# Twitter: a tool for information warfare?

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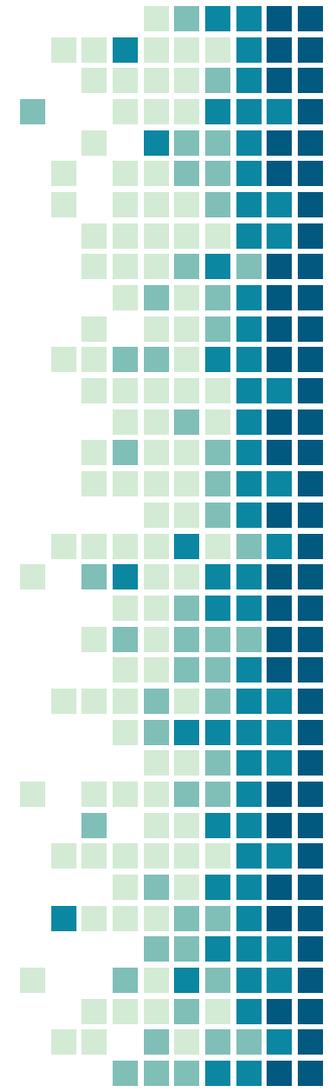
Background – information warfare

- Information warfare is described as a "strategy for using information to pursue a competitive advantage, including offensive and defensive efforts", which includes **propaganda**, **misinformation**, and **disinformation** (Theohary 2018).

- As a form of political warfare, information warfare can be used to achieve strategic objectives and advance foreign policy goals without the use of armed forces.

- Wars are thus no longer about control over territory, but rather about **the control of the population** and the **political decision-making process** (Nissen 2015)
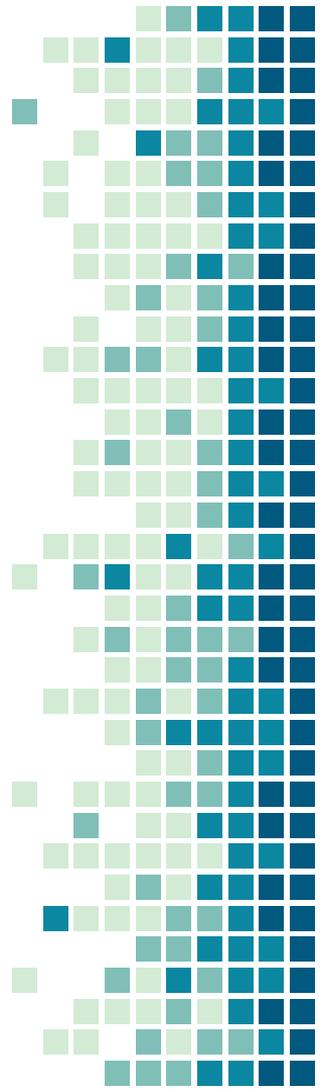
Background – social media

- Volume I of the Mueller report found that the Internet Research Agency (IRA), a Russian entity, had conducted a disinformation campaign on various social media platforms, and earliest efforts were on Facebook, Youtube and Twitter.

- The disinformation campaign had sought to sow discord in the American public, and affect the results of the 2016 US Presidential Campaign.

- Most news and studies have focused mainly on Facebook's role in this interference (see Beam, Hutchens and Hmielowski, 2018; Madrigal, 2017; Folkenflik, 2017).

- Given that Twitter was one of the earliest platforms targeted by the IRA, I believe we need to study its potential to become a tool for information warfare.

Can Twitter be used as a tool for information warfare?

- Twitter recognises that their platform could be misused and manipulated for nefarious purposes.

- The enactment of the <u>platform manipulation and spam policy</u>, <u>election integrity policy</u>, and the <u>suspension of all paid political ads on the platform</u> in the years following the Mueller investigation showed how Twitter attempted to address these issues.

- Twitter also issues challenges to suspicious accounts that display automated behaviour.

- Particularly noteworthy is the platform manipulation and spam policy, where Twitter showed that it understood disinformation campaigns are carried out by the amplification of false and/or misleading information.
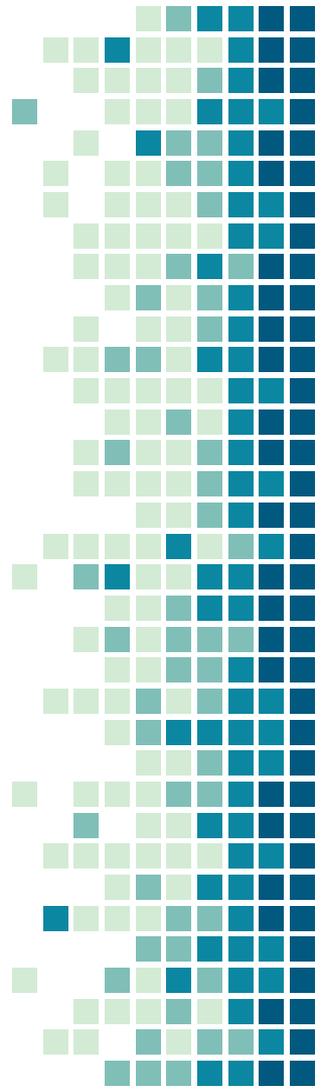
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- However, I argue that these measures are not enough. Given that amplification efforts are carried out by bots, which are only getting more and more sophisticated, these policies are not enough to stop manipulation.

- While Twitter is constantly evolving its strategies to identify and remove bots from the platform, sophisticated bots can bypass their safeguards. Even more worryingly, even simple bots on Twitter can survive up to 5000 tweets (NATO StratCom COE, 2018).

- Twitter also believes that they should not be the arbiter or truth, and that "journalists, experts and engaged citizens" should be the ones who challenge false information instead (Crowell, 2017).
  - However, given the large volume of tweets from automated accounts, it is nearly impossible for them to provide correct information to every single tweet that has false news.
  - Even if they did, these corrections may not be seen by everyone given the structure of the platform, where retweeting (re-sharing the tweet) is far easier than reading the replies to the tweet.