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Fact or Fiction? The Challenge of Tackling Misinformation on Twitter.

Since the birth of the internet in the modern world, society has drastically transitioned its means of communication to include the digital landscape. Long gone are the days when discussion could only occur face to face. While some might claim that nothing productive or valuable occurs online, social media platforms provide the foundation for meaningful discourse that has a very real influence on the outside world. Since the earliest stages of social media's development, one platform that has always had a prominent voice is Twitter. Twitter's emphasis on open-ended discussion that favors free speech has allowed the platform to quickly rise to popularity, becoming the home to authentic conversations. However, Twitter's lack of moderation in its content has resulted in very brutal and honest speech that isn't always politically correct and, in some cases, can be harmful. Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter has only furthered this issue. He aims to turn the platform into a "digital town square" by pushing back on restrictive policies and accentuating the platform's role as a pedestal for free speech. This brings rise to some very concerning questions. Who and how should the plethora of content on Twitter be regulated, and how should they react to harmful information that isn't necessarily true? While Twitter should preserve its tenet for freedom of speech, obscenities should be taken more seriously, and regulations should be implemented to counteract falsified information and misleading statements.

One of the major examples demonstrating the harm of misinformation on Twitter is the incident involving Eli Lilly and Co. Where a fake account put out a tweet claiming insulin was free, which was viewed millions of times before it was removed. This caused panic inside the company, and they had to contact Twitter to get it removed. According to Drew Harwell, a technology reporter from the Washington Post, “When the fake account still was active five hours later, a Twitter ad-sales rep in New York publicly pleaded with Musk for the fake account to be removed. Musk did not respond, but the account was suspended late Thursday night.” The incident has caused Eli Lilly to pause their Twitter ad campaigns and publishing plan, potentially costing them millions of dollars. It has also caused other major companies and political figures to be impersonated on the platform, leading to some advertisers pulling back. "For \$8, they're potentially losing out on millions of dollars in ad revenue," said Amy O'Connor, a former senior communications official at Eli Lilly who now works at a trade association. "What's the benefit to a company ... of staying on Twitter? It's not worth the risk when patient trust and health are on the line." The incident has highlighted the risks of Twitter's new \$8 verification system, which has been criticized for not checking the identity of anyone who pays for the check mark. This has caused some advertisers to question the value of investing in the platform and has raised concerns about the potential for false information to be shared. These negative implications of free speech on Twitter garner a need for some form of moderation on the platform. If false news, regardless of whether it stemmed from comedic or malicious intentions, has the potential to impede our economy, then clearly, it is an issue that needs to be taken seriously.

Some would expect that in light of the harm surrounding misinformation on Twitter, the company would take serious strides toward minimizing it in an effort to protect the platform. However, this couldn't be further from the truth. Since he acquired Twitter, Elon Musk has hinted

at implementing an edit button, a feature that proactive users have largely anticipated for years. Musk recently asked his followers if they wanted to see it added in a poll, and 73% of the 4.4 million responses were in favor. Twitter has confirmed that an edit button may be in the works, but it seems like many of its negative implications are being overlooked. An edit button could be weaponized and have unintended consequences, so Twitter must think carefully about the extreme effects they could have on its immediacy-focused platform. Lewis Mitchell, a data science professor at the University of Adelaide, provides an example of how the simple feature of an edit button could be used negatively. “Consider this. I, a cat lover, decide to tweet, ‘I love cats!’ Then you, being also a cat lover, decide to quote my tweet, agreeing ‘I do too!’” Mitchell asserts, “Now, what happens if I edit my original tweet to declare ‘I love dogs’? You are now misrepresented as a dog-lover, and when your cat-loving friends see this...” Mitchell's example is somewhat contrived but raises very realistic concerns regarding the feature. It's not difficult to imagine how someone with malicious intent could potentially alter their tweet to misrepresent another individual. Having the ability to mask your true intentions when posting a tweet (and initiating discourse) only furthers the amount of misinformation on the platform and makes it more difficult for users to navigate. This is one of the main things that differentiates Twitter from the real world; in real conversation, you can't go back and change what is said, so everyone's intentions are clearly represented. These very differences are what garner a need to regulate misinformation, so for this reason, an edit button is a step in the wrong direction. Musk needs to re-evaluate the direction in which he wants to take the platform if he wants to turn it into a digital landscape for authentic conversation.

