

ECREA Pre-Conference

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Astroturfing, the technique of disseminating disinformation campaigns on social networks

What is Astroturfing?

Concept:

Campaign that focuses on the spontaneity and apparent emergence of dissemination of ideas or information from various apparently unknown accounts, which are then spread to the community, but are in fact organised and coordinated.

The similar behaviour of a group in the face of a disinformation campaign is a clearer sign than the presence of individual bot-like behaviour.

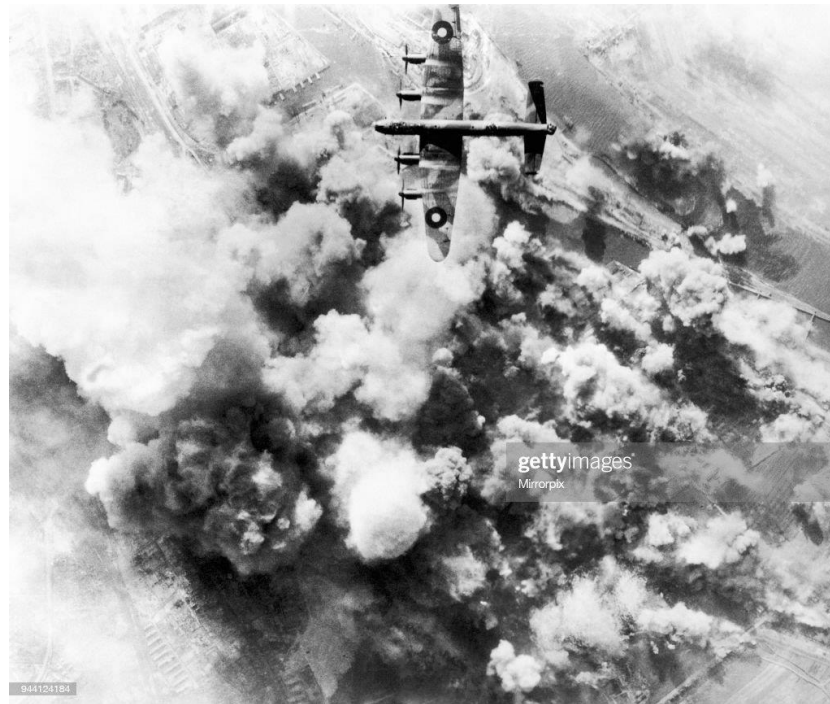


Astroturfing:
How your opinion
is manipulated

Need another example of
why you shouldn't trust
the interweb? Here's one.

History: Thunderclap

- * **The Second World War: “Thunderclap” operation over Germany**
- * **A new marketing tool: Australia (1975)**



History: Astroturfing

* A new name: Astroturfing

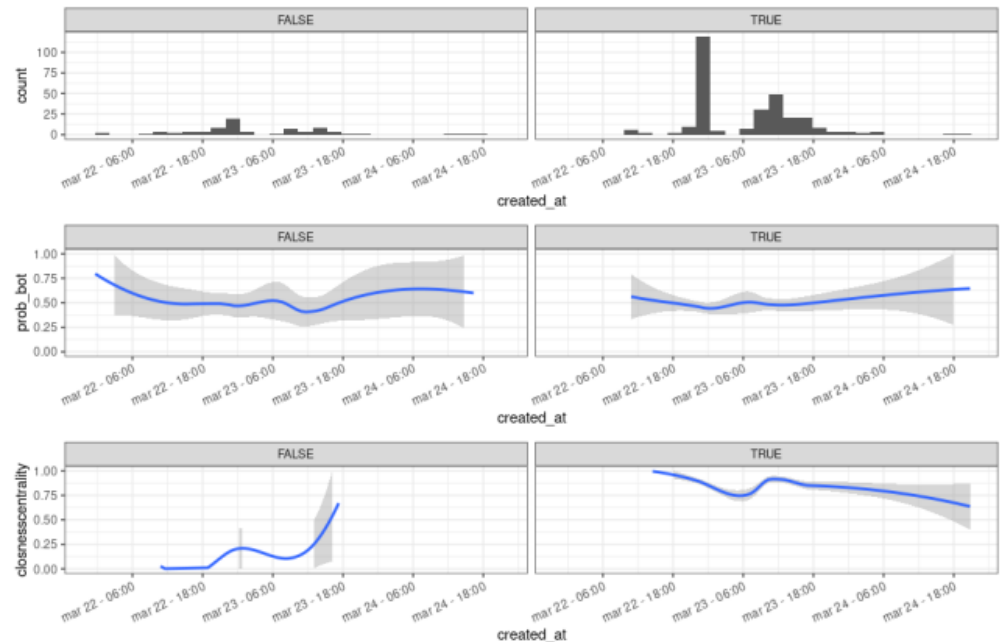
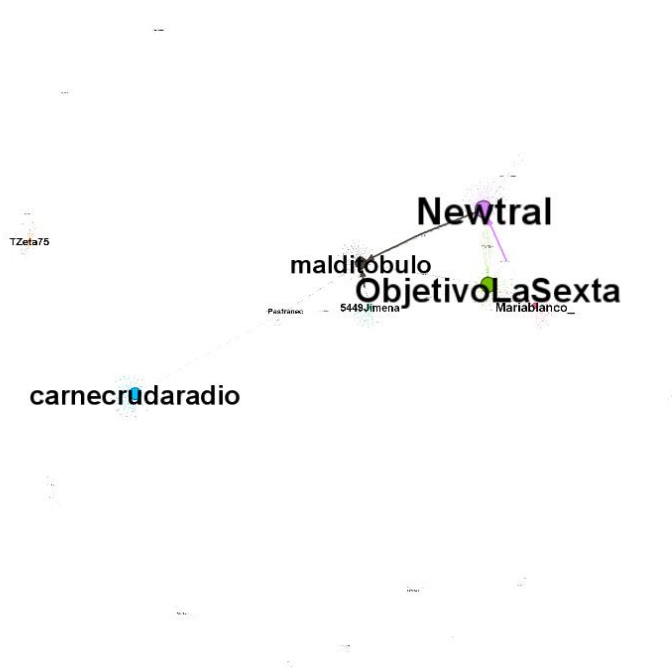


