

'Fogging' and 'Flooding': Countering Extremist Mis/Disinformation After Terror Attacks

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Social media and associated changes to the media ecosystem have profoundly impacted upon the dynamics of public sense-making and understanding in the aftermath of terror attacks. This analysis looks at how and why misinformation and disinformation arises in such situations, what impacts it has and what might be done to manage and mitigate its effects.

The main focus of the report is on introducing three innovative concepts intended to help us to interpret and understand these processes of social reaction:



'Fogging' is an effect that arises from constructing and communicating multiple explanations and interpretations of the events in question. The effect is to create a miasma of competing and contrasting accounts and explanations in the information space, such that public audiences do not quite know what to believe happened or why, or which sources can be trusted.

'Flooding' is an informational effect that involves dominating an information space with a particular misinforming or disinforming message. This involves reposting the message in high volumes and frequently across platforms to make it highly visible and likely to be encountered repeatedly by audience members engaging with the event or issue of concern.

'Surfacing' refers to some specific techniques of persuasion used to establish a patina of plausibility to the alternative narratives being constructed and that are used to fog and flood the zone of influence. Some key examples of 'surfacing' mis/disinforming messages are: by claiming to be an eyewitness; by using visual images that are claimed to be of the scene but are not really; by drawing attention to other sources online proffering alternative accounts.