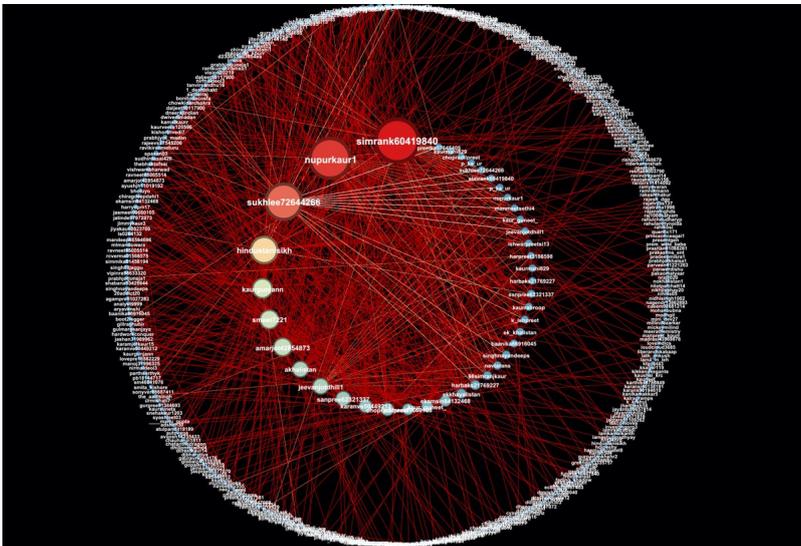




Benjamin Strick @BenDoBrown Wed Nov 24 01:12:25 +0000 2021

A coordinated network of fake accounts posed as Sikh personas to promote the Indian Govt, nationalism & label Sikh activists as terrorists.

They claimed they were #RealSikhs, but were far from it. News on our investigation: <https://t.co/iJNDWmFZgq> Here is an explainer thread <https://t.co/DZfe7De5ZK>

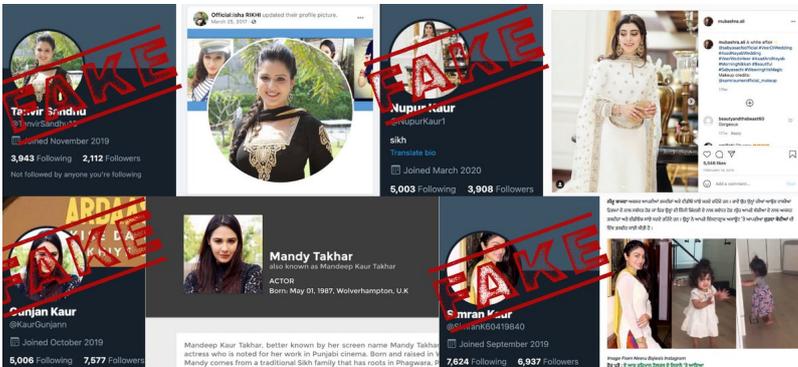


What we know is that their aims were to label Sikh political interests as extremist, stoke cultural tensions within India & overseas & promote the Indian Govt.

So WHO are the #RealSikhs?

WHAT was their aim?

And HOW did they attempt to distort perceptions? <https://t.co/jnkNY4PBqV>



First, WHO were these accounts trying to be and what did they look like?

The accounts were well-curated. They had relatively high follower numbers & were very active.

The personas were replicated across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. <https://t.co/0jEBLWnfiH>



Let's take a look at some of the accounts. The first pattern identified in this network is the profile images.

Most of the accounts in this network used the images of Bollywood actresses & celebrities.

Here is [@jimmykaur3](https://t.co/M32C05DNXZ). It's actually an image of an actress. <https://t.co/M32C05DNXZ>



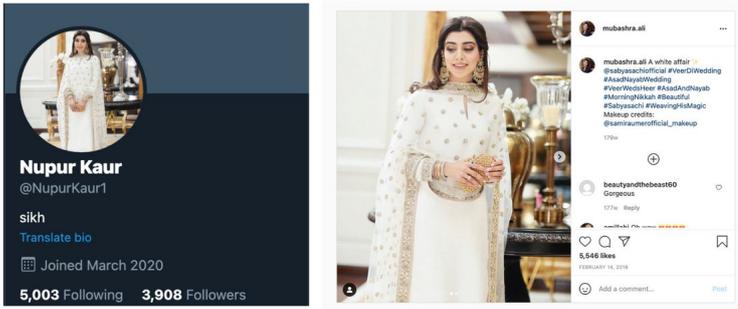
Here is [@Amarjot42854873](https://t.co/m17ulmzVxF)? Again - fake. This person does exist and it's not Amarjot Kaur. <https://t.co/m17ulmzVxF>