Stages: Astroturfing

Distribution stage: The strategy starts with accounts managed by real people - who appear to be housewives, athletes or people from their town, with no apparent connection between them - hired to broadcast several messages on the same topic in a short space of time.

"Can anyone verify this news? What is Buzz Light Year doing in Denia? Is not the movement of people prohibited?
@astro_duque, where are you? Pedro Duque is admitted to the Hospital de Denia"

"There is not a single reason to think that women are discriminated against in chess and that they need quotas. What a fucking barbarity this is! <https://t.co/LdQRE5eUpV>"

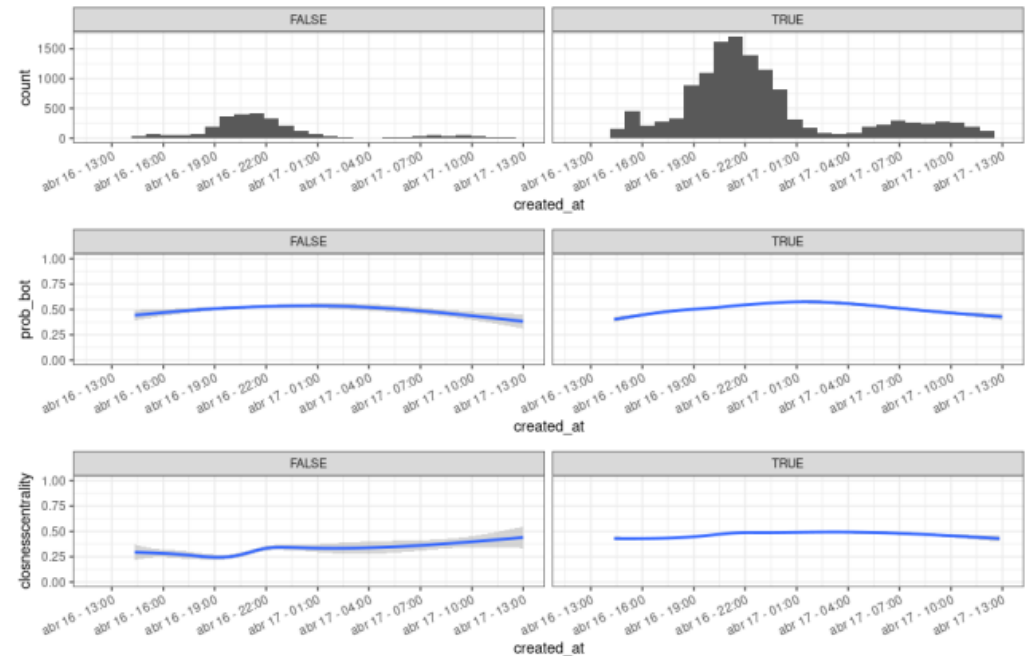
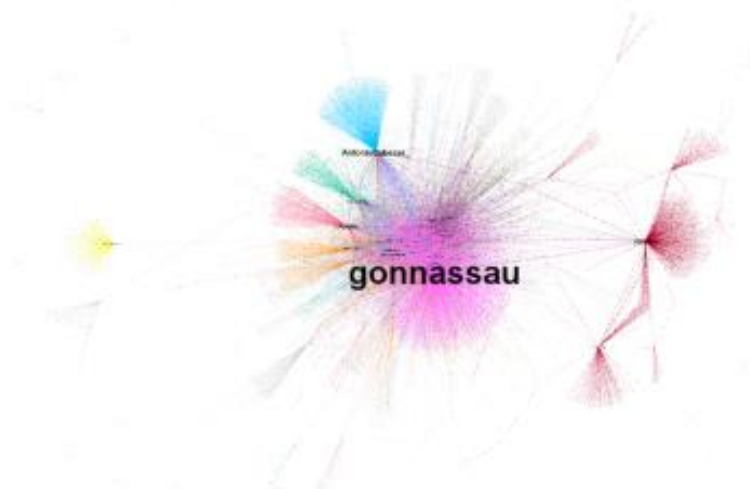


