



ADMM Cybersecurity and
Information Centre of Excellence

UPDATE ON THE INFORMATION DOMAIN

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FACEBOOK'S NEW POLICY AGAINST COORDINATED SOCIAL HARM

INTRODUCTION

1. On 16 Sep 2021, Facebook announced a new enforcement policy on the use of its platforms against groups that coordinate and spread misinformation, hate and social harm, which hitherto do not violate its traditional standards against inauthenticity.

WHAT IS COORDINATED SOCIAL HARM

2. According to Facebook, “coordinated social harm” campaigns refer to networks of largely authentic users who organise to systematically violate their policies to cause harm on or off their platform. Examples include bullying, harassment, harmful health misinformation and incitement to violence.

3. Facebook recognises that if a tightly organised network of users engage in such content violations, these behaviours can potentially create more harm that far exceeds the impact of each individual post or user.

DETAILS OF NEW ENFORCEMENT POLICY

4. As part of this new enforcement policy, Facebook said they will take a whole range of actions, including disabling accounts, pages and groups suspected of engaging in the activity, and reducing the reach of the harmful content.

5. Facebook's security teams will apply these tactics previously used to take down influence operations from fake accounts to address additional threats from coordinated networks of authentic user accounts.

TAKEDOWN OF QUERDENKEN MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

6. Under this new enforcement policy, Facebook removed almost 150 accounts and pages on Facebook and Instagram linked to a German online movement pushing the Querdenken conspiracy theory, which fueled resistance to government health restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. The Querdenken movement used authentic and duplicate accounts to post and amplify content focusing on the conspiracy that the German government's COVID-19 restrictions were part of a larger plan to remove basic rights and freedom from its citizens. Individuals linked to the movement repeatedly violated Facebook's Community Standards against harmful health misinformation, incitement of violence, bullying, harassment and hate speech.

8. While Facebook said that they are not banning all Querdenken-related content, they will continue to monitor the situation and take action to prevent abuse on their platforms and protect people using their services.

ASSESSMENT

9. The new enforcement policy signals a marked change from Facebook's long-standing stance of using authenticity as the key indicator to assess whether a behaviour is prohibited on their platforms. Most of Facebook's enforcement actions taken against disinformation operations in recent years were premised on users engaging in coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

10. It certainly bears watching how the new enforcement policy will allow Facebook to actively take down more coordinated networks that push out harmful content on their platforms.

CONTACT DETAILS

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