

News and the Internet Research Agency

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The Markup
NYU Journalism
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Full Report: bit.ly/smapp_ira_links

What is this talk about?

1. How we studied hyperlinked news by the IRA? (specific)
2. What are the tools and pipelines the IRA employ? (general)

Goals for the Audience:

Fake News is not the only *bad* kind of information.

Context is important!

The IRA looks more like a marketing agency than a group of hackers.

They used free marketing tools to automate activity on Twitter.

Raw Tweet



Extract URLs

bit.ly/something_remarkable



Expand shortened URLs

www.npr.org/some_article



Extract Domain

www.npr.org

Custom software released as an open source
Python package [urlExpander](#) .

Raw Tweet



Extract URLs

bit.ly/something_remarkable



Expand shortened URLs

www.npr.org/some_article



Extract Domain

www.npr.org

- Processed all non-cyrillic IRA tweets. Resulting in 200K rows from 550 users.
- Comparison groups of **political** (N=400K) users processed the same way.

Custom software released as an open source Python package [urlExpander](#) .

News Sharing

Fake (Junk) News

False or hyperpartisan news domains from opensources.co. N=700

Mainstream News

National news outlets that strive for journalistic best practices. Collected by [Greg Eady](#). N=115

Local News

City or state level news outlets that strive for journalistic best practices.
Via [Local News Dataset 2018](#). N=6.2k

News Sharing

	IRA	Political	Ratio
Fake (Junk) News	6%	4%	1.5x
Mainstream News			
Local News			

%age of all hyperlinks

News Sharing

	IRA	Political	Ratio
Fake (Junk) News	6%	4%	1.5x
Mainstream News	11%	13%	.85x

Local News

%age of all hyperlinks

News Sharing

	IRA	Political	Ratio
Fake (Junk) News	6%	4%	1.5x
Mainstream News	11%	13%	.85x
Local News	30%	2%	15x

%age of all hyperlinks

AMERICAN GUNSLINGER



American Gunslinger

@USA_Gunslinger

Truth is strong, and sometime or other
will prevail! #2A

📍 Wisconsin, USA

📅 Joined November 2015

TWEETS
2,782

FOLLOWING
20.3K

FOLLOWERS
26.4K

LIKES
1,918

 Follow

Tweets

Tweets & replies

Media



American Gunslinger @USA_Gunslinger · Feb 21

Illegals held in vicious rape in Massachusetts
Coincidence, MSM? <https://t.co/irl0BPriFw> #W4G
<https://t.co/FPD2JIHUYO>

A Local Paper!

This story is true.

The language is polarizing.

How does the identity of the sharer frame the article?

Supports a certain narrative.

<https://www.bostonherald.com/2016/03/19/illegals-held-in-vicious-framingham-rape/>

NEWS > LOCAL NEWS

Illegals held in vicious Framingham rape



2 of 2

From left, Marlon Josue Jarquin-Felipe, Adan Diaz, Ariel Diaz and Elmer Diaz. (Photos by Art Illman/MetroWest Daily News and Wicked Local)

By **JOE DWINELL** | joed@bostonherald.com and **O'RYAN JOHNSON** | Boston Herald
PUBLISHED: March 19, 2016 at 12:00 am | UPDATED: November 18, 2018 at 12:00 am



PEER REVIEWED

Russian Twitter disinformation campaigns reach across the American political spectrum

Evidence from an analysis of Twitter data reveals that Russian social media trolls exploited racial and political identities to infiltrate distinct groups of authentic users, playing on their group identities. The groups affected spanned the ideological spectrum, suggesting the importance of coordinated counter-responses from diverse coalitions of users.

BY DEEN FREELON AND TETYANA LOKOT

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IRA Left

BlackNewsOutlet	Chicago man acquitted of hate crime after slapping, spitting on elderly black judge. __LINK__	suntimes.com
gloed_up	RT @BleepThePolice: #KillerCops BREAKING!!! 13-Year-Old with replica gun shot by a #Baltimore police officer __LINK__	cbslocal.com
Crystal1Johnson	New video shows LAPD officer kick and punch black man lying facedown in the street __LINK__	nydailynews.com

IRA Right

USA_Gunslinger	Latino activist who said Trump is wrong and illegals are not rapists was charged with rape. __LINK__	fox13now.com
PigeonToday	Another one for #BlackLivesMatter - look what happens when you don't fight cops __LINK__	wgme.com
redlanews	Islamist w/ arsenal in car taken into custody in Santa Monica! Another attempt of attack! #StopIslam __LINK__	abc7.com

Client Use of IRA accounts that shared Local Media URLs

	Tweets	Users
twitterfeed ^{rss}	77.96%	8.33%
Twibble.io ^{rss}	7.54%	7.69%
Twitter Web Client	7.51%	90.71%
TweetDeck sm	6.97%	23.08%
Twitter for Android	0.02%	0.32%
Buffer sm	0.00%	0.32%

Engagement Metrics

	N tweets	avg likes	avg retweets	avg replies
IRA ALL	205,308	1.66	2.55	0.19
IRA Local	49,184	0.53	0.82	0.06
IRA Left	637	25.30	47.29	2.04
IRA Right	144	19.28	26.84	3.24

Goals for the Audience:

Fake News is not the only *bad* kind of information.

