'Soft Facts' and Spontaneous Community Mobilisation: The Role of Rumour After Major Crime Events

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Abstract

This study examines how social media increasingly shape and frame processes of community mobilisation following major crime events. In so doing, it illuminates social reactions that are frequently 'seen but unnoticed' in the aftermath of high profile crimes. Pivoting around several case studies of community mobilization in difficult and emotionally tense situations, the analysis distils some generalisable lessons about how social media are transforming the ways contemporary social life is organised.

This study examines how social media increasingly shape and frame processes of community mobilisation following major crime events. In so doing, it illuminates social reactions that are frequently 'seen but unnoticed' in the aftermath of high profile crimes. Pivoting around several case studies of community mobilization in difficult and emotionally tense situations, the analysis distils some generalisable lessons about how social media are transforming the ways contemporary social life is organised.

The research was commissioned by Nesta under the auspices of their 'Below the Radar' programme to focus upon the generation of spontaneous community mobilization and rumours in the aftermath of the murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich in May 2013. These are 'below the radar' inasmuch as they are aspects of social reaction to major incidents that have hitherto been largely neglected. Key insights derived from the analysis are:

- Social media communications function as both an 'engine' and a 'camera' - they propel social reactions, but simultaneously leave 'digital traces' that can be used to develop a picture of these reactions.
- Rather than 'big data', the key quality of social media following major crimes and disasters is its functioning as 'fast data', with information about what is happening travelling rapidly out from the scene to various audiences.
- The 'velocity' of data influences both public sense-making and processes of collective action, and comes close to outstripping the capacity of existing social networks to respond. Consequently, rumours play an important role in shaping public sentiments on social media following major incidents.
- Concurrently, forms of community mobilisation spring up, often reflecting polarized political and ideological interpretations of what has happened and what should be done about it.
- The evidence suggests that effective spontaneous community mobilisation frequently has to be scaffolded by existing social networks and institutional structures that are repurposed in moments of perceived crisis.

Positioned in this way, the research contributes to a more fine-grained understanding of how social media communications are impacting upon the organisation and ordering of contemporary society. There is a surfeit of grand claims about the transformative impact that Twitter and other social media channels are having upon social life. For example, and directly relevant to the substantive interests of this report, Brym et al. (2014) identified that social media were pivotal in the conduct of political revolution in Egypt.[1] Likewise, Manuel Castells (2012) argues that the forms of fluid and networked organisation that such communications enable are integral to how contemporary protest movements are initiated and

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[1] Brym, R. et al. (2014) 'Social media in the 2011 Egyptian uprising', British Journal of Sociology, 65/2.

sustained.[2] These accounts elaborate and refine an established cultural narrative about how the internet has propagated more flexible and effective forms of political and social activism.[3] Whilst not disputing the overarching thrust of these accounts - that pervasive social media communications are restructuring some foundational concepts of identity, politics and social order - our starting point is that they rather neglect the specifics of how any such changes are being wrought. This requires 'high resolution' detailed examination of the content of social media in order to understand how they are being used to accomplish certain objectives. The contents of this report are intended to contribute to such an effort. The following detailed dissection of a select number of events shines a light upon a particular form of collective action that appears specifically enabled by social media communications.

The empirical data informing the report were collected using a text-mining platform developed by the authors and their research team. The platform was being tested in 2012 when it started picking up social media traffic about the murder of Lee Rigby and a decision was taken to keep collecting these data. The data collection period concluded following the end of the court case when the two suspects were convicted of murder. By that point in excess of 34 million tweets relating to the case had been collated. The scale of the data is important, because of the 'high resolution' picture it affords of processes of social reaction. It enables us to track and trace in fine-grained detail what happens following a major crime. In particular, we are interested in the ways such data provide a record of how people try to use social media to accomplish certain goals. Preliminary analyses of these data identified a number of interesting facets warranting deeper and more detailed investigation. Two of these and the inter-relationships between them are taken forward as the focus herein.

The first concerns the role of rumours in the aftermath of major crime events in triggering particular forms of collective response. We label these rumours as 'soft facts' to capture their often contingent status and how, because of the speed of communication associated with social media, their provenance and accuracy is frequently uncertain and subject to revision, as an event unfolds. The second key construct introduced is the notion of 'spontaneous community mobilisation'. In bringing forward this concept, our intent is to capture the ways social media induce new forms of organised reaction, as communities seek to make sense of what has happened and the implications of this. The particular quality we are interested in highlighting here is a form of mobilisation that is not scaffolded by formal plans and organisations. Rather, it is more rapid and improvised in nature.

Framed in this way the research conducted can be understood as seeking to engage with three principal aims:

> 1. To use data driven analysis to develop an understanding of how rumours about crime risks and threats encourage forms of community mobilisation that are not dependent upon formal organisations.

