

"The Mechanism of Digital Propaganda by Bot Accounts and Its Role in Spreading Fake News: Applied Models."

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Abstract:

This article aims to shed light on how "electronic trolls" operate as a modern digital phenomenon that affects the public digital space. The focus of the article is on studying the mechanisms by which these fake accounts are used to spread false and misleading news through social media platforms, and how they influence public opinion.

The article elaborates on the operational strategies of these accounts, explaining how they target audiences by disseminating misinformation or stirring controversy on specific issues to manipulate general perceptions. Practical examples are provided to illustrate how these strategies are implemented in various contexts.

Furthermore, the article discusses the negative impact of this phenomenon on the public, as fake news contributes to the distortion of facts and the spread of informational chaos. Lastly, the article proposes practical solutions to counter this challenge, such as enhancing digital awareness and developing effective mechanisms to monitor and combat fake news.

Keywords: Electronic Fly, Mechanism, Digital Advertising, Fake News

Introduction

With the rapid expansion of the internet as a powerful tool for mass communication and in light of the ongoing digital transformation of media and communication channels, cyber trolls, often referred to as "electronic flies," have begun to proliferate within the digital environment. This phenomenon warrants close attention and study, as it plays a significant role in shaping and directing virtual public opinion to serve the objectives of those behind it. By utilizing mechanisms of propaganda and spreading false news, these entities contribute to distorting facts and misleading the public.

Social media platforms, once spaces for the free exchange of information and communication among individuals, have increasingly become vehicles for the dissemination of fake news and deceptive

propaganda. This trend poses serious risks to national security and the stability of societies and countries alike.

The study of cyber trolls is crucial in today's world as it sheds light on their methods and techniques for influencing public opinion. It also plays an essential role in raising social awareness and in developing effective strategies to combat this growing threat.

Therefore, the importance of researching this topic lies in understanding how these cyber trolls emerge, their operational mechanisms, and offering practical examples of how different countries have addressed and countered their influence.

1. Electronic Flies: Concept and Idea

The conflicts and disputes in our current era have shifted from traditional battlefields to the digital space, where the tools of warfare have evolved to include what is known as "electronic flies" or "cyber teams." This term has become common in recent years with the rise of tensions and conflicts in various regions around the world..(Al-Dosari)

Electronic flies are referred to by several names, such as "electronic battalions," "black cells," "bots," "cyber armies," "hackers," and "pirates."(Al-Janubi)As a new and exciting element in the world of the internet, these entities, unlike their biological counterparts, are not confined to the physical realm; they operate within the web, moving through the networks and algorithms that support our digital connectivity. This technological phenomenon, which encompasses automated systems, algorithms, and artificial intelligence, is a fundamental part of the modern information system, influencing how information is distributed, consumed, and understood. (Mohammad-Ameen, 2024).

The term "electronic flies" indicates the evolution of communication technologies and misleading practices, as modern technologies have enabled the emergence of specialized electronic committees and groups dedicated to disseminating information, ideas, and opinions. These groups aim to control awareness and public opinion to serve specific objectives. (Bouzyan, 2021).

It refers to those fake accounts on social media that are operated automatically by programmers linked to government and security agencies of a specific country.(Al-Najjar)•Itis also known as fake accounts that are programmed and organized in a specific way, managed using electronic software and systems regularly.

These accounts automatically write comments, give likes, retweet, and create hashtags. They are used on social media to support a certain position or attack opposing views, with the aim of influencing public opinion towards individuals or countries.(Mahboubah)

The use of electronic flies began in 2017 when Yasser Abu Hilala, the former director of Qatar's Al Jazeera channel, spoke about this technology, stating that it was being used by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to influence public opinion. However, despite this The roots of the idea and its applications date back to 2010, when some political entities began using these accounts to shape Arab and Palestinian public opinion. The term became widely known in 2011 after the revelation of Syrian electronic activity, as it was used across European, American, and Arab platforms to support Bashar al-Assad's regime during the Syrian revolution. (Ghrabi, 2019)

The goals of electronic flies include spreading rumors and false news, or exaggerating minor incidents to make them appear as critical and major events, thus making them the talk of the hour. It doesn't matter if the truth is revealed later. (Alhamdani)

2. Electronic Flies and the Industry of False Propaganda in the Digital Space:

Electronic flies are considered a modern phenomenon in advertising techniques in their various forms, where propaganda serves as a fundamental function to achieve communicative objectives, Although the term "propaganda" is often associated with a negative connotation as a means of political persuasion, its current forms did not emerge until the 19th century, despite the concept being as old as political systems throughout history. (Al-Dailami)

The impact of the internet on the dissemination and distribution of information has complicated the process of distinguishing between "truth and propaganda" or "fact and fiction." The differentiation between fake information and that which cannot be verified has become more challenging, as the line between them is now unclear and blurred. As a result, new terms have emerged in the media, such as "fake news," "unverifiable news," "alternative facts," and "disputed truths." (Barkho, 2017).

