SOCIAL MEDIA BOTS OVERVIEW

Social Media Bots can propagate hate

OCIA defines Social Media Bots as programs that vary in size depending on their function, capability, and design; and can be used on social media platforms to do various useful and malicious tasks while simulating human behavior. These programs use artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and other programs or databases to imitate legitimate users posting content.

Automated Social Media Bots allow the user to establish a set of parameters using programming language within an application or program (e.g., retweet a specific hashtag every time it is posted, but not when the bot itself retweets it), which the Social Media Bot then executes without human interaction.

Semi-automated Social Media Bots allow a user to program a set of parameters, but may have or require additional user interaction or a greater degree of management. These types of Social Media Bots are typically fake accounts with fake personalities and are run at least partially by humans or click farms, rather than through automated programming language.

Common Attack Methods of Social Media Bots

Click Farming or Like Farming inflate fame or popularity on a website through liking or reposting of content via Click Farms, which provide fake user accounts (typically semi-automated Social Media Bots) and management of the Social Media Bots (e.g., bot herder) for purchase.

HashTag Highjacking use hashtags to focus an attack (e.g., spam, malicious links) on a specific audience using the same hashtag.

Repost Storm use a parent Social Media Bot account, or martyr Social Media Bot, to initiate an attack by reposting something, which an associated group of Social Media Bots (aka botnet) instantly repeats.

Social Media Bot Uses

Commercial Activity Social Media Bots facilitate company-to-customer relationships, including selling of products or services.

Counterterrorism and Terrorism Social Media Bots allow for faster searching and detection of online activity by using foreign language search terms.

Entertainment Social Media Bots are used on social media specifically to find, add or create, the illusion of online fame of popularity.

Harassment Social Media Bots can be used to overwhelm the user’s account to the point of deactivation.

Social and Civic Engagement Social Media Bots post to encourage and heighten civic engagement and participation.

Social Media Bots Signature Behaviors

Congregation of Bots Social Media Bots often congregate together, and act with randomness, making them easier to identify.

SpecIFIC Content Social Media Bots tend to use emoticons, exclamation points, or other content in more regular patterns as compared to human users on social media.

Activity Levels Social Media Bots often have higher levels of activity (typically automated Social Media Bots) as compared to human social media behavior.

Conclusion

Social Media Bots are becoming more prevalent and better at mimicking human behavior on social media platforms. As of 2017, technology companies are seeking investments and further incorporation of Social Media Bots into social media services and platforms, expanding “future digital communication” to provide a myriad of services as automated assistants. As Social Media Bots gain a greater foothold in social media and daily life, the potential uses, for good and malicious purposes, are ever expanding.

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