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[2] Castells, M. (2012) Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age. Cambridge: Polity.
[3] For example: Van Laer, J and P. Van Aelst (2010) 'Internet and social movement action repertoires' Information, Communication and Society, 13/8; Garret, R. (2006) 'Protest in an information society: a review of literature on social movements and new ICTs'. Information, Communication and Society, 9/2.

2. To bring forward new concepts that account for the role of social media data in seeding new forms of social organisation.

3. To consider the policy and practice implications of these modes of spontaneous community mobilisation for agencies involved in community impact management work following the occurrence of major crime events.

The main body of the report starts by elaborating and refining some of the key ideas traced in outline above. In the next section of the report, the original research design and how the data have been collected and analysed are described in more detail. After which, the discussion becomes a more avowedly empirically driven analysis, using several case studies of community mobilisation that have been identified in the dataset.

DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS

The analysis conducted for this study has been built around three key concepts: community; spontaneous community mobilisation; and 'soft fact' rumours. Before seeking to elaborate and refine these concepts through exposure to the empirical data, it is helpful to construct some provisional definitions of what precisely they are seeking to articulate.

It has become commonplace in the literature on communities to recognise that a sense of affiliation, identity and belonging to a community can derive from a number of different starting points. There has been a move away from understanding communities principally in terms of their socio-geographic dimensions, to acknowledge a range of overlapping and interspersed forms of community in peoples' everyday lives. We talk routinely in terms of ethnic communities, thought communities, faith communities and communities of interest in non-mutually exclusive ways. These complex forms of connection and virtual membership, where some people may be known to each other, but many others are not, are important to this analysis inasmuch as they afford insight into some of the different motivations that can animate people and shift them into a position where they are 'mobilisable'.

This latter state is important in the context of the report and its analysis on the grounds that just because people acquire the motivations to do something about an issue or problem, whether they actually engage in social action appears quite finely balanced. As is documented in some of the case studies in the aftermath of the murder of Lee Rigby, whilst many groups seemed to get their membership 'mobilisable', relatively few actually engaged actively. It appears that even when 'social support' for a cause is widespread, direct participation in activism is often much more limited.

'Community mobilisation' is a term that has become increasingly popular in the academic and policy-oriented literatures in recent years in respect of capturing forms of collective action where groups with a shared sense of identity seek to accomplish particular ends. A conceptual cousin of work on 'social capital' and collective efficacy, the notion of

mobilisation is often preferred over other notions inasmuch as it accents actually doing things, rather than the potential capacity to do things.[4]

The second principal analytic construct deployed by this study is that of 'soft facts' and rumours. Innes (2014) defines a soft fact as information where the provenance is uncertain, but in the absence of any more authoritative source being available, it is used as the basis of understanding and action.[5] The contingency associated with the information's validity and reliability is often understood by its users, and they accept that in due course the 'facts' may have to refined or updated. But in the mean-time soft facts are used to temporarily fill a knowledge gap. Defined in this way 'soft facts' can be contrasted with 'hard' facts, where more certainty and less contingency are present. Innes argues that whilst a premium is placed on 'hard facts' in many social situations, in an information environment saturated with multiple and overlapping channels of communication, much social action is actually conducted on the basis of 'softer' facts. One especially influential category of soft facts are the kinds of rumours that are routinely spread via and travel across social media channels. A perjorative taint often attaches to the term 'rumour' and there is a tacit expectation that rumours contain either misinformation or disinformation. This is however misleading. As Shibutani (1966) recognised decades ago now, rumours can turn out to be true or false - accuracy is not their defining quality. Rather, they are forms of 'improvised news' that arise when information is needed by people, but not available via authoritative channels. This is a quality that the label of 'soft facts' neatly articulates.

Having mapped the key conceptual resources that frame and inform the analysis of the data, we now move on to examine several empirically-led case studies of community mobilisation following the killing of Lee Rigby. In the first of these, the focus is upon how social media communications about events in Woolwich provided a platform for the rapid emergence of a community of interest. This was an important influence upon processes of collective sense-making, as a public narrative of what had happened started to be constructed. Subsequent case studies focus more explicitly upon forms of social action and activism. Before this though, we briefly describe how the data has been collected and analysed.

RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data informing this report were the products of two previous projects. The TaRDiS project was funded by the European Commission to build a social media monitoring and analytics platform, designed specifically to cope with some of the complexities and intricacies associated with how social media's involvement in processes of violent extremist radicalization.[6] At the point when prototype tools for data collection were being tested under the auspices of the TaRDiS project, the tragic and disturbing murder of Lee Rigby occurred

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[4] Putnam, R. (2000) Bowling Alone. New York: Simon & Schuster.

