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I explored the famous whistle blower, Sophie Zhang. Sophie Zhang is a Data Scientist and a whistle blower that worked at Facebook. Zhang who identifies as a transgender woman, that was "tired of being in the closet as a transgender woman" also identifies as someone with autism. Zhang's sexual identity was one of the core aspects that motivated and inspired her

actions to write memos exposing the "fake accounts" after she was fired from her Data Scientist job at Facebook.

Sophie uncovered abusive political manipulation and opposition harassment accounts in 25 countries. Zhang reported that Facebook evaded efforts to counter fake accounts. She unveiled as these as "series of multiple blatant attempts by foreign governments to abuse" the Facebook platform. She was on a "Fake engagement" team, a subdivision of a "Spam team" and Zhang was assigned to look for an abuse of the platform. Zhang investigated "fake engagement" like inauthentic likes, comments and shares, which "affected national presidents" without oversight.

Zhang went on to expose information about bots being used to boost political influence globally. Additionally, Zhang uncovered bots used to harass political opposition and she found and removed over 600,000 fake accounts acting as health ministries around the world during the pandemic. "I know that I have blood on my hands by now," – Sophie Zhang stated.

What inspired Sophie Zhang to write the memo exposing her years of findings was that she felt like her "day job was fake likes and interactions". She went on to state that when someone "fake likes you" or "follows you" this creates a notification. These notifications negatively impacted the "numbers".  For example, with spamming, someone can essentially conduct spam by giving themselves a creative name, like, "Go to my profile to get your free iPhone," and these bot can go on to follow lots of random people.

Facebook is a "for profit" that portrays themselves as a nice company with a mission that's trying to "change the world".  Sadly, Zhang didn't achieve what she was hoping for by

exposing the political manipulation, but it caused enough of a media scandal to make Facebook prioritize the work that "she left behind".

I am impressed with Sophie Zhang's bravery to go up against a social media giant to expose fraudulent accounts that had significant influence on the political decisions in many countries. She saw how the 2016 election was influenced by Russian bots and how conflict was started in less developed countries and how the people created "fake accounts" where they were offering harmful medical advice or luring people in and misleading them about winning free iPhone, and other attractive items. I think that the more we know about how we're being influenced by social media we can use this information to protect our privacy, do our own research before making political decisions and not be manipulated into negative or things we think are factual.

References

https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-54161344.amp

https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/07/29/1030260/facebook-whistleblower-sophie-zhang-global-political-manipulation/

www.quora.com/What-is-a-bot

Definitions

Bot is an abbreviation for Robot. In software terms a Bot is a program that takes over the functions of a target computer and steals cycles to perform it's assigned tasks. Normally, the Bot communicates either with its Mothership, or with another remote Bot controlled computer for instructions and to report activity.