



LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media

P.W. Singer , Emerson Brooking

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Social media has been weaponized, as state hackers and rogue terrorists have seized upon Twitter and Facebook to create chaos and destruction. This urgent report is required reading, from defense expert P.W. Singer and Council on Foreign Relations fellow Emerson Brooking.

LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media Details

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From Reader Review LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media for online ebook

Nat says

This pairs well with *A Song Called Youth* (which anticipates the kind of world we inhabit) and Paul Virilio's *War and Cinema*. In fact, I was kind of surprised that *War and Cinema* wasn't invoked at all in *LikeWar*, especially Virilio's discussion of the evolving nature of what constitutes the front line of the battlefield--now the front line is in everyone's pocket. (That would have made for a pithy summary of *LikeWar*.) But this is so full of totally mind-bending contemporary examples of military-civilian technology chimeras that I will definitely be incorporating elements of it into future courses--partly because it makes the philosophical response to these phenomena, namely a renewed emphasis on "critical thinking" and picking apart bad arguments, seem totally inadequate to the challenges posed by huge, multinational, military-grade disinformation operations all running at the same time and in different directions. And the phenomena described by Singer and Brooking give some non-merely-theoretical substance to extreme skepticism about testimony.

Jami Lilo says

An engaging read. While the subject matter can be depressing, who doesn't look at the current cyber world and cringe?, the authors keep the information quite entertaining. While learning specifics behind personal recreations, planting seeds of doubt in our brains by groups and organizations, and recruiting for actual physical war, the theme is that the internet is far more dangerous than the days of the wild west shoot outs. Like advertising, memes do their job of making people laugh or feel and then wa-lah they become truths and facts. It's frightening to say the least. It's not all bad, the book explores Anonymous and other positive people and groups fighting this international cyberwar.

If you're looking to read this title for school - it's excellent and very well researched and documented. If you're reading out of curiosity or how to protect yourself as much as possible - go for it! The authors are talented and skilled at keeping the pacing fast and the verbiage is amusing, while being informative.

Example: When writing about Tay, a network powered chatbot Microsoft created that adopted the speech and patterns of a teenage girl that was quickly converted by trolls on the internet into a racist, sexist, and Holocaust denier and thus quickly deleted, the writers write "After less than a day, Tay was unceremoniously put to sleep, her fevered artificial brain left to dream of electric frogs." Okay, by itself it's not as funny, but when I read it surrounded by the emotionally exhausting truths of our reality it was quite refreshing.

Overall, this book will appeal to a much broader audience than one would project due to the authors' ability to make the subject matter entertaining. As a mom of teenagers, this will be on their summer reading list so that they can understand the depths of results of social media on society.

Jill Elizabeth says

What an extraordinary book this is! I am currently engaged in a love-hate relationship with social media. I love the ability to keep track of what is going on in the lives of the people I care about; I hate that this

keeping track seems to be replacing actual human contact. I love the ease of knowing what's going on in people's lives; I hate the ease with which miscellaneous people I don't want to know every detail somehow manage to glean it from things I put up to share with those I care about. I love that it's harder to hide wrongdoing in an era in which everyone has a camera and a platform; I hate that it's harder to define "wrongdoing" as a result because everything is now a-contextual and a glimpse is presented as "reality" and that I never know what is real and what is fake/manufactured for public viewing anymore.

I could go on and on, but won't - chances are you know what I mean, and if you don't, I won't be able to convince you. That's something else social media has taught me...

In a very thorough and detailed manner, Singer and Brooking examine the history of social media and its increasing influence on everything along the personal-public, social-political spectrum. It's not only social bullying/warfare we need to worry about anymore; now it's actual, martial bullying/warfare too - to an extent I wasn't aware of, but now am with brutal clarity. This is a great and engaging read that pictures a horrifying yet excessively necessary picture of what the world is literally coming to these days. I think it should be required reading for everyone, since the authors make it clear that it is increasingly the case that everyone is affected by the insidious nature of this media-as-message.

Michael Burnam-Fink says

"There is a war... for your Mind!"

That's the slogan of InfoWars, the incendiary conspiracy news network and nutritional supplement marketing firm. And while Alex Jones is wrong about almost everything, he's right about that. In *LikeWar* Singer and Brooking ably synthesize a sophisticated picture of information warfare in 2018, drawing from sources as diverse as Taylor Swift, Donald Trump, and ISIS, to argue that the internet has led to a blurring of lines between consumer, citizen, journalist, activist, and warrior which threatens the foundations of liberal democracy. The tech companies which built these platforms and profited from them must grapple with the politics of their technologies, before we all reap the whirlwind.

Computer networks and smart phones connect billions of people, allowing ideas to flow faster than ever before in history. Sometimes, the results can be impressive. The Chiapas Zapatista movement in 1994 was a dial-up and fax version of a network insurgency that managed to bring enough international opprobrium on Mexico that the government blinked, and reached some kind of political accord (Chiapas is complicated). More recently, Eliot Higgins and a team of open source analysts at Bellingcat managed to track down the exact BUK missile system and Russian soldiers responsible for shooting down MH 17 in 2014.

