

Manufacturing divides

The Gupta-linked Radical Economic Transformation (RET) media network



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The African Network of
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Executive summary

This report attempts to map the Radical Economic Transformation (RET) media network across its various channels. It shows that the RET network consists of a surprisingly varied, multi-channel media empire that includes mainstream news, alternative news, editorial websites and social media presences, both real and artificial, that work together to push a consistent agenda.

The report provides a timeline of events surrounding the media network's operations and highlights the main individuals and organisations involved in the network's activities. In addition, the report attempts to illuminate the network's agenda and priorities by describing the individuals and organisations targeted and quantifying the volume of discussion relating to specific themes and topics.

While every effort was made to collect as much relevant data as possible, the data analysed is not complete. This is for a few reasons including:

1. The list of fake accounts analysed on Twitter is not comprehensive as new accounts are created regularly
2. It is not possible to measure the Facebook "trolling" activity of fake accounts on pages other than those known to be linked or operated directly by the RET network.
3. The network continues to produce a high volume of content on a daily basis which means that any analysis of that content will be out of date as soon as it is committed in writing

Regardless of the above caveats, it is clear that the network produced at least 220,000 tweets and many Facebook posts and comments supporting their agenda between July 2016 (when the campaign began in earnest) and July 2017 (when data was collected for this report). This media onslaught is unprecedented in South African history and has likely played a key role in introducing the term '*white monopoly capital*' into South Africans' daily discourse. To this extent, it is fair to say that the campaign has been wildly successful.

A timeline of events shows that the RET network's activities started a few months after Bell Pottinger was employed by the Gupta-Zuma faction and the network's focus is clearly on attacking the enemies of the Gupta-Zuma faction. A #GuptaLeaks email seems to imply that Bell Pottinger knew about the Twitter campaign but was not actively involved in creating nor managing the accounts. Indeed, new evidence presented in this report shows that Gupta employee, Haranash Ghosh, composed tweets with the knowledge, and possible input of, Oakbay CEO Ronica Ragavan, Sahara CEO Ashu Chawla and former Oakbay CEO, Nazeem Howa, that were subsequently posted on Twitter by an account that has, in turn, been shown to have been retweeted hundreds of times by fake accounts. This lends credence to the management of the social media network being an in-house initiative.

The RET network's largest period of sustained activity up until the time of writing was in the second half of 2016 when the network focused on attacking former Finance Minister, Pravin Gordhan, in order to create a climate conducive to accepting his removal as Finance Minister. Since then, the network appears to have entered a new phase of heightened activity as of June 2017 with the *WMC Leaks* campaign which, while still

promoting similar themes, also attacks rivals of the Zuma political camp such as Deputy President, Cyril Ramaphosa.

Key people and organisations whose tweets are prominently amplified by fake accounts in the data, and indeed, who push the same rhetoric as the RET network include one Sipho Khuzwayo, possibly a leader in the Progressive Professionals Forum (PPF); PPF head, Mzwanele “Jimmy” Manyi; the Black 1st Land 1st Party (BLF) and its leader, Andile Mngxitama; journalists, Pinky Khoabane and Piet Rampedi; the Gupta-owned ANN7 and The New Age; advisor to Police Minister Fikile Mbalula, Bo Mbindwane; and many others. It is important to note that it is not clear from the data the extent to which these individuals and organisations are knowing collaborators versus simply ideologically aligned proponents of the RET rhetoric.

The authors of this report hope that readers take away a greater understanding of the PR campaign mounted by the Gupta-Zuma faction; a campaign unprecedented both in its scope and in its use of modern technology. Understanding how such campaigns work is vital for safeguarding against their under-handed influence today and for guarding against them tomorrow if we are to see our fragile democracy grow and thrive.

Introduction

In 2009 Jacob Zuma became South African president despite much internal ANC resistance (resulting in the spin-off party, Congress of the People, or COPE). President Zuma's time in office has been mired in controversy around issues relating to corruption and rape. These issues have steadily piled up over the years. One of the problematic issues surrounding the president is his relationship with the Gupta business family.

The specific details of the allegedly corrupt relationship between the president, members of his cabinet and members of his family have been covered in great detail in other reports and so they will not be covered in detail in this report. For in-depth breakdowns of the Zuma-Gupta state capture project see the following reports:

1. The “*State of Capture*” by former Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela¹
2. “*Betrayal of the Promise: How South Africa is Being Stolen*” by the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI)²
3. “*Unburdening Panel Report*” by the South African Council of Churches (SACC)³

According to the *Betrayal of the Promise* report, after the major political setback that was the recall after only three days of Des van Rooyen who was installed to replace then-Finance Minister, Nhlanhla Nene, President Zuma and the Guptas re-evaluated their political strategies which lead to them enlisting the help of British PR firm, Bell Pottinger at the beginning of 2016. The #GuptaLeaks emails confirm that the firm then worked with members of the Zuma camp, including his son Duduzane Zuma⁴, in order to thrash out a compelling narrative that would divert attention away from their actions and those of their associates, the Gupta

family, and towards wealthy, white South African businessmen instead. Shortly after the framing of their alternative narrative was bedded down, “alternative news” properties and social media communities began springing to life within a surprisingly contained time period (many emerged in the first half of 2016), including news and editorial websites such as Black Opinion (run by BLF leader, Andile Mngxitama), and Uncensored Opinion (run by journalist, Pinky Khoabane). Additionally, the content on these properties and the hashtags that they coined began to be amplified by a community of Twitter accounts that has an uncanny knack for



Figure 1: Example of a tweet authored and amplified by fake accounts. This one was further retweeted by Mzwanele “Jimmy” Manyi. Original URL: <https://twitter.com/sibonelokgasi1/status/821990257994452992>

¹ <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/download-the-full-state-of-capture-pdf-20161102>

² <http://pari.org.za/betrayal-promise-report>

³ <https://trinityjhb.co.za/unburdening-report>

⁴ <http://amabhungane.co.za/article/2017-06-06-guptaleaks-how-bell-pottinger-sought-to-package-sa-economic-message>

behaving in unison. On closer inspection, all of these accounts were found to have been created in recent months and their timelines only include content that attacks critics of the Zuma presidency, the Gupta family or those alleged to be involved in 'state capture'. Sometimes they also attack Zuma's political rivals such as Deputy President, Cyril Ramaphosa, who also appears in their content.

This report will focus on one aspect of the state capture political project undertaken by the Gupta-Zuma faction: that of a concerted media campaign orchestrated through the integration of multiple media channels including the Gupta-owned ANN7 television and The New Age newspaper, 'third party' news and opinion websites and fake Twitter and Facebook communities. Both overt and covert strategies are used on these channels. This integrated media network is referred to as the "RET (Radical Economic Transformation) network".

A variety of evidence points to the RET network being funded by the Gupta family including that:

- BLF leader, Andile Mngxitama, is a regular "expert commentator" on ANN7; and Pinky Khoabane's website, *Uncensored Opinion* is reblogged by The New Age website and she has a regular column in the newspaper.
- Mngxitama previously entreated the Gupta family for funding⁵, met with them or their representatives⁶, and was instructed him to write an attack article about journalist, Alec Hogg⁷
- The #GuptaLeaks email trove shows that Gupta employees composed and discussed purposefully divisive tweets⁸ and these tweets were subsequently broadcast by fake Twitter accounts (see *Tools of the Trade* for more info section)
- The Guptas are connected to the creation and funding of divisive websites that appear regularly in the fake accounts' tweets such as the Black Opinion, Uncensored Opinion, WMC Leaks and Weekly Xposé (see *The RET media network* section for more details)
- The Guptas have many links to the WMC Leaks campaign: content shared during the WMC Leaks campaign has been linked to a former Gupta employee⁹ (and possible relative¹⁰), the administrator of the WMC Leaks Facebook page has been traced to India¹¹, and the owner of the WMC Leaks website has been shown to be an Indian digital marketing entrepreneur with possible links to the Guptas¹².
- One of the prominent fake accounts, @France4u1, knew about the surveillance of Peter Bruce months before it was made public in the WMC Leaks campaign, tying the fake accounts and the subsequent campaigns together¹³

⁵ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2017-05-31-revealed-how-blfs-mngxitama-asked-guptas-for-funding>

⁶ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-07-24-guptaleaks-gupta-spin-machine-commissioned-blfs-andile-mngxitama>

⁷ <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/guptaleaks-gupta-spin-machine-commissioned-blfs-mngxitama-20170723>

⁸ <http://amabhungane.co.za/article/2017-06-23-guptaleaks-direct-evidence-gupta-henchmen-prepared-fake-race-baiting-tweets>

⁹ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-06-22-scorpio-in-the-non-surprise-of-the-year-wmcleaks.com-smear-campaign-tracked-to-a-gupta-associate>

¹⁰ <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/columnists/2017-06-29-peter-bruce--the-price-of-writing-about-the-guptas/>

¹¹ <http://ewn.co.za/2017/06/29/ewn-exclusive-further-evidence-shows-harassment-and-malign-of-sa-journos>

¹² <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/exclusive-indian-it-guru-linked-to-fake-wmc-sites-20170726>

¹³ <http://ewn.co.za/2017/06/22/more-details-on-gupta-paid-twitter-s-surveillance-report>

Prominent RET organisations and individuals

The following organisations, or prominent members thereof, are frequently mentioned by the fake accounts. These organisations and individuals act as *amplifiers* of the fake accounts' messages by further retweeting and drawing attention to their content. It is not clear the extent to which they actively work with, or are, the controllers of the fake accounts versus the extent to which they are simple ideologically aligned (see the *Twitter campaign in more detail: Key players* sub-section for a quantification of their presence in the network):

Former government spokesperson, *Mzwanele “Jimmy” Manyi*, is a key figure in the network of amplifiers. He acts as both an ideological lynchpin in the community and a key amplifier due to his large existing network. He is also the founder and head of the *Progressive Professionals Forum (PPF)*, one of many new lobby groups that push this community's agenda.

The *Black First Land First Party's (BLF)* official account is often referenced and often retweets content from suspect accounts. *Andile Mngxitama*, the BLF's leader and editor of the *Black Opinion* website is also frequently mentioned and shares content from fake accounts. Other notable BLF-aligned individuals that appear in the data include *Lindsay Maasdorp* and *Kim Heller* (a PR practitioner previously aligned with the EFF who appears to have moved to the BLF given her recent (re)tweeting of Mngxitama and others).

Former journalist, *Pinky Khoabane*, whose claim to fame is bringing the Vodacom “Please Call Me” case to court¹⁴ is a prominent figure both on Twitter and through her website, *Uncensored Opinion*.

Bo Mbindwane is another prominent voice within this network that is referenced and amplified often. Mbindwane was recently announced as an advisor to Police Minister, Fikile Mbalula¹⁵.

Businessman, *Kenny Kunene*, features in this community both as an amplifier and through his *Weekly Xposé* alternative news website which pushes this community's agenda and which has been shown to be created by the same Gupta employee who has previously created other websites within this community (more on this in the *The RET media network* section).

Another notable account is *@TheMaytrix23* who plays a pivotal role as an influencer and organiser within the community.

The main news sources for this community are the Gupta-owned *ANN7* and *The New Age*, both of which also work to amplify content from this community by retweeting, reblogging it, as well as by giving key players such as Andile Mngxitama and Pinky Khoabane a platform for their messaging.

The *ANC Youth League (ANCYL)* and *MK Veterans Association (MKVA)* appear in the data. As the *#GuptaLeaks* have shown, the Guptas have had direct involvement in writing communications for, and defining the agendas of, these organisations¹⁶.

¹⁴ <https://mg.co.za/article/2013-09-06-00-chirping-classes-when-pinky-khoabane-comes-calling>

¹⁵ <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-07-27-zuma-cheerleader-bo-mbindwane-is-now-an-advisor-to-fikile-mbalula>

¹⁶ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-06-15-scorpio-and-amabhungane-guptaleaks-bell-pottinger-ancyl-and-mk-veterans-the-early-days>

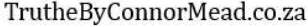
Formal websites	Alternative 'news'	Pro-Gupta websites	Attack websites
		 	

Figure 2: Some of the known websites in the RET network

The RET media network

The RET network is surprisingly large, varied and ever-evolving. It consists of a mixture of formal media channels such as the ANN7 and *The New Age* news websites; editorial and 'alternative news' websites such as *Uncensored Opinion*, *Black Opinion* and *Weekly Xposé*; pro-Gupta spin sites such as *TrutheByConnorMead.co.za* and *AtulGupta.co.za*; and outright libellous, defamatory attack websites such as *Voetsek Blog* (a favourite content source of prominent fake accounts @abrahamcpt19 & @Tshepo_Magai), *WMC Leaks*, *WMC Scams* and *Dodgy SA Ministers*. These websites are all related as they share a variety of common features including:

- They are all promoted by the same fake accounts on Twitter and pages on Facebook
- Similar WordPress templates and layouts (original versions of the websites contained the same sections, although these have been changed to look more varied in recent years)
- Shared content through reblogs and syndication (Pinky Khoabane is a regular contributor to The New Age newspaper and website, which also reblogs her Uncensored Opinion posts, and Andile Mngxitama is a regular "expert commentator" on ANN7)
- Shared website developers/creators (as the Mail & Guardian points out, Voetsek Blog and TruthByConnerMead.co.za use the "same e-mail service, software and service provider"; while, Voetsek Blog, Weekly Xposé, Uncensored Opinion, ANN7 and The New Age have all been shown to have been created or linked to Gupta employee, Himanshu Tanwar's FutureTeq company^{17 18})

The #GuptaLeaks emails show that the Guptas attempted to further expand their news empire by considering the purchase of the *Mail & Guardian* and by negotiating the right to appoint *Independent Media* editors with Sekunjalo chairman, Iqbal Surve before this deal fell through¹⁹

¹⁷ <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-11-23-00-time-to-cause-some-havoc-the-weird-web-of-gupta-linked-misinformation>

¹⁸ <http://amabhungane.co.za/article/2017-02-02-kunene>

¹⁹ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-06-15-scorpio-and-amabhungane-guptaleaks-bell-pottinger-ancyl-and-m>

In addition, a News24 investigation²⁰ revealed that Kapil Garg, the creator/owner of the most recent *WMC Leaks* campaign website (whose content is pushed by the RET network on social media), has been shown to have several possible links to the Guptas, even though they deny having any relationship with Garg or his social media marketing company, CNET Infosystem. Possible links include that:

- *“Uttar Pradesh is the same state the Gupta family’s hometown of Saharanpur, which is 200km away from Noida, falls under;*
- *“The Gupta leaks show that the family owns a company called SAS Technologies that has an office in Noida, and own property in the city. When Duduzane Zuma, the president’s son and Gupta business partner, applied for a business visa to India in 2014, he gave the address of a guest house in Noida as his residence;*
- *Garg earlier this month registered two websites via his own email account: atulgupta.info and ajaygupta.info.*
- *On June 29, Garg, who lives almost 9 000km away from South Africa, liked a post by WMC Scams on Facebook about Mining Minister Mosebenzi Zwane’s launch of the controversial new mining charter.”*

The News24 investigation further found a variety of suspect domains linked to Garg via a common Google AdWords id, implying that the same owner derives advert revenue from these domains (see Figure 3). News24 identified the following domains, some with content and some still under construction, as being connected to Garg and CNET infosystem (many of these domains have subsequently been repurposed or suspended): *atulgupta.info*, *ajaygupta.info*, *wmc-scams.com*, *whitemonopolyafrica.com*, *whitemonopoly.com*, *fakeguptaleaks.com*, *publicopinion.co.za*, *southafricabuzz.co.za* and *whitemonopolycapital.com*.