Stages: Astroturfing

Amplification stage: Later, the repercussions of the messages are amplified, calling on the media or journalists, even if they are disinformation.

* @Santi_ABASCAL @javiernegre10 #silenciaelpais <https://t.co/G5hfi2bLnE>

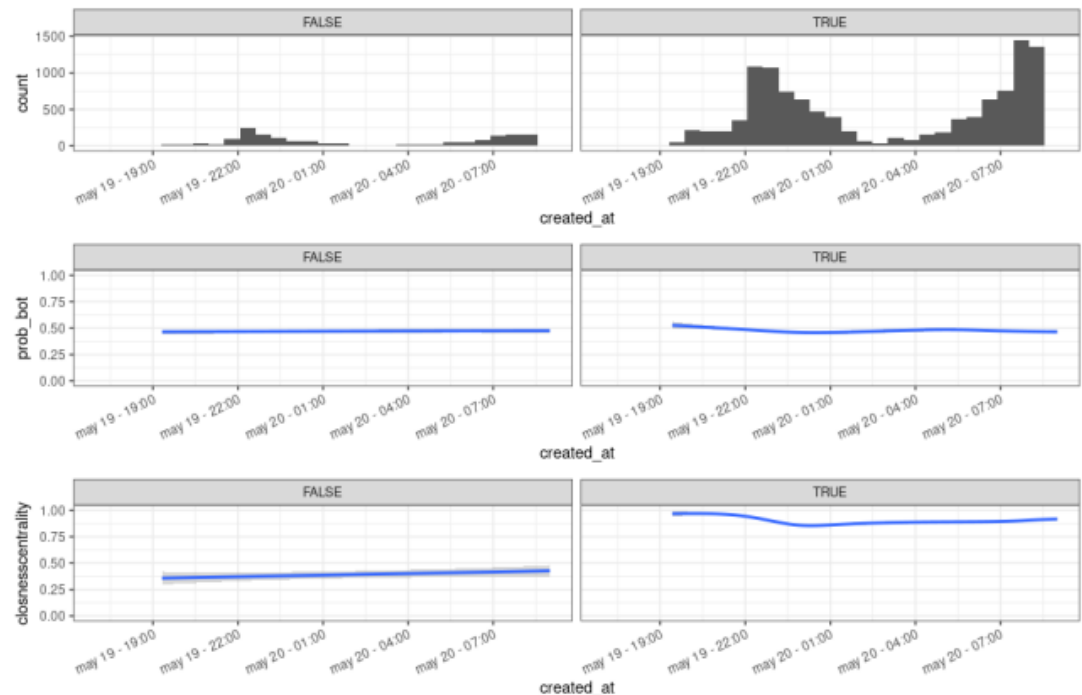
* @ignacioblanco @jgon222 Or Male and Female. Or Male and Female. I suppose that next year if the first champion is male, the prize will be given to a non-chess player even if he doesn't know how to play chess. And the next male to win will have to be black.



Stages: Astroturfing

Flood stage: If the previous step is successful, a multitude of messages of support will be launched with the help of automated bots at certain times of the day. This phase usually coincides with meal times, and there may be several successive actions depending on their reach.

* And as well as being a feminist woman, I am Asturian, and the mother of daughters and sons, and I would not have let any of them - and they have played chess - participate in such an unfair and discriminatory tournament. <https://t.co/4vtmFbe4QP>



Conclusions: Astroturfing

- Astroturfing is **difficult to detect**, particularly the early stages.
- The accounts or users who participate **never have the profile of great influencers**.
- They are accounts called **nano or microinfluencers**, and are characterised by not standing out from the rest of the users (they generally have a few hundred followers). Actors who are looking to **establish contacts and disseminate issues without attracting attention**. And they do so without using hate speech with a very prominent charge or intensity.
- This strategy helps them to **promote basic intense emotions and to avoid being detected by algorithms** that monitor this type of expression.

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