



[Twitter Removes Accounts Tied to a Saudi Arabian Disinformation Campaign](#)

Last Friday, Twitter announced that it had taken down more than 88,000 accounts linked to Saudi Arabia because of concerns that they were involved in spreading misinformation and spam. The accounts were removed for aggressively liking and retweeting messages that were favorable to the Saudi government's interests. Twitter traced the accounts back to Smaat, a social media and marketing company based in Saudi Arabia that is known to manage accounts of Saudi government agencies. This is one of the largest single crackdowns on state-backed accounts in the history of the social media platform.

In a blog post, Twitter announced that the accounts were used to spread positive messages about Saudi authorities and to advance the country's geopolitical interests on the world stage, including discussion of sanctions on Iran. They also found that third-party automated tools were used to help spread the messages across the platform. The contentious tweets were mainly in Arabic, however a small portion of them were targeted towards Western audiences – with those tweets advocating Saudi regime positions on topics such as public opinion regarding the country's government officials. The Saudi government-backed accounts also urged American-led regime change in Iran and deflected responsibility from Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and his allies for the October 2018 murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who many independent analysts believe was killed on the direct order of the Crown Prince himself.

Twitter's actions late last week were not the first time the social media platform has taken down Saudi-linked accounts. Just a few months ago in September, Twitter removed six accounts that were tied to a Saudi media group that it said was spreading positive messages about the nation's government. Twitter also removed hundreds of accounts originating in the United Arab Emirates and Egypt that were targeting the Qatari and Iranian regimes by spreading pro-Saudi government propaganda. Additionally, last month in November, federal prosecutors charged two former Twitter employees with spying on behalf of the Saudi government. Twitter is not the only social media platform that has discovered this type of behavior. Facebook also removed hundreds of accounts back in August of this year that were linked to the Saudi Arabian government and the spreading of misinformation over the internet.

The uncovering of these tactics on social media is not surprising, considering that the Saudi regime has been found to use methods like these to control speech and keep reformers from organizing opposition. One example of this is through employing troll armies, which the Saudi government has been accused of using to harass and intimidate users online. The regime has even resorted to arresting and imprisoning Twitter users who are critical of their policies as well.

State-linked social media influencer campaigns like this one are the type that tech companies like Twitter and Facebook are hunting down in the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, since many suspect that Russian operatives used these platforms to try and sway public opinion during the lead up to that election. Both Twitter and Facebook have shut down influencer campaigns this year that were similarly found to have ties to regimes in various countries including China, Russia, Iran, and Israel.