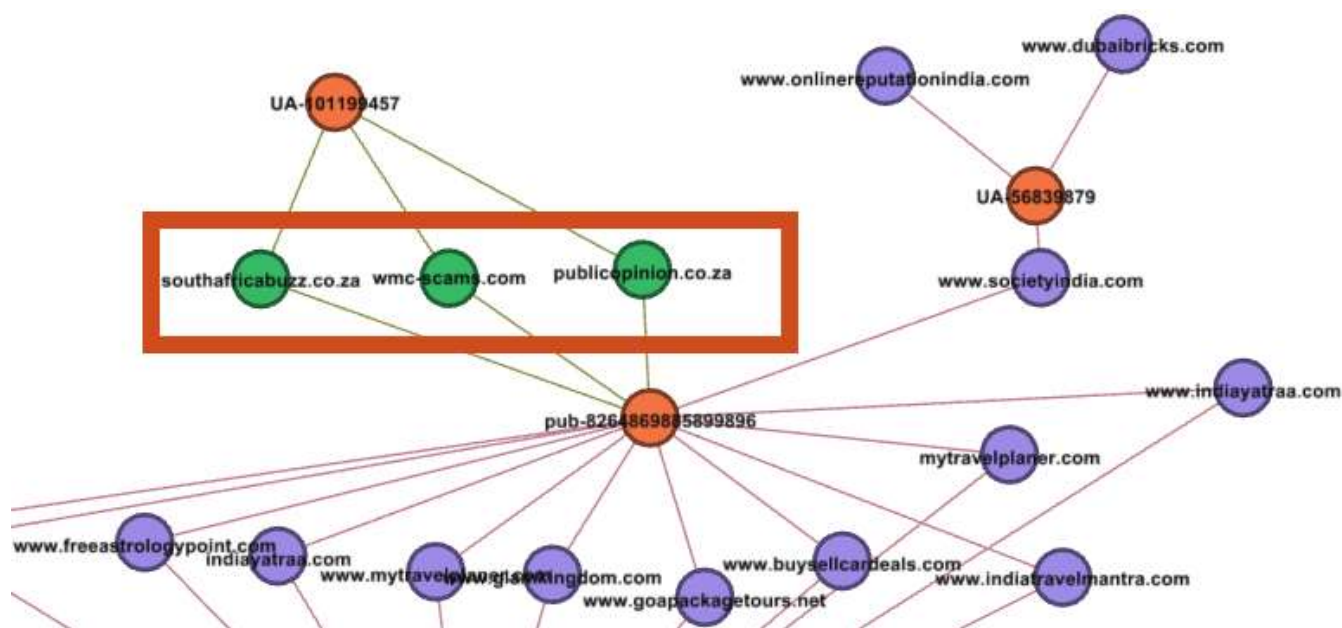


Figure 3: A News24 network showing domains allegedly belonging to Kapil Garg’s CNET Infosystem. The domains shared a common Google Adwords identification code. Full version with extended network available here: <http://cdn.24.co.za/files/Cms/General/d/5591/aa45a686d2bb49299b77e30c3e846a55.png>

²⁰ <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/exclusive-indian-it-guru-linked-to-fake-wmc-sites-20170726>

Influence and engagement

The RET network's primary means of information dissemination and narrative-setting has been via Twitter and Facebook. Their key strength has been the consistency with which they have pushed their message, which is of vital importance as any PR agency will know. As the saying goes, if you repeat a lie often enough people will begin to believe it, and the RET network has remained doggedly on-message.

A couple of factors relate to the success of the RET narrative. One factor is the campaign's execution, but perhaps a bigger factor is the choice of narrative and its ability to tap into existing beliefs, fears and prejudices within many South Africans.

Based on the review of the network's activities in this report, one might argue that their execution has been clumsy but effective. This is only part of the story however. Influence scholars debate whether a single actor or group of actors can really affect widespread social change on their own. The belief that trendsetters, or 'influencers', are able to completely alter the trajectory of society was most famously articulated in Malcolm Gladwell's book, *The Tipping Point*²¹, wherein Gladwell gives examples of how individuals or small groups have affected broader trends in society, including the example of New York hipsters making Hushpuppy shoes trendy again.

The belief that social change rests in the hands of a few hyper-connected, influential individuals is still popular today and is embedded in such fields as "influencer marketing". However, empirical research shows that it is very difficult for single actors or groups to have a large scale effect if their audience is not already pre-disposed to receiving their message in the first place. This is the truth that populist rhetoric taps into. Content that resonates is content that is relevant to its audience. In the case of populist rhetoric, it taps into the latent fears and prejudices that are common to all humans and harnesses those emotions for its own ends.

In contrast to the Gladwellian view of influence emanating from key actors, an alternative view holds that influence is *contextual*. It can only take hold in an environment primed to receive it (see Duncan Watts' breakdown of this topic²²). A famous analogy states that any spark can start a fire when the forest is dry and it is not the primary agency of the spark that should be focused on but rather the receptivity of the forest.

The white monopoly capital narrative is a populist message that taps into the very real discontent felt by many South Africans. It provides a convenient scapegoat for the poverty and lack of material progress that so many South Africans feel. It also mixes together the right amount of facts in order to create a message that resonates with many South African's lived experiences, fears and prejudices by bringing a concept that was only used within a small corner of South African politics into the mainstream. Writing on one of the Gupta-linked 'alternative news' websites (Pinky Khoabane's *Uncensored Opinion*), Professor Chris Malikane (economic advisor to current Finance Minister and highly compromised figure at the centre of state capture,

²¹ Gladwell, M. 2000. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, ISBN 0-316-34662-4

²² <https://www.fastcompany.com/641124/tipping-point-toast>

Malusi Gigaba) provides a detailed breakdown of the history of the term, tracing its usage as far back as 1962 by the South African Communist Party (SACP)²³.

Adding an element of truth to the lie makes it more believable. To this extent, the RET network has been particularly consistent across its media properties. The network has succeeded in making the conceptual pillar of their narrative, ‘white monopoly capital’, a household term in South Africa, where it appears in news headlines and politicians’ speeches. To this extent, one could say that they have successfully changed the national discourse.

The authors of Superlinear Blog provide an example of the extent to which this narrative has succeeded. They analysed roughly 800,000 tweets about the anti-Zuma marches that occurred in April 2017 in response to President Zuma’s cabinet reshuffle²⁴. The analysis showed that the conversations were split between two main narratives: those that supported the marchers’ stance against state capture and those that dismissed the marchers in the belief that they were mostly white South Africans and related to white monopoly capital.

The success of this second narrative shows that the white monopoly capital message was correctly chosen to tap into, and harness, an existing latent feeling within many South Africans in order to shift attention away from state capture by the Gupta and Zuma families. To this extent, it has been a wild success.

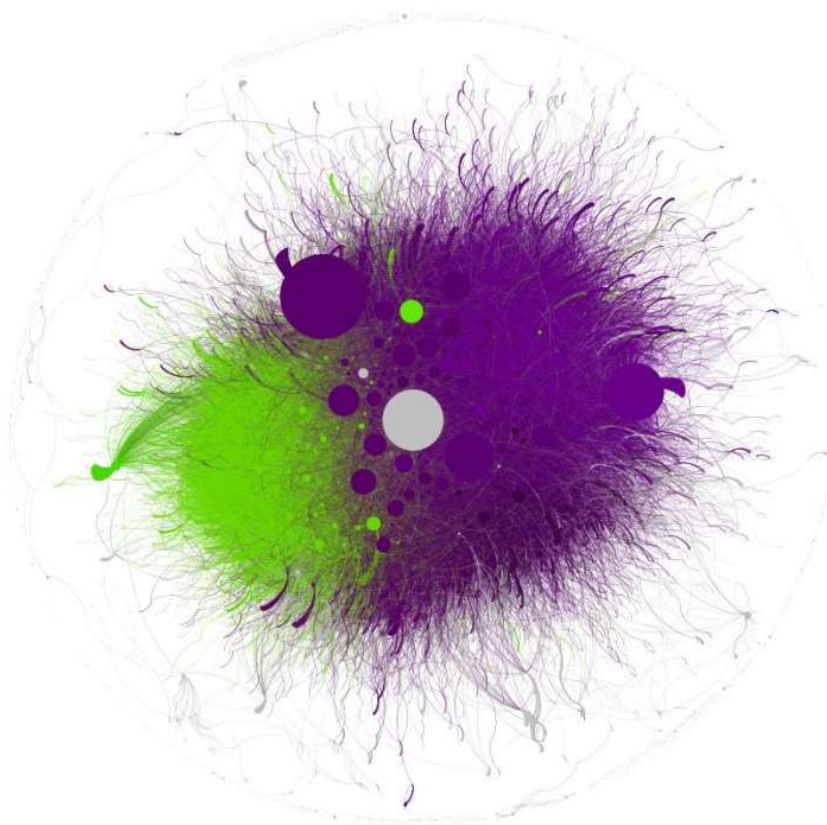


Figure 4: Superlinear Blog analysed roughly 800,000 tweets about the post-cabinet-reshuffle anti-Zuma marches. The analysis found two broad narratives at play. Description from the original article: “Interaction network from conversations about the cabinet reshuffle and anti-Zuma marches. Purple communities broadly expressed anti-Zuma sentiment and support for the marches while green communities dismissed the marches on the basis of race and often pushed the “white monopoly capital” narrative.” Source: <http://www.superlinear.co.za/anti-zuma-marches-a-battle-of-two-narratives>

²³ <http://uncensoredopinion.co.za/chris-malikane-white-monopoly-capital-definition-use-denialism>

²⁴ <http://www.superlinear.co.za/anti-zuma-marches-a-battle-of-two-narratives>

RET activity on social media

The RET network appears to operate as an integrated media network whereby content is often published on one of their websites and is then amplified via social media channels. While both Facebook and Twitter are leveraged, the main focus appears to be via Twitter where activity volumes are highest as Table 1 shows. The network uses paid advertising such as Google Ads (targeted journalist, Peter Bruce, claims that they do so in their campaign against him²⁵), Facebook Ads (see Figure 5 for an example) and, possibly, Twitter Ads to further spread their messaging.

Twitter		Facebook	
Total tweets	220 431	Posts by pages	3 574
Tweets authored by suspect accounts	4 849*	Comments on pages' posts	6 713
Retweets by suspect accounts	215 582*	Likes of pages' posts	28 121
		Shares of pages' posts	8 256

Table 1: Breakdown of content produced and amplified by the network as at 12 July 2017. *Assuming a constant ratio of original tweets vs. retweets to that observed in the dataset of 200,047 tweets (see Twitter campaign in more detail section for more methodological details)

Tools of the trade

Cyber security firm, Trend Micro's, report entitled *The Fake News Machine: How Propagandists Abuse the Internet and Manipulate the Public*²⁶ details how one might go about setting up or procuring the services of a group capable of employing "dark hat" means of amplifying content online. These services are mostly found on the 'dark net' (an unsearchable part of the internet that, while also used for legitimate purposes, is infamous for housing activities such as the trade in illegal drugs, child porn and other illegal services, including tools and services for artificially boosting content and propaganda). Trend Micro's survey of these corners of the internet focused on several dark net marketplaces where individuals and groups advertise their wares.

Technology propagandists claim that they can artificially manipulate a wide variety of online platforms including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Ask.fm, Baidu, WeChat, Weibo, VKontakte, Ok.com, Change.org, Telegram, Periscope, MoiMir, SoundCloud, Vimeo, Vine, Ask, DailyMotion, Pinterest, RUTube and Google+.

They offer a variety of services including, for example:

- *Twitter*: creating accounts, buying followers and creating retweets



Figure 5: Screenshot of a sponsored advert promoted via the WMC LEAKS attack page on Facebook. Original URL: <https://www.facebook.com/whitemonopolycapitalfacts/posts/1960126250934839>

²⁵ <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/columnists/2017-06-29-peter-bruce--the-price-of-writing-about-the-guptas/>

²⁶ https://documents.trendmicro.com/assets/white_papers/wp-fake-news-machine-how-propagandists-abuse-the-internet.pdf

- *Facebook*: creating accounts, buying followers, comments and Likes
- *YouTube*: buying Likes, Dislikes, views, video reviews and making videos appear on the front page
- *Content takedown* i.e. removing specific articles and content from the web
- *Online voting manipulation* e.g. on Change.org by bypassing CAPTCHA, SMS verification, etc.
- *Click farms* i.e. software and hardware for automating activities such as liking and following
- *DIY software tool kits* for automating common social media activities
- *News manipulation* e.g. writing press releases, guaranteed article placements on news sites (especially in Russia and China)
- *Social media celeb endorsements* e.g. mentions and shares by minor online celebrities (especially in Russia and China)

Trend Micro's researchers identify several distinct regions where prominent marketplaces exist, each with their own culture, tools and platform priorities. These regions are China, Russia, the Middle East, India and English-speaking communities. China is almost completely inwardly focused on their own platforms due to the restrictions imposed by the Chinese government on connecting to global platforms while the Russian community has a particular focus on using real humans to complete tasks through crowdsourcing platforms. Some of the platforms are very large. Vtope reportedly has 2 million "mostly real" users and SMOFast has roughly 500,000 registered users. These platforms have gamified the process of creating and amplifying fake content through the introduction of internal currencies where users are awarded points for completing tasks, thus facilitating paid human behaviour on a massive scale. This makes it incredibly cheap to manipulate website and social media platforms. For example, ZiSMO, a forum focused on promoting social media content, charges as little as RUB 2 (~ZAR 0.44) for an account and RUB 1,000 (~ZAR 220) for a million Instagram likes.

In addition to the size and sophistication of the platforms that have been created to choreograph mass online behaviour, many of these platforms also offer full service options including 24/7 VIP support and online dashboards that allow customers to set performance goals and time-based limits, all while receiving real-time feedback on progress.

Returning to the RET network, messaging and content enters social media via Twitter and Facebook. Twitter content is initially tweeted by a fake account and then amplified by other fake accounts. Often this content will tag a prominent real account in the extended network such as @mngxitama, @mzwanelemanyi or @pinkykhoabane who then reshapes the content in turn, acting as the bridge between the fake network and the broader community of Twitter users that follow them while the retweets generated by the fake accounts lend the content an air of authenticity with legitimate Twitter users.

The controllers of the fake accounts tend to favour a small subset of the fake accounts for authoring tweets. They then use the remaining fake accounts to retweet the authored tweets in order to amplify them further. Trend Micro, refers to the accounts that initially tweet the content as "gurus" and the accounts that amplify the guru's message by retweeting it as "sect followers" and reported on this pattern of behaviour in the 2017

French presidential elections in relation to the familiarly-named “#Macronleaks” campaign which was aimed at attacking then presidential candidate, Emmanuel Macron (see Figure 6).

