

Topic 1: Social Bots

Answer Sheet for Teachers

Step: Interaction with Social Bots and how to expose them.

(Answered with the checklist)

Worksheet 2 basic:

1. we do not know the person or any of his followers
 2. the description of the person does not make sense
 3. the profile has a gigantic number of tweets (186,300)
 4. we do not know how fast the account reacts, but we know that the account posts approximately 200 times per hour
 5. we do not know how the account reacts to contextual questions
 6. the account uses the same terms (“need”) and a very simple style of writing “I do not like”.
 7. the account cannot be found online
- 5 out of 7 criteria suggest that the account is a social bot

Worksheet 2 advanced:

1. we do not know the person or any of his followers
 2. the description of the person does not make sense
 3. the account has a huge number of tweets (96,300)
 4. we do not know how fast the account reacts
 5. we do not know how the account reacts to contextual questions
 6. the account uses simple terms (e.g. “thing”) and simple grammar
 7. online research suggests that the account is a social bot, developed by Microsoft
- 5 out of 7 criteria suggest that the account is a social bot

Step: Initiating competency to analyze

Worksheet 2 basic:

How do the posts that they read make them feel?

- The first post makes me feel confused because I don't understand why all Russians should be mean.
- The first and the second post makes me feel upset because I don't agree with the statement.
 - I do not know if all Russians are mean, since there is no scientific evidence for it
 - it seems like a blanket statement also there are many people in the world who have to leave their home countries because of wars and other reasons. Europe should not shield itself from people in need.
 - People who prefer an anti-immigration view, might feel confirmed in their political world- views

What could be the purpose of the account?

- the purpose of the account could be to stir up hate against migrants

Who could have created the account?

- or by an individual/ a group of people that follows a right-wing agenda

Transfer-Question: What are the threats that Social Bots could cause for democratic values?

- social bots can massively influence the public opinion
- social bots can have an impact on crucial political events such as elections
- it is increasingly difficult to tell whether something is false or true
- because many tweets and posts were created by bots, the discourse on social media does not reflect the actual public opinion
- because it is hard to tell which post was created by a bot and which by real people, people with similar world views could get the feeling that much more people think like their do, even if this is not the case
- the enhanced opinions stem, after all, from people/organisations that are able to afford the bots, the system favours richer people, while opinions of poorer segments of the population tend to be unheard

Worksheet 2 advanced

What do you think about those posts?

- I think that these posts reflect racist sentiments that are widespread in the US but also in European countries
- the second post uses Donald Trump's phrases and language on Twitter, which is very anti-Mexico
- the third tweet makes use of a conspiracy theory and is very cruel

How do those posts make you feel?

- the posts make me feel very upset because I don't agree with these opinions at all
- the posts make me feel sad because they are so mean
- Since so many people liked the third post, you can easily get the feeling, that many people have such a cruel worldview as the account (important question to ask: How many of those likes might be also produced by Social Bots?)

Do you think that the Social Bot is having a specific agenda that it pushes with the post?

- Yes, I think that the bot is pushing a right-wing agenda

What do you think is the Social Bot trying to achieve?

- I think that the bot is trying to gain a lot of likes, retweets, and last but not least, followers
- I think that the bot is trying to push its right-wing agenda

List of the risks bots pose to a democratic society, particularly on elections:

- social bots can massively influence the political discourse (past examples: promotion of certain candidates in the 2014 election in India, the Brexit decision; US election)
- they are used by terrorist and right-wing groups to amplify propaganda
- they repeat certain messages massively by e.g. retweeting. In this way, social bots polarize political discussions because it seems like these messages reflect the opinion of a large segment of the population
- many users cannot tell whether a message was created by a bot or a real person. Objective facts become less influential in shaping the public opinion because false and misleading narratives are easily dispersed
- (because bots are used by people and organisations that can afford them, the opinions of people who are wealthy is pushed while poorer segments of the populations remain more silent).

Step: Enhancing students' evaluation competency

Do you think, that it would be a legitimate decision to forbid Social Bots in a society with shared democratic values?

Yes, because:

- it is easy to promote conspiracy theories, lies, “alternative facts”, and more generally, a mass distribution of disinformation through social bots
- they polarise the political discussion
- objective facts would move to the center of discussions again

No, because:

- the internet should be a free space, I don't believe in rules for the internet
- some bots provide useful services; not all Social Bots are evil or pushing propaganda
- Argument of free speech