Twitter moves to reduce reach of 'state-affiliated' media

August 6 2020

Twitter is following a move by Facebook, adding labels to identify accounts from "state-affiliated" media that are used to advance a government's agenda

Twitter on Thursday unveiled new steps to curb the spread of content from "state-affiliated media" used to advance a government's political

agenda—a move affecting key outlets from Russia and China.

The US social platform said it would add new labels to these accounts and would "no longer amplify" their tweets through its recommendation systems, in the latest move to identify and limit the spread of government-led influence campaigns.

A Twitter spokesperson said outlets affected by the new policy include Russian-based Sputnik and RT and China's Xinhua, but did not provide a full list.

The Twitter move affects media "where the state exercises control over editorial content through financial resources, direct or indirect political pressures, and/or control over production and distribution," the company said in a statement.

"Unlike independent media, state-affiliated media frequently use their news coverage as a means to advance a political agenda. We believe that people have the right to know when a media account is affiliated directly or indirectly with a state actor."

Twitter said the decision would not affect "state-financed media organizations with editorial independence," specifically citing the British-based BBC and US-based National Public Radio.

For accounts with the state-affiliated media label, Twitter will offer a link to an article explaining the policy and referring them to its "transparency report."

Twitter's announcement follows a similar action by Facebook earlier this year which labeled content from media which are editorially controlled by governments.

The moves by Twitter and Facebook come amid concerns over campaigns by governments aimed at influencing elections and public sentiment in other countries through media outlets that disguise their true origins.

State-led influence campaigns were prominent on social media during the 2016 US elections and have been seen around the world.

A recent report by Oxford University researchers found disinformation and conspiracy theories spread by leading media outlets from Russia and China, as well as from Iran and Turkey—all of which are state-controlled or closely aligned to regimes in power.

Twitter also said it would create new authentication labels for "key government officials," including foreign ministers, institutional entities, ambassadors and officials who are authorized to speak on behalf of the state.

Intially, these labels will only be applied to accounts from the countries represented in the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: China, France, Russia, Britain and the United States. Twitter plans to roll out the feature to other countries in the future.

"We believe this is an important step so that when people see an account discussing geopolitical issues from another country, they have context on its national affiliation and are better informed about who they represent," the statement said.

"At this time, we're not labeling the personal accounts of heads of state, as these accounts enjoy widespread name recognition, media attention, and public awareness."

© 2020 AFP

Citation: Twitter moves to reduce reach of 'state-affiliated' media (2020, August 6) retrieved 19 April 2024 from https://techxplore.com/news/2020-08-twitter-curb-state-affiliated-media.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.