Next up [@TanvirSandhu16](https://t.co/36PhyByIOB). Again, also fake. This is actually an image of Isha Rikhi. <https://t.co/36PhyByIOB>



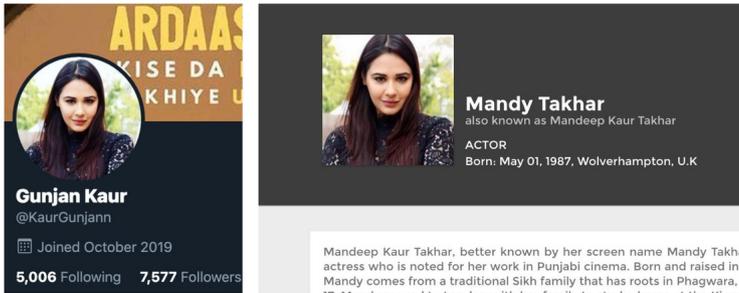
Let's take a look at [@nupurkaur1](#). This is actually a photo of the sister of Mubashra Aslam. <https://t.co/Mq70bK6Fz9>



Are we seeing a pattern here?

Here is [@kaurgunjann](#) with more than 7000 followers.

This is actually actress Mandy Takhar. <https://t.co/2Qpku9Rebm>



I call these accounts sock puppets. They are fictitious online identities attempting to be a specific persona.

And these ones have a story that doesn't just exist on Twitter - let's take a look. <https://t.co/E9z2IU75cc>



These fake accounts carry their personas over to different platforms.

We found that 22 accounts that were the same personas on Twitter & Facebook. They used the same image, name, cover photo, and posted the same content.

Here is an example of 'Sanpreet' on both platforms. <https://t.co/3rkEeSONM7>



Sanpreet Kaur
@Sanpreet62321337
proud to be a Sikh 🤗
Joined December 2019
4,261 Following 5,013 Followers

Sanpreet Kaur

Posts About Friends 3685 Photos Videos More ▾ Add Friend Message

And here is 'Gunjan' - also copied across to Facebook. <https://t.co/clq1OPB6bM>



Gunjan Kaur
@KaurGunjann
HATH JORH KE KRIYE
ARDAAS HAR ROZZ
KISE DA BURA NA KRIYE
KHIYE UCHI SUCHI SOCH
Joined October 2019
4,979 Following 7,561 Followers

Gunjan Kaur

Posts About Friends 4003 Photos Videos More ▾ Add Friend Message

Many of the personas were present on Instagram as well.

Note: the accounts had significantly less success with metrics on Instagram and Facebook in comparison to the traction they gained on Twitter. <https://t.co/vbXOrqn8io>

