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Massive Networks of Fake Accounts Found on Twitter

Massive collections of fake accounts are lying dormant on Twitter, suggests research. The largest network ties together more than 350,000 accounts and further work suggests others may be even bigger. UK researchers accidentally uncovered the lurking networks while probing Twitter to see how people use it.

Analysis of the data revealed some strange results that, when probed further, seemed to reveal lots of linked accounts, suggesting one person or group is running the botnet. These accounts did not act like the bots other researchers had found but were clearly not being run by humans.

A Twitter spokesman said the social network had clear policy on automation that was "strictly enforced". Users were barred from writing programs that automatically followed or unfollowed accounts or which "favourited" tweets in bulk, he said. Automated responses "degraded" the experience for other users and was prohibited, he added.