Disrupting Radicalisation Online: The Implications of Role Differentiation in Radical Networks

Stuart Green – 2226756G – 24484252

Abstract

Online social media platforms are becoming increasingly important for radical groups to spread their ideology and recruit new members. The exploitation of modern communication technology by radical groups has caused concerns that online spaces may become increasingly important domains for radicalisation. This research has sought to study radicalisation pathways online in order to better understand how the radicalisation process online may be disrupted. To this end, this paper makes use of social network analysis methodology in order to empirically map a radical group’s online community so that group accounts may be compared. This allows for their role within the radicalisation process, as well as their susceptibility to account suspension as a tool of radicalisation disruption, to be assessed. This analysis identifies three different roles online accounts may fulfil in the online radicalisation process and how they differ in susceptibility to suspension: (1) Beacon roles act to attract new users to the group. These accounts are the most susceptible to suspension as they would find it difficult to regain their audience post-suspension. (2) Recruiter roles engage users who have expressed an interest in the group and attempt to draw them further into the group’s core community. These accounts are also susceptible to suspension as they may permanently lose much of their audience. (3) Group Maintenance roles ensure cohesion within the group’s core community and promote ideological rigidity. These accounts are the least susceptible to suspension as much of their audience is shared, making it easier to regain post-suspension.