 **kauravneet3181** [Follow](#) [...](#)

279 posts 744 followers 2,590 following

Ravneet Kaur

POSTS IGTV TAGGED

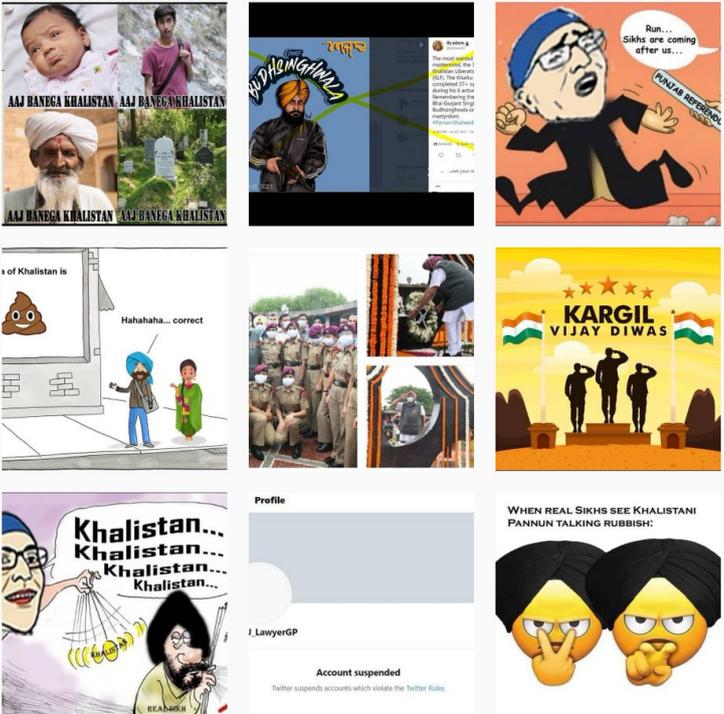


 **sukhleen.kaur.3133719** [Follow](#) [...](#)

233 posts 1,406 followers 4,944 following

Sukhleen Kaur

POSTS IGTV TAGGED





simran.kaur.280397

Follow

390 posts 1,777 followers 5,197 following

Simran Kaur

POSTS IGTV TAGGED



Will not allow Khalistan to be formed in India, Himachal has come to give a befitting reply to Gurbatwant Pannu: Bitta



Bitta said that he has come to Himachal to answer to Khalistan supporter Gurbatwant Singh Pannu. He said that Gurbatwant Singh Pannu only knows how to make



Kisan Morcha suspends Kisan Union in Punjab for criticising Khalistani terrorist Bhindranwale and SFJ's Pannu during his speech



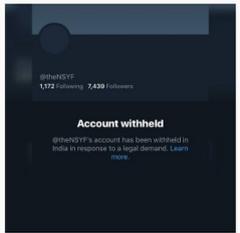
kaurgunjan07

Follow

291 posts 1,793 followers 4,597 following

Gunjan Kaur

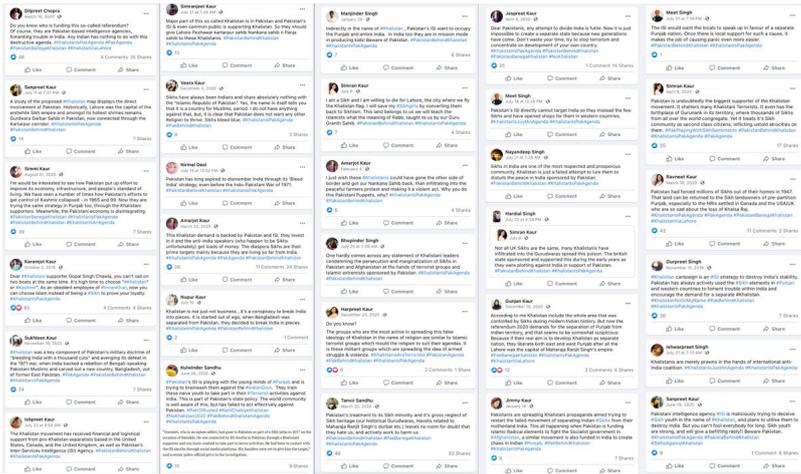
POSTS IGTV TAGGED



So WHAT was their aim?

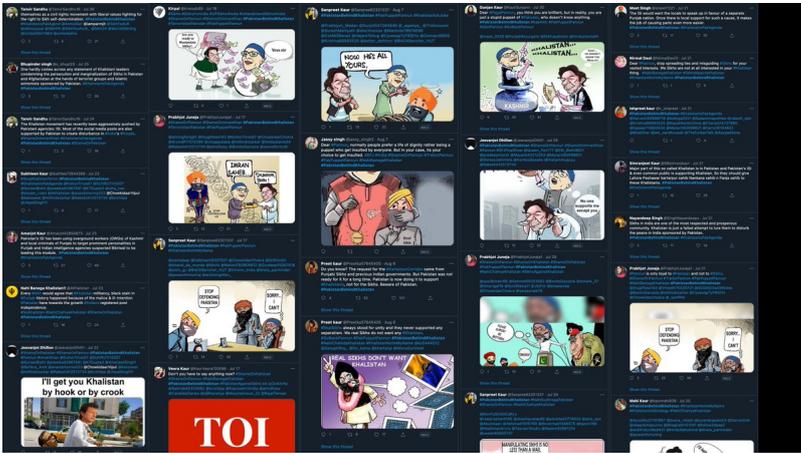
We can glean some obvious details from the content the accounts post. Here is some of the Facebook activity we looked

at. It shows a strong focus on countering Sikh independence. Note the prominence of tags such as **#PakistanBehindKhalistan** <https://t.co/kSHu563reY>



That same tag, as seen on Twitter, shows extremely similar content. Again targeting Sikh independence.

