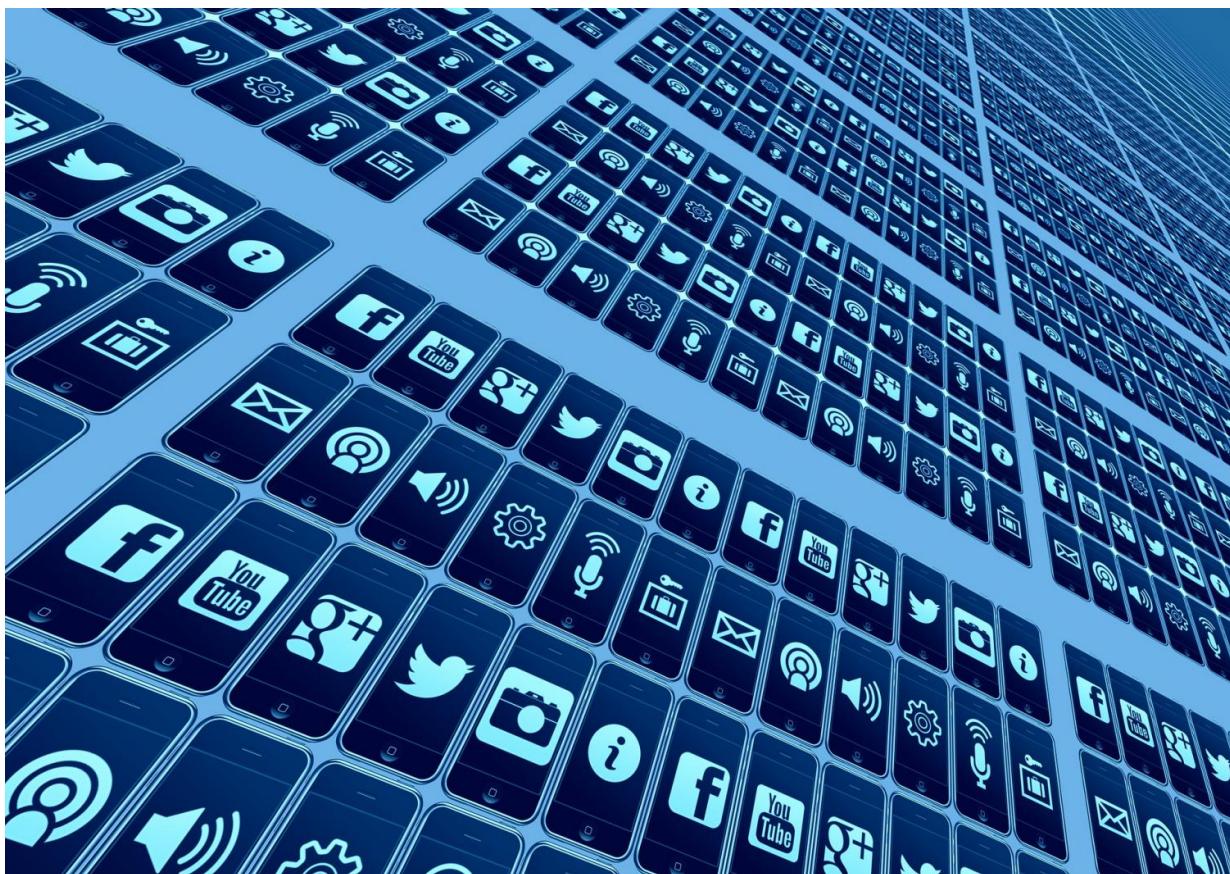


Should Twitter, Facebook get serious about real names?

February 2 2018, by Levi Sumagaysay, The Mercury News



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Fake social media accounts can retweet a presidential candidate, boost the perceived influence of a celebrity—or both—so is it finally time to

require real names?

The anonymity question has popped up again as society deals with the aftermath of Russian bots helping determine the outcome of the U.S. presidential election, and after a new report that shows how easily people can buy fake followers to make them seem more influential than they really are.

For example, Twitter told Congress that bots retweeted Donald Trump's posts nearly half a million times when he was running for president, according to documents released recently by the Senate Judiciary Committee. Bots also were responsible for retweeting 48 percent to 73 percent of retweets of WikiLeaks' accounts before the election. (WikiLeaks published leaked Democratic emails.)

The documents also showed that Russian operatives publicized more than a hundred fake events to which tens of thousands of Americans RSVP'd on Facebook.

Meanwhile, a report over the weekend shed some light on how social media influence can be bought, tens of thousands of fake users at a time. The *New York Times* showed how a single Twitter user can pave the way for the birth of hundreds of fake bots, and how famous or semi-famous people buy fake followers, sometimes on their own or because their publicists think it's a good idea.

Amid all this, tech entrepreneur Mark Cuban is calling on Twitter to require real names, and for Facebook to enforce its policy that requires them.

Cuban's idea was slammed by people such as fellow tech entrepreneur Anil Dash. Eva Galperin, director of cybersecurity at the San Francisco-based internet advocacy group Electronic Frontier Foundation, also

weighed in.

A few years ago, Facebook got some high-profile criticism over how its real-names policy hurt drag queens. Advocates of anonymity also say it would be easier for governments to crack down on protesters and dissidents who rely on Twitter to organize if real identities were attached to Twitter users' profiles.

Still others point out that requiring [real names](#) may not do much to stomp out abuse anyway. For example, Twitter, Facebook and their users deal with notorious trolls or harassers all the time—and they don't bother to hide their identities.

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