[5] Innes, M. (2014) Signal Crimes: Social Reactions to Crime, Disorder and Control. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[6] TaRDiS stands for Tackling Radicalisation in Dispersed Societies and is focused upon developing methods and tools for understanding risks of radicalisation in ethnically mixed and diverse communities.

and we happened to collect all of the Tweets associated with the early reaction, including the very first tweets by members of the public at the crime scene. A decision was taken by the research team to leave the data collector 'on' and the software algorithms were rapidly 'tweaked' to increase the precision of the collection so that it would pick up as much of the traffic relating to the Woolwich incident as possible.

Because the software and tools were performing well we were able to continue a pretty much constant data collection process up until the conclusion of the court case when the two suspects were convicted of murder. A total of 34.5million public tweets, blogs, and Facebook entries were collated, but for the purposes of this report, we will focus exclusively on the content of material broadcast via Twitter. This decision reflects the unique qualities of this dataset and the level of granularity it affords in being able to track and trace public reactions to the unfolding developments associated with the incident, and how the police and authorities responded to it.

Indeed, the volume of data and the complexities pertaining to it meant that there was no possibility that this could be analysed under the funding available from the EC. Consequently, an application was made to the Economic and Social Research Council's 'Urgent Priorities' scheme for funding to facilitate analyses of the social media data relating to the murder in Woolwich.[7] The particular focus of this analysis has been developing a new conceptual framework for thinking about social reactions to major crimes, enabled by the unparalleled level of detail about such processes that these data afford. In conducting this analysis it was noted that there were some interesting insights into processes of social organization and collective action that could potentially be distilled from the dataset. Reflecting this, an application was made to Nesta's 'Below the Radar' programme to conduct research focused upon spontaneous community mobilization and rumours.

In the original application, the research design was to compare several case studies where community mobilization did and did not occur, as a way of distinguishing between the necessary and sufficient conditions for this particular form of collective action. However, as we have engaged more closely with the detail of the empirical data available, it has become apparent that how collective mobilisation is initiated and sustained involves complex social dynamics and mechanics. Accordingly, the examples in what follows have been selected to illuminate different facets of how and why communities mobilize under certain conditions and in particular situations. We are especially interested in highlighting some of the contingencies and constraints that act to influence the ways in which attempts at mobilizing do or do not gain traction.

Our approach has been to identify and isolate several case studies within the dataset, and use these to develop insights into the process of mobilizing people. What makes these cases particularly interesting for thinking about collective action and community mobilization is they involve complex and often ambiguous circumstances, where becoming involved often exposes people to the potential for direct violence and harm. A lot of work in the social capital tradition has tended to focus on how people become involved in activities that are

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fairly obviously 'pro-social' in intent, and where the risks of harm to their interests are fairly minimal. As will become apparent in the later sections of this report that clearly is not the case here.

Our suite of data collection and analysis tools, called *Sentinel*, a research prototype, offers a collection of services framed in terms of the 5W (who, what, when, where, why) framework:

- *Who*: Identify participants in events, and relationships between them.
- *What*: Characterize events including crimes and social mobilisation.
- *When*: Maintain a timeline of linked events.
- *Where*: Determine locations by both geo-tags and place names.
- *Why*: Apply social science models to uncover causal links between events.

The Sentinel architecture is illustrated in Figure 1. Sentinel is able to collect social media data from a variety of sources, including Twitter, YouTube, blogs, and newsfeeds. Sentinel's data mining and analysis services are accessed by a set of modular web interfaces, which support the development of customizable user apps. The services are hosted on a cloud computing platform to provide stability and scalability. The Sentinel analytic tools identify significant topics in two ways, by *bottom-up* and *top-down* natural language processing. The bottom-up approach uses FlexiTerm[8], an open-source software tool for automatic term recognition (ATR) that incorporates term variant normalisation methods enabling it to be more robust than traditional ATR approaches in handling the kinds of informal text found in social media. The top-down approach uses an *ontology* of concepts and terms relating to crime and social disorder, including formal and informal organisations and groups. The ontology is designed to be highly extensible allowing domain experts – including social scientists and criminologists – to add new concepts and terms rapidly.
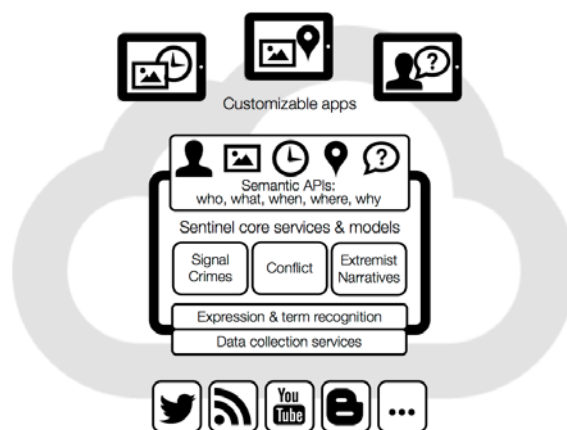