When assessing the impact of misinformation, one issue which cannot be overlooked is politics. Twitter's format of short, concise messages (tweets) makes it easy for users to quickly

express their views on current events and issues, leading to a high volume of political content that is greater than any other platform. The use of hashtags and the ability to retweet and reply to other users also allows for the amplification of political messages and the formation of online communities around specific issues or viewpoints. This type of engagement is one of the driving forces for Twitter's popularity and has allowed the platform to become deeply rooted in politics. So, it should come as no surprise that the presence of fake news also influences this outlet and perhaps poses the largest threat to our society. In his article, *Twitter Discriminates against Conservative Users*, Dan Boylan, a reporter for the Washington Times, speaks to this issue. "Last month, in response to reporting by The New York Times, Twitter closed more than 1 million fake accounts." Boylan exclaims, "Military analysts continually express deep concern over Russia's ability to manipulate bots to ratchet up anger across American social media and deepen partisan division." Boylan's assertion captures the potential threat of fake accounts, an issue that has riddled Twitter since its birth. The issues revolving around bots have always been troubling as they can not only be misleading but can also be dangerous. They feed into misinformation in their own right, similar to Tweet editing if millions of different accounts can be controlled by a single entity, that gives them more leverage/power in conversation than they otherwise wouldn't have. If a power like this can be used in the context of politics, it can very easily bring rise to conflict and even further political polarization due to the platform's relevance in the real world. In fact, we have seen the aftermath of these circumstances during President Trump's term, as many of his tweets would receive "bot comments" that sparked controversy and only furthered our nation's political divide. For this reason, there is a critical need for some form of moderation of these fake accounts, as they only funnel into the endless stream of misinformation on Twitter's platform.

Now despite the compelling evidence that shows the real-world harm of misinformation on Twitter, there are still individuals who firmly believe that this issue deserves no solution. Many of these people root their argument in the first amendment and state that having the ability to speak your mind, regardless of what that may entail, is a fundamental aspect of democracy and hence, should be preserved to the same extent on Twitter. And to that point, it is important to bring rise to an essential fact many of these individuals may not have considered. Discourse in the digital and the real world is by no means comparable. The scope of Twitter users, alongside features such as liking and retweeting coupled with the ability to hide behind a screen, all elevate the conversation beyond what is possible in the real world. But elevating the conversation also elevates its extremities, and increasing the scope of a discussion also increases the risks, which is what gives fake news so much power. For this reason, Twitter garners the need for stricter rules surrounding conversation than what is supported under the first amendment. It is a matter of morals, and we cannot allow fake news to contribute to real change, especially if it harms our society, as has clearly been shown. When you take this into consideration, it completely dismantles any argument supporting misinformation.

In conclusion, despite its warts and all nature, it is only thanks to Twitter that individuals can communicate in a way that was never before imagined. But we need to be able to take the bad with the good and not overlook serious issues that could negatively affect the real world. In the end, it is up to Twitter to take action to minimize misinformation and ensure that the platform is a space where people can have meaningful and productive discussions without causing harm. If that means that we need to create stricter regulations than what is used for physical conversation, then that is a price we need to be willing to pay in the name of truth and prosperity.

Work Cited

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Worldbuilding Research Essay Rubric

Each category is worth up to 4 points for a total of 24.

