

From Retweets to Raqqa THE AMERICAN ISIS TWITTER SCENE

ISIS activists and sympathizers are active on a variety of platforms—open forums, private messaging apps, and the dark web—but Twitter is by far the platform of choice. The Program on Extremism identified and monitored approximately 300 American supporters of ISIS on Twitter, including some individuals now in Syria and Iraq. These accounts can be divided into three categories: nodes, amplifiers, and shoutouts.

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THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

NODES

Nodes are the leading voices in the ISIS Twittersphere. They enjoy a prominent status and are the primary content creators for the network. A group of two or three clustered users will often swap comedic memes, news articles, and official ISIS tweets, allowing them to pool followers and more easily spread content both to new audiences and throughout their network.

AMPLIFIERS

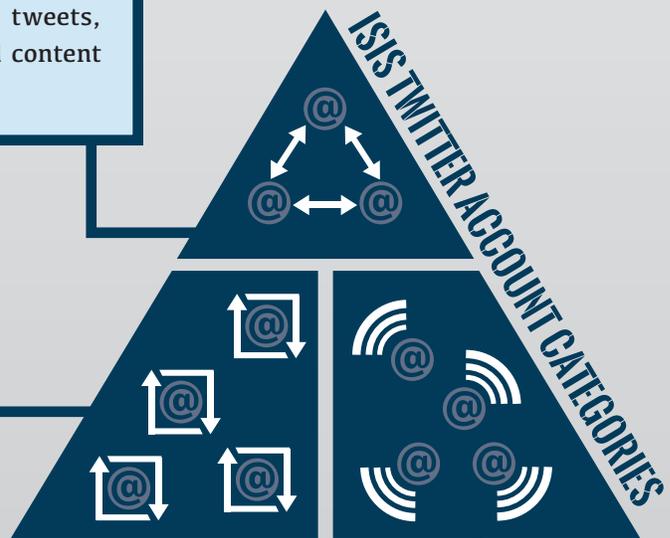
Amplifiers largely do not generate new content but rather retweet and “favorite” material from popular users. Ultimately, because they post little, if any, original content, it is often unclear whether these accounts correspond to real-life ISIS sympathizers or are programmed to post automatically.

CHARACTERISTICS

- Nearly 1/3 of the tracked accounts are purportedly operated by women.
- Most American ISIS supporters online communicate in English.
- Many accounts use avatars of black flags, lions, and green birds (a symbol of martyrs).
- Increasingly avatars feature Americans arrested on terrorism charges, killed waging jihad abroad, or committing attacks in the US.

SHOUT-OUTS

Shout-out accounts primarily introduce new, pro-ISIS accounts to the community and promote newly created accounts of previously suspended users, allowing them to quickly regain their pre-suspension status. A unique innovation of the online ISIS scene, they tend to have the largest followings in the Twitter landscape and play a pivotal role in the community’s resilience, despite frequent account suspensions.



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