You can see much of the content had few interactions. <https://t.co/7zvc0CvBe7>



However, some of the content gained significant traction. For example this tweet about independence groups overseas received more than 3000 retweets and 16,000 likes.

Not bad for a sock puppet with a set list of talking points to promote certain narratives. <https://t.co/HZrcyfmBAz>



The coordinated fake network also amplified concerning narratives that attempted to define what 'real Sikh' and a 'fake Sikh' is. <https://t.co/9TFwJh7cOo>

Jeevanjot Dhillon @JeevanjotDhill1 · May 27

The difference between a **#RealSikh** and **#FakeSikh** is pretty clear from this picture. **#Khalistanis are not #RealSikhs. #ShameOnKhalistanis #KhalistanisDisrespectsSikhGurus #NahiChahiyeKhalistan**
 @skyaduvanshi10 @sarveshwar @BonitoDacosta @Jaspal13649680 @rajaa081058



**There was a Sikh who
Sacrificed his life for Tiranga**



**And there is a Sikh who
burned it**

3 10 26 IMG↓

The fake network of accounts also attempted to push specific narratives about the farmers' protests using messaging claiming that 'Khalistani terrorists' hijacked the protests. <https://t.co/42jvi6iLz4>

Simran Kaur @SimranK60419840 · Jan 27

Everybody knows that the so-called **#KhalistaniTerrorists** are trying to fire from our **farmers'** shoulder. Our **farmers** are the backbone of our country and that is why **#SFJ** and other **#Khalistani** terrorist organisations are provoking the Sikh **farmers**. No Indian **farmer** supports any



8 64 171 IMG↓



Ravneet Kaur
January 25 · 🌐



While [#SikhFarmers](#) were protesting peacefully for their real concerns, [#KhalistaniSeparatists](#) intruded in the [#FarmersProtest](#) and turned the peaceful protest into a [#KhalistaniMess](#). It shifted the focus from the [#RealProblems](#) of our [#RealFarmers](#).
[#ShameOnKhalistani](#) [#NahiChahiyeKhalistan](#)
[#SikhFarmersDontWantKhalistan](#)
[#KhalistanisHijackedFarmersProtest](#)

Farmers' Protest explained!



2

1 Comment 1 Share



Veera Kaur
March 16 · 🌐



The day starts with such a shocking news!! Why [#UN](#) is accepting money from a [#Khalistani](#) terrorist group? Is [#UN](#) not aware that [#SFJ](#) is behind the turmoil inside the [#FarmersProtest](#), and this is one of its strategies to create disharmony in India? Do Not TAKE the TERROR MONEY!!! [#UNDeclineTerrorMoney](#) [#ShameOnSFJ](#)
[#SikhFarmersDontWantKhalistan](#) [#WeDontWantKhalistan](#)
[#SikhsAgainstKhalistan](#)



TIMESOFINDIA.INDIATIMES.COM

UN confirms \$10,000 donation from pro-Khalistan outfit | India News - Times of India



There was also a common theme throughout the network of fake personas to retweet or tweet about the Indian Armed Forces and Indian Army content.

This content was unique as it was not related to Sikh independence much like the other content.

<https://t.co/sK2XDMzKSY>





Mahi Kaur @kaurmahi829 · Jul 26

Let us salute to all our soldiers who are brave and protect us all throughout the day and night. 🇮🇳 The #IndianArmedForces had defeated the Pakistan army in Kargil in July 1999. Since then this day (July 26) is being celebrated as 'Kargil Vijay Diwas'. #KargilVijayDiwas



3 22 48 IMG

Simran Kaur Retweeted



ADG PI - INDIAN ARMY @adgpi · Jul 27

Retiring Officers Seminar #ROS.

General MM Naravane #COAS commended retiring officers for their selfless service to the Nation & bid them adieu. These officers will superannuate on 31 Jul 2021 & continue to play a stellar role in Nation building.



