

Disinformation's spread: bots, trolls and all of us | Nature

By Kate Starbird

July 29, 2019

Misconceptions about disinformation leave us vulnerable to manipulation online, says Kate Starbird.

Earlier this month, the White House hosted a 'Social Media Summit' that served to reframe and distract from serious, hostile manipulation of online discourse. Much ink has already been spilt on the algorithms, business models and human impulses that make the social-media ecosystem vulnerable to disinformation, the purposeful spreading of misleading content. Although the major tech companies are often insufficiently open about, or motivated to fix, the problem, they have begun to take action against what Facebook calls "coordinated inauthentic behavior".

But disinformation is not as cut-and-dried as most people assume: those behind disinformation campaigns purposely entangle orchestrated action with organic activity. Audiences become willing but unwitting collaborators, helping to achieve campaigners' goals. This complicates efforts to defend online spaces.

[...]

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