

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Falsehoods used to heighten fear, incite hate, lead to violence

The New York Times

Child Abduction Rumors Lead to Violence Against Roma in France



Roma at a camp that was attacked on Monday night outside Paris.
Kenzo Tribouillard/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

- 2019: False rumours that child kidnappers were roaming suburbs in vans
 - Spread on Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter
 - Used videos of vans speeding away, grainy screenshots
- Accusations focused on the Roma
- **Led to several violent attacks on a Roma camp, and Roma individuals**

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Child-lifting rumours caused 69 mob attacks, 33 deaths in last 18 months

45 persons were killed in 40 cases of mob lynching across nine states between 2014 and 3 March 2018 according to data

IndiaSpend | Mumbai

Source: *Business Standard*

Mexico

Mexican mob burns detective to death in child abduction scare

- Three other men taken captive in incident in state of Hidalgo
- Video posted online shows mob beating man in town square



▲ The prosecutor's office said it was investigating the incident and would bring the killers and other members of the mob to justice. Photograph: Marco Ugarte/AP

Source: *The Guardian*

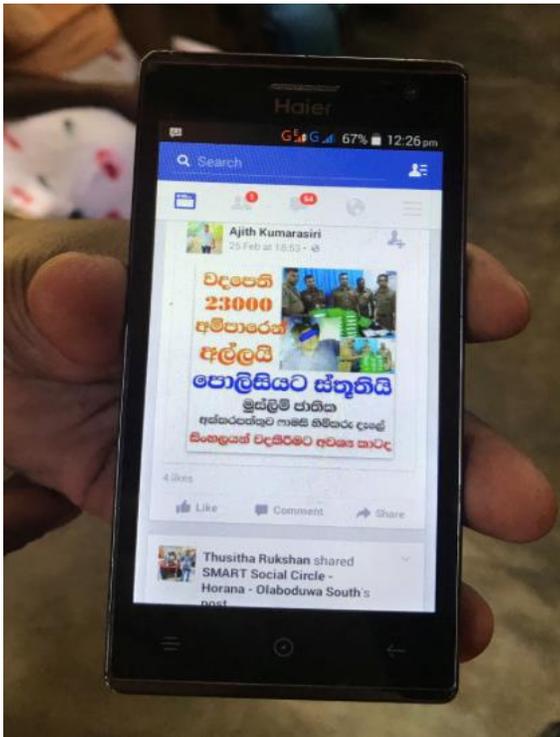
Falsehoods used to heighten fear, incite hate, lead to violence

- 2017-2018: Child abduction rumours have caused a continuous spate of killings in India
- And a horrific lynching in Mexico in 2018

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

False:

“23,000 sterilization pills caught in Amara. Thank you to the police. Muslim pharmacy owner from Akkaraipattu arrested. Who wants to sterilise the Sinhalese?”



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- Sri Lanka, 2018: Swirling rumours that Muslim minority were trying to sterilise the Sinhalese majority
- Sinhalese mistook lump of flour in food for sterilization pills; Muslim restaurant worker mistakenly “confessed” on mobile video, due to language barriers
- Spread widely online, tensions exploded
- **Mosques were burned, people attacked**
- **Widespread ethnic violence**
- **Government declared State of Emergency and temporarily banned social media platforms**

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

TODAY World

MENU ▾



Indonesian police blame social media for attack on temples

Published 01 AUGUST, 2016

UPDATED 01 AUGUST, 2016

Muslim mob burns down Buddhist temples in northern Sumatra

in [Asean Headline](#) | August 01, 2016 | (1,452 views)

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Tweet



Several Buddhist temples or vihara in northern Sumatra of Indonesia were plundered and burned down by a Muslim mob following a dispute between an Indonesian of Chinese descent an administrator of a mosque over its microphone volume, according to [the Jakarta Post Online](#) on Saturday.

Falsehoods used to heighten fear, incite hate, lead to violence

- Indonesia, 2016: Falsehoods that a Chinese woman who complained about noise from a mosque threw items at it, expelled the prayer leader, and disrupted prayers
- Incited an angry mob
- 12 Buddhist temples burned
- Billions of rupiah in losses

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

False rape claim behind latest religious clashes: Myanmar media

Updated 21 Jul 2014, 12:01am

Myanmar's latest religious clashes were sparked after a Buddhist woman was paid to make false rape claims against two Muslim brothers, state media reports.

