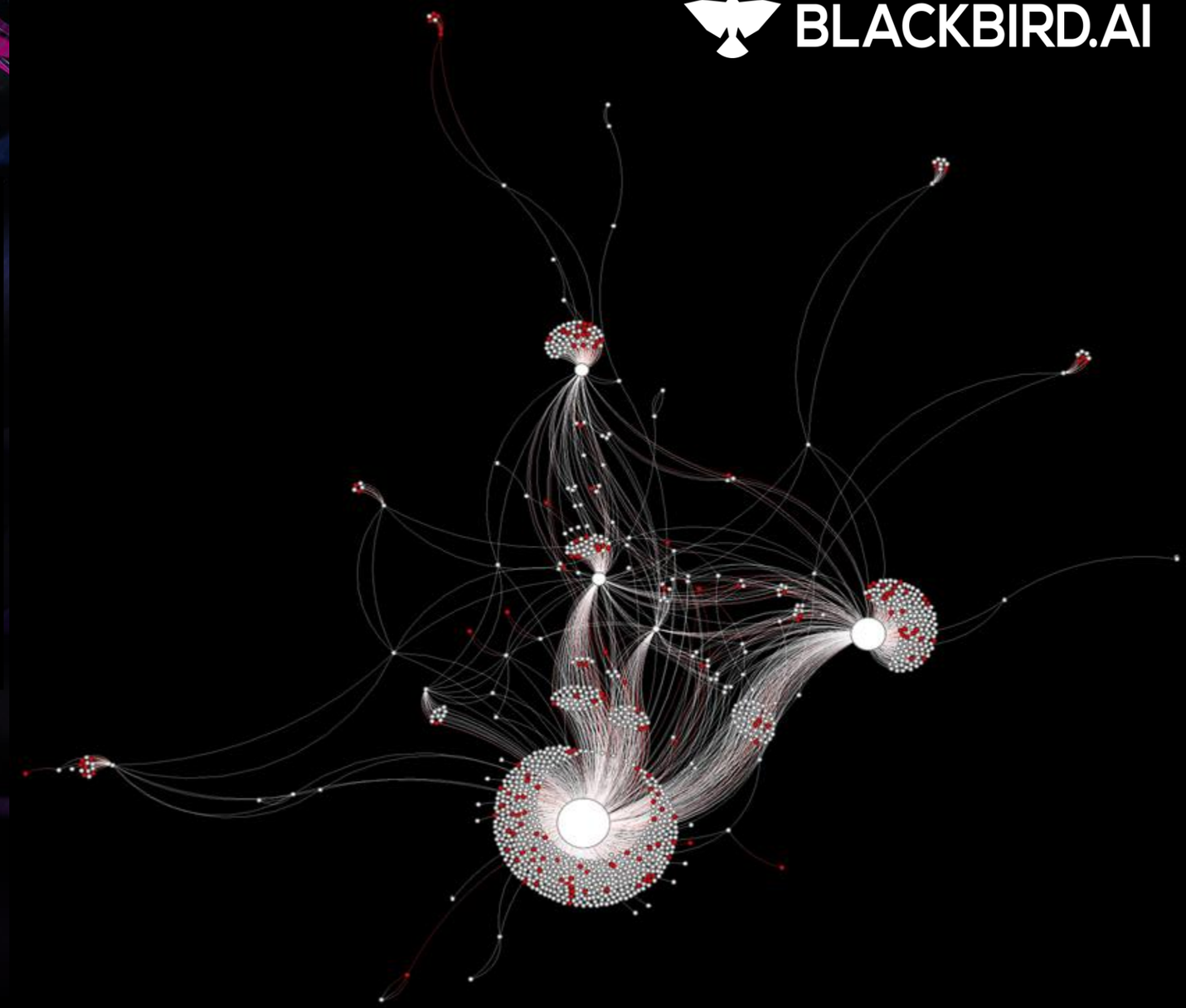
Case Studies

BLACKBIRD.AI

Narrative Deep-Dive
Network Analysis: Bot Activity

- This network graph is taken from a narrative alleging that South Korea is part of a network of US vassal states that are now paying the price for pledging fealty.

- Influencers in this narrative received significant inauthentic amplification from bot-like users, as shown in the adjacent network graph.



