New IDC Government Insights Report Dissects Propaganda as a Service

Analyst Shawn McCarthy offers insight into economics behind global disinformation engines and strategies for mitigation

NEEDHAM, Mass., March 1, 2021 – Online propaganda is a rapidly growing problem, leaving chaos, mistrust, and revolutions rumblings in its wake. Broad propaganda penetration is achieved by following a specific set of steps. A new report from IDC Government Insights, Propaganda as a Service: Addressing the Economics Behind Global Disinformation Engines (Doc#US47453321), helps government agencies understand these steps and the economics behind them.

The most successful generators of false news use large networks of pop-up news sites and bot networks to help echo sentiments and increase pass-along rates. These types of "false information generation" activities can and should be monitored and mitigated by governments. The new report was designed to support government officials when addressing the challenges posed by an increase in the development and dissemination of false news.

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When viewed through a technology lens, propaganda has become increasingly powerful and far-reaching because online tools have made it easy to create, distribute, and promote false claims while gaining followers and boosting pass-along rates. After all, sharing is just a click away. The current concern is over the increased manipulation of public opinion, often via social media, coupled with the near-instant dissemination of false information. In democratic systems, this trend is viewed as an existential threat to democracy.
itself. Mitigation efforts only work when agencies understand the economics of misinformation and distribution processes. Those that lack the marketing savvy to address these challenges are at a disadvantage and risk being undermined when misinformation thrives. However, just as AI-augmented systems have boosted the production and penetration of propaganda, AI will become an important tool for combating the flow of false information.

IDC offers agencies the following key recommended actions:

• AI can be used to generate, share, and amplify propaganda but can also be used as a tool to recognize such activity and make mitigation recommendations, including identifying specific flags that indicate the news is manufactured.
• Significant citizen outreach is needed to help people understand how propaganda manipulates emotions.
• Just as propaganda generators can be hired, it is also possible to hire AI-powered services to review news and rank levels of disinformation. Key patterns and data points can help identify misinformation sources.
• Government agencies should monitor news that mentions their department or subject area.

"Understanding how these services are funded, and how they use a combination of pop-up news sites, traffic-driving bots, and other techniques, is the first step toward helping governments mitigate the threat," said Shawn P. McCarthy, research director, IDC Government Insights. "Disinformation, ultimately, can
only be stopped by targeting the people behind the tools. And that means no longer allowing the perpetrators to operate in anonymity, with no fear of discovery or legal accountability."

For additional information about this report or to speak with Shawn McCarthy, please contact Sarah Murray at 781-378-2674 or sarah@attunecommunications.com.

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