

Evidence of humans, not 'bots,' key to uncovering disinformation campaigns | Illinois News Bureau

By Craig Chamberlain

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CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Political disinformation campaigns on social media threaten to sway political outcomes, from U.S. elections to Hong Kong protests, yet are often hard to detect.

A new study, however, has pulled back the curtain on one type of campaign called “astroturfing,” which fakes the appearance of organic grassroots participation while being secretly orchestrated and funded.

The study suggests that the key to uncovering such accounts lies not in finding automated “bots” but in specific traces of human coordination and human behavior, says [JungHwan Yang](#), a University of Illinois [communication](#) professor who is part of a global team of researchers on the project.

The starting point for their research was a court case in South Korea that identified more than 1,000 Twitter accounts used in an astroturf campaign to boost one candidate in the country’s 2012 presidential election. Running the campaign was South Korea’s National Information Service, comparable to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

[...]

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