

# **How Twitter is being gamed to feed misinformation**

*By Farhad Manjoo*

*If you can make something trend, you can almost make it come true*

Twitter is where political messaging and disinformation get digested, packaged and picked up for distribution to cable, Facebook and the rest of the world. While Facebook was accused of disseminating fake news, rightfully, another social network has been let off the leash. As the author points out, Twitter is a smaller platform, but this a platform heavily used by people in the media industry and naturally, what trends on Twitter naturally affects what we see on news media elsewhere.

Twitter is where journalists pick up stories, meet sources, promote their work and criticise competitors' work. In a way, Twitter has become a place where many journalists unconsciously build and gut-check a worldview - where they develop a sense of what's important and merits coverage, and what doesn't. Basically, if you can get something big on Twitter, you can be assured that it will get coverage everywhere else. As Alice Marwick points out, if a story gets big on Twitter, the journalists have an obligation to cover it.

Moreover , Twitter has a lot of fake people - bots and it becomes easy to spurn out thousands of bots and get a baseless story trending in no time. We can all agree on one thing - our media machine is broken and it badly needs fixing. If anything you hear has more than 50% likelihood to be a lie, how do you believe anything at all ? As Jaron Lanier points out, it is much easier to break trust than to build trust and negative stimuli is cheap and works more effectively than positive stimuli. This is essentially what political parties, government regimes etc do - rather than building trust in themselves, they are more focused on breaking the trust people have in the opponent.

What is the solution ? Accountability and verifiable digital identity on these platforms will go a long way in stopping bots from taking over our media platforms. The next step is to audit the algorithms that control our news feeds. Both are more difficult than said but are crucial if we want to save this idea called democracy and free will that we have come to love.