

**United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Veterans Affairs**

**November 13, 2019**

**Testimony of Kevin Kane  
Twitter, Inc.**

Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Roe, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

The purpose of Twitter is to serve the public conversation. We serve our global audience by focusing on the needs of the people who use our service, and we put them first in every step we take. People from around the world come to Twitter to engage in a free exchange of ideas. We must be a trusted and healthy place that supports open democratic debate.

Twitter facilitates and amplifies the voices of veterans, both online and in our workforce. Our efforts to connect all communities online — including the veterans' community — enables advocacy of their issues and raises awareness of their needs. Within the company, Twitter demonstrates a strong commitment to honoring veterans by attracting, hiring, and retaining veterans and military families.

Over the past three years, Twitter has launched initiatives through partnerships with nonprofits to socialize career opportunities as well as to improve resume and interview skills for veterans and their families. It is not only a priority to get veterans in the door, but also to hire them at levels recognizing their experience gained while serving in uniform. Our commitment is not solely limited to hiring. Our business resource group for veterans and military families, @TwitterStripes, works each day to share the veteran community's story both inside our offices and out. This group delivers programming that helps our employees understand the pride and challenge of service.

The commitment to Twitter's efforts to support veteran causes and our employees with service backgrounds comes from the top, with our executives acting as model allies. As a result, our employees support the veteran community both in the workplace and on the platform. Some examples include: large turnouts to raise awareness and funds for the veteran suicide epidemic in a 22 push-up challenge; sponsoring teams and running the Marine Corps Marathon; hosting senior military leaders as speakers at employee events; and donating — with corporate matching— to veteran nonprofit organizations.

We also have close relationships with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and advise the agency on best practices to leverage the power of Twitter to better serve veterans who are at risk for committing suicide. Twitter representatives presented at a conference on this topic hosted by the VA and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in July 2019. In September, we supported the VA's suicide prevention campaign by creating a custom emoji for the #BeThere hashtag to elevate this important initiative on Twitter.

We appreciate the ongoing dialogue we have with this Committee, and we share your concern about malicious efforts to manipulate the conversation on our service. While our work in improving the health of the conversation is never done, I look forward to discussing our progress to date with the members of this Committee, which will focus on: (1) lessons learned from global elections; (2) our voluntary releases of state-backed information operations; and (3) our efforts to safeguard the conversation, including updates to our rules governing election information, political advertising, and financial scams.

## **I. LESSONS LEARNED FROM GLOBAL ELECTIONS**

The public conversation occurring on Twitter is never more important than during elections, the cornerstone of democracies across the globe. Our service shows the world what is happening, democratizes access to information and — at its best — provides people insights into a diversity of perspectives on critical issues in real time. We work with commitment and passion to do right by the people who use Twitter and the broader public. Any attempts to undermine the integrity of our service are antithetical to our fundamental principles and erode freedom of expression, a core value upon which our company is based. This issue affects all of us and is one that we care deeply about as individuals, both inside and outside the company.

Twitter engages in intensive efforts to identify and combat state-sponsored and non-state sponsored hostile attempts to abuse our platform for manipulative and divisive purposes. We possess a deeper understanding of both the scope and tactics used by malicious actors to manipulate our service and sow division across Twitter more broadly. Our efforts enable Twitter to fight this threat while maintaining the integrity of peoples' experience and supporting the health of conversation on our service.

Our work on this issue is not done, nor will it ever be. It is clear that information operations and coordinated inauthentic behavior will not cease. These types of tactics have been around for far longer than Twitter has existed — they will adapt and change as the geopolitical terrain evolves worldwide and as new technologies emerge. As such, the threat we face requires extensive partnership and collaboration with government entities, civil society experts and industry peers. We each possess information the other does not have, and our combined efforts are more powerful together in combating these threats.

**A. *Retrospective Review of 2016 U.S. Elections***

In the fall 2017, we conducted a comprehensive retrospective review of potential service manipulation activity related to the 2016 U.S. election. This analysis was divided into two parts: (1) a review of organic activity that included investigations into both the Russian Internet Research Agency specifically and broader malicious automation originating in Russia; and (2) a comprehensive review of promoted election-related Tweets linked to Russia. First, to better understand the nature of the threat of malicious automation and identify ways to address future attempts at manipulation, we examined activity on the service during the 2016 election period. We focused on identifying accounts that were automated, potentially linked to Russia, trying to get unearned attention, and Tweeting election-related content, comparing activity by those accounts to overall activity on the service during the election as a baseline.