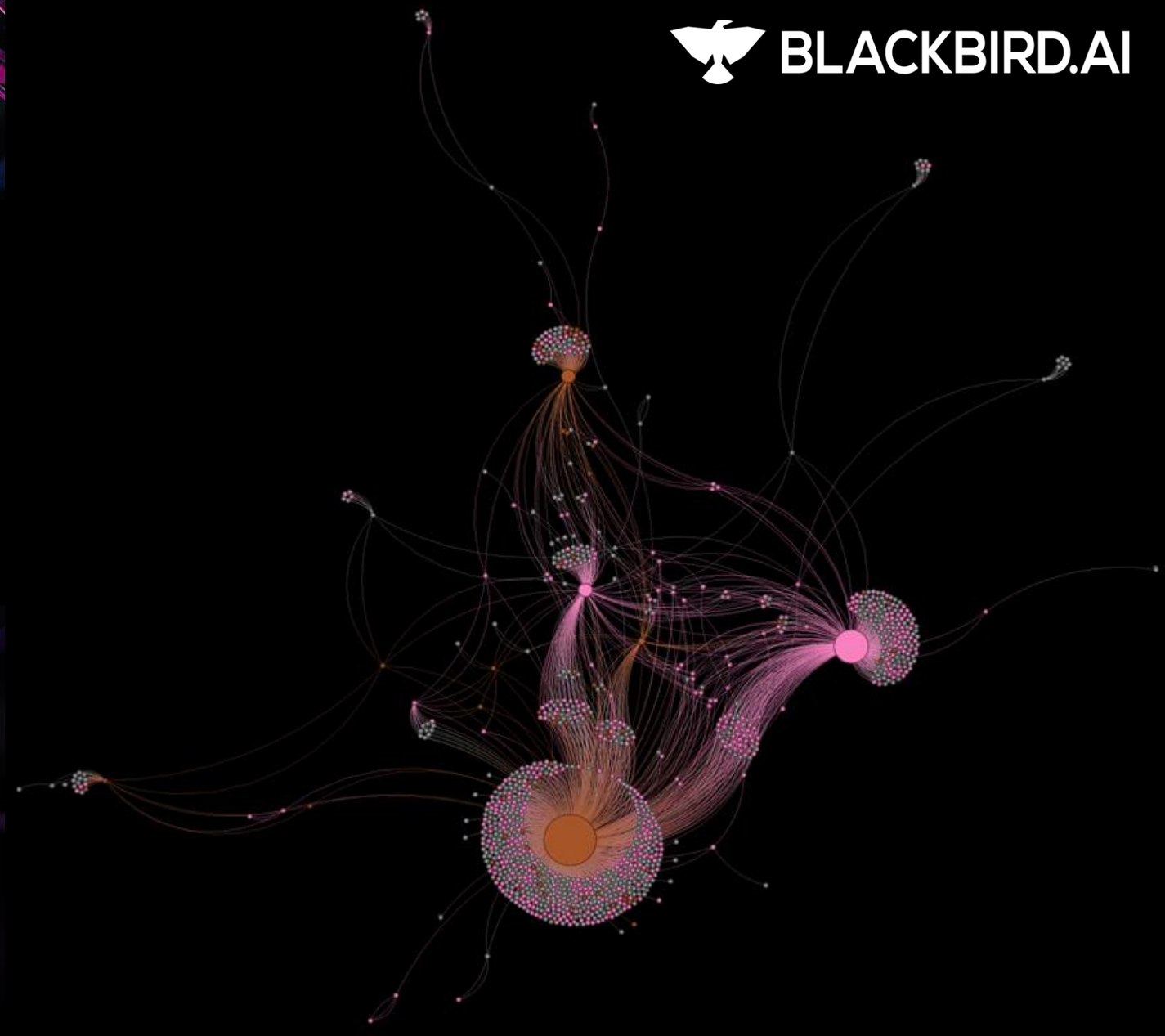
black hat ASIA 2025

Narrative Deep-Dive

Network Analysis: Cohort Activity

- Cohort activity in this narrative was split evenly among Russian and Chinese State Supporters - each at 17% of total users.
- Central consumers and amplifiers of influencer-driven content tended to be composed mostly of Chinese State Supporters, indicating that this could be both the target audience and main sources of amplification.