Context is more important!

The IRA looks more like a marketing agency than a group of hackers.

They used free marketing tools to automate activity on Twitter.

Thanks!

Favorite website from this project:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170516141946/http://lawnews.tv/>

Getting Started

Scraping without Coding Samantha Sunne (Try this!)

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/e/2PACX-1vTBBph8FTWX4A09C22oWMxZuiLm_hkcprlJpFRfusBDIPIyvSEJWERH1YHyjQZI29FcseD9aP1cYlrk/pub?start=false&loop=false&delayms=60000&slide=id.p

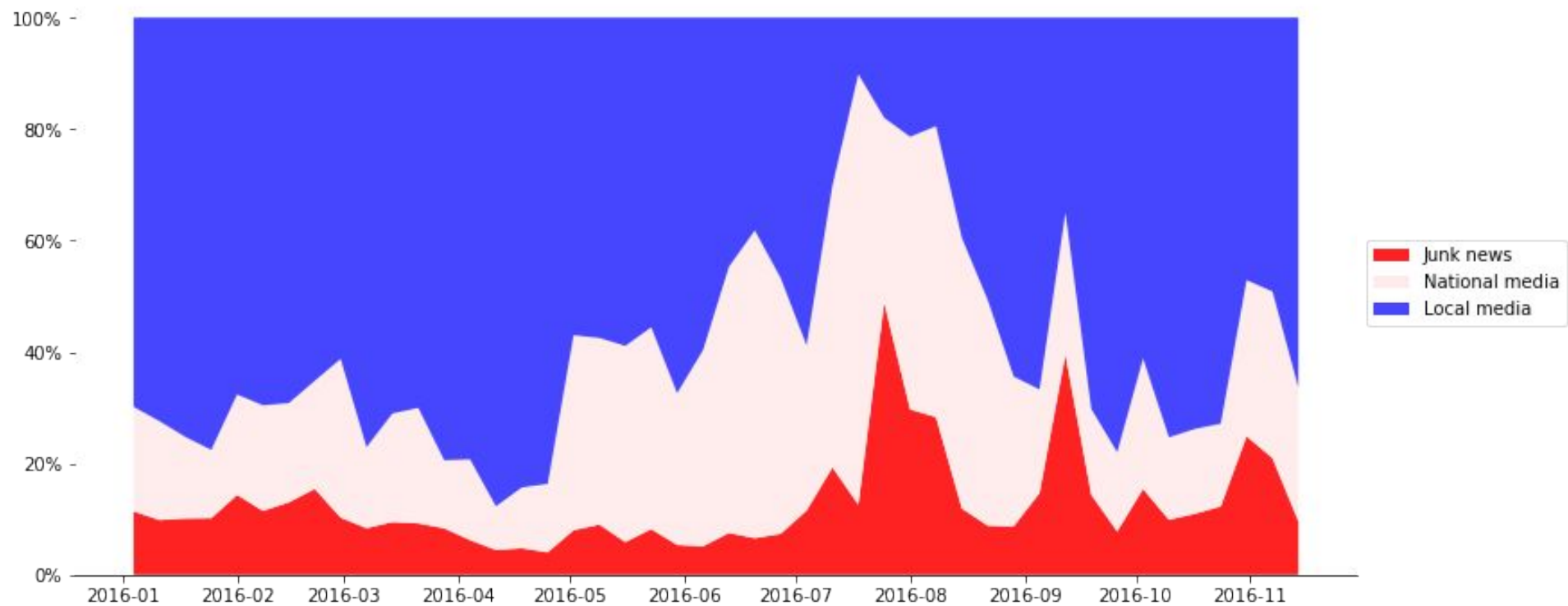
Workbench Data (Try this!)

<https://workbenchdata.com/>

OSINT Resources Guide

https://inteltechniques.com/JE/OSINT_Packet_2019.pdf

Types of informations shared on Twitter by IRA accounts



Number of Links Shared by IRA Twitter Accounts (N=556) per Week