Figure 1: Sentinel conceptual architecture

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[8] I Spasić, M Greenwood, A Preece, N Francis, & G Elwyn, FlexiTerm: a Flexible Term Recognition Method, *Journal of Biomedical Semantics*, **4**(27), 2013. Software available at at http://www.cs.cf.ac.uk/flexiterm

Examples of Sentinel-generated visualisations are shown in Figure 2 below: the left-hand screenshot shows a "what/where" visualisation, mapping tweets by location and significant topics; the right-hand screenshot shows a "what/when" visualisation, plotting significant topics against a timeline.
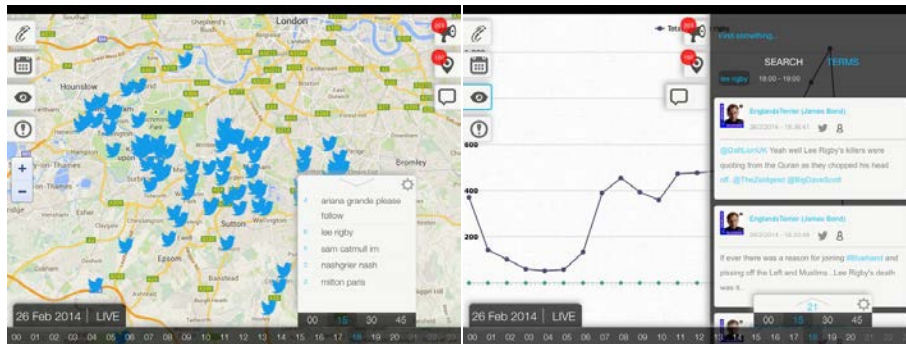

Figure 2: Example Sentinel Visualisations

In this study, we focus on social media data collected by Sentinel from Twitter. Twitter data collection is organised in Sentinel in terms of project-specific *channels*. To maximise the relevance of collected tweets to a particular domain of interest, a channel defines a set of parameters to Twitter's streaming API[9] which may include:

- a geographical bounding box defining a region of interest;
- a set of search terms covering hashtags, topics, and names of entities, groups, and places;
- a set of Twitter accounts to follow.

Typically, the set of parameters is designed in consultation with subject-matter experts, and is calibrated and refined over the period of a study. As mentioned above, data collection was already underway when the Woolwich incident occurred. In the context of the TaRDiS project, tweets were being collected: (a) in a geographical region of South London; and, (b) in relation to extremist activity. Consequently, many of the early posts relating to the Lee Rigby murder were picked up by Sentinel. As events unfolded, the team rapidly expanded the set of search terms, creating a distinct channel for the Woolwich incident. Examples of terms included in both the original TaRDiS channel and the Woolwich-specific one are given in the table below.

TaRDiS project channel terms:	Woolwich channel terms:
Mosque, EDL, BNP, EDLTrobinson, MPS, riot, protest, march, jihadwatchRS, hopenothate, ect	woolwich, terrorist, lee rigby, help for heroes, leerigby, muswell hill, helpforheroes, arson, burnt down, h4h, choudary,

	chislehurst, darul uloom, bomb, walsall, redditch, newport, cemetery, graves, christchurch, funeral, tipton, aisha, wolverhampton, adebolajo, adebowale ect

TABLE 1: Example terms used to define the TaRDiS and Woolwich collection channels

