



ADMM Cybersecurity and
Information Centre of Excellence

UPDATE ON THE INFORMATION DOMAIN

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TWITTER'S ALGORITHM FAVOURS RIGHT-WING POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

1. On 21 Oct 2021, Twitter revealed that an internal study on Twitter's algorithmic amplification of political content showed that their algorithm had a bias towards right-wing politicians and news outlets.

TWITTER'S INTERNAL STUDY

2. The study was conducted to better understand how the political content of elected officials when algorithmically ranked^[1] on the timeline, is amplified differently compared to when the timeline is displayed using the reverse chronological format.^[2] It also sought to contribute to discussions on how algorithms played a role in shaping how political content is consumed on the Internet.

3. The first part of Twitter's study examined tweets from elected officials in Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Spain, the UK and the US between 1 Apr and 15 Aug 2020. The second part of the study focused on political content from news outlets such as *Fox News* and the *New York Times*, where millions of tweets were analysed during the same time period.

[1] Algorithm ranking is a way of sorting content in a users' timeline based on relevancy instead of publish time, such as prioritising content a user sees in their feed first by the likelihood that they will actually want to see it.

[2] A reverse chronological format means that the newest content from accounts a user followed shows up first.

FINDINGS FROM STUDY

4. The study found that mainstream parties and outlets on the political right enjoyed higher levels of amplification compared to their counterparts on the political left.

a. In six of the seven countries, apart from Germany, tweets posted by accounts from the political right in the countries studied were amplified more than those on the left.

b. Similarly, right-leaning news outlets saw higher amplification on Twitter compared to left-leaning news outlets.

NEXT STEPS FOR TWITTER

5. Twitter acknowledged that it was concerning if certain tweets received preferential treatment not as a result of the way in which users interacted, but because of the way the inbuilt algorithm works. However, Twitter emphasised that the findings did not suggest the algorithms amplified extreme ideologies more than mainstream political voices.

6. Based on the findings, Twitter said that further analysis was required in order to determine if any specific changes were required to reduce adverse impacts by their Home timeline algorithm. The study noted that the difference in amplification could be due to the different strategies used by political parties to reach their audiences on the Twitter platform.

7. Twitter added that they would be making aggregated datasets available for third party researchers who wish to reproduce their main findings and validate their methodology, upon request. The full raw data would not be available due to privacy concerns.

ASSESSMENT

8. The study was useful to understand how social media algorithms could work in an unintended way. While the aim of the study was to understand the algorithmic amplification of political content, it also provided insights on how misinformation, manipulation, hate speech and abusive content may be amplified.

CONTACT DETAILS

For any queries and/or clarifications, please contact ACICE at ACICE@defence.gov.sg

Prepared by:
ADMM Cybersecurity and Information Centre of Excellence

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