Hostile Actor Amplification via YouTube during NATO's Trident Juncture 2018

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COSMOS
Collaboratorium for Social Media and Online Behavioral Studies
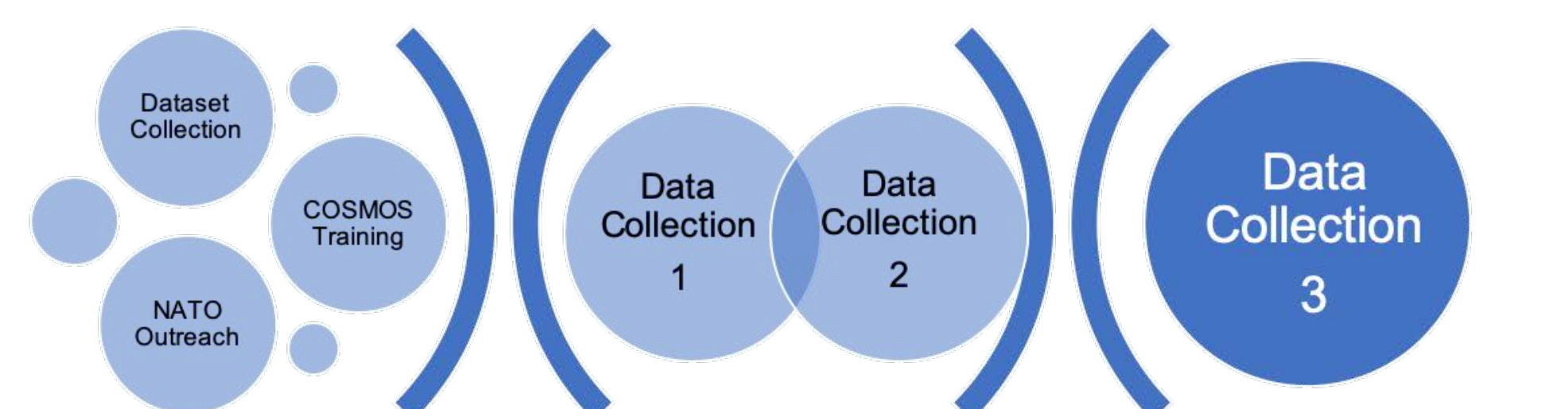
UA LITTLE ROCK

The Trident Juncture 2018 Information Environment

As highly-motivated information actors have become increasingly creative and coordinated across multiple media platforms, those who are slow to react may get swept up by a wave of malicious efforts aimed to undermine and take over the information environment. Our study focuses on YouTube, a medium used by information actors prior to and throughout NATO's exercise Trident Juncture. Content was added to the information environment at such a high speed to not only reach audiences, but to engage them.

Adversaries were taking full advantage of the opportunity to insert discord or weaponize narratives and manipulate or change the information received.

TRIDENT JUNCTURE WAS NATO'S BIGGEST EXERCISE IN DECADES
Trident Juncture 2018: NATO's biggest exercise in decades

Information Environment Assessment Methodology

Longitudinal design over a seven-month period:

Dataset Collection · COSMOS Training · NATO Outreach · Data Collection 1 · Data Collection 2 · Data Collection 3