But there are a lot of dark sides. When people connect, the emotion that spreads most rapidly is anger. Lies spread five times faster than truth. Musicians can use social networks to directly connect with their fans, and ISIS uses it to connect with alienated Muslim youths worldwide. Social networks sort diverse citizens into filter bubbles of people who think alike. Eliot Higgin's careful open source intelligence has a paranoid fun-house mirror version in the QAnon conspiracy, where Qultist decoders find hidden messages from an alleged 'senior white house source'.

And then there is the matter of information war, an area that even now, after years of offensive cyber operations, liberal democracies still don't understand. Hostile propaganda slips into Western news networks and major platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are infested with bots. *LikeWar* can even take a

personal toll. Over the course of writing this book, General Michael Flynn went from forward looking full-spectrum commander to head Trumpist conspiracy cheerleader to indicted and plead out felon. Flynn's fall is complex, but it can't be separated from the internet. If the trolls got him, what chance does your idiot cousin stand? The counters, 'citizen truth teams' and senior emissaries to groups vulnerable to recruitment, seem like thin reeds against the coming maelstrom of noise.

LikeWar starts with Clausewitz's dictum that war is a continuation of politics by other means, and there are clear links between cyberspace and physical space. Intensity of hashtags impacted the subsequent intensity of Israeli airstrikes during attacks on the Gaza strip. ISIS used propaganda to create an aura of invincibility that outflanked the defenders of Mosul, while Russia denied that its 'little green men' were even in Ukraine. But the difference is that cyberspace is constructed space rather than natural space. The networks are built, maintained, and owned by real corporations and real people. The internet grew from an anarchic specialized scientific network to a major engine of commerce and communicate with little deliberate government oversight. Section 230 absolved American companies of responsibility for policing content, with major carve outs for copyrighted IP and pornography. Yet as concerns over cyberbullying and counter-terrorism rose, major networks adopted digital constitutions that were permissive towards speech and censorious towards erotica. Policing content is and was possible, but always took a back seat to growth and engagement, the guide stars of Silicon Valley.

The future is if anything, darker. Advances in machine learning and AI allow ever more realistic bots, computer generated DeepFakes where a politician can be programmed to say *anything*, and personalized targeting of people with exactly the propaganda they'll believe. There are defensive counters, but if I might draw military analogies, what we saw in 2016 was armored warfare circa 1918: clearly the future, but not yet a mature system. Given the pace of technology, we only have a few years before digital blitzkrieg.

I'm extremely online, and I've been following this space for years. I've presented at multiple conferences on this topic, including Governance of Emerging Technologies and Association of Internet Researchers. *LikeWar* is the book I wish I'd written. Cognizant, forward looking, and deeply researched, it is vital reading for anyone interested in technology or politics.

My only reservation is that I wish the sources were better linked in the text, instead of being buried in static endnotes. Maybe the next edition will push an update.

John says

Superb. Gripping. Terrifying, even for people who believe they understand the potential of what we have unleashed. A must-read for digital citizens.

Richard Lawrence says

LikeWars is a well written, well researched and penetrating analysis on how powerful social media has become in influencing society, politics and our perceptions of what is real and what is not. More importantly, it attempts to chart a trajectory of how social media will evolve in the future and powerful role artificial intelligence (AI), specifically neural networks, will play in determining that trajectory. The solutions presented by the authors to the issues we are facing and will face are as insightful as their observations. I would hope that every educator and policy maker here in the United States would read this book and be motivated to take action.

Aneeza Rafiq says

This book is an eye-opener for everyone who uses social media, and that includes everyone. I know a lot more about LikeWar than I did before reading this book.

The book starts by giving an overview of how social media, especially Twitter, played a huge role in landing Donald Trump in the oval office. By the next few chapters, I got fed-up by continues examples of 'Islamic State'. I know what ISIS stands for but I live in an Islamic State (Pakistan) and continuous use of this particular phrase in a negative sense alarmed me. Example: "...unrepentantly barbaric Islamic State..." Some people who think Islam and ISIS are a synonym might develop more hate towards Muslims.

The author gives examples of the way social media is used to manipulate people's opinions, from all over the world. A lot of people still have no idea about the use of bot armies and human trolls to distort information and misdirect public sentiments.

In the end, the author has given a solution to cyber warfare which is directed at not only democratic governments and social media 'kings' but also towards the general public.

The book is well written and researched, information is given in interesting bite-sized chapters.

Michael D. Kanner says

[Review based on an early edition from the publisher]

Singer explains it all!

As he did with WIRED FOR WAR, Singer explores a new dimension to conflicts to the non-expert. In doing so, he also gives you a short history of social media and the use of media in manipulating the opinions of the public. I should also note that he does include a short discussion of how social media has changed our sense of community and American politics, including both Trump's use of Twitter as a direct line to his supporters as well as how Russia tried to influence the election.