RELATED STORY: [Mob burns school i](#)

Source: AFP

Falsehoods used to heighten fear, incite hate, lead to violence

- Myanmar, 2014: False rape claim by Muslim woman picked up by local website, published on Facebook, went viral
- **In 24 hours – violence ensued**
- **2 killed, dozens injured**
- **Mosques burned**

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Mosque-attack suspect read conspiracy site InfoWars prior to London rampage: Prosecutors



This is a June 19, 2017 file photo of a police cordon at attack near Finsbury Park Mosque in north London. British prosecutors Monday Jan. 22, 2018 described the suspect in the June attack near London's Finsbury Park Mosque as ... [more >](#)

Source: *Washington Times*

PROOF: MUSLIMS CELEBRATED TERROR ATTACK IN LONDON

Arabic TV viewers reacted with smiley emoticons, thumbs up

Paul Joseph Watson | Infowars.com - MARCH 23, 2017 

Falsehoods used to heighten fear, incite hate, lead to violence

- UK, 2018: Authorities found that man who drove a van into a mosque had been radicalised online, including by conspiracy theories
 - Email from far-right UK group warning of “an Islamic “nation within a nation” forming in the UK”
 - Articles from InfoWars (conspiracy theory and fake news website) – example: “*Proof: Muslims celebrated terror attack in London*”
- **Attack killed 1, injured 12**

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

“Yellow Vest” Movement in France, Dec ‘18 – Early ‘19

A wave of misinformation around France’s Yellow Vest movement

Source: The Observers



Consequences of Online Falsehoods

“Yellow Vest” Movement in France

- Context: Real sense of social injustice, precipitated by diesel tax increase
- Facebook’s algorithms fueled growth of “Anger Groups” – **online hubs for falsehoods**, e.g. -
 - French constitution nullified in 2016 by then-French PM
 - Macron would sell France’s sovereignty at a UN conference
 - A million Germans protested increased fuel prices
 - French police would march with the Yellow Vests
 - President Macron wrote to Paris police to use force against protestors
- **Effect: Heightened anger, weakened political centre**

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

“Yellow Vest” Movement in France

- Evidence of **foreign disinformation**:
 - Misleading foreign news reports published online
 - E.g. Photo of police officers briefly removing helmets to speak with protestors falsely reported as them showing solidarity with protestors
 - About 200 accounts churned out approximately 1,600 tweets and retweets a day
 - E.g. False claim that Algerians able to get medical treatment “for free” in France
 - worsened sense of inequality and threat

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

“Yellow Vest” Movement in France



Source: Politico (EU)

- **Top 100 false posts** related to the protests viewed a **total of 105 million times** over a 5-month period
 - Photo of bloodied protestors supposedly beaten up by French police instead taken in Spain the year before: **3.5 million views**
 - Viral video of Macron dancing “while France suffers” had been shot a month before at a summit: **5.7 million views**

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Hong Kong, 2019: Anti-immigrant, anti-refugee anxiety exploited

NEWS, CRIME, VIRAL

FAKE NEWS MAKES TARGETS OF HONG KONG'S SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY

By Coconuts Hong Kong Feb. 18, 2019



Source: Coconut (Hong Kong)

- 2 videos went viral, purporting to show men of South Asian descent attacking and robbing local women in Hong Kong.
 - Videos were instead taken in Romania and Malaysia
- Effect: Anti-refugee sentiments, criticisms of politician defending refugee rights

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

France, 2017: Anti-immigrant, anti-refugee anxiety exploited to turn public against institutions

“The French State is replacing Christian public holidays with Muslim and Jewish holidays”



Misleading far-right news article that a Paris lighthouse was being demolished to build housing for migrants

- Impetus for demolition was not migration;
- Spread widely on Facebook; fed anti-immigrant sentiments; increased support for far-right populists



“The French State is going to spend 100 million euros buying hotels to house migrants”



Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Germany: Anti-immigrant, anti-refugee anxiety exploited to turn public against institutions

“Our children are in danger”



- Online news site misleadingly reported a girl's claim to have been raped, and allegations that the police were covering it up by refusing to investigate
- Spread widely on social media

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Germany: Anti-immigrant, anti-refugee anxiety exploited to turn public against institutions

- German security and foreign policy expert: Foreign disinformation to undermine German public institutions (2017)
 - 700,000 Germans left country because of government's refugee policy
 - Refugees destroyed Germany's oldest church
- Other falsehoods (2017):
 - Syrian refugee whom Chancellor Merkel took a selfie with was a terrorist responsible for attacks in Berlin
 - Backlash caused real refugee to be unable to leave home for fear of violence
 - Chancellor Merkel allowed ISIS terrorists to operate in Europe to have an "EU Army" against other EU member countries

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Brexit Referendum, 2016

- Context: Genuine anxiety over escalation of inflow of migrants into Europe in around 2015
 - Around 2016 - Inflow was greatly reduced; migrants making a net fiscal contribution to the UK
- **Online falsehoods were spread on immigration, often exploiting anti-Muslim sentiment to turn people against the EU**
 - E.g. 12 million Turkish citizens would move to the UK if Turkey joined the EU

LOL: 12 Million Turks Say They're Headed for London When the Deal is Signed!

Andrew Anglin
Daily Stormer
May 23, 2016



We commin fo yo welfares an yo wimmins, Whitey.