BLACKBIRD.AI



COHORT LEGEND

Russian State Supporter

Chinese State Supporter

Other User

Case Studies

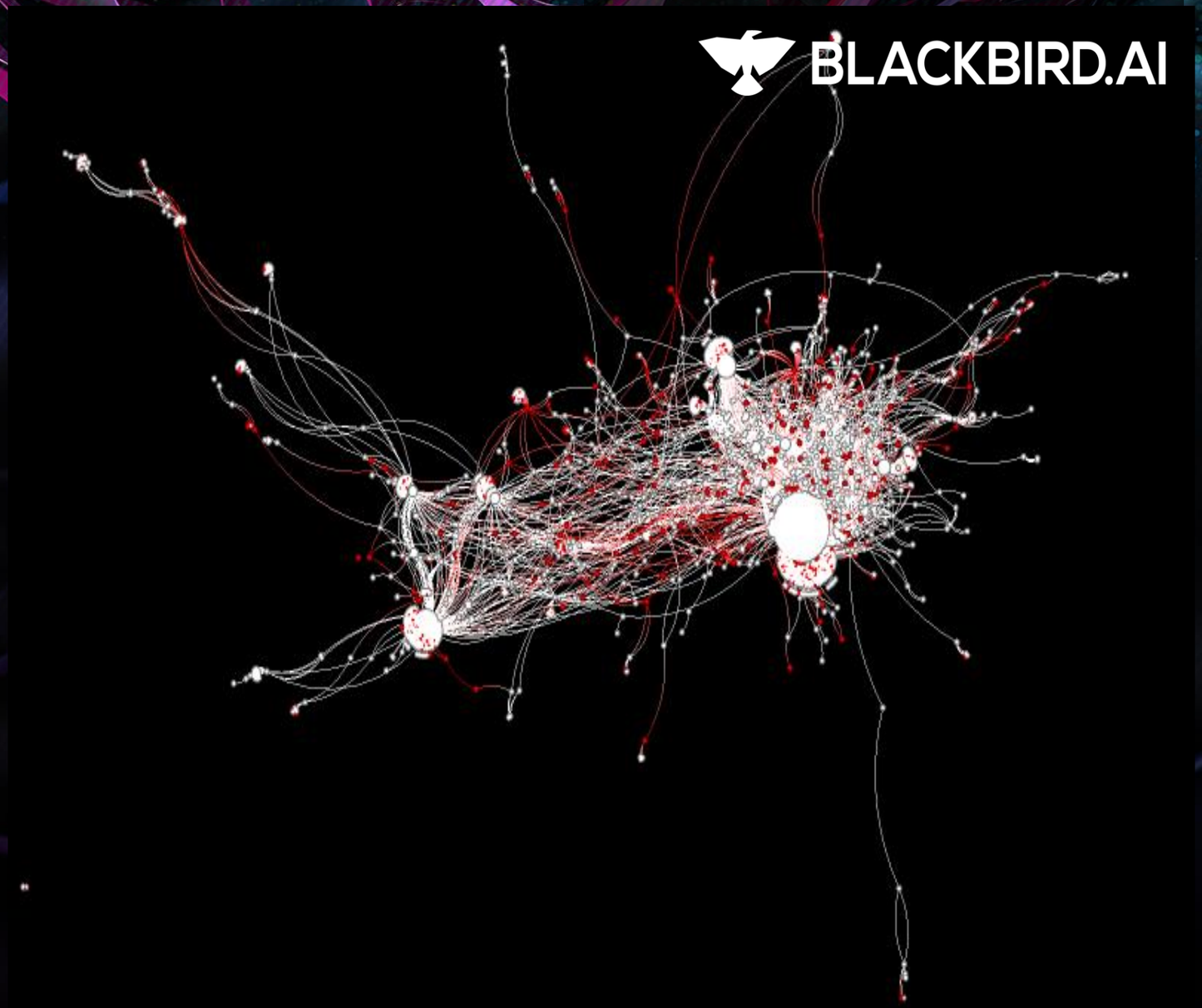
“The world must remember WWII era atrocities committed by Japan”

Case Studies

Narrative Deep-Dive

Network Analysis: Bot Activity

- Bot-like activity was high at 25.8% and distributed throughout the network for this narrative.
- Looking at activity over time on the graph did not reveal any significant patterns related to bot-like activity.

