

It's Not Misinformation. It's Amplified Propaganda. | The Atlantic

By Renée DiResta

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One Sunday morning in July of last year, a message from an anonymous account appeared on “Bernie or Vest,” a Discord chat server for fans of Senator Bernie Sanders. It contained an image of Shahid Buttar, the San Francisco activist challenging House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in the 2020 congressional runoff, and offered explicit instructions for how to elevate the hashtag #PelosiMustGo to the nationwide Trending list on Twitter. “Shahid Says...,” read the large print, “Draft some tweets with #PelosiMustGo—don’t forget to capitalize #EachWord. Don’t use more than two hashtags—otherwise you’ll be marked as spam.” The call to action urged people to start posting at noon Pacific time, attach their favorite graphics, and like and retweet other Buttar supporters’ contributions.

I was living in San Francisco then and had been following Buttar’s efforts to get attention, as traditional outlets largely ignored the democratic socialist’s underdog campaign. The day before, incensed at Pelosi’s refusal to debate him, he had sparred with an unoccupied chair outdoors on a public street. But on Twitter that Sunday morning, the challenger had a more promising strategy: If the ploy worked, his slogan would show up on millions of screens across the entire country without costing him a dime.

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