Topic 1: Social Bots

Worksheet: 1 – Introduction

Bot or Not?

How do I figure out if an Account is fake or real?

Explanation: As we know, Social Bots are programs that simulate human users in social networks. Some Social Bots are not programed to cause any harm, but some Social Bots react in an inappropriate and aggressive way. Some Bots are programed to push a right-wing agenda, like discrimination against migrants, or fake news about a certain group of people (for example against Muslims, Jews or people with a different skin color). If bots are programed for fighting for an opinion, the goal behind them is often to suggest to users that a certain opinion prevails in the Internet.

Discussions in the Internet can be manipulated. But also, online conversations can have an impact on moods of people and even – in some cases- on electoral decisions. This makes it even more important to be able to expose Social Bots.

These tips will help you to recognize if an Account is real or a Social Bot.

Check:

1) How trustworthy is the account?

If you stumble over radical positions or seditious news in the timeline, you should first look at the source:

- Do you know the person who allegedly tweets there?
- Do I know followers of the account?

If this is not the case, be careful. Check also, what the account had shared before. When the account is usually posting on the same issue, you should look deeper into it.

2) What does the profile description reveal?

Characteristic for Social Bot accounts is to have a nonsense description or if there is even no description. For example, you can look at the links that the profile provides, are those trustworthy?

3) How often does the account tweet?

Even if you are a person that is very active on Social Media, there is a limit in posts that an actual person can set up. Oxford University has found out, that accounts that post more than 50 posts a day are usually those of Social Bots.

Look at the example below. "DieWelle2017" was created in July 2016, but already reached the amount of 30,000 posts.

Twitter account @ diewelle2017

4. How fast does the account react?

Social Bots are much faster than human users. If a post is shared or commented seconds after, it was released that likability that this was done by a Social Bot is very high.

5. How does the account react to contextual questions?

Everything that requires a deep understanding or any contextual knowledge is difficult for a Social Bot. If in doubt, it can help to confront the bot with a question that a person can simply answer, but whose response to a bot is not part of the standard program.

6. How does the account write?

In some cases, you can detect Social Bots by their writing style. For example they usually use the same terms, same style of writing and very easy grammar. Also, they often use phrases that they used before. Look at the example of the account @wowsoportland below. All comments over the pictures have a similar style.

Source: @wowsoportland

7. Do research!

There are some tools that you can always use, if you are not sure if an account is real or now. For example for twitter there is the website Botometer: https://botometer.iuni.iu.edu/#!/ that checks for you accounts that might be Social Bots. Also, you can simply google the name of the Social Bot. Sometimes a short internet reseach is very revealing and the fastest way to detect a social bot. For the example that we used above: @wowsoportland. A short google-research reveals the following:

It is not that hard to be a Social Bot Detective, is it?

Adapted from: Bot or no bot: How to recognize opinion robots. (2018, October). Retrieved from: https://www.tellerreport.com/tech/--bot-or-no-bot%E2%80%94how-to-recognize-opinion-robots-.r1c6Eaoy4.html