The Changing Face of Computational Propaganda

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There is a growing body of research on the use of social media and other digital communication tools in attempts to manipulate both human and computational systems. But how is computational propaganda, the use of automation and algorithms in online attempts to alter public opinion, changing? How can we best study these changes? This talk explores the rise of AI chatbot, rather than simple social bots, in transnational political information operations. It also discusses two new forms of computational propaganda: "geo-propaganda" and "encrypted-propaganda". The former is focused on how geolocation data, alongside other forms of data, is being used to create sophisticated disinformation and propaganda campaigns. The latter looks into the differences between manipulative content on encrypted messaging applications versus that on public social media platforms. Dr. Woolley will access ongoing research from the Propaganda Research Team at UT Austin's Center for Media Engagement to address these, and other, pressing questions.

Dr. Samuel Woolley is a writer and researcher focused on how emerging media technologies are leveraged for both freedom and control. His new book, The Reality Game: How the Next Wave of Technology Will Break the Truth (PublicAffairs), explores how tools from artificial intelligence to virtual reality are being used in efforts to manipulate public opinion and discusses how society can respond. Dr. Woolley is an assistant professor in the School of Journalism and the School of Information (by courtesy) at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin. He is the program director of the propaganda research lab at UT's Center for Media Engagement and director of disinformation research for the UT "Good Systems" grand challenge--a university wide project exploring ethical AI design. He is a research affiliate at the Project on Democracy and the Internet at Stanford University. He is the co-editor, with Dr. Philip N. Howard, of the book "Computational Propaganda". His research has been published by a number of academic venues including The Journal of Information, Technology, and Politics, The International Journal of Communication, and The Handbook of Media, Conflict, and Security. His writings on tech, propaganda, and policy have been published by the National Endowment for Democracy, the Brookings Institution, the Stanford Hoover Institution, USAID, and the German Marshall Fund. He is a regular contributor to Wired, the MIT Technology Review, Slate, and a number of other publications. His research has been featured in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the Financial Times. He is the former director of research of the Computational Propaganda Project at the University of Oxford and the Founding Director of the Digital Intelligence Lab at the Institute for the Future in Palo Alto, CA. He is a former fellow at the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the German Marshall Fund of the United States, Google Jigsaw, the Tech Policy Lab, and the Center for Media, Data and Society at Central European University. He has past academic affiliations with CITRIS at UC Berkeley and the Oxford Internet Institute at the University of Oxford. His PhD is from the University of Washington in Seattle. He tweets from @samuelwoolley.

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