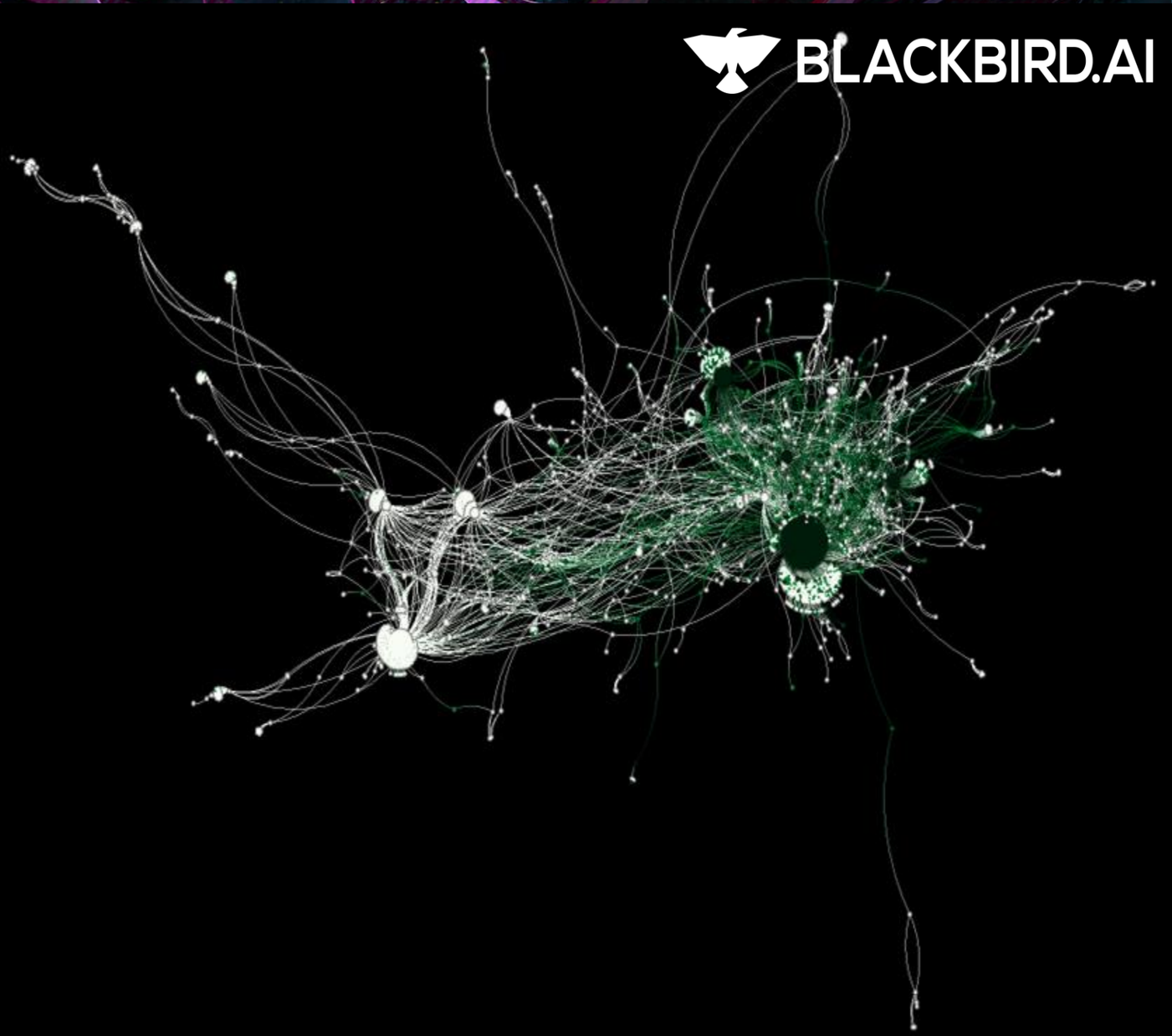


black hat ASIA 2025

Narrative Deep-Dive

Network Analysis: Cohort Activity

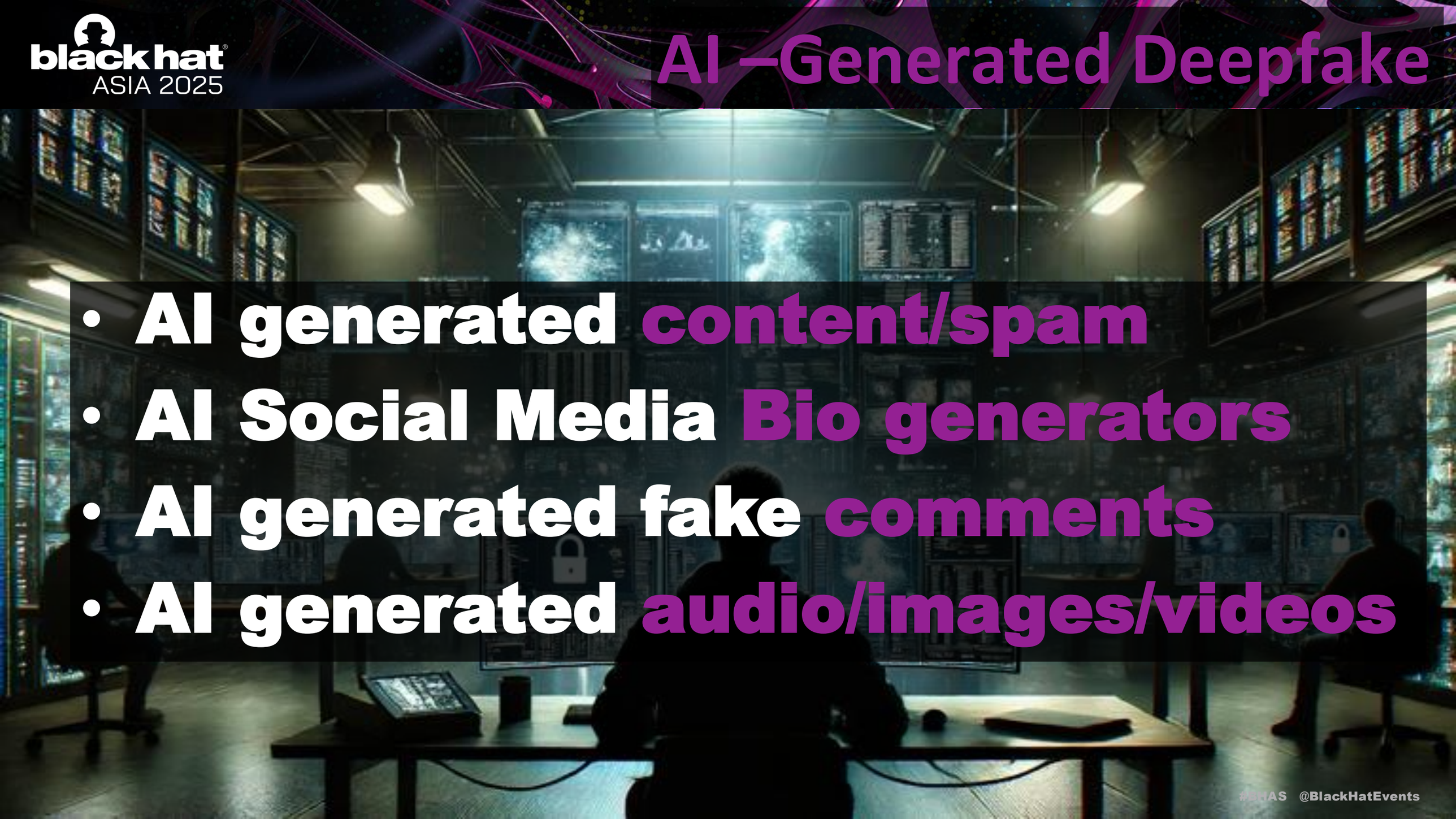
- Chinese State Supporters were the dominant cohort for this narrative, at over 26% of post volume.
- The largest influential node on the graph falls within the pro-China cohort; additionally, much of the networked activity around them came from other Chinese State Supporters.