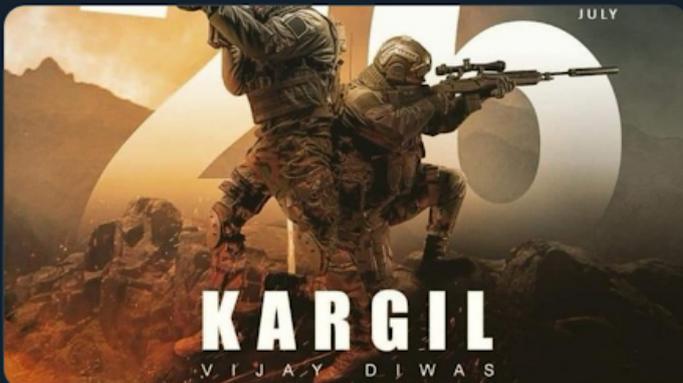
27 404 2.7K IMG



Sanpreet Kaur @Sanpreet62321337 · Jul 26

In the Kargil war, we fought on many fronts. The USA didn't allow us to use GPS during the war. I salute every brave soldier who fought for Mother India and gave us victory. #KargilVijayDiwas #OperationVijay

@KulashekarS2 @Sach40047087 @Sarthakvikas @morya_shyam @Sabhigyanam



2 25 92 IMG

While most of the content appears to push specific talking points, or narratives, some tweets (example below) went further in a call for 'nationalists' to 'counter & expose' groups this network labelled as extremists. <https://t.co/yir3kekjX>



While the fake personas appeared to gain significant traction on Twitter, their tweets and images were also linked, embedded, or reposted on news sites and blogs indicating platform breakout.

Below are two examples of this. <https://t.co/uQM6z7k5VH>

Some anti-national elements are also trying to serve their selfish interests in the ongoing farmer: past several days.



Some anti-national elements are also trying to serve their selfish interests in the ongoing farmers' movement in India for the past several days.

Why Twitter matters.

Twitter is where proxy wars are fought and where various groups try to influence and spread their Propaganda.

While the Khalistanis in Canada are known to be linked with Intelligence Agency ISI of Pakistan and have the alleged support of India's INC Party, their twitter propaganda and Troll armies are run by organized groups.

“ Numerous evidence that surfaced lately prove that the so-called Khalistan movement, a failed secessionist campaign is being run and fuelled by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, which changed its operating centers to Canada, US and other European countries when it failed to

— Sukhleen Kaur (@Sukhlee72644266) June 18, 2021

The leaders of these Troll groups rub shoulders with Canadian politicians and high society. On Twitter they Bully and threaten Pro Indian handles.

They also use 'War tactics' Decoys pretending to be pro-Hindu Indian handles follow strong Indo-Canadian handles and then tag them to Extremist Groups to link them and set them up for attack and reporting.

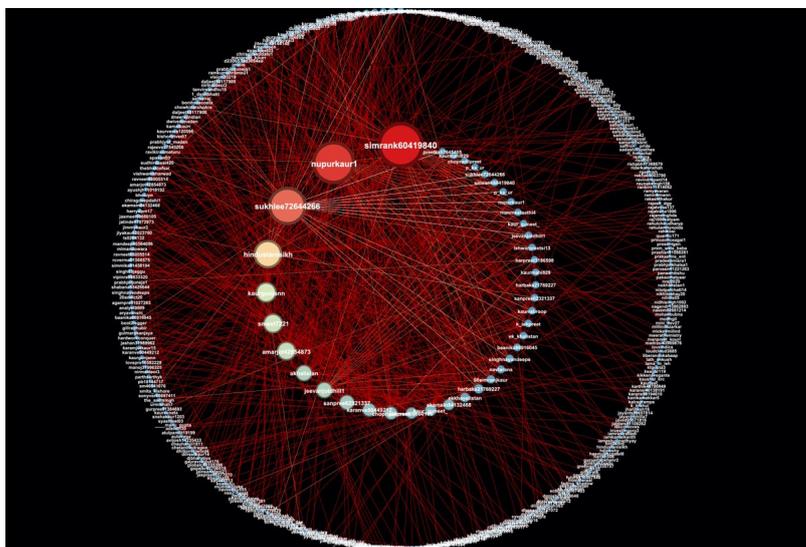
Often with influence operations, looking at a network through visualised data helps with a lot of things - namely identifying how it operates, size, spread and also finding more accounts.

So let's take a look at that. <https://t.co/fSXgM8Ub8J>



I captured data using the Twitter API on three tags used by the network: **#RealSikhsAgainstKhalistan**, **#SikhsRejectKhalistan** & **#RealSikhs**.

