

MYANMAR DIPLOMATIC MISSION UPDATE: CYBER OPERATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE CAMPAIGNS - URGENT

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Thurs, Jan 3, 9.30 PM (12

hours ago)

to ]

Dear Foreign Minister,

A disturbing issue has come to my attention.

Violent and hateful online content runs rampant in Myanmar.

I have been tasked with monitoring and assessing the online 'chatter' in Myanmar's social media space. Tensions and violence between various groups, like the Rohingya refugees and the Burmese, are rising at an alarming rate.

Hateful and violent content spreads at a rapid pace in the online ecosystem. Fake articles and deepfakes, indistinguishable from real video, flood Myanmar's social media space. This content has led to real violence: beatings, riots, executions, etc.

At first the content seemed targeted at Rohingya Muslims. Now, the content targets at all groups with existing tensions in Myanmar.

The content ranges from false rape allegations to doctored videos such as a Rohingya killing a native; a Burmese mob beating a Rohingya; a soldier shooting at protestors; protestors firebombing a military vehicle; and so forth.

All this content is fake, all synthesised, all generated.

By whom?

Please bear with me but the answer is not any human or group. Rather, a powerful piece of AI-software is generating the content.

In other words, it is an online bot.

The bot mimics OpenAI's ground-breaking GPT AI. GPT is an open-source artificial intelligence that can generate synthetic text samples. This means GPT can create human-sounding text articles based on a prompt.

However, the bot operating in Myanmar's online ecosystem appears far more advanced than GPT because it can produce synthetic audio and video.

The synthetic content spreads faster than attempts to verify or remove it. Given the speed information spreads online, the fake and violent synthetic content is shared and consumed at a staggering rate. A single clip on a popular video-sharing app ushered in a million views – within a day. This clip falsely accused a Rohingya child of theft, and it shared details of his whereabouts.

To counter the bot, we have begun studying it, and our observations show that the bot has one goal: engagement. It does not care how it achieves this, only that it gets the most engagement as fast as possible. (Engagement here means likes, shares, comments, etc.)

Hateful, anger-filled content attracts the most engagement, so the bot creates and spreads this content. Again, the bot has one aim: maximise engagement.

We have observed the bot creating fake social media profiles from sites like Facebook to Snapchat. These fake profiles come complete with fake human pictures, but these pictures don't match any known humans. The pictures are synthesized too. We have observed a thousand, sometimes tens of thousands, of these fake accounts, all making and sharing content.

We have found evidence of the bot operating in other regions too. These regions include the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and the USA. We too have evidence that the bot is operating in Australia.

Efforts to contain and delete the bot are rudimentary. The bot can copy itself faster than researchers can delete it.

A caveat: the bot does not create hateful or violent attitudes. We have not observed that and that appears impossible to do. Instead, it amplifies existing attitudes of anger and resentment online.

A younger diplomat described it as producing content that intensifies anger and hate with algorithmic precision. The more people engage with its hateful content, the better it gets producing hateful content.

## **Who created this bot and where does it come from?**

We do not know. Unfortunately, we have no verifiable facts on its origins. Theories suggest it is an experiment run amok by Mossad or the CIA. Our contacts at both agencies have thoroughly denied this.

We have informally dubbed this bot, 'The Hate Machine.'

I will continue to update you on this matter when necessary. Thank you.

Yours Sincerely,

Sanjeet Sharma.

Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Consular Operations Branch

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