AI –Generated Deepfake

AI and Deepfakes

AI –Generated Deepfake



- AI generated content/spam
- AI Social Media Bio generators
- AI generated fake comments
- AI generated audio/images/videos

AI –Generated Deepfake

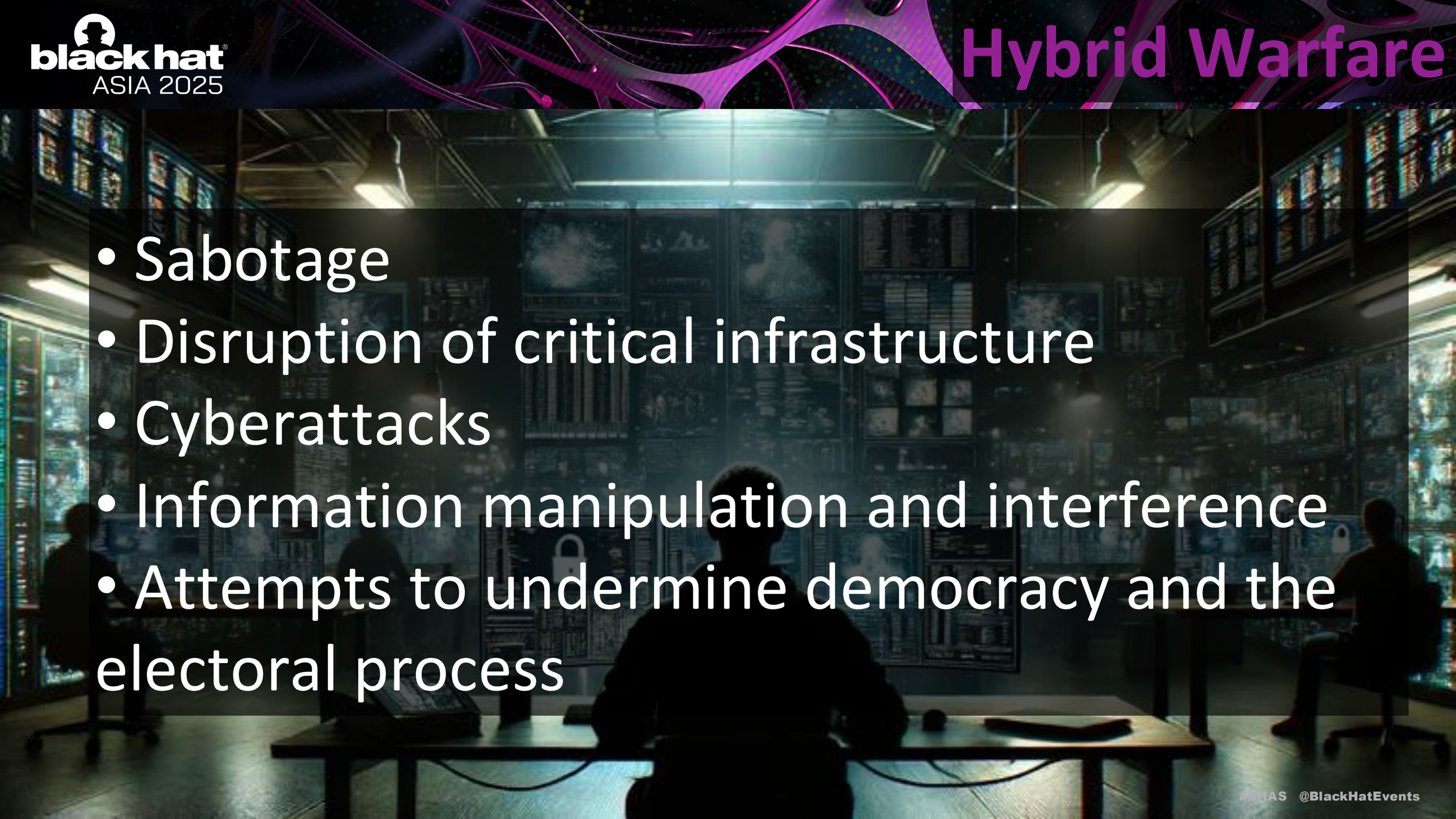
Anyone can generate deepfakes.
They have become easier and cheaper to make and simpler to disseminate on social media and messaging platforms.

