Twitter Thread by Ryan Broderick



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The Facebook/WhatsApp stuff has me feeling like I'm stuck in an insanely boring Groundhog Day.

(short thread)

Me and @inigo_av interviewed Carlos Merlo, a fake news producer in Mexico, the week before their election in June. Not only had his operation been running for years. Merlo had been doing interviews bragging about it!

https://t.co/NuJmMTT1G7

Here's Merlo in the NY Times in May bragging about his bot armies and spoofed local news pages. He saw himself as a local Cambridge analytica.

https://t.co/tqSOypkMj2

On June 28th, TWO DAYS before the Mexican election, DFR Lab releases a report about Merlo. Within a few hours of DFR Lab's research and our story going live, Facebook effectively wipes Merlo off their platform. They ban a huge chunk of his network.

https://t.co/JJY26N0IBn

Except Facebook knew about Merlo for 6 months. DFR Lab is part of The Atlantic Council, who are partnered with Facebook. Facebook told me that Merlo had been in their own internal election report and they knew DFR Lab had isolated him as a problem too.

https://t.co/TO9t8FM0yF

So here we are now in Brazil. WhatsApp has been a massive problem for local factcheckers. Researchers built a public WhatsApp monitor. Only 8 percent of the 50 most widely shared images scraped by the monitor were truthful. It's a fake news swamp.

https://t.co/PO7568ZleI

The researchers behind the monitor pen an Op-Ed in the New York Times this week, essentially declaring WhatsApp misinformation a public crisis.

https://t.co/71c7fCipP4

What happens the next morning? Brazil's biggest newspaper releases a bombshell report alleging local marketing firms have been buying bundles of phone numbers and using them to mass-WhatsApp voters anti-leftist propaganda. Maybe for months.

https://t.co/IFdecTEdPu

That same morning WhatsApp's new CEO, Chris Daniels publishes a piece in the same newspaper, writing, "We have a responsibility to amplify the good and mitigate the bad."

https://t.co/mlJ3shXdC8

But what has Facebook been doing? They've been getting even tech outlet in America onboard with an embargo to publish tours of their "election war room"



Obviously, here in Brazil, the War Room tours mean nothing. The country just learned that marketing firms have been using encrypted messages to manipulate the electorate for god knows how long.

And what does WhatsApp say this morning?

https://t.co/gLQX0zHTpA

> WA response to Folha report yesterday.
>
> I deleted a twete previous because I erroneously drew a direct line to the political parties that is not explicitly stated in the Folha story. I'm sorry for that, it's a complicated situation, as @broderick notes. here's the statement pic.twitter.com/hLYCe937rH
>
> — rat king (@MikeIsaac) October 19, 2018

It's been almost two years since the US election, almost three since Brexit, and the only thing that seems to be changing with Facebook and their "family of apps" is the PR strategy.