

Facebook halts small Iranian group targeting U.S. users on social network

13 February 2020, by Mike Snider



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Facebook has taken down three networks, each of which used "coordinated inauthentic behavior" to exploit other users and spread misinformation across Facebook and Instagram.

One of the networks, based in Iran, used six Facebook accounts and five Instagram accounts to post in U.S. groups and comment on other posts across the platforms, Facebook said in a blog post.

Posts dealt with topics such as the U.S. elections, Christianity, U.S.-Iran relations, and immigration policy. Some also criticized U.S. policies in the Middle East and public figures. Also posted: video interviews with academics, public figures and columnists on those issues. Some accounts attempted to contact public figures, Facebook said.

The Iran-based group and the other removed groups were engaging in foreign or [government interference](#), "coordinated inauthentic behavior on behalf of a government or foreign actor" on Facebook and Instagram, said Nathaniel Gleicher, Facebook's head of [security policy](#), who authored

the post.

Also removed: a Russia-based network that primarily targeted Ukraine and a third based in Myanmar and Vietnam that targeted audiences in Myanmar.

"Each of them created networks of accounts to mislead others about who they were and what they were doing," Gleicher said.

About 60 people followed one or more of the Iran-based operation's Instagram accounts. The group had some links to the 783 Iran-linked groups, pages and accounts Facebook removed in January 2019 for engaging in "coordinated inauthentic behavior," he said.

In the Russia-based network, which involved 78 Facebook accounts, 11 pages, 29 groups and four accounts on Instagram, Facebook found links to Russian military intelligence services. The posts in Russian, English and Ukrainian involved local and [political news](#), as well as topics such as Russian military engagement in Syria, alleged leaks by Ukraine's Security Service about ethnic tensions in Crimea and the 2014 downing of the Malaysian airliner in Ukraine.

The network that targeted Myanmar had links to two telecom providers operating in Myanmar and Vietnam and a Vietnamese public relations firm. Facebook removed 13 Facebook accounts and 10 pages tied to this [network](#), which used fake accounts "to manage Pages posing as independent telecom consumer news hubs," Facebook said.

"We're constantly working to detect and stop this type of activity because we don't want our services to be used to manipulate people," Gleicher said. "We're taking down these Pages, Groups and accounts based on their behavior, not the content they posted. In each of these cases, the people behind this activity coordinated with one another

and used fake accounts to misrepresent themselves, and that was the basis for our action."

Facebook has been criticized for not doing enough to fight misinformation. Special Counsel Robert Mueller indicted Russian nationals and businesses who used [fake accounts](#) across Facebook and Twitter to attempt to interfere in the 2016 presidential election.

Most recently, the company said it would not take down online political ads, but give users tools to control what types of ads they watch. Google and Twitter have said they will block or limit the spread of ads that could contain misinformation.

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