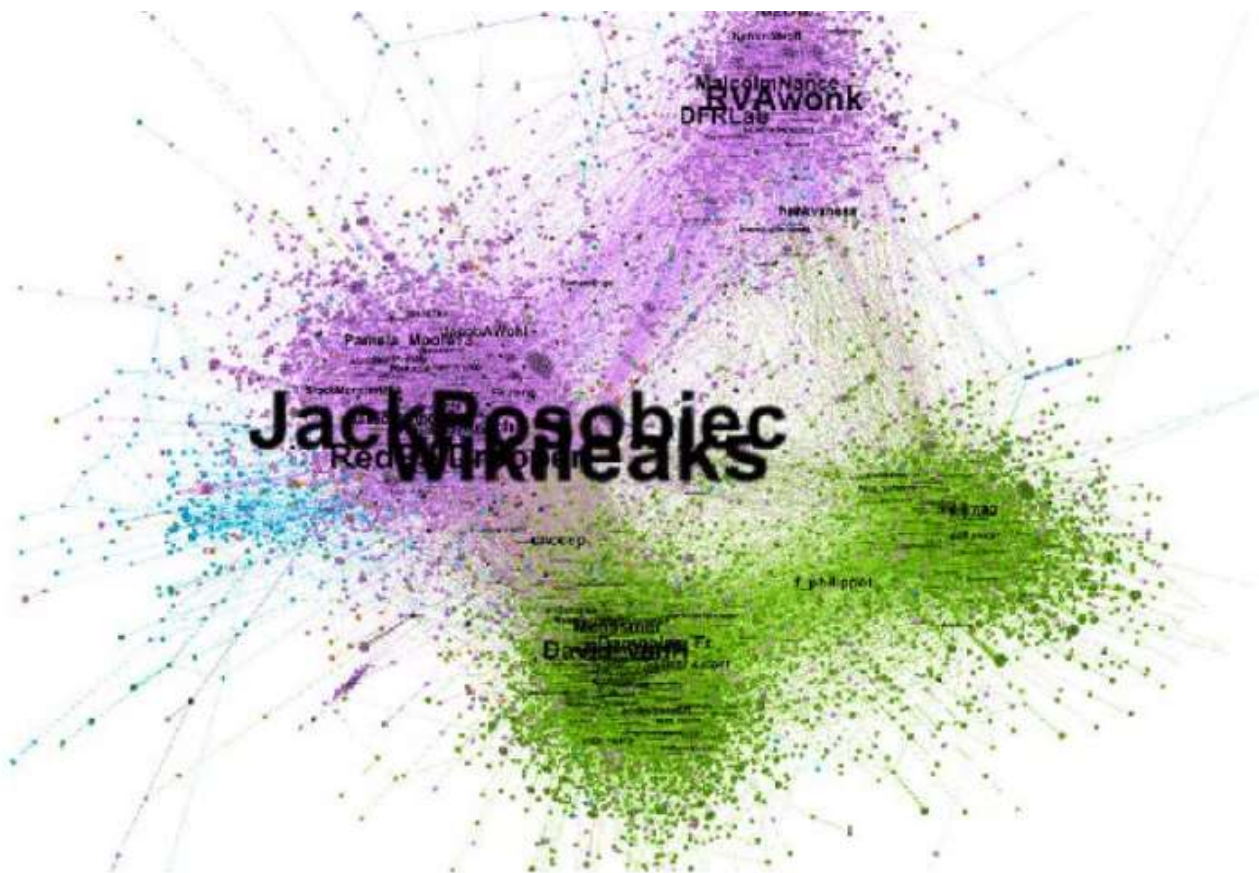


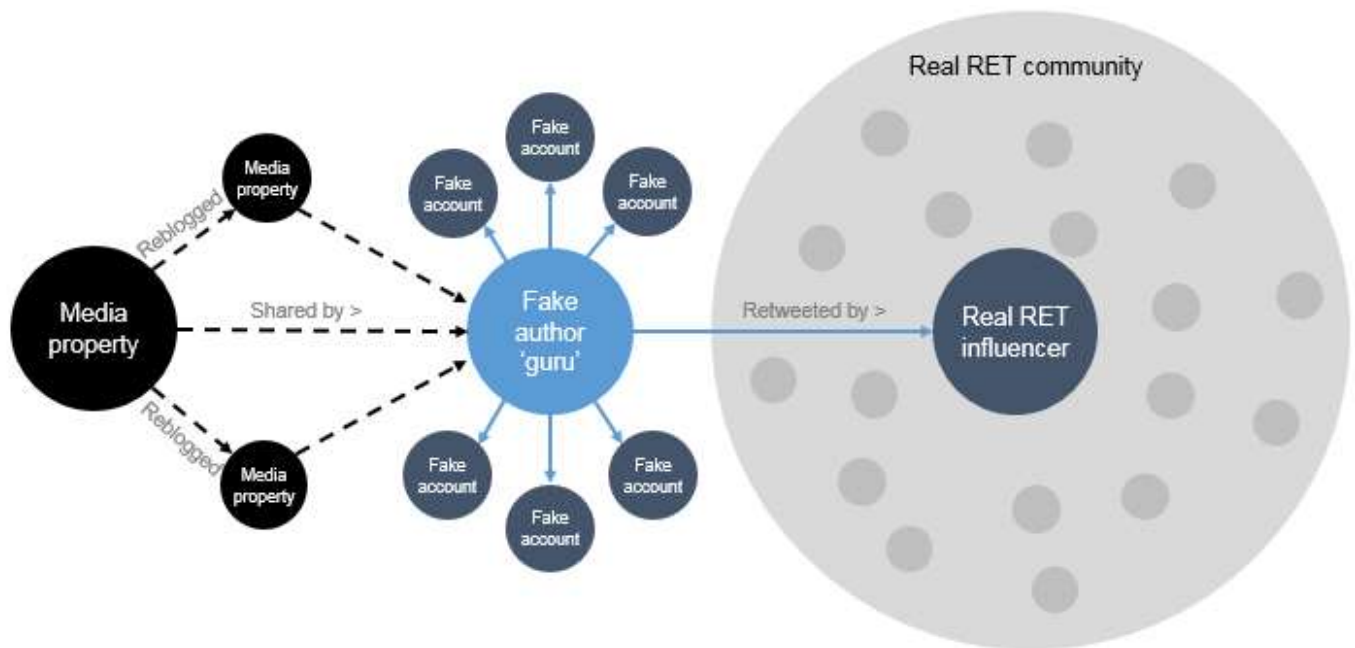
Figure 6: Screenshot from "The Fake News Machine" report by Trend Micro. Original description: "Figure 52. Twitter network diagram for #Macronleaks hash tag"

Trend Micro describes Figure 6 as follows:

"The diagram above illustrates the #Macronleaks discussion during the French election. Each of the Twitter accounts are colored based on the account's primary language. We can see two distinct main communities here: Francophone (in green) and Anglophone (purple). However, we can also see small satellite communities that only talk to, repost and retweet each other and not anyone else. These smaller satellite communities are typically the ones we are interested in—especially if they exhibit the same behavior across multiple social events.

These communities would often have one or two accounts that actively post messages (we call them "gurus") and often followed by a large number of users who actively repost and retweet messages by the active accounts (the "sect followers"). We deliberately do not call them bots here: these accounts often exhibit behaviors of real humans, and could be just very devoted fans of a particular online personality"

Figure 7 summarises how the RET network's dissemination strategy works based on the interplay of various channels and properties, including a reliance on guru and sect follower accounts once the content reaches Twitter:



[Step 1: Create content]

Step 2: Amplify

Step 3: Inject into discourse

Figure 7: Rough outline of the general form that this network's media dissemination takes. Content is either created on a website or authored directly by a fake account and is then amplified through a mixture of reblogs (in the case of website content) and retweets. This messaging is then introduced into the larger Radical Economic Transformation (RET) community via a key influencer.

Based on this well-established pattern of fake news behaviour, a feasible format for the system that the RET network could be using might involve using a DIY software kit or set of tools that allow for the following:

Using scripts to automate the creation of accounts with pre-set parameters for account names, profile images and descriptions that make the accounts appear South African. These parameters are likely supplied by a South African collaborator or someone who knows the local culture in order to make them look authentic. Trend Micro highlight the services of Aman Singh a.k.a. BeSoEasy whose website, www.latestautomationbots.com, sells tools that allow for just this kind of input and behaviour. Similarly, a user on Quora²⁷ suggests a tool called Best Social Network Automation for such a task. There is some evidence to suggest that the RET network is not (or at least did not start by) using automated means for account creation. The erratic manner in which varying numbers of accounts were created on arbitrary days might point to humans manually creating them instead. If the accounts had been created using automated means, we might expect to see a more regular pattern to the distribution of creation dates, including similar-sized batches of accounts being created across days, which does not appear to be the case (see Figure 8).

²⁷ <https://www.quora.com/How-can-I-export-my-Twitter-followers-into-a-CSV-or-Excel-file/answer/Jane-Rich-1?share=784dacdb&srid=F3F>

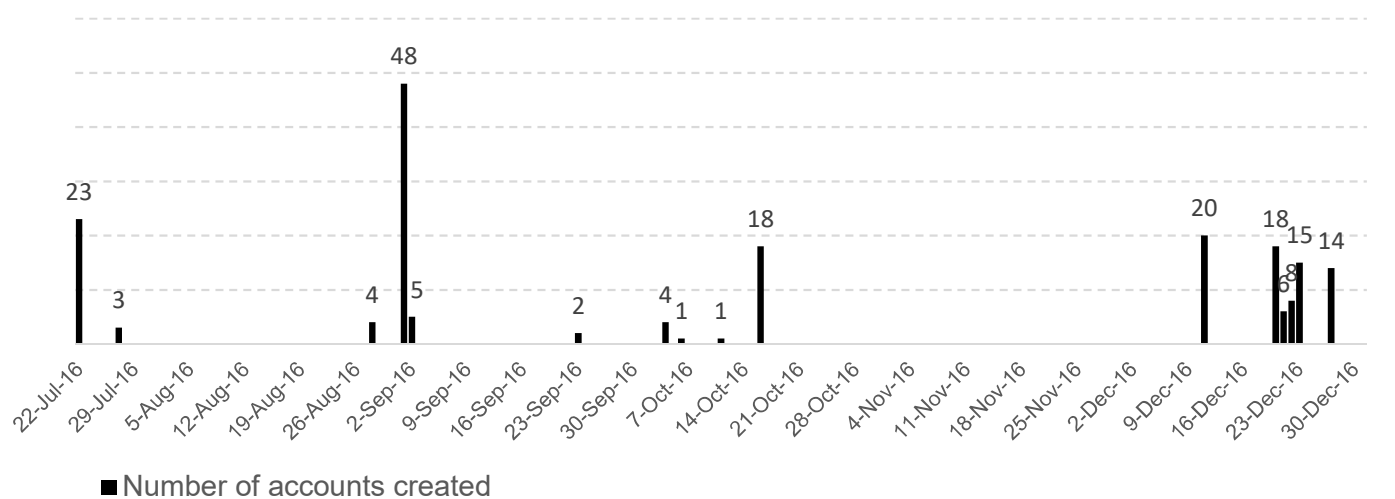


Figure 8: Breakdown of when the suspect Twitter accounts in this report's dataset were created. Note: The list of suspect accounts is likely incomplete as it was created by identifying the accounts created in batches on specific days. Fake accounts created in smaller numbers on other days will not be included in this report's analysis.

Once the accounts are created, they are likely *controlled through software or scripts*, allowing the operators to post content from a guru account while pointing the sect follower accounts at that content in order to amplify it through retweets. This method is lent support by the fact that when the network amplifies content, retweets occur within seconds of each other, pointing towards automated rather than human behaviour.

These tools let the operators supply the fake accounts via a text file or spreadsheet that contain *pre-written comments and tweets*. The software then automates the posting of the content on a schedule. Again, it is likely that a South African or someone familiar with the culture would have written such content in advance.

amaBhugane has previously shared evidence of a Gupta employee writing such content²⁸ (see Figure 9). Figure 10 shows a screenshot of a slightly tweaked version of one of the tweets that appears in the amaBhugane list being subsequently posted on Twitter by a Ravi Soobramany (@ravisooobramany) account (a Google search of the name - perhaps coincidentally - auto-corrects the query to "Ravi Subramanya" who is Chief Manager at Bank of Baroda, which the Guptas bank with and who just recently threatened to close their accounts²⁹). @ravisooobramany appears over 400 times in tweets amplified by fake accounts in this report's dataset. Table 2 summarises the 14 tweets by @ravisooobramany that were amplified by fake accounts in the dataset. This draws a link to the tweets brainstormed by Haranash Ghosh, Oakbay CEO Ronica Ragavan, Sahara CEO Ashu Chawla and former Oakbay CEO, Nazeem Howa, and implies that they likely had direct involvement in creating content that was then disseminated and amplified by the RET network.

²⁸ <http://amabhugane.co.za/article/2017-06-23-guptaleaks-direct-evidence-gupta-henchmen-prepared-fake-race-baiting-tweets>

²⁹ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/business/2017-07-27-bank-of-baroda-to-shut-guptas-accounts>

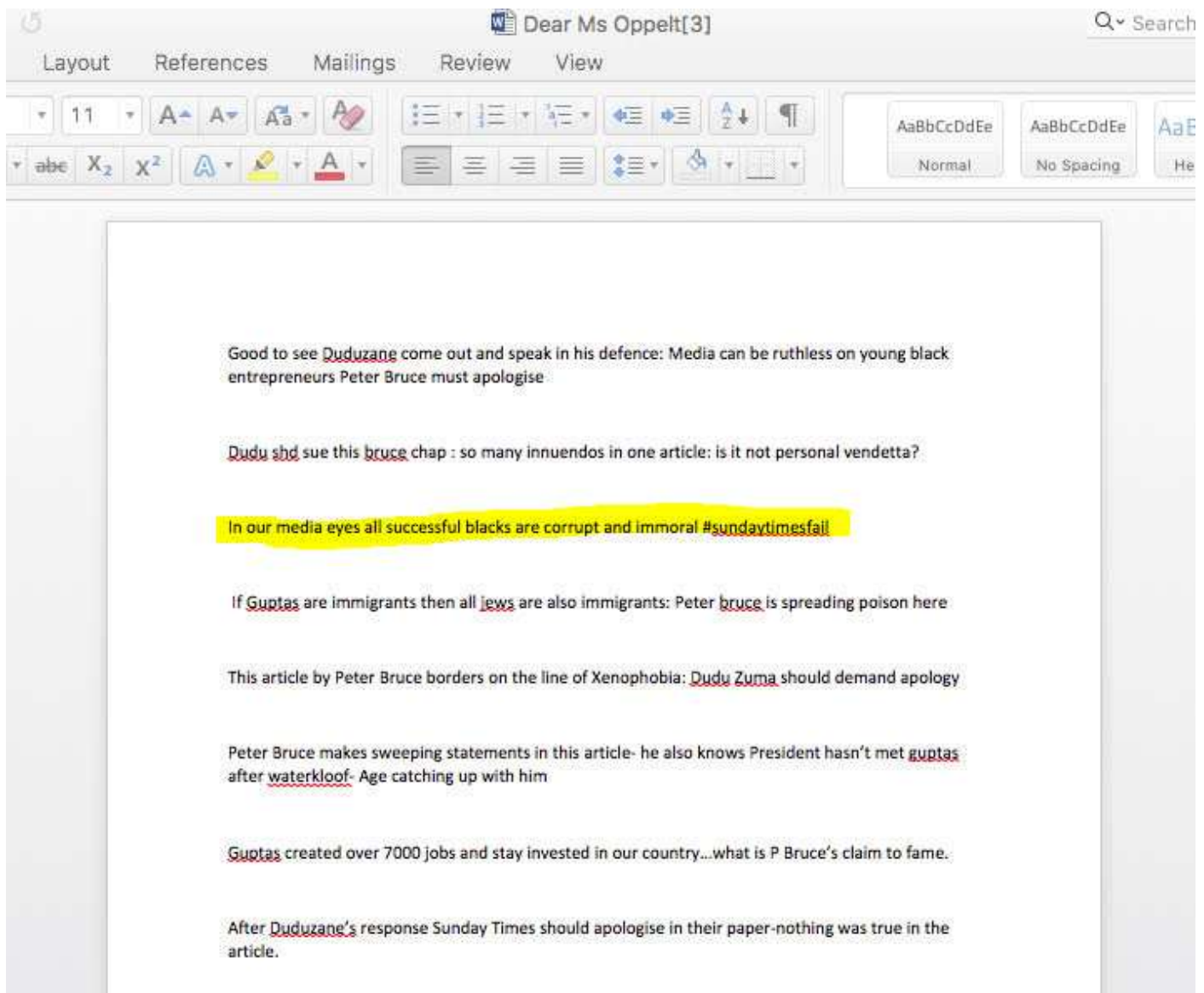


Figure 9: Screenshot of a Word document included in the #GuptaLeaks tranch of emails showing examples of pre-written tweets of the kind that might be fed into automated content promotion tools. The tweet highlighted in yellow was subsequently tweeted by @ravisobramany whose other tweets have been retweeted over 400 times by fake accounts. Image source: <http://amabhungane.co.za/article/2017-06-23-guptaleaks-direct-evidence-gupta-henchmen-prepared-fake-race-baiting-tweets>

In the eyes of our media all successful blacks are corrupt & immoral #Peterbrucefail @myanc_ @SundayTimesZA



nazeem @nazeemhowa

Good letter responding to @Bruceps. In his column he again make much of acquaintances. Don't we all network?