AI –Generated Deepfake

Hybrid Warfare

Hybrid Threats

Hybrid Warfare



- Sabotage
- Disruption of critical infrastructure
- Cyberattacks
- Information manipulation and interference
- Attempts to undermine democracy and the electoral process

Hybrid Warfare

FRANCE

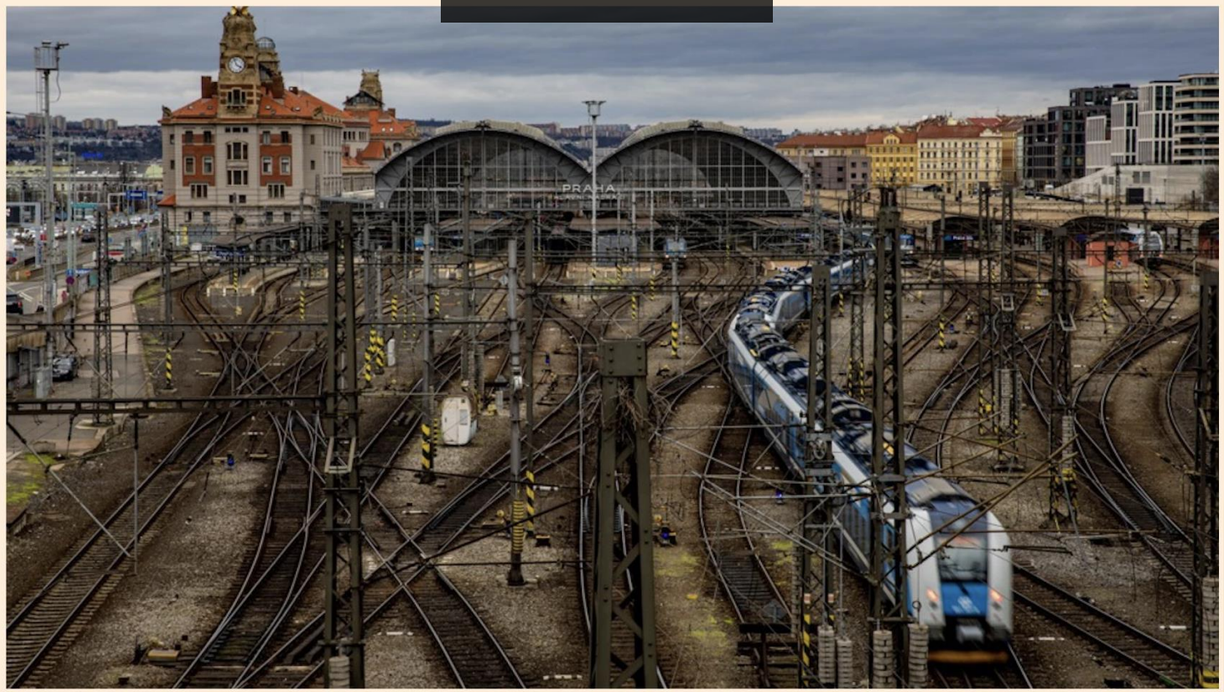
ROMANIA

How Russia-backed influencers meddled in Romania's vote

Bucharest scrapped presidential election after 'illegal' social media campaign used tactics seen in Moldova poll

Romanian officials said a network of more than 100 paid influencers with a total of 8mn followers were deployed to boost Călin Georgescu on TikTok and other social media platforms © FT montage/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

CZECHIA



Russian are accused of wanting to sabotage trains, including here in Prague EPA-EFE/MARTIN DIVISEK