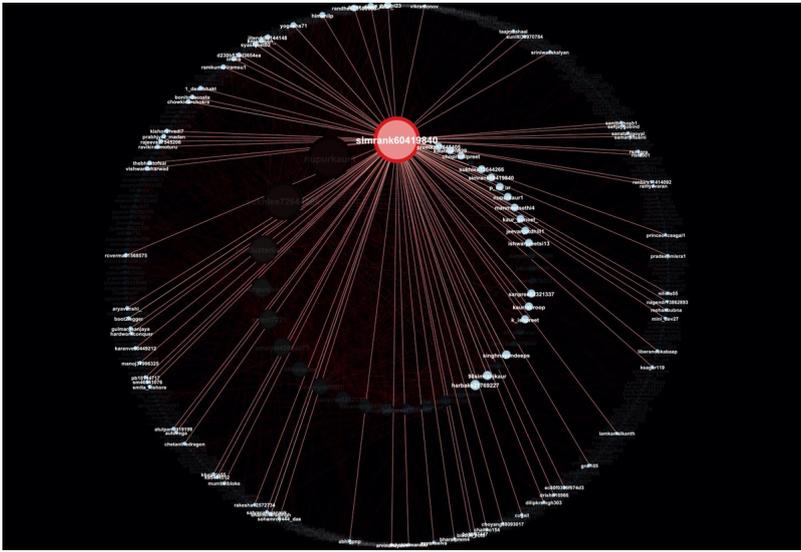
I've set out that data using **@Gephi** to show the core network of primarily fake accounts and the wider network of amplifiers in the outer ring. <https://t.co/dvx9xNW1aN>



Doing helps to visualise the interactions (likes, retweets) between accounts.

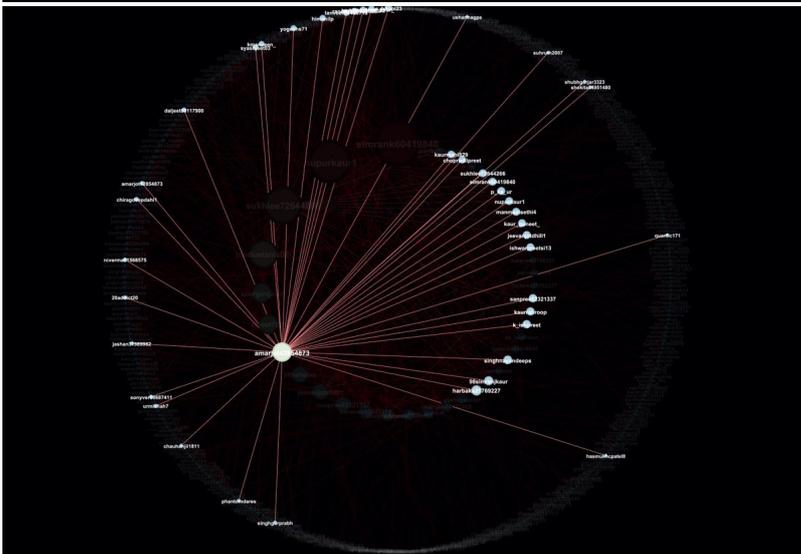
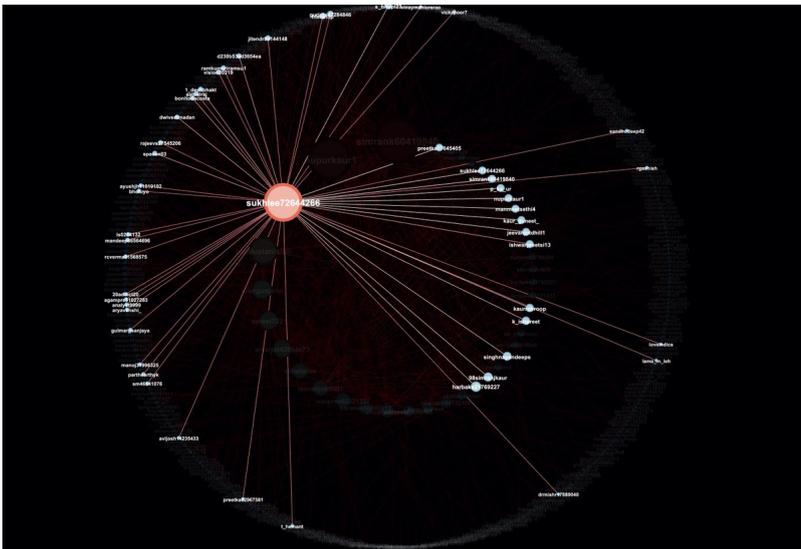
For example, here I have highlighted the interactions of **@SimranK60419840** to show its personal spread within the