9:54 AM - 27 Sep 2015

11 Retweets 1 Like



Figure 10: Screenshot of a tweet using the content discussed in an email thread uncovered in the #GuptaLeaks emails. Original URL: <https://twitter.com/ravissoobramany/status/648042953496231936>

Tweet by @ravissoobramany	Retweets by fake accounts in dataset
RT @ravissoobramany: #Nhleko arrest Gordhan for his economic crimes	63
RT @ravissoobramany: When #PravinGordhan speaks, @our_DA claps. which side is he working?	58
RT @ravissoobramany: Welldone @KrilaGP for taking on our fight with whitecapitalists	47
RT @ravissoobramany: Its a political game #StateCapture	27
RT @ravissoobramany: This case of Old Mutual & #FutureGrowth a classic case of how these crooks rule our country	26
RT @ravissoobramany: Got his payment from White capitalists ? https://t.co/mQBYXPegrl	24
RT @ravissoobramany: Have a look at his track record bfr eskom he successfully ran Transnet. Innocent till proved guilty? @Spiwo @kanisq @Kh...	24
RT @ravissoobramany: Lol... shame our fin minister is so weak https://t.co/UWPYDAFIFj	24
RT @ravissoobramany: Molefe is one of the finest black CEOs we have in the country He turnaround @Eskom_SA no loadshedding @Spiwo @kanisq @K...	24
RT @ravissoobramany: Trevor Manuel & his puppet Gordhan hv full support of capitalist & their media	24
RT @ravissoobramany: Gultas - " we firmly believe in the rule of law & we are happy to answer to any and all allegations made against us. @a...	23
RT @ravissoobramany: This #Gordhan is a drama queen - y he is playing victim & canvassing his innocence @pietrampedi @RanjeniM https://t.co/...	20
RT @ravissoobramany: but do u support #BankingInquiry ? looks like will benefit the country, no?	14
RT @ravissoobramany: Shameful collab- all stooges of white capitals r coming tgthr to support #pravingordhan	11

Table 2: In addition to sharing the tweet that appears in the #GuptaLeaks emails, some of @ravissoobramany's other tweets were retweeted over 400 times by fake accounts in this report's dataset.

The tool-use scenario described seems more plausible than the RET network turning to the dark net marketplaces to hire foreign crowd-sourced humans or pre-existing botnets (although these methods have been experimented with as well as shall be shown). The RET network approach appears to be a largely custom, in-house affair as the fake accounts appear to have been created specifically for the RET network's

campaigns given their creation at the time of the campaign. In addition, there is evidence, as already referred to, of a Gupta-sponsored “war room” run by social media marketing firm out of India, who likely employs these tools and methods.

Finally, a #GuptaLeaks email seems to suggest that Bell-Pottinger was aware of the fake Twitter and Facebook campaigns but was not directly involved. According to amaBhungane³⁰:

“The email said [Bell Pottinger] had “reviewed the Twitter accounts and website of your sympathisers provided (from an objective / neutral point of view) and have the following observations:

- *They are having little impact on the debate.*
- *They are using information that hasn’t been changed much/at all from Oakbay Investment information.*
- *They were set up recently and at a similar time to when the issues started.*

“Based on these facts we believe that as long as these are not linked to you in any way or that you are not influencing the editorial agenda then just let them continue. Otherwise they should stop immediately.””

Twitter campaign in detail

This section deals with the ways in which the disinformation network operates on Twitter. It covers the RET network’s timeline of activity from roughly mid-2016 when it started operating through to the time of writing (July 2017). The network’s Twitter activity is measurable because Twitter’s public systems make it possible to download up to the last 3,200 tweets in a user’s timeline. This allowed the researchers to collate a list of roughly 200 suspected fake accounts³¹ (see Appendix 1 for the list) and download up to the last 3,200 tweets made by each account. This resulted in a dataset consisting of 200,247 tweets generated by this list of suspect accounts. 98% of these tweets are retweets (195,242 – see Figure 11), pointing to the role that this network plays in amplifying specific messages to more widely disseminate them and to give the illusion that the content they are sharing resonates with a wider group.

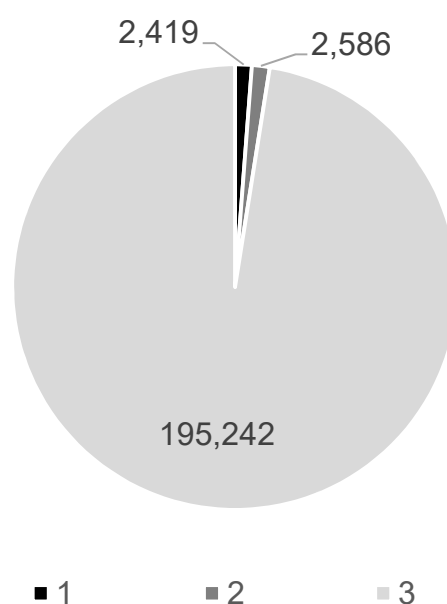


Figure 11: Breakdown of the types of tweets generated by the list of suspect Twitter accounts

³⁰ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-07-24-guptaleaks-gupta-spin-machine-commissioned-blfs-andile-mngxitama>

³¹ Caveat: The authors do not guarantee that they have identified every single fake account so this list might be even larger than what is included in the analyses in this report. In addition, the authors relied on a set of heuristics (i.e. ‘rules of thumb’) to automatically identify suspect accounts. As such, there exists the small possibility that one or two legitimate accounts have inadvertently included in this list.

Fake accounts

Two types of fake accounts have been used by the RET network on Twitter. Its long-standing approach has been to manually create fake accounts and then orchestrate them as a collective “botnet”. The majority of activity thus far has been via this type of account. These accounts are identified through a mixture of heuristic rules:

- They tend to be created in batches as controllers are likely paid to create a group of fake accounts in a burst. As a result, all suspect accounts were created between July 2016-present.
- Their tweet counts are tend to be very similar as they are retweeting the same content
- Their profile pictures tend to be generic photos rather than real people likely collated in advance
- Their usernames are often generic South African names or unusual portmanteaus of mixed ethnicities also likely collated in advance

The Sowetan³², Daily Maverick³³ and Superlinear Blog³⁴ breakdown how the accounts have been identified in this way. In addition, a small cottage industry has emerged on Twitter devoted to identifying RET network fake Twitter accounts. The network has in turn reacted violently to such attempts, widely sharing attack articles mentioning such “bot spotters” by name in an attempt to intimidate them³⁵.



Figure 12: Screenshots of suspected fake account profiles, identifiable by their creation dates, often lack of backgrounds and use of stock images

³² <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2016/11/08/exposed-the-twitter-army-pushing-a-pro-gupta-agenda>

³³ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-11-10-paid-twitter-manufacturing-dissent-helping-guptas>

³⁴ <http://www.superlinear.co.za/running-interference-the-fake-white-monopoly-capital-propaganda-community-on-twitter>

³⁵ <http://www.wmcleaks.com/paid-twitter-bots-2-white-media-social-propaganda>

This campaign saw the evolution of the RET network's media strategy by introducing this new type of fake account alongside the traditional fake accounts. The two types of fake account were not mixed. They were used in isolation to amplify separate attack accounts. This appears to have been a form of A-B testing to see which approach works better. The data shows that the traditional accounts were more successful in disseminating the network's message than the new type of accounts, likely because the new type of accounts did not have any existing followers, and thus entry points, into the RET Community.

The recent *WMC Leaks* campaign has introduced a new type of fake account. These accounts were used to amplify three attack accounts: @dodgysaminister, @economycapture and @indecentexposes, while 'traditional' fake accounts were used to amplify @WMC_LEAKS. The services of the new type of account appears to have been temporarily hired via the international black market (see Appendix 2 for an extended list of suspected accounts). This is evident by the fact that this type of fake account differs from the 'traditional' fake accounts in a few ways:

- They are more likely to have realistic, Euro-centric profile pictures and names
- They were created outside of the time period between July 2016–current when the traditional accounts have been created
- Their timelines contain mostly spam-related material outside of the period of the *WMC Leaks* campaign launch, indicative of the content that they push for other clients or for the owners directly

All these features are indicative of fake accounts for hire which often come with 'provenance' in the form of a long-standing presence on Twitter, giving them face-value legitimacy in the eyes of the average user.

Interestingly, all of these accounts also retweet a single account, @digitalgrowup, which has 31,7k followers. This account appears to be the owner or controller of the fake accounts hired for the *WMC Leaks* campaign. As such, it represents a potential avenue for further investigation as to who is behind the RET network. A start would be to look at which South Africans follow this account. Beyond this though, @digitalgrowup would appear to be a dead-end as the accounts whose messages were amplified by @digitalgrowup's fake accounts (@indecentexposes, @economycapture and @dodgysaminister) have been suspended by Twitter. This might imply that Twitter is better at identifying fake, automated accounts of the kind that are on the international market than manually created accounts that are controlled directly by a team of human handlers, as would appear to be the case with the RET network via a war room in India. This shows that the campaign's controllers were surprisingly calculated in their decision to not mix the different types of fake accounts to amplify individual attack accounts. If they had done so, all of their accounts might have been suspended. It seems unlikely that the RET network will hire such bots in future given their relative lack of efficacy and Twitter's ability to identify them.



Figure 13: Example profiles from the "new" type of fake account used by the RET network. The first account, @digitalgrowup (highlighted with a black border) appears to be the owner of the bots who hires them out to "clients".

Timeline of activity

The 200,247 tweets that were collected from the list of suspect accounts appear to cover the entire lifespan of the network. Only 14 accounts generated more than 3,200 tweets thus some data was not collected for these accounts. However Twitter's public systems make it possible to obtain a count of the total number of tweets that each account has authored. When these counts are summed up for the list of fake accounts focused on in this report, it is possible to see that the list of accounts has generated over 220,000 tweets as of time of writing. Thus, this report's Twitter analysis is based on 91% of the tweets generated by the network. Table 3 shows tweets from the 22nd July 2016 which appears to be the first day of activity by the network:

Creation date	Twitter username	Tweet text
2016/07/27 12:46	esaia_kekana	RT @judithsubban: President Jacob Zuma is set to launch the #Ingula Pump Station in Ladysmith. It is part of gov's massive infrastructure d...
2016/07/27 12:46	esaia_kekana	RT @POWER987News: #PoliticalKillings: "The bulk of the so called political killings happened in KZN," Nhleko.
2016/07/27 12:47	esaia_kekana	RT @mailandguardian: Suspicious dumping may be happening in SA's downstream steel industry, amplifying calls for safeguard quotas. https://...
2016/07/27 12:59	KagisoNtuli4	RT @Radio702: Ekurhuleni officials will conduct an audit to help repair public assets & rebuild homes in Tembisa after the tornado https://...
2016/07/27 13:06	MoloiFikile	Hello Twitter! #myfirstTweet
2016/07/27 13:07	MoloiFikile	RT @Mediclinic: Mediclinic Prime offers advice to help you & your loved ones enjoy good health. https://t.co/izkwRm1hle
2016/07/27 13:08	MoloiFikile	RT @FloydShivambu: It's back to action in Malamulele, Ward by Ward until victory. The EFF will take over the new municipality. #VoteEFF htt...
2016/07/27 13:08	MoloiFikile	RT @News24: https://t.co/pdTxfqQbDI Quota system will end Bok glory days - Mains https://t.co/5Sj9qlQRPC
2016/07/27 13:08	MoloiFikile	RT @Radio702: Top local casting director Moonyeenn Lee will join the Oscars Academy, after 43 years in the film industry. https://t.co/0EMU...

Table 4: After five days of inactivity, the RET network generated the above tweets.

After its initial, tentative steps in July 2017, the network quickly ramped up its activity, generating as many as 7,030 tweets in a day between the period of August and November 2016 (see Figure 14) which was the peak activity period for the network.

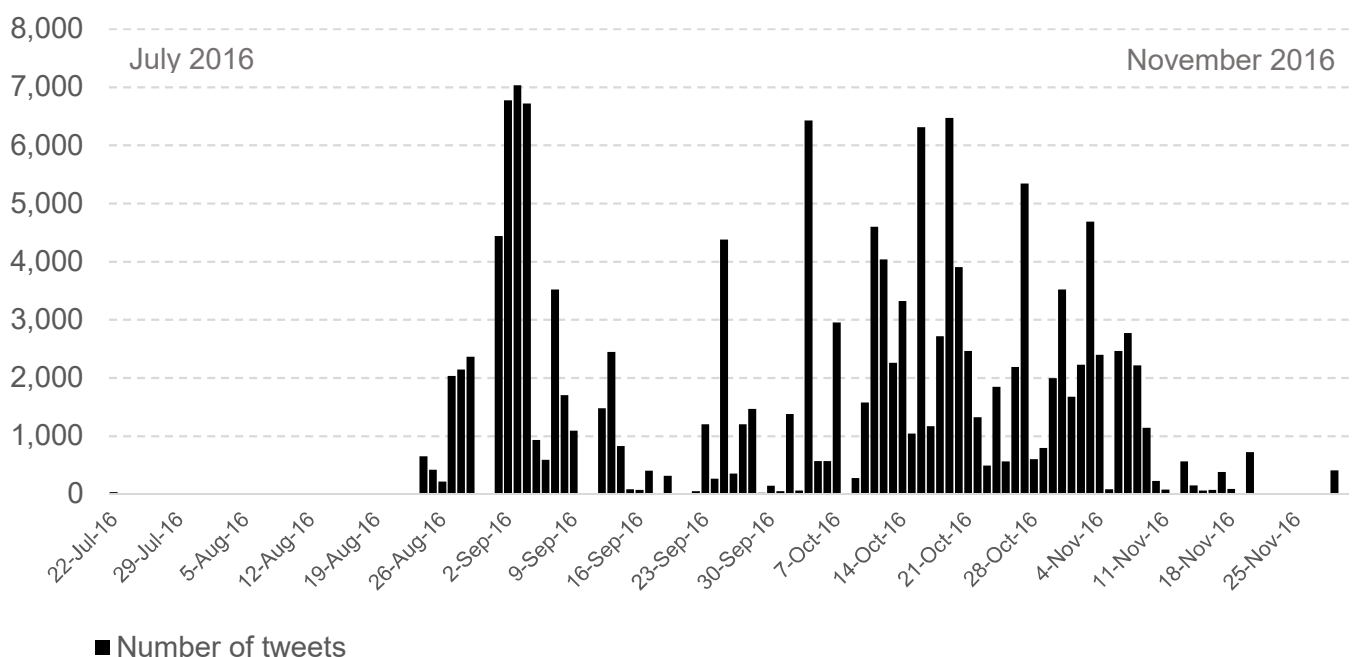


Figure 14: Daily counts of tweets generated by the RET network fake accounts during its period of peak activity between July and November 2016.

