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Study Says Social Media 'Bots' Worked to Boost 'Super League'

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A Spanish company that works on digital media projects recently released a study showing that social media 'bots' and 'troll farms' worked in support of the European Soccer Super League last April.

A bot is a software program that performs actions **automatically**, or without human intervention. A troll farm is a place that creates **fake** accounts and tries to affect the discussion about an issue.

The combination of the two works faster than human users. The goal is to create fake **trending topics** on social media.

In the 72 hours after the league was announced, the bots and trolls used over 270,000 new accounts to publish two million tweets in favor of the new league.

The Super League involved a number of Europe's top soccer teams. The teams wanted to break away from UEFA and form their own league. UEFA is the organization that runs European soccer. It puts on events like the European championship and the Champions League.

The teams included Real Madrid and Barcelona of Spain, Juventus and A.C. Milan in Italy and Manchester United and Liverpool in Great Britain.

The league fell apart when several teams pulled out. Fans were upset with their teams. Players were unhappy with team owners. Leaders of traditional soccer organizations like FIFA and UEFA criticized the new league and said they might ban some players from future events.

At the height of the news about the Super League, some fake accounts posted as often as 10 times every second. The Spanish company Pandemia Digital, which wrote the report, said most of the “bots” were based in Spain and in Arabic-speaking countries.

Most of the tweets were in favor of the league or **promoted** messages that were against UEFA.

One popular hashtag was in favor of Real Madrid president Florentino Perez. It was “EstamosContigoPresi,” which in English means “we are with you, president.” That message came from 7,000 different accounts. Most of those accounts had no followers.

Pandemia Digital also said one message came out 3,600 times in just three or four hours: “The super league is a good idea and will revolutionize football.”

I’m Dan Friedell.

Dan Friedell adapted this story for Learning English based on a report by Reuters. Ashley Thompson was the editor.

Can you think of other conversations that may have been changed by bots or troll farms? Tell us in the Comments Section and visit our Facebook page.

Words in This Story

league – n. a group of sports teams that play against each other

automatically – adv. a way of describing something that can be done without the help of a person

fake – adj. not true or real

trend – n. something that is currently popular or talked about

topic – n. something that people are thinking about or writing about

promote – v. to make people aware of (something, such as a new product) through advertising
: to make (something) more popular, well-known, etc.