News

5 April 2024

‘Russia trying to sabotage European railways,’ says Czech transport minister

UK

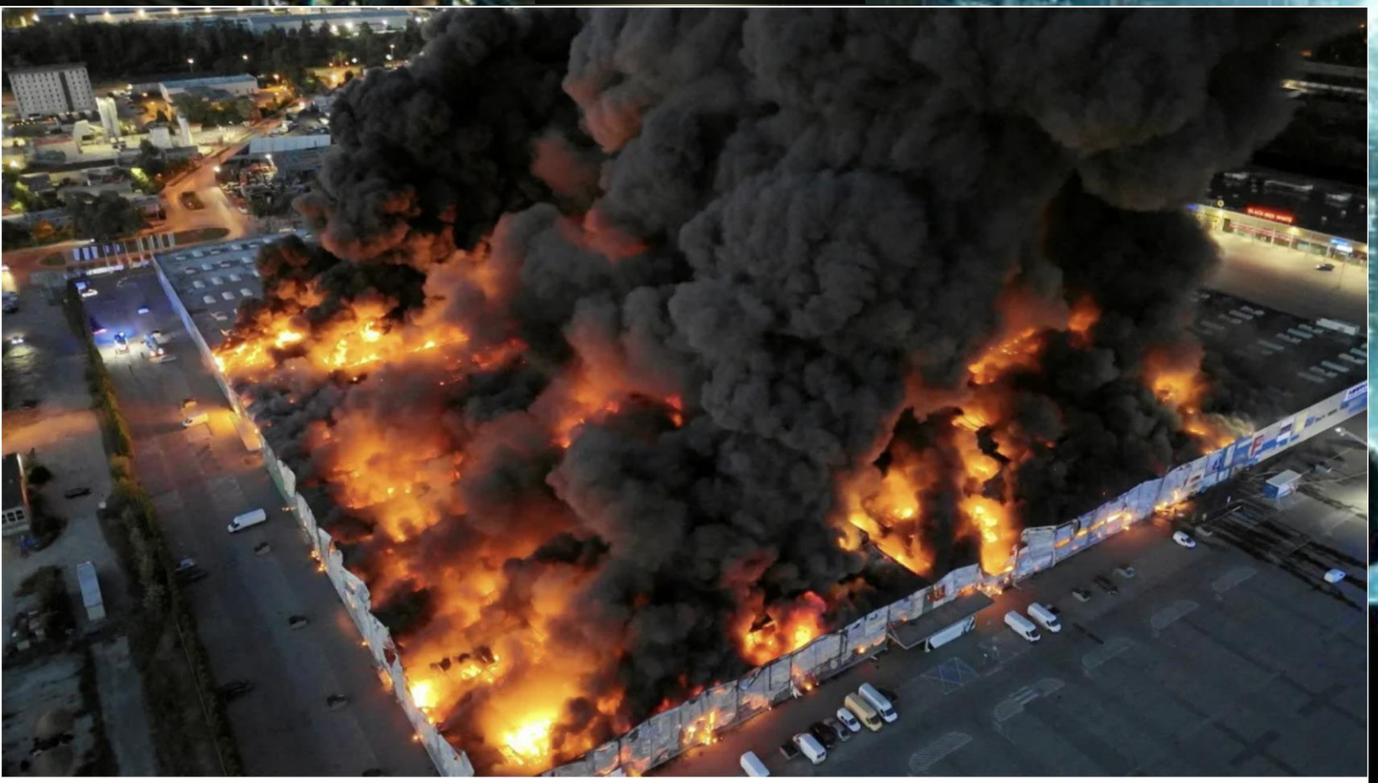
Cyber-attack on London hospitals to take ‘many months’ to resolve

Exclusive: NHS source says clarity needed on how Russian hackers gained access and whether records are retrievable

Six NHS trusts and scores of GP practices in south-east London have been struggling to deliver

Hybrid Warfare

POLAND



Polish authorities said Russia appears to be behind a large fire that consumed a shopping center in Warsaw. Dariusz Borowicz/Agencja Wyborcza.pl/Reuters

DENMARK

Firefighters extinguish a fire that broke out at the headquarters of Danish multinational pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk in Bagsvaerd near Copenhagen, Denmark, on May 22, 2024. Russia has been accused of carrying out sabotage attacks... More

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Hybrid Warfare

Bosnia – Moldova - Georgia

EL PAÍS

International

RUSSIAN WAR IN UKRAINE >

NATO warns of Russia's attempts to destabilize Bosnia, Moldova and Georgia, the weakest links in Europe

The Alliance is analyzing its future relationship with the Kremlin amid concerns about its activities in North Africa and the Sahel

ESTONIA

A Finnair Airbus A321-231 comes in to land at Heathrow Airport in west London on April 29, 2024. Finnair has suspended flights to eastern Estonia because of GPS disturbances, which Tailinn has blamed on Russia.... More **ADRIAN DENNIS/GETTY IMAGES**

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Hybrid Warfare

POLITICO

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NEWS > DEFENSE

Russian plot to kill European weapons chief foiled by US and Germany

Rheinmetall is Germany's largest manufacturer of 155mm artillery shells, a crucial resource for Ukrainians defending themselves against Russia's war.