Teaching courses in security, conflict and political rhetoric, I was fascinated by his account of how ISIS and Hamas quickly understood the additional capacity that social media gave them in promoting their cause and recruiting new members and sympathizers. I do not think that I have come across such a detailed account. It is worth the price just for this account.

Although the notes constitute almost half of the e-copy I was sent by the publisher, he doesn't bog the reader down with minutia or dense academic jargon. His cases are clear and flow easily out of the discussion.

I will be recommending to students in my security courses as a must read if they are interested in the changing face of warfare. Another groundbreaking book by one of the leading analysts commenting on conflicts today.

David Goode says

Great read...most important book I've read in some time. Highlights the manipulation of social media and it's effect on the divisiveness in civil discourse and beyond

Inge says

Currently the most interesting read of 2018, and quite possibly, of all times. I would recommend it to anyone as it didn't feel skewed to a political side, even if there is a lot of politics discussed. Audiobook is 11 hours and 21 minutes long.

Peter Mcloughlin says

I wish this book had had its recommendations implemented before 2016. But closing the barndoor might keep a few remaining horses inside. Social Media that dumpster fire that we can't escape has become the nervous system of the body politic of most nations and is a theater of offensive and defensive warfare although the offense has the upper hand. Social media is used by a huge swath of humanity and is subject to new forms of manipulation more powerful than its predecessors. The election of Donald Trump is exhibit A for the damage this technology can inflict. As we attempt to salvage our political system in the aftermath of 2016 social media is also attempting to take measure against the kind of manipulation that hate groups and extremists have used so well to trash our democracy. The book lays out how social media is subject to manipulation and the techniques involved. It is good at diagnosis and has a few medicinal recommendations. Lessons for the gobsmacked.

Craig says

This book will make you question quite a bit about social media and its power and influence. It covers topics as diverse as ISIS, the history of the internet, Russian election meddling, and Taylor Swift. Very informative and anyone who uses a computer should probably read this. It was well written and well researched and you will get a lot out of it.

Maru Kun says

This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality - interview with the author in which he reminds us of Trump's comment that "I would never have become President if it was not for social media".

I Thought the Web Would Stop Hate, Not Spread It - article in the NYT on the same topic.

Let me say it again: Social media platforms — and Facebook and Twitter are as guilty of this as Gab is — are designed so that the awful travels twice as fast as the good. And they are operating with sloppy disregard of the consequences of that awful speech, leading to disasters that they then have to clean up after.

And they are doing a very bad job of that, too, because they are unwilling to pay the price to make needed fixes. Why? because draining the cesspool would mean losing users, and that would hurt the bottom line. Consider this: On Monday, New York Times reporters easily found almost 12,000 anti-Semitic messages that had been uploaded to Instagram in the wake of the synagogue attack.

And another one - The Internet Will Be the Death of Us - the NYT is on a roll today.

This was a week ago — before Sayoc’s arrest, before Bowers’s rampage, before Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right populist, won Brazil’s presidential election. As The Times reported, pro-Bolsonaro forces apparently tried to hurt his opponents and help him by flooding WhatsApp, the messaging application owned by Facebook, “with a deluge of political content that gave wrong information on voting locations and times.”

The hatred, ignorance and division fostered by social media has been greatly underestimated and its malign impacts are only just becoming apparent. This looks essential reading.

PS goodreads is an exception of course

Deane Barker says

Devastating analysis of how much we suck as humans, and how easily manipulated we are by social media. It's a long-range survey of how governments are using social media as a weapon, or force-multiplier, for their own ends.

Extensively researched. Seems like a long book, but it is *literally* 1/3 endnotes.

Bob H says

In a month -- October 2018 -- in which self-activating, internet-inspired terrorists, from mail bombers to synagogue shooters, are more in the news than ever, this book couldn't be more timely or urgent. The authors have given us a wide-ranging and compelling look at how the internet in general, and most prominently the social media, Facebook and the rest, have turned out to be a menace. Coarsened public dialogue is the least of it, we read here, and social media have been a theater of political espionage and outright war, driving everything from sabotaged elections to flash lynch mobs (as in India) and a component of real wars and real genocide (as with the Islamic state and the Rohingya massacres). Neither Congress nor the social media companies seem quite able to confront it.

Indeed, the authors tell us, the internet is a battlefield, and:

"Battle on the internet is continuous, the battlefield is contiguous, and the information it produces is contagious. The best and worst aspects of human nature duel over what truly matters most online: our attention and engagement."

Some actors are beginning to challenge it, they tell us. The U.S. military now has a center at Fort Polk, LA, that wargames online threats and conflicts, especially those abutting real-life theaters of war as in Eastern Europe. Some of the social media companies are programming in ways to counter dangerous or defamatory speech and to deal with online terrorism. Congressional hearings continue, for whatever good they may do.

But, it's no spoiler to say that the authors show us that social media platforms are only now maturing, it's still largely an uncontrolled and lawless frontier out there, and there's a lot of catching up to do.

Highly recommend.