MAY/JUN2018   JUL/SEP 2018   OCT-NOV 2018

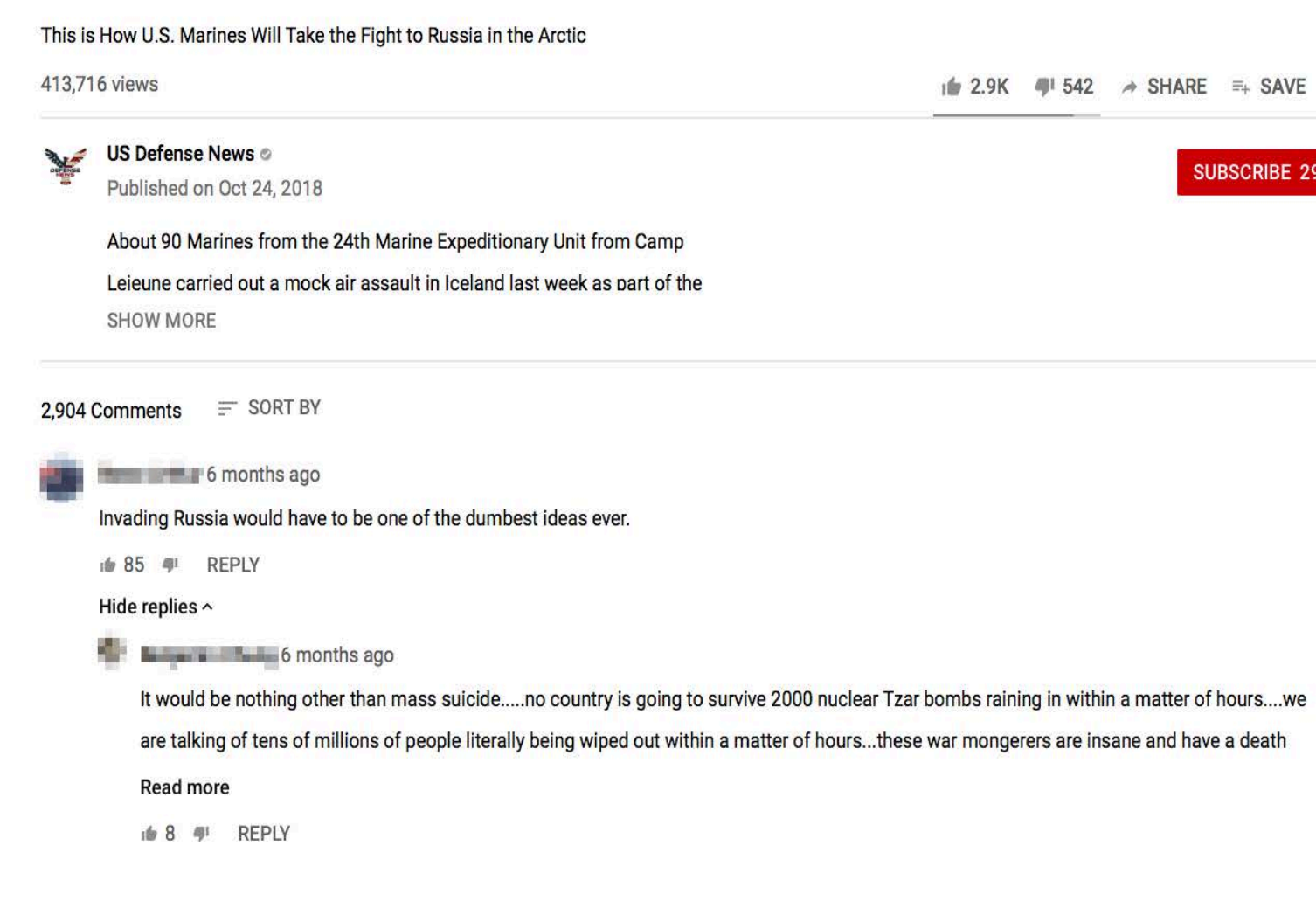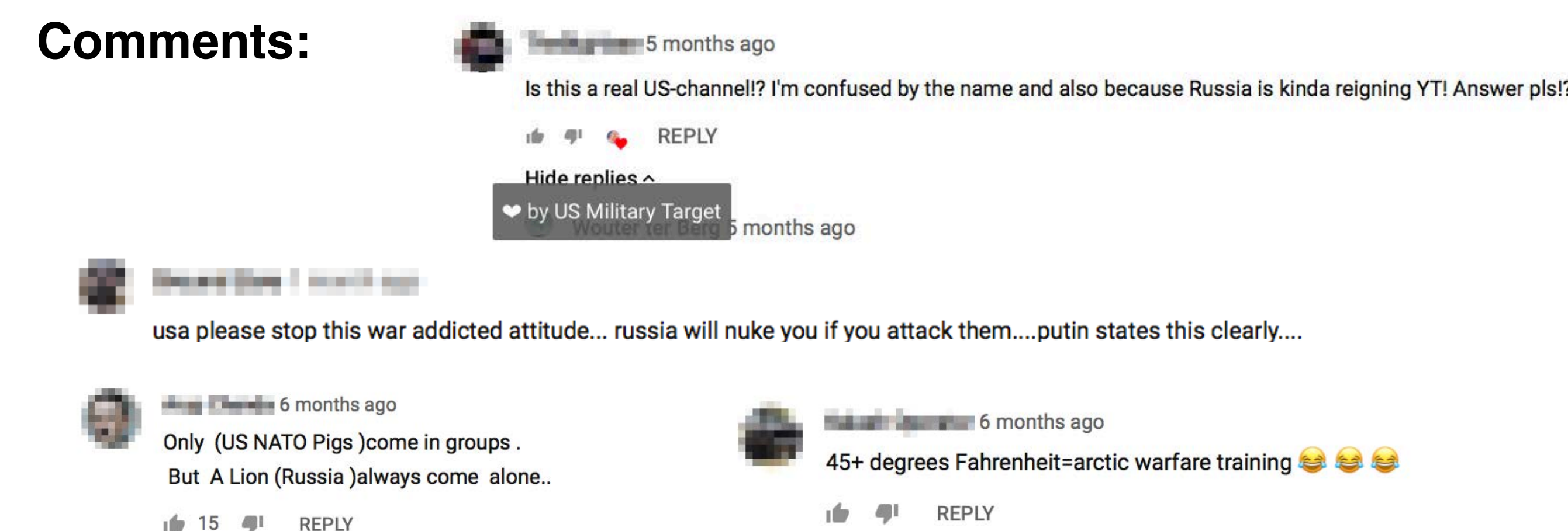Main data collection time period: 1324 videos