While the network's activity peaked in the second half of 2016 during the period around the release of the Public Protector's "State of Capture" report, it has still been consistently active since then, albeit at a slightly reduced level. Figure 15 summarises the RET network's full level of activity on Twitter based on daily tweets generated by the fake accounts, from the time of initial activation right up until the time of writing:

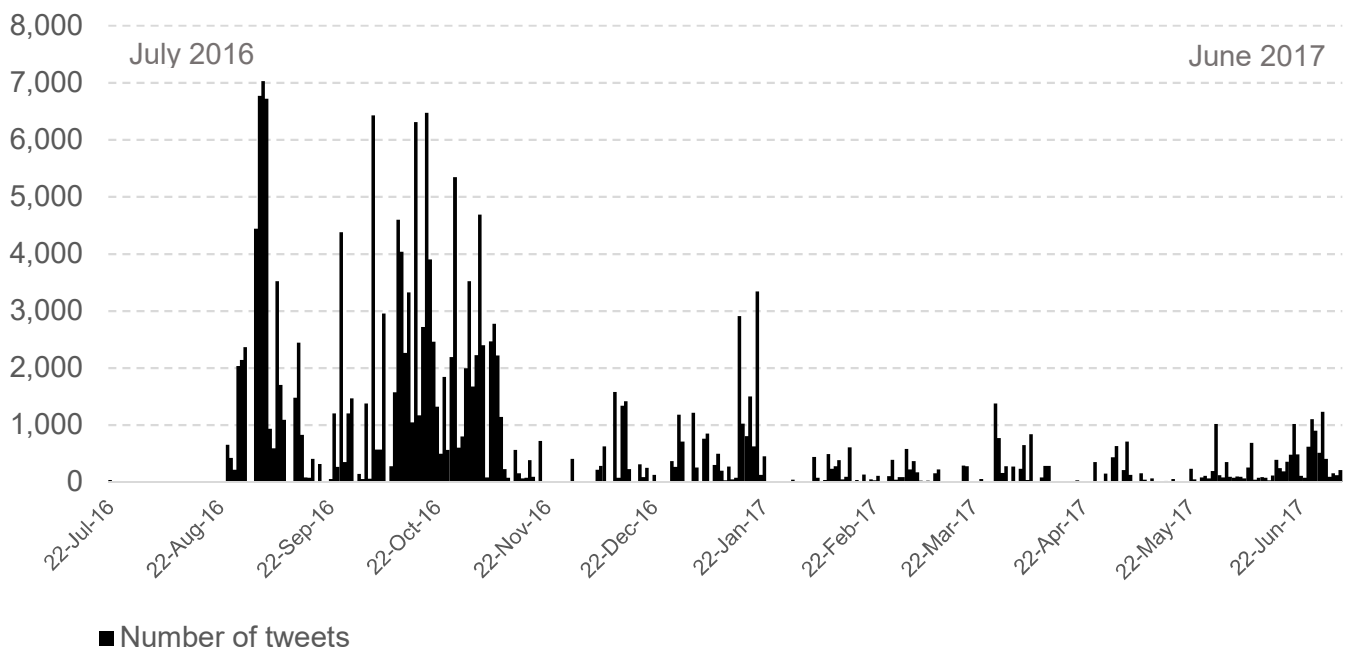


Figure 15: Time series showing the daily number of tweets generated by the fake Twitter accounts between inception and the time of writing

A few interesting patterns stand out in Figure 15:

Firstly, the fake accounts' activity has decreased over time. This could be due to a reduced need for its services, reduced budgets to run the social media war room, the network having moved onto using other accounts not measured (although the list used for this study was updated at the time of writing), or some other change in the network's methodology such as a greater emphasis on hired fake accounts beyond those measured in this report.

Secondly, the activity seems to have a monthly cycle to it with peak activity straddling the end of one month and the start of the next and subsiding in the middle of the month. Could this pattern relate to the network's 'media planning' strategy or to the employment dynamics of the war room workers perhaps?

Finally, there appears to be a resurgence of activity centered around the network's latest *WMC Leaks* campaign towards the end of June 2017. This campaign was backed up by a multi-channel approach that included the creation of new supporting websites (such as *WMC Leaks*, *WMC Scams* and *Dodgy SA Ministers*), new social content (crude cartoons and memes for sharing on social), new attack accounts (including @wmc_leaks, @economycapture and @indecentexposes) and an adoption of a new type of fake Twitter account temporarily hired via the international black market as already mentioned. The complexity and investment required for this latest campaign appears to imply that the network has entered a new phase. Indeed, analysis of the Facebook data to be discussed later in the report implies that the planning for this latest campaign started at least as early as the 2nd of May 2017 – almost two full months before the campaign's launch at the end of June 2017.

Key players

The fake accounts have very clearly defined targets, mostly consisting of critics of President Zuma and others implicated in state capture, including the Gupta brothers and their businesses. Targets include the mainstream media, watchdog institutions designed to uphold good governance and prevent corruption, and businesses in large economic sectors disproportionately controlled by white South Africans. Identifying the users that are most mentioned by the suspect accounts tells us who their targets are. Ranking the users that they retweet the most tells us which real people act as amplifiers by introducing the suspect content to their wider Twitter networks.

Table 5 presents a partial list the primary *attack accounts*. These accounts appear to have been created with the sole purpose of attacking specific targeted individuals and organisations. These accounts publish material that is then amplified by the other fake accounts. Accounts such as @radio702, @dailymaevrick and @sundaytimeza were created to closely mimic their real counterparts in order to fool users into believing that the messages put out by these accounts was endorsed by those organisations. They represented an early experiment in alternative ways of disseminating their false information. @wmc_leaks is the key account in the RET network's latest campaign, launched in June 2017.

Username	Number of times retweeted in data	Number of times @mentioned in data	Full Twitter name	Account description
@wmc_leaks	1 098	137	WMC Leaks	By Blacks, For Blacks with single motto : Expose WMC, Save SA from #EconomyCapture
@voetsek_sa	1 186	6	Voetsek	Raising awareness of #EconomicApartheid in #SouthAfrica
@blackopinion2	1 150	33	Black Opinion	A Black Consciousness online publication that seeks to counter mainstream whitewashed news, media and analysis. email: editor@blackopinion.co.za
@radio702	715	2	Radio702	Join the Conversation... Listen on 92.7FM in Joburg or 106.2FM in Pretoria
@safakenews	506	6	Anti Fake News	Parody Account
@dailymaevrick	289	0	Daily Maverick	A Voice against Fake News spreaders. Standup and Raise your voice.
@wmc_scams	161	18	Account temporarily restricted at time of writing	For people with brains. And a browser. Parody Account
@sundaytimesza	124	0	Sunday Times	The Sunday Times brings you news, investigative exposé, sport, opinion, entertainment plus so much more. Parody Account
@unbiasedview1	105	2	Unbiased view	None
@safakenews1	95	0	Anti Fake News	A Voice against Fake News spreaders. Standup and Raise your voice.

Table 5: Partial list of accounts created to attack targetted individuals and organisations

Table 6 presents a partial list the primary *fake accounts*. These accounts publish both links to RET network websites and direct editorial comments that is then amplified by other fake accounts.

Username	Number of times retweeted in data	Number of times @mentioned in data	Full Twitter name	Account description
@abrahamcpt19	10 256	13	None	None
@lovinabongile	4 903	8	Bongile Lovina	Proudly South African. Avid Traveler. Re-tweets are not endorsement.
@wykjacqui	3 136	3	Jacqui van Wyk	None
@tumi_kgasi	2 853	4	Tumi Kgasi	None
@epic_qwabe	2 582	5	Mpho Qwabe	None
@fikile_samuel	2 258	17	Fikile Samuel	Be the Change. Proudly South African
@emmanuel7	1 675	8	Emmanuel Adams	None
@thulo_bonang	1 659	2	Bonang Thulo	Entrepreneur - Mother - Wife
@france4u1	1 548	71	France Phora	Kickass
@johanmike3	1 273	1	Johan Mike	None
@sibonelokgasi	1 197	22	Sibonelo Kgasi	Revolutionary. Hard Worker. I love my SA
@reuben147	1 161	1 160	reuben	None
@bernard_msweli	1 007	1 007	bernard msweli	None
@sjdnel05	989	989	SJD	None
@sabulletin1	951	946	SA BULLETIN	None

@cricis_managmen	879	878	Critical thinker	None
@amahledeavalos	860	824	Amahle	Proud on my dad. Believe life is very precious, so enjoy every moment. Want to see RSA a well-developed country. #youth #lifestyle #beauty #black
@kobus10030428	819	817	Kobus	None
@duduzile_1	753	749	Duduzile Mthethwa	None
@ralphgodfrey3	746	742	Ralph	None

Table 6: This table ranks the top fake accounts based on how often they have been mentioned and/or retweeted by the other fake accounts. These are the key initial authors that are then amplified in turn by other fake accounts.

Table 7 is a partial list of the primary *amplifier accounts*. These accounts have been mentioned directly by fake accounts or have had their tweets retweeted many times by fake accounts. It is important to state that it is not clear which accounts are knowing collaborators in the campaign and which are simply ideologically aligned. Key people and organisations that feed into the RET network's messaging on Twitter include one Siphokhuzwayo (the Twitter account does not mention professional or other information but a person with the same name is a leader within the PPF³⁶) whose engagement levels are almost double those of the next most prominent individual. This is particularly surprising given that he is a relatively unknown player compared to the others. Other prominent users include PPF head, Mzwanele "Jimmy" Manyi; the BLF and its leader, Andile Mngxitama; journalists, Pinky Khoabane and Piet Rampedi; Bo Mbindwane, who is an advisor to Police Minister, Fikile Mbalula; and, the Gupta-owned ANN7 and The New Age accounts.

Username	Number of times retweeted in data	Number of times @mentioned in data	Twitter full name	Account description
@siphokhuzwayo	14 767	50	Siphokhuzwayo	Politics, Media, Reading, Music...Love Life! Never stop learning! Proudly & Unapologetically South African. ACCA. MBA (WBS) RT's are NOT an endorsement.
@pinkykhoabane	8 076	63	Pinky Khoabane	They say I'm a contrarian & controversial when all I do is think, say & write what I like-stories that media ignore.
@phutism	7 844	6	Editor's Choice	A news editor is selective and filters out information that is not newsworthy- often positive news! Is it not censorship?
@sibonelokgasi1	5 615	35	Sibonelo Kgasi	Revolutionary. Hard Worker. I love my SA. My New Twitter account as old one is blocked
@mngxitama	5 070	117	andile	https://t.co/wjcyIDC6Aq
@madalafs	5 014	19	Madala	Travel Travel
@pietrampedi	4 027	27	Mr Putin	Piet Rampedi is African Times Editor (https://t.co/NUkUIG1Z7M) Entrepreneur, Father, Husband, Proud African, FJT leader, BC Ideologue, Sundowns.
@black1stland1st	3 976	42	BLACK 1ST LAND 1ST	Black Consciousness and Pan Africanism inspired by a Sankarist way of governance
@mxolisibob	3 539	9	Mjlo	Avid Reader, Lounger of Note
@esethuhasane	2 251	28	BellGumbinja	ALL POWER - TO THE PEOPLE
@the_new_age	2 225	10	The New Age	
@sathyankerala	2 080	1	SATHYAN.KK NAMBIAR	SATHYAN.KK / THODEEKALAM / JOHANNESBURG
@mbindwane	1 916	55	Bo Mbindwane	Account contains personal views.
@mzwanelemanyi	1 815	123	Mzwanele Manyi	President of Progressive Professionals Forum.CM(SA), Harvard Alumnus with Economic Geology background . Corporate and Gvt Experience. Transformation Agent.
@matthews01karl	1 903	2	Karl Matthews	News reader love movies and music Avid Sports fan
@kanisq	1 744	5	Kanisq	Gemini, Copywriter, Lover, Banker, Sales, Marketing, Corporate Communications, Media..... TWEETS IN PERSONAL CAPACITY
@themaytrix23	1 291	5	GertOrrin	The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today.
@ann7tv	1 123	138	ANN7	ANN7 (Africa News Network 7) is South Africa's 24-hour news channel with a strong emphasis on Breaking News, Politics, Provincial News and Sports.
@djnewsouthafric	1 102	1	Tumelo Mapaa	I don't support companies founded on dirty apartheid money...Multichoice, ABSA, City Press, AVBOB, ENCA, EFF, DA, Mediclinic and such

Table 7: Partial list of the 'real' accounts that amplify (or are amplified by) the fake accounts

³⁶ Watch this interview with Khuzwayo to get an idea of his politics: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AI52mqGHSLI>

Table 8 is a partial list of the primary targets of the fake accounts. The list consists of journalists investigating allegations of state capture, the former Public Protector, who released a report on state capture, the South African Treasury which was the target of state capture attempts, and SaveSA, a civil organisation opposed to state capture:

Username	Number of times retweeted in data	Number of times @mentioned in data	Twitter full name	Account description
@bruceps	0	545	Peter Bruce	Former Editor, Business Day & Financial Mail, Joburg. Ex Madrid, Bonn Corr & UK News Editor, Financial Times. Sharks, Saracens, Pirates, Spurs, Real Madrid..
@ferialhaffajee	37	285	Ferial Haffajee	Editor-at-large; Huffington Post SA. Was editor-in-chieftainess, Mail&Guardian; City Press. Judge, CNN/Multichoice African journalism awards. Author. Journalist and managing partner of the amaBhungane
@samsoleza	0	250	Sam Sole	Centre for Investigative Journalism. Digging dirt, fertilising democracy.
@adriaanbasson	28	156	Adriaan Basson	News24 editor. Author. Media freedom. Digital first. Facts matter. Views are my own. adriaan@24.com
@treasuryrsa	1	171	TREASURY.GOV.ZA	"If you want a career in which you can influence the day to day lives of citizens, Treasury is a good place for you" James Archer #treasuryeconomicswinterschool
@amabhungane	0	156	amaBhungane	Developing investigative journalism in the public interest. Digging dung. Fertilising democracy.
@thulimadonsela3	42	72	Adv Thuli Madonsela	Patron of Thuli Madonsela Foundation I Harvard Advanced Leadership Fellow I Former Public Protector I Life activist on Justice-Human Rights-Rule of Law-Governance
@barrybateman	2	93	Barry Bateman	Eyewitness News senior reporter. I've written a book. I DJ, tweet about food, beer, SA life and whatever piques my interest.
@alechogg	5	83	Alec Hogg	Publisher of https://t.co/Bado7gTP6J , financial writer and broadcaster, business keynote speaker. Email me at alec@biznews.com . Follow @BiznewsCOM
@_savesa	2	71	Save South Africa	Join the campaign to Save South Africa!