LISTEN SHARE

GERMANY

of a DHL airplane at Leipzig Halle Airport. Photo
Wikimedia Commons

Bei 100 Fahrzeugen den Auspuff verstopft

Klima-Radikale attackieren Autos mit Bauschaum

... und fordern mehr Klimaschutz von Minister Habeck

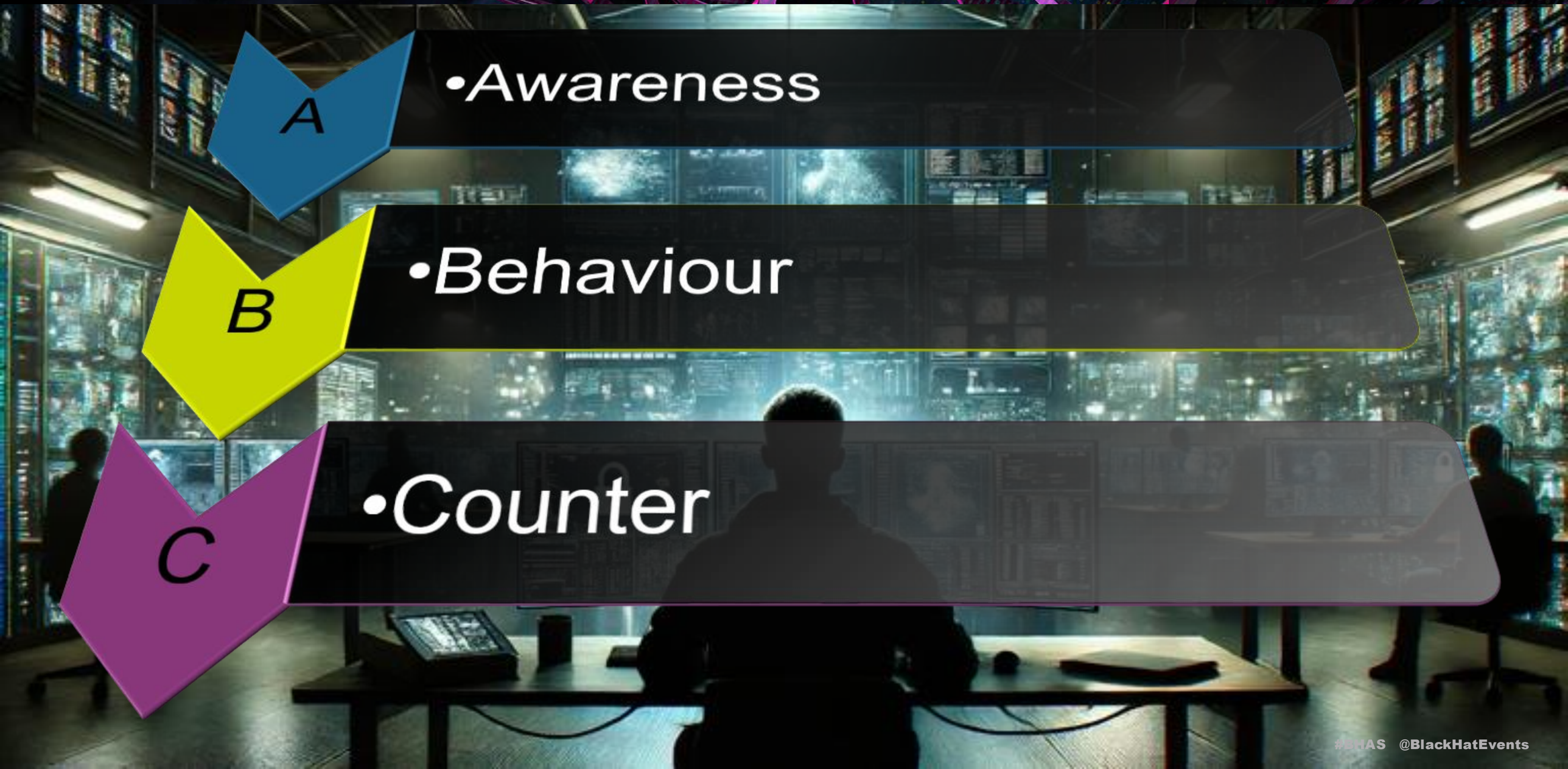
In Langenau wurde der Auspuff eines Mini mit Bauschaum verstopft

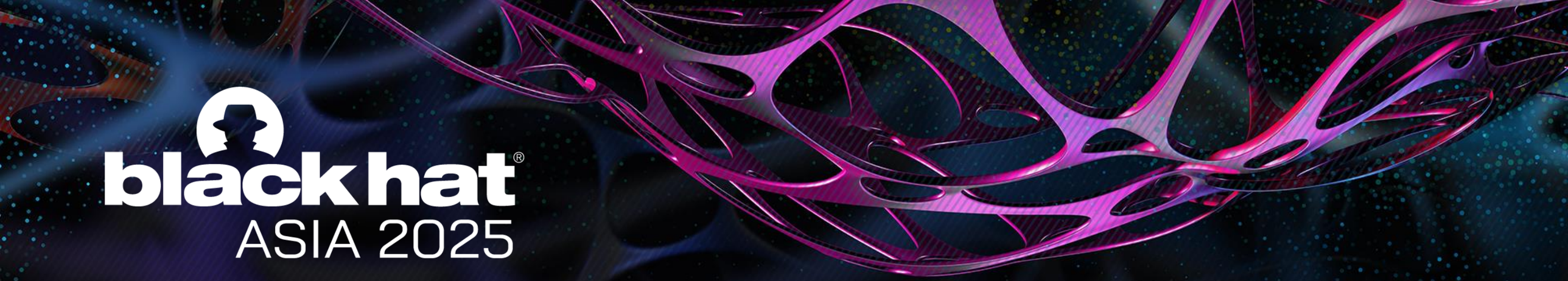
Hybrid Warfare

Conclusion

Conclusion

Conclusion





Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (Disinformation 2.0)

Based on Learnings from 30 Years at NATO

FRANKY SAEGERMAN