*Which type of networks are functioning to power the findings in the Aral reading? What possible ways can you imagine to alter the dynamics presented in that paper?*

The authors of this article sought to better understand how news, both true and false, spread across Twitter. Through their work, the authors clearly saw that false news can diffuse faster across all types of information (political, scientific, economic, etc.). Following this discovery, the authors worked to better understand why this phenomenon was seen. The authors’ conclusion was that false news tended to be more novel than true news and this attribute has a greater propensity to be shared. The perhaps most significant finding, however, was that the authors were able to conclude that bots were not the major driver for why false news spreads. The authors found that humans and bots can spread this information at the same rate, and, because of this, the authors conclude that false news spreads more due to humans’ greater likelihood of sharing. In terms of the type of network that is functioning in this reading, based on work in SIADS 652, this article is clearly detailing diffusion in networks. At the most basic level, this could be considered an SI model where seed tweets (the original tweet) come into a Twitter user’s feed and is either retweeted or ignored throughout time based on some constant probability. More advanced and perhaps more specifically, the authors look to be detailing an Independent Cascade Model. For every tweet, users have a different probability for retweeting or not when they see the tweet from one of their “edges”.

This was a very interesting article, and I agreed with a lot of the points and arguments that the authors presented. However, I do believe that there were some missing pieces and analysis that the authors left out that could alter the dynamics of the paper and how to measure this type of information. The authors noted that they saw greater diffusion of false news relative to true news, but unfortunately did not delve further into some of the reasons why this may be okay in the social media landscape. Many of these retweets may be attempting to offer a correction (if it’s a quote retweet) and other propagation may be due to the information or material clearly being false/satirical that those sharing are already in on the “joke”. I believe it’d be important to further understand the “why” behind certain news that was shared. The authors also made a note that users more likely to spread false news had a small following, weren’t verified, etc., and I think it was important to dive into this finding a bit more. These types of users fall into an echo chamber in my opinion where they search out beliefs in line with their own and share with those with an aligned way of thinking. It’d be valuable to dig into whether false news stayed within these bubbles and echo chambers or often did make its way into more mainstream portions of Twitter.

While the first few weeks have focused on data privacy within these social media sites, this week’s readings focused on the data itself and the shields users must put up to ensure that they’re able to successfully parse true and false news. Having this understanding is critical and can not be more relevant today based on current events. The spread of true and false news, as the authors also note, has far reaching consequences on society economically, politically, etc. As seen this past week, with the midterm elections in the US, users must be very careful vetting the source of the news as it may pertain to voting results and controversies. This article also applies to platform issues themselves, particularly the newly rolled out Twitter Blue, where users can pay to be verified. We have already seen cases where users will parody celebrities and companies, and users must be careful to flag this before harmfully spreading any false information.