CASE STUDY 1: CREATING A COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

When computer scientists talk about 'big data' they attribute three defining qualities to it: volume, variety and velocity. This is important because it attends to how, although the scale and amount of data that is available are important, there are other dimensions to the information ecology that need to be accounted for. Indeed, all three of these attributes were present and active if we examine the broad patterns in the Twitter traffic following the stabbing of Lee Rigby. The volume of traffic peaked within the first 24 hours of the killing becoming public knowledge as people flocked to social media to try and establish what was happening. As such, there was an important interaction between the volume and velocity of information that was being communicated. Aspects of this are represented in Figure 3 below, which simply maps the volume of the data flows on Twitter relating to the Rigby incident over the first couple of days. This is not the total volume of Twitter worldwide or even within the UK, but a filtered proportion of it detected by Sentinel within a 'channel' as discussed above. The Twitter API limits Sentinel to up to 10% of the worldwide feed. Nevertheless, this gives a significant throughput volume. For example, in Figure 3 below the volume in this 'Woolwich Incident' channel peaked at nearly 900 tweets per minute on the first day, more than enough to enable meaningful analysis.
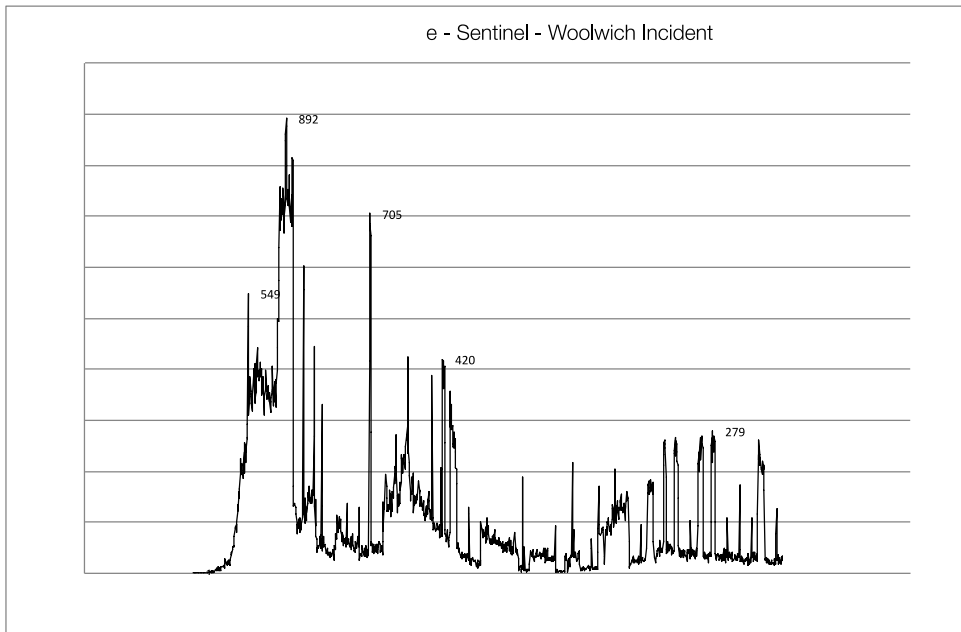
FIGURE 3: Total Twitter volume per minute in Sentinel Woolwich Incident Collection

What this mode of representation cannot capture, is the variety of information that comprises this volume of traffic – this is a dimension that becomes more apparent in subsequent sections of this report. However, quantitative mapping of communications volumes does suggest how social media platforms can play an important role in the aftermath of significant public events as people interested in finding out more about what has happened (or is happening) use their social networks to try and do so. In effect, social media technologies platform a community of interest – bringing people into communications contact who have a shared interest in making sense of an emerging situation. This sense of mutual interest and belonging may be only a temporary relationship of association, but they do seem to exist at different levels and in different 'spaces'.

For instance, looking at some of the very early tweets in the dataset, there is a clear sense of how individuals were seeking to mobilise the knowledge residing within their 'community' of Twitter associates and contacts to try and make sense of some anomalous signals in their environment. The following extracts are an edited sample of tweets sent by people in Woolwich within the first hour after the murder (at around 14.20). The first of these was someone picking up on the arrival of a helicopter, whilst the second was one of several responding to the police cars arriving with blue lights and sirens:

1. "The Air Ambulance appears to be landing in Woolwich - it's just circled over the Town Centre twice." (14:39 22 May 2013)
2. "What happened on John Wilson Street?!?! (Woolwich)" (14:39 22 May 2013

3. "someone just got stabbed by two guys down woolwich" (14:40)

The 'call and response' pattern present in Tweets 2 and 3, was repeated on a number of occasions in the early social media traffic following the killing. For example, it was present in Tweets 4 and 5 in the following sequence:

4. "What the hell is happening in woolwich??????." (14:45)
5. "Madness outside Woolwich library, some kid got stabbed and then the killers got shot by police :O" (14:45)
6. "Gunshots going off in woolwich" (14:47)
7. "two blokes just got shot by police up Woolwich...dun dun dun" (14:49)

It is notable that information about how the story was developing amongst this emerging community of interest being built around Twitter, was seemingly in advance of the official sources. Tweet 7 was six minutes ahead of the same information being linked to official police sources - thus supporting the previous commentary about the velocity of data. The next Tweets start to introduce a slightly more emotive tone into the exchanges:

8. "It may be the case' that police have opened fire on murder suspects in Woolwich, Scotland Yard says. update expected in ten minutes" (14:54)
9. My god 3boys and 1 solider just shot dead in Woolwich seriously what is this world coming 2!!! (14:57)
10. "so apparently someone got their head cut off in Woolwich?! Please say that's a sick joke! What the hell is this country coming too??!!" (14:58)

The intriguing thing about these communications is how collectively the authors actually did a fairly good job of ascertaining the key facts about what was transpiring in Woolwich. So although no one individual knew everything, the call and response mechanism allowed them to piece together a relatively accurate collective understanding. Of course, from where they were situated, the participants in these exchanges could not verify the accuracy of the information being provided. They could not establish whether the provisional account they are working up was valid and reliable. In practice, there was an awful lot of information and speculation swirling around as well, some of which it transpired was disinformation and misinformation. In this sense, the people engaging in the collective sense-making work were making use of 'soft facts' where the provenance of the information could not be established. But in the absence of more authoritative inputs they were the best explanations available.

