

# Connection Engine to Misinformation Machine

## How the Russian Social Media “Information Warfare” Campaigns changed the Social Media Landscape



Social media is forever changing. Since its inception, social media has changed time and time again. It started out as a means of staying connected with friends and family. It then evolved into a place to share ideas, business goals and products. In the last 5 years, video and livestream capabilities have changed the very way we communicate, connect and share. But over the last couple of years, social media has changed from a connection engine into a misinformation machine.

In 2016, the IRA (Internet Research Agency), through the use of Social Media Bots, infiltrated the American Political Landscape through the use of Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to help spread disinformation and discord among the American people during the 2016 Presidential Campaign Season. During the Mueller Investigation, his team discovered that on Facebook “in total the IRA-controlled accounts made over 80,000 posts before their deactivation in August 2017, and these posts reached at least 29 million U.S. persons and “May have reached an estimated 126 million people.” In addition, the “IRA purchased over 3,500 advertisements and the expenditures totaled approximately \$100,000” (Source: [The Mueller Report: Volume I; Section II – Russian “Active Measures” Social Media Campaign; Part C – The IRA Targets Elections; Number 3 – U.S. Operations through Facebook](#))

And Facebook is not alone. The Mueller Investigation also uncovered that “In January 2018 Twitter publicly identified 3,814 Twitter accounts associated with the IRA. According to Twitter, in the ten weeks before the 2016 U.S. presidential election, these accounts posted approximately 175,993 tweets, ‘approximately 8.4% of which were election related. Twitter also announced that it had notified approximately 1.4 million people who Twitter believed may have been in contact with an IRA-controlled account.” (Source: [The Mueller Report: Volume I;](#)

*Section II – Russian “Active Measures” Social Media Campaign; Part C – The IRA Targets Elections; Number 4 – U.S. Operations through Twitter)*

In the Executive Summary of Volume I of the [Mueller Report](#), he states that the IRA “used social media accounts and interest groups to sow discord in the U.S. political system through what it termed ‘information warfare.’” (Source: Executive Summary to Volume I of the [Mueller Report](#))

The deactivation of the IRA connected social media profiles and pages hasn’t stopped the misinformation machine, though. It has continued at an alarming pace. Not through the use of Russian Bots, but through misinformed, die-hard supporters that continue the spread of disinformation and propaganda. Through the use of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, misinformation has continued to spread and “information warfare” has increased with every passing day. Videos with altered audio are now taken at face value. Dog whistle memes are the norm. Anything that actually has facts or even video to back it up is now deemed “fake news”.

You may be reading this and feeling some type of way. Like there is no hope for the truth.

**That is where you are wrong.**

For almost a decade, I have worked in the field of web & social media design & management, in addition to web & social media search engine optimization. What the IRA and Russian Government did is nothing new. It is nothing special. It is actually quite simple.

All the IRA had to do was set up their social media profiles, create & optimize their content, target their audiences effectively through perfectly placed paid advertisements, and to keep a constant flow of information on their social media profiles to work with the already in place algorithms to increase their organic reach. All of this during a time where the country was already divided and on the verge of breaking. The Perfect Storm.

*“But what can we do?”* You ask.

**Simple. Beat them at their own game.**

The IRA Bots lack one thing. The human element. The IRA had 3,814 Fake Twitter profiles and reached approximately 1.4 million people on Twitter with Tweets heated to misinform and divide. Now imagine that the IRA had a fake news story that they posted once on each of the 3,814 profiles. That one tweet posted once on 3,814 different profiles would reach tens of thousands of Twitter followers and in turn reach even more users with every retweet it gets.

Now imagine a link to a factual news story or a factual document, like the Mueller Report. Now imagine that link being shared by Beyoncé. [Beyoncé](#) alone has 15 Million Followers. One tweet from her, would blow any Russian bots out of the water.

Now I know what you are saying. *“Heather. We aren’t Beyoncé. I only have like 500 followers on Twitter.”*

That is the beauty of the human element. The human collective.

The IRA had 3,814 Twitter profiles, tweeting out misinformation to thousands of followers. Now imagine if 500 of your Twitter followers tweeted the same link. Then the next day 500 more. Than 500 more. And so on. Using the human element to create viral facts. Social media is a place to connect, to share ideas and to help one another. It is time to help one another again.

*“How do you do that?”* You may be wondering.

**Below are a few ways to increase the social media footprint of links, images and videos that are factual to help turn the tide against the spread of disinformation and propaganda.**

**Fact Check** – please fact check! If you read something, go to google and fact check the link and any details within the article, video, image or gif (I know. It’s tedious but necessary.)

**Facebook** – Facebook calls for 1 Facebook post a day on Facebook Pages, but searching through Facebook Pages of Major News Outlets shows they are posting 1-2 times an hour to push videos, links and more to the masses. Posting something to your profile or page 1-2 times an hour is CRAZYtown. That is where the human element comes in. Share the link, meme or video within messenger with multiple friends and Facebook page messenger. Facebook takes more stock in human to human interaction through messenger than a post on your profile. You can even ask them to share it with other friends and ask them to post on their profile to increase engagement and reach even more!

**Twitter** – 30-33 tweets per day is the sweet spot for tweets. Make sure you retweet factual links (don’t forget to fact check) and share factual links from the share button on the link or iPhone share option to quickly push a tweet out while you are scanning the internet.

**Engage!!!** – Engage with factual links, images, videos and gifs. Comment on the post with an emoji or quick comment. Stay neutral in your comments if need be.

**Disarm the Trolls** – the easiest way to stop a troll in his tracks is to engage with facts in a neutral way. My favorite way is to pull a fact based quote from a non media source (.gov or .org) and post the link in response to the trolls response. He will obviously re-engage but repeat the process and he will eventually stop because you refuse to be baited.

**Hashtag Campaign** – the best way to create engagement and reach is through a hashtag campaign. Currently I am doing a 30 Day Challenge on Twitter. [#30DayMuellerReport](#). The Challenge is to [tweet](#) a [Free Audible Book of the Mueller Report](#) to ALL 535 Members of Congress (both the House & the Senate) by July 4th. Creating a hashtag campaign to get others involved and engaged is a great way to use the human element! Get enough people and you could make your hashtag trend! #winning

**Stay Neutral** – I know. It’s hard. I learned how to stay neutral with trolls through the advanced social media course I attended and reading books on how to disarm a narcissist. The best way to stay neutral is to post a video or image with a quote from a historical figure or a neutral

emoji. Do not insert political/religious views. They will leave you and your factual link open to attack. If they do comment and troll, fight back with facts with neutral links to back up your claim.

**Stay Human** – the goal is to be human bots: not become them. Share your personal experience that led you to share the link. Again, do not focus on political/religious views but more family/friend anecdotes, experiences and memories. Share your heart with the world backed up by the facts to drive factual information home.

To beat the onslaught of misinformation that is plaguing our social media platforms we must become human bots. We must become the source of true and factual information. **A Viral Fact Collective. Social Media Warriors.** Humans are what makes up social media networks. Let us take our network back for all humans. #KnowledgeisPower #TheHumanElement