The Role of Twitter Bots in Political Discussion on 2019 European Elections

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Abstract : The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of the European election campaigns (May 23-26, 2019) on Twitter achieving with artificial intelligence tools such as troll factories and automated inauthentic accounts. Our research focuses on the last European Parliamentary elections that took place between 23 and 26 May 2019 specifically in Italy, Greece, Germany and France. It is difficult to estimate how many Twitter users are actually bots (Echeverría, 2017). Detection for fake accounts is becoming even more complicated as AI bots are made more advanced. A political bot can be programmed to post comments on a Twitter account for a political candidate, target journalists with manipulated content or engage with politicians and artificially increase their impact and popularity. We analyze variables related to 1) the scope of activity of automated bots accounts and 2) degree of coherence and 3) degree of interaction taking into account different factors, such as the type of content of Twitter messages and their intentions, as well as the spreading to the general public. For this purpose, we collected large volumes of Twitter accounts of party leaders and MEP candidates between 10th of May and 26th of July based on content analysis of tweets based on hashtags while using an innovative network analysis tool known as MediaWatch.io (https://mediawatch.io/). According to our findings, one of the highest percentage (64.6%) of automated "bot" accounts during 2019 European election campaigns was in Greece. In general terms, political bots aim to proliferation of misinformation on social media. Targeting voters is a way that it can be achieved contribute to social media manipulation. We found that political parties and individual politicians create and promote purposeful content on Twitter using algorithmic tools. Based on this analysis, online political advertising play an important role to the process of spreading misinformation during elections campaigns. Overall, inauthentic accounts and social media algorithms are being used to manipulate political behavior and public opinion.

Keywords : artificial intelligence tools, human-bot interactions, political manipulation, social networking, troll factories

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