One of the key consequences of these communications was that the community of interest mobilising around Twitter grew extremely rapidly. At 14:58 the first eyewitness accounts from several members of the public who had been reporting developments via Twitter on their smartphones were recognised as significant and were rapidly retweeted in high volumes. Some sense of this was articulated by the quantitative metrics for communications about the Woolwich incident that are outlined in Figure 3 above, where a significant and abnormal burst of twitter traffic was detected around 14:40 (Mean.86 Tpm), which continued to build,

peaking at 17:48 (Mean 182 Tpm). Sentinel collected a total of 80549 tweets on this subject during the period of 188 minutes between those times.

Co-occurring with the increased volume of communications taking place though, the 'soft facts' began to 'harden' into a public narrative. An especially interesting role in the 'hardening up' and translating of 'soft facts' into 'hard facts' was played by more traditional mass media outlets. In the midst of lots of speculation and questions, the reports from professional journalists were influential in steering an emerging definition of the situation. A sense of this is provided in the following three tweets referencing a local newspaper and London radio station:

> 13. Evening Standard is saying the victim might be an army cadet, terrorist incident? (15:54)
> 14. Chilling reports on LBC make Woolwich incident sound 'terrorist' - killers didn't try to escape, were taking pictures and waited for police? (16:22)
> 15. @lbc973 are speculating that this could be terrorist act in Woolwich. Certainly fits profile of beheading soldier's threats. (17:10)

This sense-making by a growing community of interest all happened well ahead of any official statement by the Metropolitan Police, which occurred just under three hours after the crime was committed:

> 16. BREAKING: The Met are now treating Woolwich as a terrorist incident. (17:16)
> 17. COBRA has been called to a meeting and it's being treated as a terrorist incident #woolwich RIP Soldier (17:28)

What can be observed here then is the importance of 'credible voices'. When LBC radio in London began to suggest that the murder might be a terrorist incident, their statements were treated with a degree of authority. Their intervention was widely retweeted by the membership of the community of interest that was mobilizing via Twitter.

At this juncture of the discussion it is worth just briefly teasing out some of the implications of the analysis so far for thinking about 'below the radar' social action. First, the ways that the members of the community of interest on Twitter were 'crowdsourcing' their sense-making activity, shows how they were using social media as a form of radar. It was extending their field of vision and awareness about potentially consequential events in the world. Moreover, they were using it as a form of 'sonar' radar – 'pinging' signals to see what responses they received from the information environment. Importantly though, there were evident constraints on what could be achieved in this mode. The intervention of more 'above the radar' organisations was important in validating or re-interpreting the 'signal returns' they were getting.

The ability of some actors to influence and shape the views of the wider community interested in the unfolding events is a microcosm of what happened on a much larger scale following the murder. A lot of data was being communicated rapidly, in a variety of formats as people tried to make sense of what had happened. It would be a mistake however to conflate all of the individuals involved and see them or their interventions as being equivalent. For detailed analysis of the data segments at least two key audiences. There were Twitter users who were generally interested in what had happened. But in addition, there were others involved in the online conversation who were interested to try and actively manipulate and steer the response in line with their established political and ideological interests. Rather opportunistically, these pre-existing communities sought to marshal their communications around the events to advance their political cause.

The operations of such processes can be detected in the Woolwich incident dataset, through tracking some key developments over time. Figure 4 below provides a representation of the total of Twitter traffic broken down by its main topic channels. So the data has been 'cut' according to whether it contained either the hashtags and/or mentions of 'Woolwich' or 'EDL' or 'Rigby'. 'Rigby' did not appear in the dataset until the day after the murder when he was formally named as the victim. As will be discussed in much more detail in the next section of this report, the English Defence League, as an established community of interest became a significant actor in the story of what happened after the murder in South London. For now though, it is sufficient to note, as depicted in Figure 4 that 'Woolwich' was the channel that was initially dominant within the community of interest that arose on Twitter. However, as the data shows, it's use by the Twitter communities faded quite rapidly in the subsequent days after the initial flurry of Twitter activity.