	4	3	2	1
Argument in Context	Hook immediately engages the reader, leading smoothly into a concise summary of the issue and current debate. The thesis statement is clear and persuasive in the context of the established debate.	Hook is present, but could be more engaging or more smoothly integrated into the summary of the current issue. The debate could be more current, or the summary could be more complete (i.e. the writer needs to consider another perspective on the issue). Thesis statement is present, but it could be clearer or more persuasive.	Hook needs significant improvement (it may be unengaging, cliché, or disjointed). The debate is not current, or the summary is either long-winded or obviously incomplete (i.e. the writer does not entertain a different perspective on the issue, or the issue is unfocused). Thesis statement is unpersuasive.	Hook is missing. There isn't yet an identifiable debate. Thesis is vague.
Support and Development	The writer convincingly supports their argument by integrating the required research source material, using They Say / I Say templates to introduce quotations smoothly and respond insightfully. Writer makes each source's credibility and relevance obvious for the reader in the text. Writer addresses at least one opposing viewpoint thoroughly and effectively refutes it in order to strengthen their own position.	The writer supports their argument satisfactorily but it could be more convincing. They Say / I Say templates frame each quotation but could be applied more effectively. Each source's credibility and relevance are somewhat obvious for the reader, but could be clearer in the text. Writer addresses at least one opposing viewpoint but could more effectively refute it in order to strengthen their own position.	The writer offers some useful support but it is generally too thin to support the argument satisfactorily. A few They Say / I Say templates are present but need to be used much more often. Questionable source credibility and/or relevance in the text. Opposing viewpoint is missing or misapplied.	The writer does not support their argument. They Say / I Say templates are missing or misapplied.
Organization	Ideas are coherently and logically organized into paragraphs (intro, body paragraphs, conclusion) and effective transitions. Concluding paragraph follows from and supports the argument presented, leaving the reader with a powerful final impression.	Ideas are generally coherent and logically organized into paragraphs, although some paragraphs may need to be revised for focus. Some effective use of transitions. Concluding paragraph generally follows from and supports the argument presented, but it could leave the reader with a more powerful final impression.	Ideas could be organized in a more coherent or logical way. Transitions are lacking or ineffective. Concluding paragraph does not quite follow from the argument presented.	Ideas are incoherent and illogically organized. Paragraphs are undeveloped and need transitions. Conclusion is missing.

Voice and Audience	<p>Writer communicates a clear purpose, making the relevance of the argument distinct for the audience. Writer effectively distinguishes their own voice from the voices of others, using voice markers (signal phrases) and embedded references.</p>	<p>Writer's purpose is somewhat clear, and there is some evidence of attention to the audience. Writer usually distinguishes their own voice from the voices of others, but voice markers (signal phrases) and embedded references could be more effective.</p>	<p>Writer's purpose is somewhat clear, although there needs to be more attention to the audience in some areas. Writer does not usually distinguish their own voice from the voices of others. Voice markers (signal phrases) and embedded references are lacking.</p>	<p>The author's purpose of writing is unclear. No obvious attention to audience. Distinction between the writer's own voice and the voices of others is unclear.</p>
Research Sources, MLA Format, and Citation +3	<p>All research sources obviously pass the "CRAP Test." Essay includes at least 4 sources (2 of which are from research databases). MLA format. Works Cited page, and in-text citation are all perfect by MLA standards.</p>	<p>Research sources generally pass the "CRAP Test," although one may be questionable. Essay includes at least 4 sources. MLA format. Works Cited page, and/or in-text citation are nearly perfect by MLA standards.</p>	<p>Two research sources do not pass the "CRAP Test." Essay includes 2-3 sources. MLA format. Works Cited page, and/or in-text citation are not close to meeting MLA standards.</p>	<p>Three or more research sources do not pass the "CRAP Test," or the essay relies on only one source.</p>
Mechanics	<p>Writing is polished, free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.</p>	<p>Writing contains some spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors. However, these errors do not impact the reader's understanding.</p>	<p>Writing contains numerous spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors. These errors impact the reader's understanding.</p>	<p>Frequent errors accumulate, impairing the reader's ability to understand the essay.</p>

Grade: 21/24