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Brexit Referendum, 2016

- Evidence of **foreign disinformation campaign**:
 - Fake foreign-linked accounts posted more than 45,000 messages about Brexit 48 hours during the referendum
 - Fake foreign-linked accounts spread anti-Muslim content, e.g. –
 - False claim that a Muslim woman ignored victims while walking past them after the Westminster attack



The account Texas Lone Star has been identified by Twitter as being backed by the Russians

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Brexit Referendum, 2016

We send the EU
£350 million
a week – let's fund
our *NHS* instead

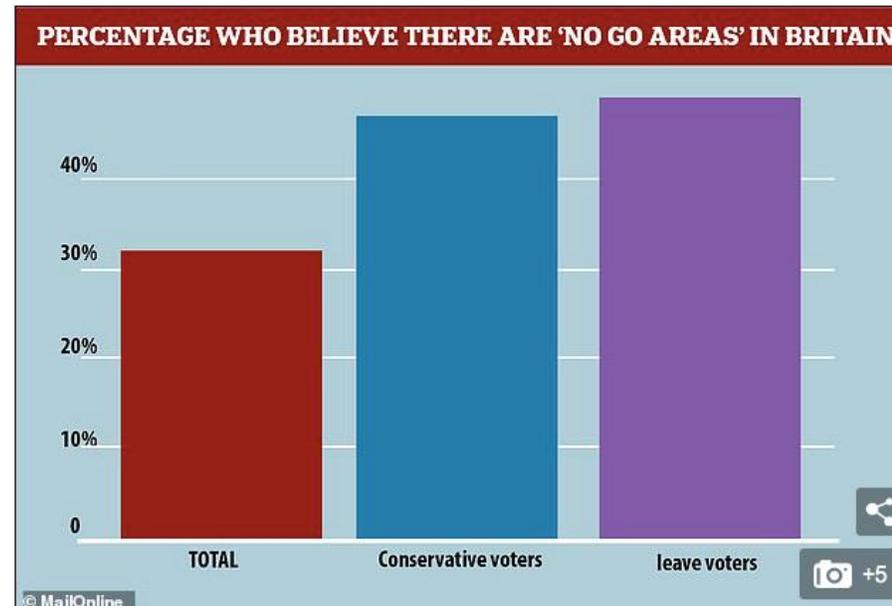
- False claim - real figure was less than half
- Spread offline and online, and using digital advertisements
- Study by King's College London:
 - **42% believed it is true**
 - 22% were unsure
 - Only 36% correctly believed it is false

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Brexit Referendum, 2016

False claim that there are Muslim “no go” areas in the UK controlled by Sharia law

- **Over a third** of British people wrongly believed this false claim
- **Half** of those who voted to leave the EU believed the claim



Source: UK Charity "Hope Not Hate"

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Undermine democratic processes

The New York Times

Opinion

Fake News Is Poisoning Brazilian Politics. WhatsApp Can Stop It.

By Cristina Tardáguila, Fabrício Benevenuto and Pablo Ortellado

Ms. Tardáguila, Mr. Benevenuto and Mr. Ortellado are the authors of a new report on misinformation in Brazil.



Source: The Conversation

- Brazil, Oct 2018: Falsehoods spread widely on WhatsApp about the then-Presidential candidates
- Study of 100,000 WhatsApp images – more than half contained misleading or outright false images
- Examples –
 - Photo with wrong information of voting number of a presidential candidate
 - Rumour that one candidate, who was stabbed at a rally, faked his own injuries
 - False narrative that one candidate was corrupt
 - Had arranged for fake votes to be cast
 - Was receiving money from gangs
 - Was conspiring to carry out voter fraud

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Undermine democratic processes

#pizzagate, US, 2016



- Rumour that Hillary Clinton and Democratic Party leaders were running a child sex ring out of a pizza restaurant
- Tweeted around 1.4 million times by more than 250,000 accounts
- A man went to the restaurant to “self-investigate”, fired a gun

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

“I don’t have any doubt that Pizzagate is real”



"I don't have any doubt that Pizzagate is real," says Kori Hayes, shown with wife Danielle Hayes at a "PizzaGate" protest outside the White House on March 25, 2017. (Michael Miller / The Washington Post)

Consequences of Online Falsehoods

Globally today: Public health impact of anti-vaccine falsehoods

Measles cases at highest for 20 years in Europe, as anti-vaccine movement grows

A climate of doubt about vaccine safety is putting lives at risk, experts warn

Source: The Guardian (Dec, 2018)

'Extraordinary': 5 states fight measles outbreak as N.Y. county bans unvaxxed minors in public

Doug Stanglin, USA TODAY Published 10:19 a.m. ET March 28, 2019 | Updated 4:37 p.m. ET March 29, 2019

Source: USA Today (March, 2019)

More than 130 dead in measles outbreak blamed on Philippine anti-vax movement

Source: The Telegraph (Feb, 2019)

BRIEFING • VACCINES

Measles Outbreaks Nearing Levels Not Seen Since 1992. Anti-Vax Propaganda Is Partly to Blame

Source: Fortune (March, 2019)

