

Alyn Smith issues report on Twitter

Alyn Smith who is an SNP member of the European Parliament published a report he had commissioned into Scottish Twitter and online chat in Scotland.

The independent report, "Scotland and Social Media, Trolls Under the Bridge?", researched and compiled by former Metropolitan Police Inspector turned investigative journalist and author JJ Patrick, found that some 4.25% of Scottish Twitter activity is identifiable as potentially malign, though this rises to a maximum of 12.24% in an assessment of certain account types.

A total of 27,000 Twitter accounts were analysed, with 9,981 being the main focus given that their geographic location is openly set as "Scotland".

Malign bots – those aimed at influencing public discourse and currently active on Scottish Twitter – centre around Brexit and "Dissolve The Union" messaging. Of 36.4 million tweets analysed, a potential maximum of 4.2 million tweets could be malign, and the report's author warns that Scotland's social media community is likely to see itself increasingly targeted by bots and trolls.

Alyn has launched www.Scot0rBot.scot to empower anyone on social media users to access the three main online troll identification engines. The Twitter account [@scotorbot](https://twitter.com/scotorbot) also launched today, will aid the visibility of the facility on Twitter.

He has also written to Twitter urging a "Place Verified"

status (in the same way as people can have their identity verified); that the firm should use geoblocking technology to ensure that profiles are located where they say they are. Such status would in no way limit free speech, but it would make clear, literally, where an account is coming from.



Alyn Smith MEP

Alyn said: “I’m an enthusiastic user of social media, and it is broadly enriching and empowering. But there are wasps in

the room, and I'm grateful to James Patrick for his independent report which will help us to, firstly, know they're there and, secondly, spot them.

"We have to be honest too: the levels of abuse have notably increased in recent years and as an out-gay-pro-EU-Nat I'll hear no lectures from anyone about cybernats – all Scottish discourse is infested by a small minority who just want to crash things. We will all benefit from upping our digital literacy.

"In recent months there have been various moments where Scottish Twitter has not rung true for me, such as the SNP MP walkout from Westminster, or the Catalan Referendum. Suddenly I have received a dozen tweets all saying the same thing, with spurious arguments suddenly appearing as if out of nowhere.

"I do not have enough evidence to point any fingers in any particular geographic or political direction – nor does this report – but it does show that there is an issue we all need to work on and that online everything is not necessarily what it seems.

"Our launch of www.ScotOrBot.scot is a really important first step. If you think an account on Twitter appears a bit strange, maybe it is. This search site will allow us to indicate, not conclusively but to at least test, whether something is what it seems.

"Similarly, I hope that Twitter will look positively upon my constructive suggestion to make all accounts "Place Verified" as it is too easy to pretend to be something you're not. If I saw a Twitter account festooned in SNP and Yes branding but saying a lot of positive things about Brexit, it would be really handy to be able to see if the account is, indeed, coming from Minsk or Saint Petersburg."