

SPOTTING DISINFORMATION ACTORS

Use this checklist to assess social media accounts for bots, sock puppets and trolls.

Disinformation is false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) to influence public opinion or obscure the truth. Note that disinformation has intent behind it, while misinformation is unintentional.

There are different types of disinformation actors to look out for: bots, sock puppets and trolls. Bots are fully automated social media accounts and controlled by code set up by a human. A sock puppet is an account created by one person to impersonate another to mask the account creator's identity. A troll is a person who intentionally sows discord and provokes negative emotion to get attention.

There are no hard and fast rules for spotting disinformation actors, making it a challenge to do. Use this checklist to determine whether or not a disinformation actor is responsible for the content posted on social media. The items in the checklist are estimates. The number of checks indicates the likeliness that the profile is a disinformation actor:

- If 1-2 is checked, maybe.
- If 3-4 are checked, probably.
- If 5 or more are checked, definitely.

If you think you've identified a disinformation actor, report them to the platform so they can investigate further.

Repeats posts and comments via copy and paste

Created the account within the last one to three years

Has under 100 friends or followers

Uses deep fakes, stolen images, altered imagery and/or doctored graphics

Profile photo aligns with the intent of disinformation, such as a young attractive woman or a white older man

Lacks personal information about family, school, work, friends, pets, valid contact information, etc.

No personal updates shared on the page

Posts use hook statements to convey feigned shock with statements like, "This is unbelievable," or "I can't believe this."

Poses as a person with very strong political opinions and posts are in direct opposition to an extreme version of people on the other side of the political divide

Frames real events and issues in a way that intensifies anger and division

Pushes a hoax event that never happened

Attempts to connect to the community by resharing prominent voices to gain credibility and connect to their target audience

Poses as an affinity group with no person or organization listed as running the group

Mimics users who are part of a real and politically focused online community