Table 8: A partial list of the individuals and organisations targetted by the fake accounts

Themes

The RET network has coined several hashtags and terms in order to reframe the national discourse in an attempt to shift the debate away from state capture by President Jacob Zuma and his collaborators towards the dominance of the economy by white-owned or -controlled businesses.

Figure 16 summarises the top twenty most used hashtags within the Twitter dataset collected (see Appendix 3 for the top 100 hashtags). The first insight that this data gives us is that the vast majority of the network's focus has been on discrediting former Finance Minister, Pravin Gordhan. Gordhan was eventually recalled in May 2017 as part of a highly controversial cabinet reshuffle by President Zuma. The cabinet reshuffle resulted in mass demonstrations across South Africa but, from the perspective of whoever controls the RET network, this must have been interpreted as mission accomplished.

Other notable hashtags within the top twenty most popular include references to former Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela's, state capture report, attacks on the mainstream media and references to Gupta-owned companies.

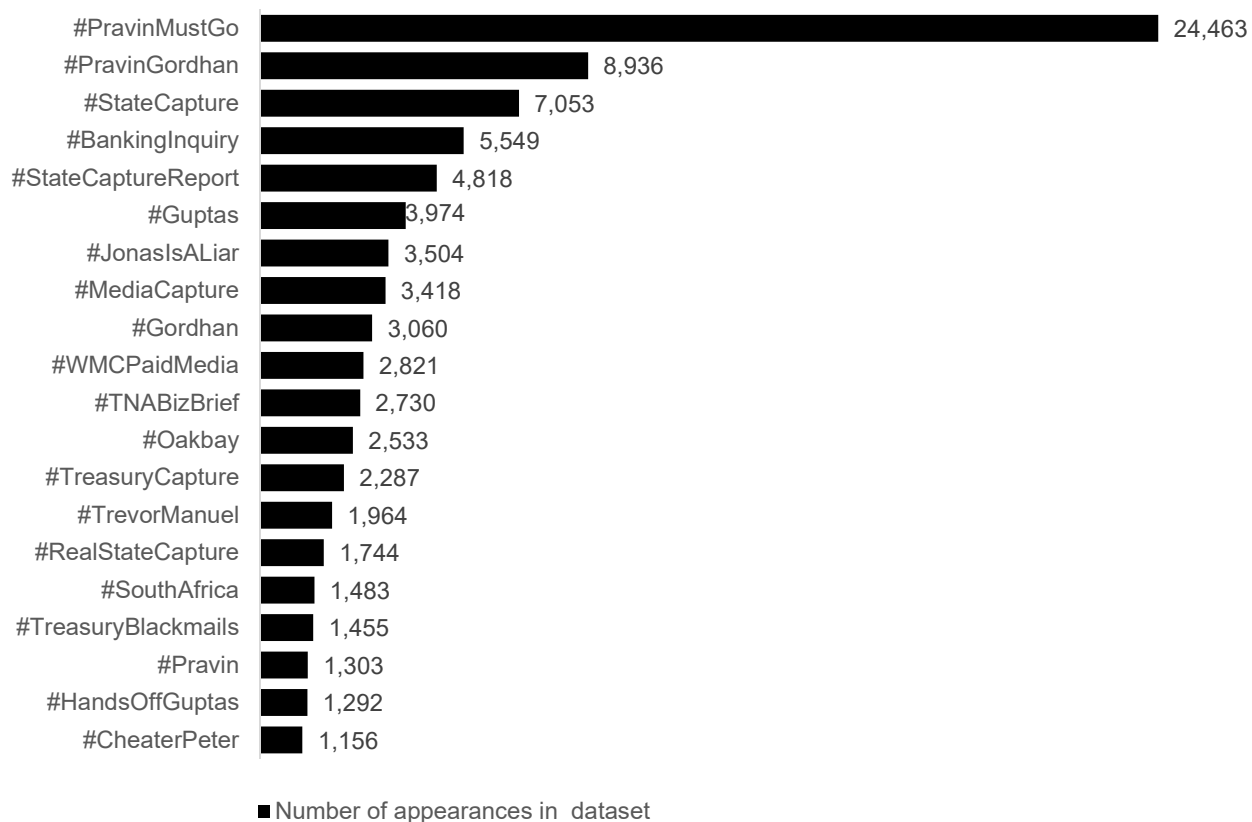


Figure 16: Top 20 most-used hashtags within the dataset

Table 9 summarises the themes present in the fake accounts' tweets based on a qualitative grouping of the top 100 hashtags in the dataset:

Theme	Associated hashtags (within top 100 hashtags)
National Treasury & the South African Reserve Bank (SARB)	#Treasury #TreasuryCapture, #PravinMustGo, #PravinGordhan, #Pravin, #Gordhan, #GordhanGupta, #ZumaFirePravin, #JonasIsALiar, #TrevorManuel, #Manuel, #TreasuryBlackmails#GordhanExposed, #McebisiJonas, #KennethBrown (former National Treasury chief procurement officer), #Brown, #SARB, #RupertGate
White monopoly capital (WMC)	#WhiteMonopolyCapital, #WMC, #RealStateCapture, #FutureGrowth, #Rupert, #RupertRulesSA #MonopolyCapital, #JohannRupert, #AngloGold, #OldMutual
The Guptas & Gupta-owned companies	#HandsOffGuptas, #Guptas, #RespectGuptas, #TNABizBrief (The New Age business briefings on SABC), #Oakbay, #OakbayResults, #Gupta, #DSTV405 (ANN7 channel on DSTV), #Tegeta
ABSA lifeboat scandal	#BankingInquiry, #BanksInquiry, #ABSAMustPay, #ABSA, #PayBackTheMoney, #BoycottABSA, #Bank, #ABSAPayBackTheMoney, #Banking
Journalists & media	#MediaCapture, #CheaterPeter, #WMCPaidMedia, #FakeNews, #SamSold, #DiscreditMedia, #WMC Puppets, #SundayTimesFail, #SoldJournos, #FakeBarry, #PaidBhungane, #RupertTVenCA#WhiteMedia
State capture report	#StateCaptureReport, #ThuliMadonsela, #PublicProtector, #Madonsela, #ThuliIsWhite
Jacob Zuma & the ANC	#HandsOffZumaEconomicLiberationNow, #Zuma, #HandsOffZuma, #ANC
State-owned enterprises (SEOs) & ministers	#Zwane, #Mining, #Molefe, #Eskom, #HandsOffBrianMolefe, #SASSA
Alternative WMC slogans	#FinancialLiberation, #EconomicApartheid, #EconomyCapture
Law enforcement agencies	#NPA, #Hawks, #ShaunAbrahams
Black First Land First (BLF)	#BLFPicket, #BLF, #BLFMarch
Save South Africa	#SaveSouthAfrica, #SiphoPityana
South African Communist Party	#SollyMapaila

Table 9: Summary of the main themes covered by the botnet based on the top 100 most used hashtags

Figure 17 summarises the relative size and importance of each topic within the top 100 hashtags based on how often the hashtags occurred in the data:

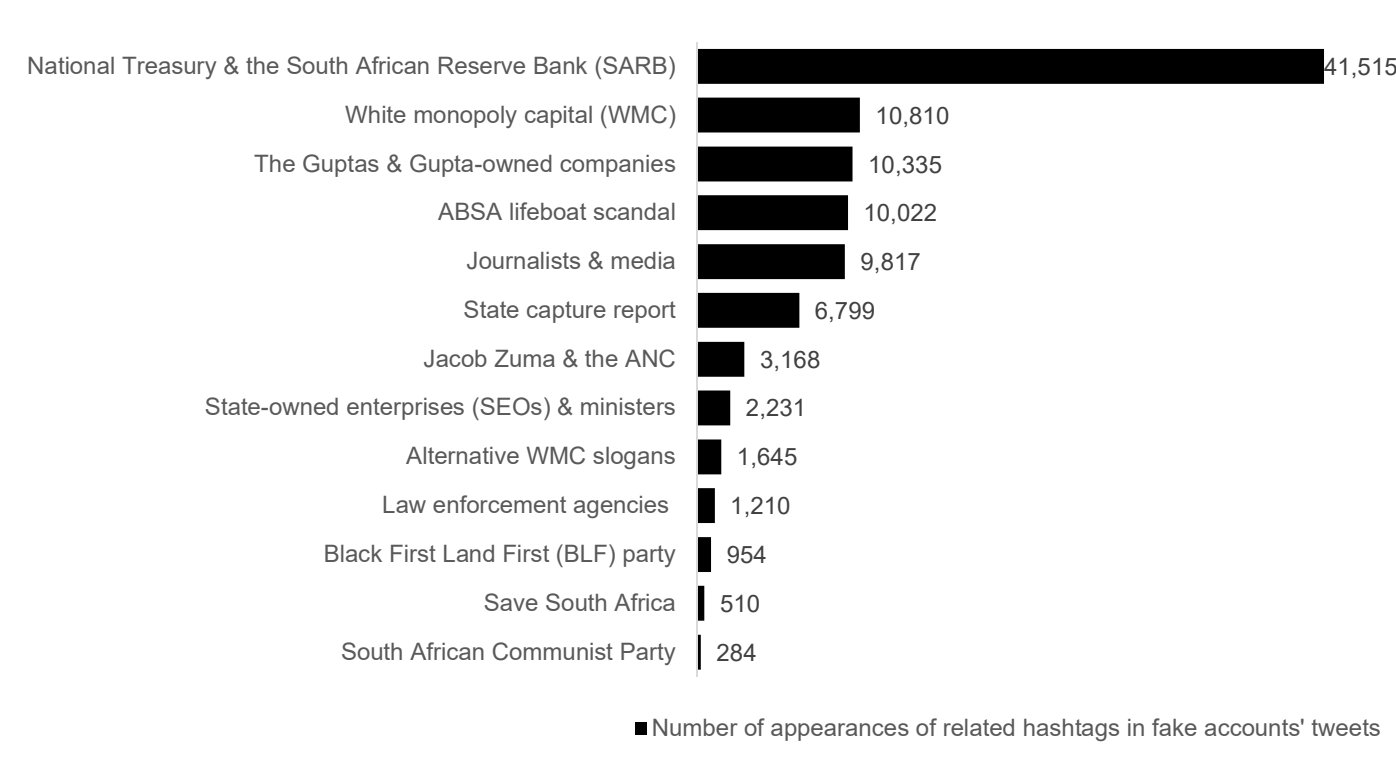


Figure 17: Ranking of the main themes identified in the top 100 hashtags used by the fake accounts in the data

The above analysis clearly shows that the network's primary goal has been the capture of the National Treasury and South African Reserve Bank. While the capture of Treasury is now complete with Malusi Gigaba having been installed as Finance Minister, the siege of the SARB continues as most recently seen by Public Protector, Busisiwe Mkhwebane's, over-reach into recommending that the Constitution be updated to alter the SARB's mandate³⁷.

Aside from this key objective, significant energy has been focused on setting up white monopoly capital as a scapegoat and on attacking critics of the Gupta empire and President Jacob Zuma and his associates. In addition, the various pillars of the state capture project (as outlined in the previously referenced "Betrayal of the Promise" report), including state owned enterprises (SOEs) and law enforcement agencies, have received their fair share of attention.

By looking at when each group of hashtags was used, it is possible to gain insight into the shifting priorities of the fake accounts. Figure 18 summarises the prevalence of each 'hashtag theme' during the August-November 2016 time period when the accounts were most active (see Appendix 4 for a breakdown extending to July 2017).

³⁷ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2017-07-10-public-protector-backs-down-on-court-challenge-to-her-sarb-order>

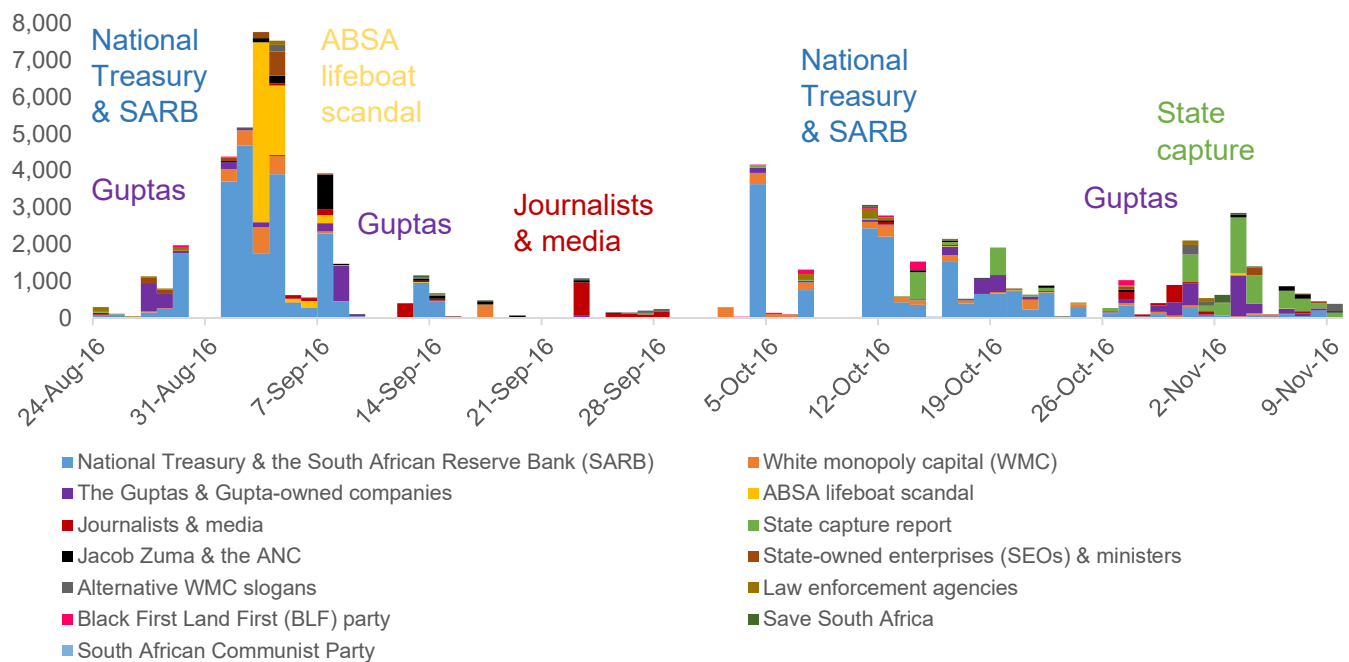


Figure 18: Hashtag themes over time, during the August-November 2016 period when the fake accounts were most active

Figure 18 shows that the main focuses of the fake accounts in the second half of 2016 (when it was most active) were attacking the National Treasury and the SA Reserve Bank, defending the Guptas and their business interests, attacking the media and specific journalists, and attempting to undermine the legitimacy of former Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela’s, “State of Capture” report.