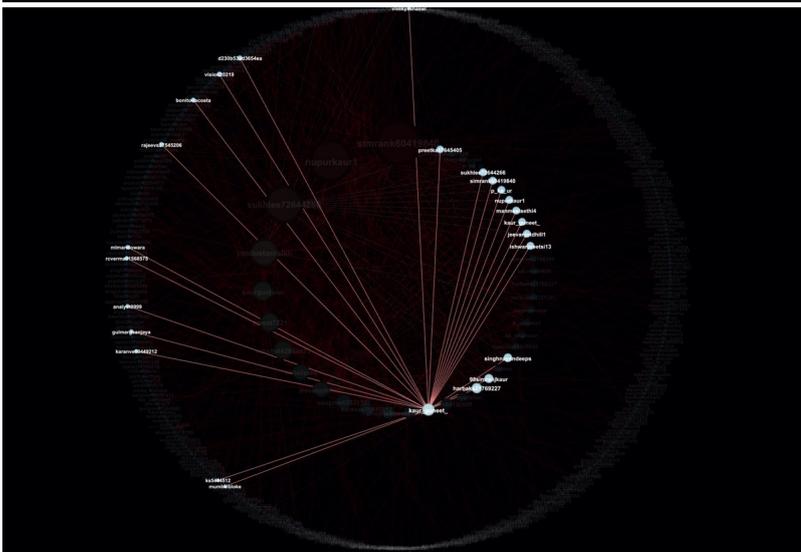
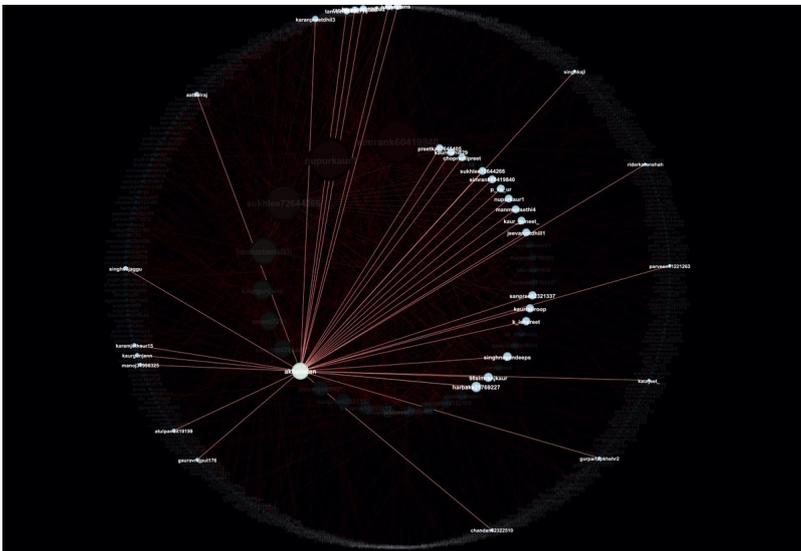
network. <https://t.co/1d0GEkw9Tw>



Though the captured activity was only a sample of these accounts, it did show that there was consistent amplification from smaller fake accounts (on right in inner circle).

Using those accounts on the right, we could find more that were being retweeted within the fake network <https://t.co/MAbbtfSYRw>





These findings are documented in a full transparent influence operations research report here [@Cen4infoRes: https://t.co/LLwyBPKS19](https://t.co/LLwyBPKS19)

This report was shared with teams at Twitter and Meta. All of the accounts identified in this research have subsequently been suspended ■

Well done [@FloraCarmichael](https://t.co/iJNDWmFZgq) [@shrutimenon10](https://t.co/iJNDWmFZgq) for turning this in-depth influence operations research into a newsworthy report. <https://t.co/iJNDWmFZgq>. Also a big thanks to [@elisethoma5](https://t.co/iJNDWmFZgq) and staff at [@Cen4infoRes](https://t.co/iJNDWmFZgq) for reviewing this research.

For those wanting to view this piece in other languages, here are the translated versions from the BBC.

Punjabi <https://t.co/6pjH5J8GHF>

Urdu <https://t.co/JMVkfShb69>

Gujarati <https://www.bbc.com/gujarati/india-59388510>

Hindi <https://t.co/c2yIS7ztdy>

Telugu <https://t.co/1uhyxKWK1w>