

Bots and Fake News

What is the issue?

Bots have a major share in spreading the fake news and other misinformation in the social media platforms such as Twitter.

What is a Bot?

- A Bot is an automated application used to perform simple and repetitive tasks.
- These tasks would be time consuming, mundane or impossible for a human to perform.
- They can be used for productive tasks but they are frequently used for malicious activities.
- Bots are used in activities such as infecting unprotected computers and adding them to a malicious bot network (botnet).
- By remotely controlling a number of computers, the individual running the botnet can carry out many different types of attacks.

How does a Bot influence the spread of misinformation?

- A new study explores the manner in which the Bots spread misinformation in twitter.
- Bots amplify low-credibility content in the early spreading moments.
- They heavily tweet links to such articles, before these go “viral”.
- Bots also target high-profile handles through replies and mentions.
- Then humans take over — vulnerable to this manipulation, they re-share content posted by bots.

Is this an accidental trend, or are bots programmed to behave that way?

- The bots are programmed to promote the spread of misinformation.
- The bots that spread misinformation may be controlled by the same sources who post the misinformation articles.

What is the modus operandi used by these Bots?

- Once an article is published on Twitter, likely bots are more prevalent in the first few seconds than at later times.

- The more a story was tweeted, the more the tweets were found to be concentrated in the hands of few accounts, who act as “super-spreaders”.
- These “super-spreaders” were more likely to be bots compared to other accounts that shared low-credibility content.
- After that, humans do most of the retweeting.
- Also, bots often mention influential users in tweets that link to low-credibility content.
- For instance a single account mentioned @realDonaldTrump in 19 tweets, each linking to the same “false claim”.
- A possible explanation for this strategy is that bots (or their operators) want to create the appearance that the low-credibility content is widely shared.
- The hope behind these shares is that these influential users will then reshare the content to their followers, thus boosting its credibility.
- Bots play a critical role in exposing the misinformation to humans and inducing them to reshare it.
- Therefore, they work as amplifiers.

Source: Indian Express