This section has shown how single-minded the fake accounts are around specific issues. They focus on attacking critics of the president and the Gupta family. In addition, they defend Gupta-Zuma interests by deflecting attention away from allegations of corruption towards allegations of misdeeds by ‘white monopoly capital’ instead.

When ranking the various topics based on their importance to the controllers of the fake accounts, it is possible to see that their first goal was the undermining and subsequent capture of the institutions which run our economy, namely the National Treasury and South African Reserve Bank. As events have shown, they were successful in capturing Treasury in May 2016 when President Zuma reshuffled his cabinet and removed Pravin Gordhan as Finance Minister, replacing him with Malusi Gigaba who has a long and chequered history as a key player in the undermining and capturing of state enterprises during President Zuma’s tenure. The *Betrayal of the Promise* PARI report goes into these events in greater detail.



Figure 19: Early examples of tweets amplified by the fake accounts include many of the usual suspects and themes already discussed.

Since the removal of Pravin Gordhan as Finance Minister, the RET network has focused on attacking the South African banking industry, spearheaded by their attack on ABSA for the controversial R3.2 billion bailout package received by the Bankcorp group of banks in the 1980s. Critics claim that ABSA (under its parent company, Barclays Africa), who bought the Bankcorp group of banks, needs to pay back this money.

Three reports have been written on this topic, including the CIEX report³⁸ (also known as “Project Spear”, the report was written by a former British intelligence officer, Michael Oatley, as a proposal for how his group would go about recouping the missing money for a commission fee), the Heath report (based on an enquiry

³⁸ Full CIEX report: <http://uncensoredopinion.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ciex.pdf>

by judge Willem Heath)³⁹ and the Davis Report (based on an enquiry by Judge Dennis Davis)⁴⁰. The Mail & Guardian describes the Davis report as the most objective⁴¹. This is their comment on each report:

- On Michael Oatley's Ciex Report a.k.a Project Spear: *"Of fairness, justice, and economics, there was little in Oatley's work. It took no cognisance of niceties such as fairness, justice, or economics."*
- On the Judge Willem Heath report: *"By barely, but only barely, more believable accounts at the time, Heath was manipulated by Thabo Mbeki for his own unfathomable political ends."*
- On the Judge Dennis Davis report: *"The Davis panel report remains the only honest-to-goodness public document about the whole matter, and it is by far the most boring."*



Figure 20: A tweet authored by the prolific @fikile_samuel account that simultaneously attacks Pravin Gordhan, the SARB and ABSA. This tweet was also retweeted by Mzwanele "Jimmy" Manyi, exposing it to his 85,000+ Twitter followers. Original URL: https://twitter.com/fikile_samuel/status/820985312130174976

Current Public Protector, Busisiwe Mkhwebane, who herself has been accused of defending Gupta and Zuma interests^{42 43 44 45} and of being an intelligence officer for the Zuma regime^{46 47} recently ruled that ABSA needs to pay back the money based on the interpretations of the CIEX report^{48 49}. This move seems to align with the messaging consistently put out by the fake accounts. At the same time as the Public Protector ruled against ABSA, she also made a recommendation to alter the country's constitution with regards to how the SA Reserve Bank works⁵⁰. These recommendations too appear to align with the messaging put out by the fake accounts (although she has subsequently backed down on these recommendations⁵¹).

Finally, criticisms of white controlled media and white monopoly capital have been consistently woven throughout these messaging campaigns, providing convenient scapegoats.

³⁹ Summary of Heath report: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/2017/01/17/the-heath-report-absa-sanlam-liaible-but-pursuing-them-expens_a_21656652

⁴⁰ Full Davis report: http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/gov_panelexperts_bankorp_0.pdf

⁴¹ <http://mg.co.za/article/2017-01-13-absas-apartheid-debt-the-broederbond-and-the-british-spy>

⁴² <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-10-20-what-new-public-protector-mkhwebane-did-next>

⁴³ <http://citizen.co.za/news/news-national/1545765/how-the-public-protector-is-taking-her-time-with-four-gupta-reports>

⁴⁴ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/news/2017-06-17-mkhwebane-stalls-gupta-probes/>

⁴⁵ <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/mkhwebane-is-a-gupta-puppet-straight-from-the-guptas-kitchen-7484620>

⁴⁶ <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-09-09-00-chinese-checkers-behind-sas-next-public-protector-and-her-spy-alter-ego-meng-xi>

⁴⁷ <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/mkhwebane-considering-legal-action-against-da-over-spy-claims-20170202>

⁴⁸ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2017-06-19-public-protector-orders-siu-to-recover-r1125bn-from-absa>

⁴⁹ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2017-06-20-in-full-mboweni-speaks-out-on-public-protectors-absa-report>

⁵⁰ <http://ewn.co.za/2017/06/23/public-protector-s-absa-report-undermines-parliament>

⁵¹ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2017-07-10-public-protector-backs-down-on-court-challenge-to-her-sarb-order>

Facebook campaign in detail

Facebook as a platform does not allow for as sophisticated strategies as Twitter does. However, given the different ways in, and levels to, which users engage with content on each platform, as well as the fact that Facebook is more popular in South Africa than Twitter, it can be just as effective a channel. The RET network's Facebook presence takes the form of specific pages promoting its messages and a collection of fake users which comment on the pages' posts in order to amplify them and to give users the impression that real people are engaging in a real conversation. Unfortunately, it was not possible to measure the extent to which fake Facebook accounts have been used to "trolled" the comments sections of legitimate Facebook pages, which could make up a large proportion of their activity, in this report.

Pages

The measurable aspect of the network's Facebook strategy centres on a stable of pages through which content is published and shared. Table 10 summarises the engagement stats for the Gupta/RET-linked Facebook pages identified for this report. The Black Opinion page relates to the relatively long-running alternative news and editorial blog of BLF leader, Andile Mngxitama. It is interesting to note that it has been around since April 2016, four months earlier than the Twitter fake accounts, which came into being in July 2016. Voetsek Blog has the most fans at 13,527 of the time of writing. However, given that it has only produced 30 posts in this time, its engagement figures are likely artificially inflated.

Page	First post	Fans	Posts	Comments	Likes	Reactions	Shares
Black Opinion	17 Apr 2016	3 991	794	2 963	7 624	8 537	6 102
Voetsek Blog	11 Dec 2016	13 527	30	1 327	1 374	1 648	437
WMC LEAKS	02 May 2017	572	63	2 425	7 671	8 224	809
Dodgy SA Ministers	02 May 2017	136	13	468	165	236	175
WMC Scams	11 Jun 2017	77	20	433	3 354	3 493	212
Weekly Xposé	27 Jun 2017	1 320	500	19	144	163	79

Table 10: Breakdown of the engagement stats for the Gupta/RET-linked pages as at 12 July 2017. Pages are ranked on the date of their first posts.

As Table 10 shows, the network's Facebook activity began as far back as April 2016 with Andile Mngxitama's *Black Opinion* page. Since then, post volumes have remained fairly steady until the launch of the *WMC Leaks* campaign in June 2017 when a massive spike in volumes occurred, providing further evidence of a new stage in the lifecycle of the network and a greater emphasis on Facebook as a distribution platform.

It is interesting to note that two of the pages involved in the campaign, *WMC Leaks* and *Dodgy SA Ministers*, both generated their first posts on the 2nd of May 2017 before going quiet for a full month until the 4th of June 2017 when the campaign kicked off in earnest. This tells us that the campaign planning began at least as early as the 2nd May 2017. Figure 21 summarises the collected pages' Facebook post volumes over time.

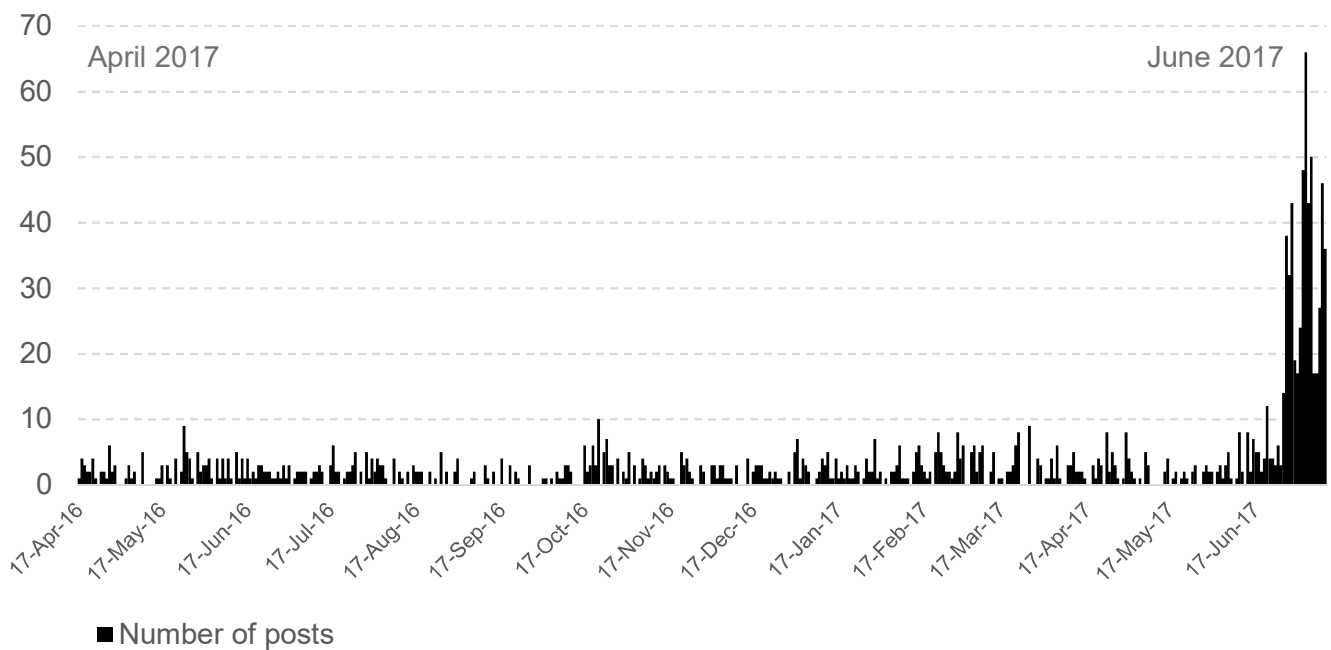


Figure 21: Breakdown of the post volumes since the inception of the Gupta/RET-linked Facebook pages

Fake accounts

It appears as if the network uses fake accounts to artificially boost engagement on the content posted by its pages, just as it does on Twitter. This is evident by examining the surprisingly high volume of comments that the *WMC Leaks* campaign-related pages received in a very short time. Granted, many comments have subsequently been made by regular South Africans criticising these pages, but initial comments when these pages went live were characterised by:

- Similar, short, invective posts that are surprisingly on-theme
- Comments are all generated within a particularly tight window of time
- Clumsy English was used perhaps pointing to Indian authors

Unfortunately, qualitatively assessing these commenters is a very subjective task so it is not possible to classify accounts as fake with 100% certainty.

Themes

Hashtags are not as widely used on Facebook as they are on Twitter therefore a different methodology was used in order to identify the themes being pushed in the messaging put out by RET network Facebook pages. A list of keywords was created to identify each 'theme' and these keywords were searched for in the posts and comments relating to the known RET network pages in order to quantify the volume of content relating to each theme. This gives an indication of the nature of the conversations occurring on these pages however it is important to emphasise that posts and comments are made both by pages owners, fake accounts and critics of the content on these pages. As such, this analysis is a quantification of the conversations being generated on these pages by *both* RET proponents and critics. Thus, this is less a quantification of the themes pushed by the RET network on Facebook than of the conversations deliberately and inadvertently started on Facebook by their content. Voetsek Blog is not included in this analysis as its website and

Facebook page were taken down during the writing of this report. The following themes emerged most prominently using this methodology:

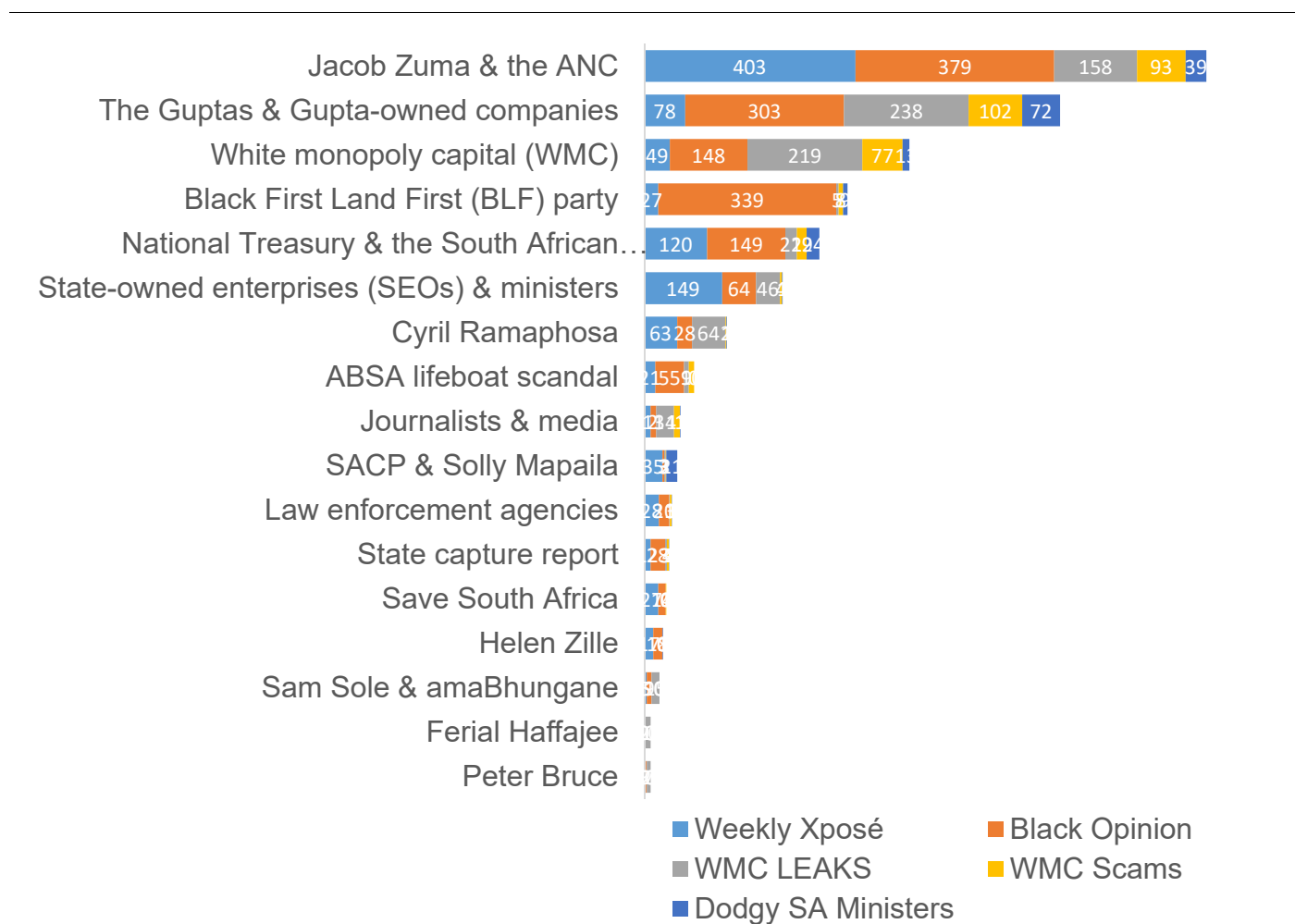


Figure 22: A breakdown of the number of posts and comments containing the keywords relating to each topic

The topic breakdown in Figure 22 shows that the RET network’s Facebook campaign has primarily generated conversations around the same topics that have already been covered in the Twitter analysis. However, the campaign does not appear to be fooling most South African Facebook users. A brief evaluation of the comments on posts shared by RET network pages shows that most of them are from ordinary South Africans angry at the network’s actions. This might explain why Jacob Zuma and the ANC appear as the most mentioned topics and could also be an indication of the negative publicity that they are both receiving from the RET media campaign.

