**ENGL 480 Video Transcript**

To many, the Twitter-verse seems like a hodgepodge of mediocre humor and politically fueled outbursts. And it is in a sense, but these Twitter scuffles people laugh at and retweet influence how we view others and can act to further polarize discussion, especially surrounding vaccination.

Social media is full of people who share opinions and beliefs, but what about these people who aren’t really “people”? Enter Twitter bots. These programable, troll-like, little critters exist for a wide range of reasons, but the most famous involves politics. Bots can perform all the actions of a real person on Twitter, but their functionality is set to have a distinct purpose.

This isn’t to say that all bots are made for malicious purposes. There are plenty of great Twitter bots that simply Tweet “good morning” at the start of a new day, or others that tweet pictures of a plant’s growth. Essentially anyone can create a Twitter bot. I went through the process of applying to make one and it took all of ten minutes to fill out the application and gain approval. Not every Twitter bot is out to destroy the world or encourage hatred. Some just want to make everyone’s day a little better.

These “bad” bots are the ones you see tweeting opinionated things that seek to engage people and stir up outrage. These are the types of bots that cause real life problems and are a solid reason why the debate over vaccinations has continued despite hard evidence debunking the original claims about vaccines causing autism.

And despite Andrew Wakefield being fully discredited, along with his findings and data later found to be falsified, the British media and some members of the people still latched onto this link between vaccines and autism, allowing this “debate” to continue.

The media needs a headline that people will engage with - now called “Clickbait”. Clickbait is generally an outrageous statement that intrigues people enough to engage with content. Popular YouTube creators frequently use it to increase views.

People arguing online can get you mad like no other, especially when other users get in on the scuffle. By subjecting users to “echo chambers,” or spaces where a person’s own opinions are represented in the content they see, Twitter bots can solidify certain beliefs. Conversely, these bots can also inject themselves into an opposing chamber, rousing frustration by the opposition that further divides groups. The more stubborn the person, the more effective the bot. As humans, we love to have a sense of belonging, and bots give us that. However, they also do the opposite, which makes them dangerous.

Bots are not necessarily smart, but they are manipulative. And they aren’t even that hard to catch, but many people aren’t spending their days actively searching for bots. And, at a glance, many of these bots act like real people. However, in recent years, there have been a ton of counterprograms to identify bots, and more recently to identify them in every language. Sites like Botometer make these Twitter bots easily detectable by monitoring an account’s frequency, language, and time of activity. You can program a bot to act “human” by having it sleep between certain hours of the day or limiting its frequency of tweets on certain days, but that does not make it real or undetectable. Like I said, they may not be smart on their own, but they are incredibly divisive. Their use of learned language, or programmable dialogue and action surrounding a topic, allows them to continue dividing the online climate. Twitter culture allows for choppy sentences and non-existent grammar, allowing many bots to effortlessly pass as a real person without much coordination at all.

This is obviously a very biased story, but there are quite literally children dying across the world from diseases like Measles, Mumps, and Rubella who don’t have access to the medications we have in the US. And the fact that people refuse to immunize their kids on the grounds of some debunked finding and other reports without fully reading them amazes me. I fully understand that there are kids who are already immunocompromised in some way that can’t receive vaccines. So, if you could prevent your child from having a disease like Measles, that has essentially been eradicated for a decade now, and other children who can’t get these vaccinations, why would you make the decision to shield your child from vaccinations. All you are doing is putting the population at risk for deadly consequences of Measles and other diseases, as well as your own child.

A quick search of “antivax” on Twitter shows us that, yes, something is being done. Whether it is actually effective is yet to be determined, but it provides some peace of mind that platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are taking steps to prevent the spread of dangerous misinformation. Twitter and social media as a whole are dangerous, but in many cases, they are a necessary evil. Twitter and other platforms encapsulate an extremely wide demographic, and the ability to know where a disease is most prevalent, where the latest incident occurred, and how something can be prevented is invaluable.