As we reported in January 2018, we identified 50,258 automated accounts that were Russian-linked and Tweeting election-related content, representing less than two one-hundredths of a percent (0.016%) of the total accounts on Twitter at the time. Of all election-related Tweets on Twitter during that period, these malicious accounts constituted approximately one percent (1.00%), totaling 2.12 million Tweets. Additionally, in the aggregate, automated, Russian-linked, election-related Tweets from these malicious accounts generated significantly fewer impressions (i.e., views by others on Twitter) relative to their volume on the service. Twitter is committed to ensuring that promoted accounts and paid advertisements are free from bad faith actors, including foreign state actors seeking to manipulate our service.

We also conducted a comprehensive analysis of accounts that promoted election-related Tweets on the service throughout 2016 in the form of paid ads. We reviewed nearly 6,500 accounts and our findings showed that approximately one-tenth of one-percent (0.01%)—only nine (9) accounts—were Tweeting election-related content and linked to Russia. The two most active accounts out of those nine were affiliated with Russia Today (“RT”), which Twitter subsequently barred from advertising on Twitter. And Twitter is donating the \$1.9 million that RT spent globally on advertising to academic research into initiatives related to elections and civic engagement. The recipients of those funds include: the Kofi Annan Foundation’s Global Commission on Elections, Democracy, and Security; the Atlantic Council; First Draft; the EU DisinfoLab; and the Reporters Committee for Press Freedom.

## **B. *Ongoing Efforts to Safeguard Elections***

The process of investigating suspected foreign influence and information campaigns is an ongoing one. Although the volume of malicious election-related activity that we could link to Russia in 2016 was relatively small, we strongly believe that any such activity on Twitter is unacceptable. We remain vigilant about identifying and eliminating abuse on the service perpetrated by hostile foreign actors, and we will continue to invest in resources and leverage our technological capabilities to do so.

Twitter continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to transparency regarding our election integrity efforts. We published a report of our findings from the 2018 U.S. midterm elections. The 2018 U.S. midterm elections were the most Tweeted-about midterm election in history with more than 99 million Tweets sent from the first primaries in March through Election Day. We are proud to document publicly our efforts to increase voter turnout, combat voter suppressive content, and provide greater clarity on the limited state-backed foreign information operations we proactively removed from the service. I have attached the full retrospective review to my testimony and it can be found electronically at:

[https://blog.twitter.com/content/dam/blog-twitter/official/en\\_us/company/2019/2018-retrospective-review.pdf](https://blog.twitter.com/content/dam/blog-twitter/official/en_us/company/2019/2018-retrospective-review.pdf)

## II. STATE-BACKED INFORMATION OPERATIONS

In line with our strong principles of transparency and with the goal of improving understanding of foreign influence and information campaigns, we released the full, comprehensive archives of Tweets and media associated with potential information operations that we had found on our service, including the 3,613 accounts we believe were associated with the activities of the Internet Research Agency on Twitter dating back to 2009. We made this data available with the goal of encouraging open research and investigation of these behaviors from researchers and academics around the world.

Prior to the release of these datasets, Twitter shared examples of alleged foreign interference in political conversations on Twitter by the Internet Research Agency (IRA) and provided the public with a direct notice if they interacted with these accounts. We launched this unique initiative to improve academic and public understanding of these coordinated campaigns around the world, and to empower independent, third-party scrutiny of these tactics on our platform.

We also recognize that, as a private company, there are threats that we cannot understand and address alone. We must continue to work together with elected officials, government entities, industry peers, outside experts, and other stakeholders so that the American people and the global community can understand the full context in which these threats arise.

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The archive is now the largest of its kind in the industry. We are proud of the fact that thousands of researchers have made use of these datasets that contain more than 30 million individual Tweets and more than one terabyte of media. Using our archive, these researchers have conducted their own investigations and shared their insights and independent analyses with the world.

### **III. SAFEGUARDING THE CONVERSATION**

We strongly believe that any attempt to undermine the integrity of our service undermines freedom of expression. We have made numerous updates to the Twitter Rules that govern our policies relating to elections, political advertising, and financial scams.