In this context, accounts that perform the function of deception are typically managed through bots and algorithms that carry out automated tasks such as liking, retweeting, or commenting, which contributes to the widespread dissemination of hashtags and helps them trend globally or in targeted countries. (Al-Arab Website).

The hashtag, represented by the symbol (#), is used by placing this symbol before a specific word to make it a topic open for discussion among people. After its first use on Twitter on August 23, 2007, the hashtag transformed from a simple symbol into a prominent icon used to express opinions and convey messages online. In 2009, Twitter officially adopted the concept of hashtags, which later spread to other digital platforms such as Facebook. (Al Jazeera Net).

The hashtag expresses the most significant political and social events that generate widespread interest or controversy, both locally and internationally, Hashtags are created in various ways; the first involves using electronic brigades to increase engagement through intensive posting and wide dissemination of content, The second method entails paying cyber trolls to program bots that promote institutions and companies or support political parties and figures, especially during election campaigns.

Cyber trolls use techniques to poison hashtags by attacking active hashtags and creating counter-hashtags through fake accounts. This is done by intensively posting opposing content to ensure that fake hashtags surpass the original ones, and organizing rumor campaigns to distort the main issue and replace it with secondary ones, This creates a manufactured crisis that makes the original issue appear to represent a minority, hindering ordinary users from finding and engaging with the true information (Berzeq).

In other words, cyber trolls employ a massive number of fake accounts to attack a specific topic, with attacks reaching hundreds of thousands of accounts. These methods are used to defame and tarnish the reputation of targeted parties or to disseminate disruptive materials aimed at spreading chaos and turning public opinion against each other. The operations also include designing sophisticated "smear campaigns" that rely on cleverly fabricated information and images to mislead recipients into believing their authenticity. (Al-Khanji).

3. The Mechanism of Electronic Fly's Operation in False Advertising:

In light of global changes, methods of warfare have evolved to align with soft power strategies that rely on modern communication technologies, such as electronic propaganda, electronic flies, electronic warfare, and electronic chaos. These tools have proven effective in influencing public opinion, garnering support, and creating opposition. They have been utilized in recent international events, such as the aggression against Gaza, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the crises in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Libya, in addition to the conflict between Israel and Iran. (Al-Dailami).

In addition, electronic flies take various forms, ranging from simple programs that perform specific tasks to complex algorithms that can continuously learn and adapt. Consequently, the objectives of electronic flies vary from collecting and analyzing non-sensitive data to executing harmful activities, including spreading disinformation, influencing public opinion, and conducting cyberattacks. Through these methods, electronic flies contribute to amplifying and directing messages in a way that makes them appear as public opinion, reflecting the evolution of modern warfare strategies and the digital influence on global events. (Mohammad-Ameen, 2024).

The issue of fake accounts has resurfaced amid the turmoil surrounding Elon Musk's deal with Twitter, with reports revealing that 25% of Twitter users are fake. Additionally, 23.4% of Musk's followers and 41% of them match spam patterns, while 69% have been inactive for over 120 days. On Facebook, 5% of active users are fake, and the company removed 6 billion fake accounts last year. Previous studies from the University of Southern California indicated that about 48 million of the 319 million accounts on Twitter are not real, while Instagram deleted over 18.8 million fake accounts in 2014.(Al-Hadi).

The recent Gulf crisis between Qatar and the boycotting countries highlighted the power of cyber trolls. A fierce war erupted on social media, where these trolls employed massive accounts operating around the clock to spread lies and misinformation, leading to the manipulation and inflaming of public opinion to serve their interests..(Amin, 2024)

Saudi Arabia, like other countries involved in the Qatar blockade, employed "bots" and "trolls" on Twitter. These networks operate through coded algorithms to manipulate accounts in ways that influence citizens' opinions and political orientations, misleading them into believing there is widespread public support for its political positions, especially following the Qatar blockade crisis in July 2017.(Amin, 2024).