This trajectory of development is in marked contrast to what happened to the use patterns for the EDL channel. It is important to note that the overall quantity of usage covers Twitter users who are both 'pro-' and 'anti-EDL'. But even more significant than this is how the volume of traffic was sustained over a much longer time-frame. This is attributable to how the EDL membership mobilised its Twitter activity to try and utilise aspects of the Lee Rigby to advance their views and position. At the same time, other groups on the left of the political spectrum simultaneously engaged in other activities to counter the propaganda and campaigning activities of the EDL.
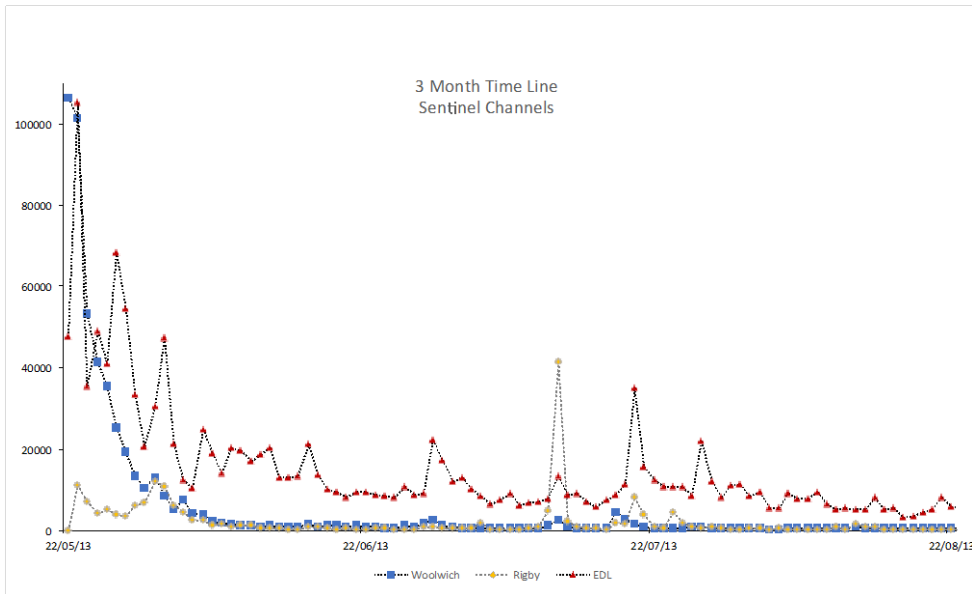
FIGURE 4: 'Channel Decay' - Three Months Post Murder

Analysis of the dynamics between such groups, and the ways they mobilise in opposition to each other is dealt with in more detail in the next case study. For now, we want to highlight one important implication of this analysis. Acknowledging that there are several different communities of interest engaging via social media, and seeking to manipulate and influence the public narrative of an event should shape how we treat and analyse any such data. Sentiment mining has become a mainstay of 'big data' treatments of social media over the last couple of years. There are now lots of commercial 'analytics' packages that are positioned to 'crunch' social media data to provide insights into public opinions and attitudes. These packages tend to 'hoover up' all social media traffic pertaining to the particular issue or event that is of interest treating it all as equivalent. What our analysis suggests is that such approaches may be misleading on the grounds that they are incorporating communications data intentionally introduced into the public conversation to advance the political standing of the views of established communities of interest.

It is naïve to treat all social media data as providing an unfettered and 'pure' insight into what members of the public are thinking or feeling about contentious events. To co-opt the iridescent phrasing of the sociologist of technology Donald MacKenzie social media is always both an 'engine' and a 'camera'.[10] That is, it never just provides a documentary record of public reactions, but rather is actively involved in shaping and directing public sentiments in some directions and towards some things, as well as away from others. In this sense then, rather than focusing upon how social media 'takes a picture' of public views, as

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[10] MacKenzie, D. (2006) An Engine Not A Camera: How Financial Models Shape Markets. Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press.

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sentiment analysis tools are predicated to do. Far more interesting questions arise if one poses the question 'What are people using social media technologies to do and accomplish?' And it is this kind of question that is the focus of our next case study.

CASE STUDY 2: COMMUNITY MOBILISATION IN OPPOSITION

In the preceding case study it was identified how a key set of communications embedded within the larger dataset related to the activities of members of the EDL, and those opposed to their political stance and position. Both sides were engaged in trying to use social media 'to do things', specifically: organise their membership and mobilise them in respect of the focal event; and project a preferred definition of the situation to garner wider popular support. At this juncture, we will elaborate and extend this discussion to develop a far more detailed account of the processes involved in mobilising these communities. A particular focus of the case study will be upon the interactive nature of the processes as the two 'thought communities' sought to mobilise in opposition to each other. This reflects how Twitter is a public social media forum that provides a set of informational resources that both sides can access and use to try and organise and choreograph those affiliated with their particular standpoint.