Also of interest is the presence of Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa amongst the themes. He is mentioned in 158 posts and comments by both the RET network accounts and real users. Indeed, the single most engaged with post in the Facebook data analysed for this report relates to Ramaphosa, showing that beyond attacking critics of state capture and Gupta interests, the RET network is also used to attack the opponents of the Zuma camp.



Figure 23: The most commented on post amongst the Gupta/RET-linked Facebook pages attacks President Zuma's main political rival, Deputy President, Cyril Ramaphosa, demonstrating that the network's goals stretch beyond just state capture to include attacks on political opponents.

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of suspected fake accounts

Caveat: These accounts have been identified using a series of heuristics. They have not been double-checked individually and so there is a small chance that some regular users might accidentally be included in this list.

@19zgirl	@edwin_chauque	@Malessacpt	@RanierPretoriu1	@Zandeele99
@4uenock	@EmmanuelSA7	@Maleteriya	@refiloerampolo1	@zandi_molefe
@Abrahamcpt19	@epic_qwabe	@Mandla_lepale	@reuben147	@Zanelendaba18
@akani_jnb	@ernest_mabe	@marcia983	@ricardomukwevho	@zmsimaka4u
@Akka_africa	@ernestsibiya10	@Martinb66522946	@Robdavid18	@Zulu1Bongani
@Akkaafrica	@esaia_kekana	@matheso372	@roux1_jonathan	@zwanecebisa
@alexmazeka1	@eternalrose4	@matloulindo	@Ruancpt	
@alwayssabelo	@Evelynday999	@MatthewKekanaSA	@sabelo412	
@Amanda_love_lif	@fadzainoleen	@Maxwell119901	@Sabulletin1	
@amandan001	@FilemoneMoses	@maziwisamary	@sakobrian	
@Anesu_22	@findme_gyibe	@mduduzimasang11	@SandraBaloyi1	
@Anton_dj99	@freefredy1	@me_athi	@ScheepersLiezele	
@aphiwekgasi1	@fundiswamtheth4	@me_itumeleng	@shandani6	
@athe7866	@GamaChristo	@melissam0021	@sibiyajonathan	
@awandemeyer	@gedion_mohlala	@Mingaze19	@Simon_Natel	
@awsome_aphiwe	@Gigabajacob	@mkhumasurprise	@simphiw45	
@ayibongwewilli	@Glamour_Twisted	@mmasina3	@Singo_venda	
@azwihangwisist	@gmuchangwa	@Mmusijohana	@Siphamandla_Lev	
@bandilelouw	@happinessphume2	@Modibajulias	@siphiwekhaulez2	
@basetsanastryd	@Hateman17	@Modiselam	@Socialm61992935	
@bhekareddy	@Heinkruger2	@molefimohlaphu1	@tabane_z	
@boitumelophash2	@iMariaTweets	@MoloiFikile	@talent_hlaisi	
@bonganimalule11	@Imrichardbaloyi	@monakalinasiphi	@tebogo_moloisi	
@bonganinaicker	@imsam4change	@monamafaith	@temoshomndawe	
@boniface456	@IMTebogo1	@mosesgowrie	@Thabo3264	
@bophelovisser	@iTebogop	@motlalepulaphi2	@thabo4change	
@briannziane	@Jabu_cpt19	@Mpho_4u1	@TheGreatRayy	
@buangferreira	@JacquesKriel10	@mthethwahosea	@theophilusmabu2	
@Busiswemanamel1	@Jamesjhbzkzn	@mthunzi_mohlala	@tholelindiwe	
@butholezwembat2	@jtswaya	@mtshaligodfry1	@thomasmalindisa	
@buyisiweabraha	@julia_rampedi	@mudangawetshik2	@Trevorradebe1	
@carolinemotaun2	@KagisoNtuli4	@Naki_jacket	@truly_rsa	
@cebisileloots	@kevin_lubane	@nandiphadlamin3	@trustme_tweets	
@chauque_mandisa	@kgaugelomokgal2	@NatashaQueen10	@tshegofatsomaz3	
@Choc_Boy_JNB	@khanyiswangobe2	@neomoagi3	@Tshepo_Magadi	
@Choncorachel	@KhozaCylvia	@nerrhiam	@tshepo_ngobese	
@Chrisngobeni3	@Kiki_ngobeni	@nogudathemba	@tumainiemmanue3	
@Cindeyramoshaba	@Kimberlymancpt	@nokwasi1	@twieteme_bongi	
@Cramalobeng	@Kobus10030428	@Orlandoman5	@UncMunaa	
@crazy4thabiso	@kuhlenkosi3	@patrickramolebe	@Victor_cpt	
@Cricis_managmen	@landiwe451	@pertuniamothap1	@victory1always	
@danisasnyman	@lebogang3211	@PhemeloZulu	@vincentkgasi	
@danny_followme	@Lindapillay10	@Phiri_n1	@vincentmashele5	
@danny_mbatha	@LindoShabalala6	@phonia_mongalo	@voiceofsefara	
@Dennis58609765	@lovinabongile	@portia1256	@VoilaVenom	
@dikotsivorster	@lucilleledwaba	@portiadlamini14	@wiseman932	
@dinganibester	@luiz_judy	@Proudsa3	@work4change2	
@dudugumede10	@Lve_ive	@Public_malatji	@Yamaguchicpt	
@duke_moea	@magosokhuliso	@Questing_lindi	@Yuandme999	
@dumisan0755	@Makinanaxoliswa	@Ralphgodfrey3	@za_lunga	

Appendix 2: List of “new” fake accounts on Twitter

This is a list of the new types of fake accounts that attempted to amplify new attack accounts, @dodgysaminister, @economycapture and @indecentexposes, created for the *WMC Leaks* campaign:

@dodgysaminister	@dio3220	@natashascher	@aztekgrl	@susan_wu543
@raffetyhunter	@directorkash	@nastajuzhaninv	@bembc	@takuya6186751
@queen_mf_t	@djmalakaii	@tonystark_liz	@babyyogibear	@stylestwerking
@qtau_ane	@dman1874	@tweetjeanabell	@lbrinich	@skr8likedat
@princeomarjnr	@caedus14	@umm_reely	@lilcraig_swag	@sk8mommy
@poprocks2359020	@allinyca	@treydays	@lfranzolin	@crookieman1
@nickkremer3	@allbreed	@thisboyaintrite	@kusoneo	@coral_sea_love
@mskeribaby9298	@annelouback	@yelowangelz	@keerlp	@clover5648
@mmacdey	@angeldumonscuna	@yesy_91	@kleiijn	@ceddyb64
@mitchellm3	@anupam_gaur	@vovikboo	@krshoes	@christacoolone
@nulmiso	@airiesya_mia	@vero_badillo	@kimcudder_	@chenqian0808
@nsmith0315	@aiyooamma	@willhal72750532	@mariusdropgig	@chenzhenshuo
@pacpumi	@acs0	@willtribble3	@mcgrath244	@eliseelbanna
@newglobalsolns	@borengk	@wintherflower	@maspq_denis	@diavel_adry
@nmotawakel	@bmh11	@sandytg2	@love4831	@douguesanches
@rendaextracasa	@biggurubob	@sami_terrell	@hej_xoxo	@dylangospel
@topelevelmma	@brunaisroadkill	@samlababe	@henrique_paiva1	@ebright
@tim2914	@brucktoothy	@samukahmezquita	@ig10_70	@dreamerroyale
@thalitareggiore	@briannagirl124	@shalakita78	@highellohigh	@cadillaclimerik
@thande_mellissa	@axun	@scam189615	@holmesyboi	@amberxgore
@tegratormii	@ashleyperkinsre	@sageholbert	@gospodinjuha	@amaynes2012
@thendojackmaize	@bearsamich	@rwc_62	@juliezhong1993	@andyganeva
@thecatladxyo	@littlepig99990	@s_nf	@israelbustos981	@_f3lipe_
@yucaodraude	@leonelgarcia221	@sabjon08	@jessicadurivage	@aaronooters
@zodiacn2	@kodes69	@romariopride		@abdoo_k_
@zhouxiaonanmich	@kondilemdu	@rram0s	@indecentexposes	@31dolunay
@zefberry	@logans_mom84	@sss_china	@indecentexposes	@322mxschool
@valoreena	@makiyo2617	@stephanie8544	@qinfeng_081	@34617381
@vanditya	@lutralutra79	@susan_73	@prostheticarm00	@48alozturk
@wallsel	@m7agence	@supremethedj	@ralphybean	@akishuch
@tartala78	@macsoulmusic	@sunnyscorpio111	@pfreedman1957	@aflorrick
@renej73	@ierology	@soccer_swagg	@povlok	@apollosgym480
@sammtwist	@geebear10	@shelbyjean94	@patz10092	@bjtjr24
@samsonsemosa	@freshboy2200	@shiluanji	@mrjamesrainier	@bwuyun
@sbrecords	@fynesoul_	@cynthiatorres17	@mike_sanjuan	@la_madrina_000
@rmlais_	@gillybabes_98	@darzopbre	@missyh8791	@lastrebelalive5
@rhendaarmetta	@gqtismylife	@chaosmosssss	@nothing7919	@lindapen721
@romaniangel	@georgioarmani	@carlaa_n	@oursym	@kharadim
@sonne3	@joedevitode	@clairebear154	@omargulski	@kia0725
@sunny02221	@kardinal011	@cheungwinniezzl	@officialzanardi	@marcweifeng
@sincerelyme803	@kavana1022	@djtravy21	@nadkitten	@matthewmckewen
@sknkosi007	@kamilakarolynne	@ehght	@nkosi4447	@makaylakeshawn
@sno_d	@jianjikai	@deuceybaby	@tetrissstessiee	@madt15
@crimsonkirie	@jesschiang	@dustnpedroza	@thesch_official	@harieba54423813
@crybb92	@janfing	@eduardocass	@thebeckie	@hanabecker
@daskokker		@dprimo3	@yjsdoodoo	@hockeyphilia
@charleensh	@economycapture	@dreykills	@ysomadbrah	@hollylocklear
@chennachait	@jb_fe	@allensunana	@yukivalentine	@greasy_kay
@cheriecheng_7	@princesanvegas	@annapaullaliima	@yeagermeister11	@gano2k6
@cheyeanna_rose	@reinherzufall	@amsmith53954	@zhoulj2006	@joeygstatus
@chizboy91	@precioussmith29	@alanleung8615	@zhaozhili123	@jinzo1989
@evadewitte	@mparunkumar	@_samwolfe_	@zhangjian163	@jlikes2play01
@enya_horton	@moogs88	@4patandal	@vishalpincha	@karabo4349
@electroartist	@momodexiatian	@bigearzzz	@watervoyage	@justinmaiden3
@elliecollins563	@moiraemcevoy	@bosslady0522	@sfurlow93	@jethomas0304
@elrealrico	@msique_photo	@buggalette0617	@scwabbl1	@jayjamel
@elvis_he	@megoa152	@bourne069	@ryelle777	
@foreveremily96	@missgoodies369	@arcwellington	@rozent0_galore	
@feriadejerez	@minoyi	@ariisamiir12	@sotoa25	
@faitheichner	@nyximinaj	@arodvol25	@stevenh4427	

Appendix 3: Extended list of hashtags used

Rank	Hashtag	Number of uses	Rank	Hashtag	Number of uses
1	#PravinMustGo	24463	51	#Tegeta	512
2	#PravinGordhan	8 936	52	#PR	467
3	#StateCapture	7 053	53	#WhiteMonopolyCapital	466
4	#BankingInquiry	5 549	54	#FakeBarry	458
5	#StateCaptureReport	4 818	55	#Manuel	457
6	#Guptas	3 974	56	#RespectGuptas	452
7	#JonasIsALiar	3 504	57	#State	451
8	#MediaCapture	3 418	58	#PayBackTheMoney	440
9	#Gordhan	3 060	59	#OldMutual	430
10	#WMCPaidMedia	2 821	60	#LondonSpy	429
11	#TNABizBrief	2 730	61	#Brown	420
12	#Oakbay	2 533	62	#PRA	418
13	#TreasuryCapture	2 287	63	#BoycottABSA	386
14	#TrevorManuel	1 964	64	#Eskom	386
15	#RealStateCapture	1 744	65	#MonopolyCapital	383
16	#SouthAfrica	1 483	66	#JohannRupert	364
17	#TreasuryBlackmails	1 455	67	#AngloGold	364
18	#Pravin	1 303	68	#BLFPicket	346
19	#HandsOffGuptas	1 292	69	#PaidBhungane	343
20	#CheaterPeter	1 156	70	#Hlongwane	341
21	#WMC	1 129	71	#ANC	337
22	#ThuliMadonsela	1 075	72	#HandsOffBrianMolefe	337
23	#FutureGrowth	1 064	73	#ShaunAbrahams	331
24	#Jonas	977	74	#NPA	317
25	#IfApartheidDidNotHappen	955	75	#Madonsela	314
26	#HandsOffZumaEconomicLiberationNow	935	76	#SollyMapaila	306
27	#FakeNews	921	77	#BLF	304
28	#Rupert	890	78	#SASSA	303
29	#OakbayResults	888	79	#Bank	301
30	#GordhanExposed	883	80	#SARB	300
31	#BanksInquiry	878	81	#Stat	299
32	#Treasury	816	82	#Banking	284
33	#Gupta	802	83	#RupertTVeNCA	284
34	#ABSAMustPay	793	84	#ThuliIsWhite	278
35	#SamSold	784	85	#RupertRulesSA	272
36	#Zwane	772	86	#Mining	269
37	#ABSA	746	87	#SaveSouthAfrica	266
38	#PublicProtector	734	88	#Corruption	265
39	#DiscreditMedia	698	89	#Prav	260
40	#Zuma	653	90	#GordhanGupta	256
41	#DSTV405	643	91	#HandsOffZuma	255
42	#WMCPuppets	610	92	#ZumaFirePravin	255
43	#Hawks	600	93	#Corrupt	253
44	#McebisiJonas	573	94	#WhiteMedia	253
45	#FinancialLiberation	567	95	#Go	252
46	#SundayTimesFail	566	96	#BLFMarch	250
47	#SoldJournos	542	97	#ABSAPayBackTheMoney	248
48	#EconomicApartheid	541	98	#RupertGate	246
49	#EconomyCapture	536	99	#DA	246
50	#KennethBrown	513	100	#SiphoPityana	244

Appendix 4: Themes over time