In April 2020, Twitter deleted thousands of accounts that it claimed were Saudi and operating from Egypt and the UAE, which were promoting content supportive of these governments, including attacks on Qatar and Turkey. The platform also removed 2,541 accounts linked to an Egyptian media network called "Al-Fajr," which used fake accounts to amplify messages against Iran, Qatar, and Turkey under the direction of the Egyptian government. (Turk Press Website).

In July 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice announced the dismantling of a Russian propaganda network operating to spread misinformation. Comprising about 1,000 accounts on the X platform, it promoted Russia. Although the accounts claimed to be American, they were actually managed by Russian agents with the support of the Kremlin. These accounts were created using artificial intelligence. (Al-Hurra Channel Website)

In this context, the electronic flies employ various mechanisms to spread false news, which are:

- * The electronic flies spread across news websites and social media platforms, disguising themselves with identities linked to an opposing state. They exploit the social values of the targeted country to communicate in its local dialect, spreading rumors and calling for the overthrow of the regime while inciting sabotage to destabilize and widen the gap of alienation between the state and its people.

- * Influential figures such as religious leaders, media personalities, academics, and athletes, who have large followings, are recruited to participate in paid tweet campaigns. They are lured through threats, money, or positions. The strategy also includes using multinational international networks operated by a specific country to promote its interests.
- * Images and videos are manipulated to present fabricated events or those from other countries as if they occurred in the targeted state, especially in issues related to human rights and conflicts, to attract media attention.
- * Content is posted through real or verified accounts to enhance its credibility, and then supported by electronic brigades to increase engagement through likes and promotion across various social media platforms.
- * Opposing views or entities are attacked with insults, blackmail, and accusations of treason, and the discussion is shifted from intellectual issues to personal matters concerning the author of the post or the opposing group.
- * Mass reporting campaigns are launched against opposing accounts, with fabricated charges such as harming institutions or sacred matters, leading to the banning of posts that are essentially simple critiques of policies.
- * Posts and comments are automated to repeat rumors, which enhances their impact on recipients through content repetition. (Berzeq).

4. International Models in Combating Electronic Flies:

Many countries have adopted various strategies to combat the threats posed by electronic flies, including:(Al-Tamimi, 2024)

✓ The United States of America:

The sentence has been established to monitor electronic activities and enhance security against digital threats.

A/ PRISM Program: Under the "America Protect" Act enacted in 2007, the PRISM program was established to monitor information in the American cyberspace, including emails, voice calls, and video conversations. The National Security Agency obtains data either directly through undersea cables that store the information.

B/" Designing Applications"Birds Angry"The Angry Birds"The United States has developed technologies to hack mobile phones, allowing for the collection of user information through the photos they share on social media.

- ✓ **Britain:** The SOCMINT model was designed in 2014 and monitors social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as personal messages. Following the riots in 2011, the British police monitored social media to curb incitement and arrested 12 young people in England and Scotland. The British government has used tools to analyze social media and extract statistical indicators about active users

In 2014, a bill was proposed requiring telecommunications companies to provide information to the police regarding individuals who threaten national security.

In 2015, a specialized unit was established for electronic warfare to engage in information warfare.

- ✓ **China:** is considered a prominent model in tightening control not only over social media but also over the internet in general, through:

Complete control over online data: The Chinese government monitors all available information on the network.

Closure of social media sites: In 2009, the government decided to close social media sites due to clashes and incidents of violence, including Google.

The "Great Firewall" project: Used to restrict internet access and control content.

- ✓ **Iran:** Known for implementing strict policies that include closing social media sites and increasing surveillance of electronic activities.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it becomes clear that electronic flies (bots) represent a global issue and challenge that is not confined to any specific country or community. Their spread in the digital space has transformed them into an effective tool for shaping public opinion and disseminating propaganda, false news, and misinformation during both ordinary times and digital wars. At the same time, their ability to rapidly and extensively spread and distribute misleading content, using automated strategies with digital programs and bots, has negatively impacted individuals and society by impairing their ability to distinguish between truth and deception, propaganda, and being influenced by their messages.

Enhancing media literacy and digital awareness in society is one of the effective mechanisms to combat the dangers of electronic flies (bots). Additionally, countering them through communication and media technologies by establishing a robust system to combat them on the internet is essential.

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