7% (96 videos):   NATO-owned
29% (390 videos)   Hostile
63% (838 videos)   Earned (news outlets and other non-hostile parties).

Information Actors' Tactics

Information Spreaders:
Targeted Messaging presented as news to divide and spread paranoia

Comments:

Is this a real US-channel!? I'm confused by the name and also because Russia is kinda reigning YT! Answer pls!?

REPLY
Hide replies
♥ by US Military Target   5 months ago

usa please stop this war addicted attitude... russia will nuke you if you attack them....putin states this clearly....

5 months ago
Only (US NATO Pigs)come in groups .
But A Lion (Russia)always come alone...
15   REPLY

5 months ago
45+ degrees Fahrenheit=arctic warfare training 😂😂😂
REPLY

Exaggeration and Hyperbole:
Attention-grabbing headlines, detailed descriptions. Some actors use them to control narratives, others for monetarization.

This is How U.S. Marines Take the Fight to Russia in the Arctic

US Defense News
About 90 Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit from Camp Lejeune carried out a mock air assault in Iceland last week as part of the
SHOW MORE

2,904 Comments

6 months ago
Invading Russia would have to be one of the dumbest ideas ever.
85   REPLY
Hide replies
6 months ago
It would be nothing other than mass suicide....no country is going to survive 2000 nuclear Tzar bombs raining in within a matter of hours....we are talking of tens of millions of people literally being wiped out within a matter of hours...these war mongerers are insane and have a death
Read more
REPLY

Analysis

The Revelation:

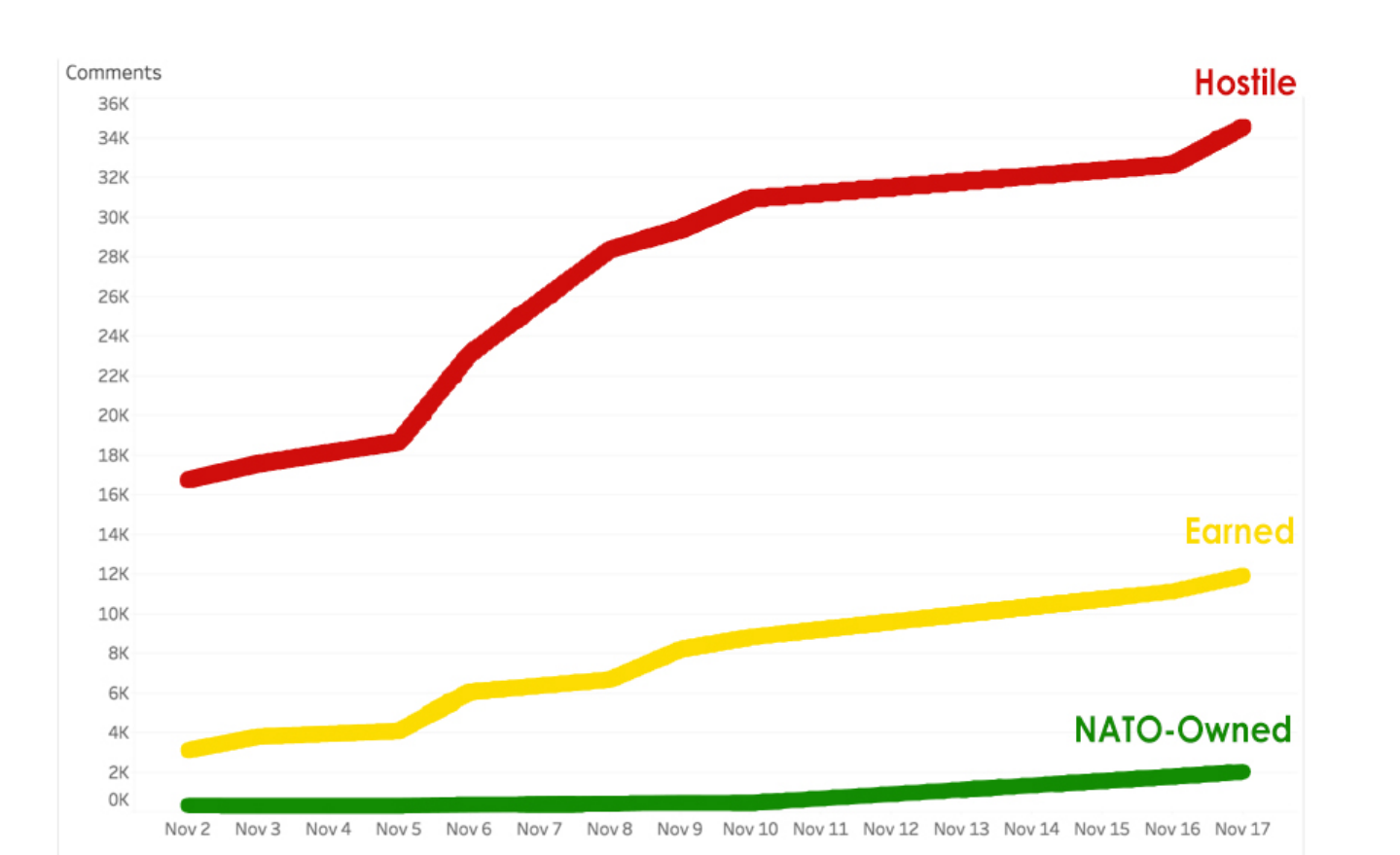A multi-method analysis (qualitative & quantitative) approach was taken revealing …

Interactive coordination among commenters identified. Multiple lines of effort to:

- flood mediums with content
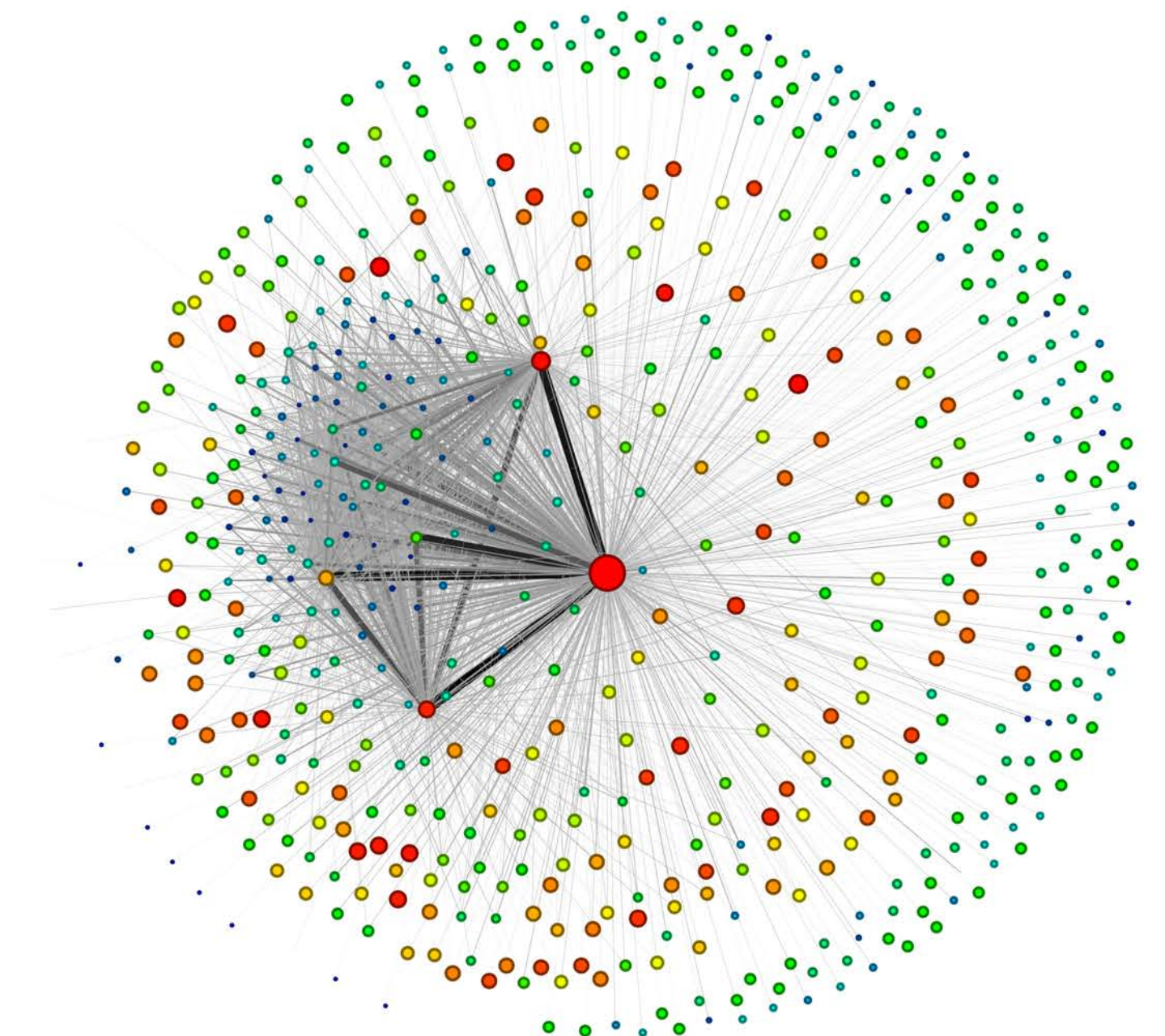- interact via cross-media domains
- conduct permeation R&S
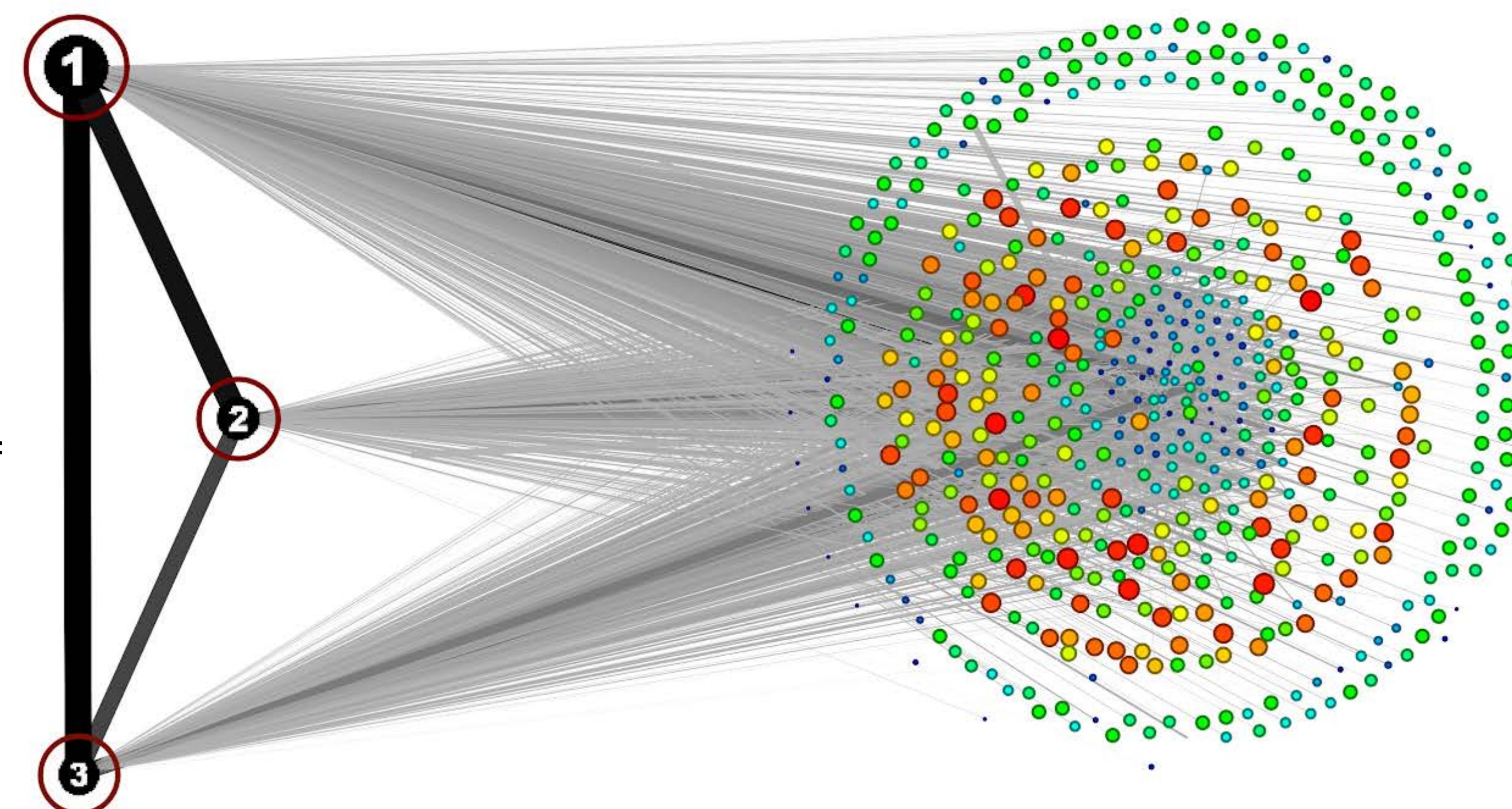
Future Research

Trident Juncture 2018 YouTube Channel Video Comments

Hostile
Earned
NATO-Owned

High engagement
Steep increase in comments published on hostile channels lead to co-commenter network research.

Co-Commenter Network
Main actors commenters are tightly connected. Bots or may be commenter 'flash' mobs, but definitely inorganic behavior.

Word Cloud of key commenter

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National Science Foundation · Office of Naval Research · Air Force Research Laboratory · Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency · Army Research Laboratory · Department of Homeland Security · Arkansas Research Alliance