#### **A. *Twitter Rules Relating to Elections***

We have made a number of recent updates to the rules governing the use of our service to better protect the conversation around elections. In addition to new prohibitions on inauthentic activity, ban evasion, and hacked materials, we codified our policy regarding civic integrity governing multiple categories of manipulative behavior and content related to elections.

First, an individual cannot share false or misleading information about how to participate in an election or other civic event. This includes but is not limited to misleading information about how to vote or register to vote, requirements for voting, including identification requirements, and the official, announced date, or time of an election. Second, an individual cannot share false or misleading information intended to intimidate or dissuade voters from participating in an election. This includes but is not limited to misleading claims that polling places are closed, that polling has ended, or other misleading information relating to votes not being counted.

We also do not allow misleading claims about police or law enforcement activity related to polling places or elections, long lines, equipment problems, voting procedures or techniques which could dissuade voters from participating in an election, and threats regarding voting locations. Finally, we do not allow the creation of fake accounts which misrepresent their affiliation, or share content that falsely represents its affiliation to a candidate, elected official, political party, electoral authority, or government entity.

On Monday, October 21, 2019, we publicly announced that we have been working on a policy to address synthetic and manipulated media on Twitter. On Monday, we announced our plan to open a public feedback period to get input from the public. We believe that we need to consider how synthetic media is shared on Twitter in potentially damaging contexts. We also want to listen and consider a variety of perspectives in our policy development process, and we want to be transparent about our approach and values.

## **B. *Twitter Rules Relating to Political Advertising***

On October 30, 2019, Twitter's chief executive officer Jack Dorsey announced that we have made the decision to stop all political advertising on Twitter globally. We believe political message reach should be earned, not bought. This means bringing ads from political candidates and political parties to an end.

A political message earns reach when people decide to follow an account or retweet. Paying for reach removes that decision, forcing highly optimized and targeted political messages on people. We believe this decision should not be compromised by money. While Internet advertising is incredibly powerful and effective for commercial advertisers, that power brings significant risks to politics, where it can be used to influence votes to affect the lives of millions. Internet political ads present entirely new challenges to civic discourse: machine learning-based optimization of messaging and micro-targeting, unchecked misleading information, and deep fakes. All at increasing velocity, sophistication, and overwhelming scale.

We will soon share the final policy and provide current advertisers a notice period before this change goes into effect. We believe our approach to political advertising is not about free expression because candidates and political parties will continue to be able to share their content organically. This is about paying for reach. And paying to increase the reach of political speech has significant ramifications that today's democratic infrastructure may not be prepared to handle. We believe it is worth stepping back in order to address.

## **C. *Twitter Rules Relating to Scam Tactics***

In September 2019, we updated our policies to clarify our prohibitions against scam tactics. We want Twitter to be a place where people can make human connections and find reliable information. For this reason, bad-faith actors may not use Twitter's services to deceive others into sending money or personal financial information via scam tactics, phishing, or otherwise fraudulent or deceptive methods.

Using scam tactics on Twitter to obtain money or private financial information is prohibited under this policy. Individuals are not allowed to create accounts, post Tweets, or send Direct Messages that solicit engagement in such fraudulent schemes.

Our policies outline deceptive tactics that are prohibited. These include:

- **Relationship/trust-building scams.** Individuals may not deceive others into sending money or personal financial information by operating a fake account or by posing as a public figure or an organization.
- **Money-flipping schemes.** Individuals may not engage in “money flipping” schemes, for example, guaranteeing to send someone a large amount of money in return for a smaller initial payment via wire transfer or prepaid debit card.
- **Fraudulent discounts.** Individuals may not operate schemes which make discount offers to others wherein fulfillment of the offers is paid for using stolen credit cards and/or stolen financial credentials.
- **Phishing scams.** Individuals may not pose as or imply affiliation with banks or other financial institutions to acquire others’ personal financial information. We additionally emphasize to individuals using Twitter that other forms of phishing to obtain such information are also in violation of our platform manipulation and spam policy.

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All people who use Twitter — including veterans — must have confidence in the integrity of the information found on the service. We continue to invest in our efforts to address those threats posed by hostile actors and foster an environment conducive to healthy, meaningful conversations on our service. We look forward to working with the Committee on these important issues.