The EDL first tried to galvanise their supporters on the evening of the murder, calling for a protest march on the streets of Woolwich that was disseminated via Twitter. This clearly fits the conceptual criteria of spontaneous community mobilisation defined above - it was unplanned and responding to unexpected events. It also illustrates how social media affords a capacity for such a form of collective action in that, by broadcasting their call for a protest in line with their established political agenda, the EDL leadership anticipated being able to mobilise significant numbers of activists motivated by the atrocity of the crime. The initial elements of their position were encapsulated in a Tweet broadcast at 18.06, which was rapidly retweeted 537 times in the following minutes:

> 17 @Official_EDL: ****CONFIRMED WE HAVE BEEN SUBJECT TO A TERROR ATTACK BY ISLAM, WE ARE CURRENTLY UNDER ATTACK**** (18:06)

It is of note that in framing this message, reference is made to an undefined notion of "we" being the victims of the attack. Subsequent to this initial pronouncement there followed a stream of messages trying to marshal some form of active response to this "attack". Within twenty minutes it was broadcast that the then leader of the EDL Tommy Robinson was heading to Woolwich with an instruction for others to take to the streets, a tweet retweeted 1126 times in the data set:

> 18 EDL leader Tommy Robinson on way to Woolwich now, Take to the streets peeps ENOUGH IS ENOUGH (18:26)

15

The EDL Twitter account was being used to reiterate the call for the EDL support to gather on the streets of Woolwich, with more details being added in to the messaging. Both of the following were retweeted around 300 times, but we don't know of course how many people read them. Additionally, these tweets seemed to specifically address London supporters:

> 19 EnglishDefenceLeague @Official_EDL 46s Message from Tommy - Feet on the streets anyone want to go to Woolwich... (18:59)

> 20 @Official_EDL: Message from Tommy - Feet on the streets anyone want to go to Woolwich contact him/me, he will be there around 9pm (18:59)

At the same time as these Tweets were being sent by the EDL leadership, they were also being monitored by political groups opposed to the EDL's ideology and values. These groups retweeted the messages to evidence to their members and affiliates the need to mobilise a counter-protest. Aspects of how these groups were also seeking to mobilise their communities are evident in the sample of messages below. Of particular note, are the timings of these messages as they were prior to the actual EDL communications and certainly well in advance of when members of the EDL actually physically appeared in Woolwich. This anticipation of the opposition's intentions and activity may well play an important role in prefiguring the capacity of the oppositional side to rapidly mobilise its support to launch a counter-protest:

> 21 #EDL Already Blaming Muslims for Woolwich Incident (17:36)
> 22 Frightening that EDL are calling for 'revenge' after #Woolwich attack (17:40)
> 23 OF COURSE #EDL will capitalise on this! More Hate Attacks, More retaliatory crimes. WELCOME TO HELL! #UK #Woolwich (17:46)
> 24 EDL en route Woolwich (18:08)
> 25 EDL ARE MARCHING TOWARDS WOOLWICH AS WE SPEAK (18:32)

Mirroring their opponents, those on the left also used Twitter to progressively up-date those they were seeking to influence and persuade, although it is evident that the level of retweeting was lower than seen with the initial EDL tweets. At the point when these messages were sent they were fundamentally 'soft facts' - they were based on rumours and predictions of what was likely to happen, but convey a sense of urgency and disquiet. In effect then, through their communication their authors were seeking to set up and frame motivations that will justify counter-action.

This interactive dynamic was continued with the next message reproduced below, where more detail is introduced about when, where and against whom any counter-protest should take place. This message moved the conversation amongst the left-wing groups from an inchoate risk, to a more precisely delineated threat. Accompanying this, there was a sense of

trying to build a community of counter-protest, bringing together a coalition of groups whose membership has an established track record of opposing right-wing groupings:

> 26 RT @blacbloc: Tommy Robinson expected in #Woolwich at 9pm #Antifa #EDL (19:46)

The fact that the two opposed sides were mirroring each other in terms of the tactics they were seeking to use to mobilise their support, plus the ways in which they were responding interactively to counter initiatives being taken by their opponents, makes this especially interesting in terms of its social dynamics.

Taken together, the Tweets reproduced above give a sense of the two sides preparing for and moving towards conflict. An important element of which is the appearance in the rhetorical exchanges of what Randall Collins (2011) labels 'righteous anger'. Over the course of the evening a number of Tweets became increasingly freighted with intense emotional language that in the first tweet listed below involved the commission of a racist hate crime online:

> 27 Its time we had a national shoot a paki day and have it every year at £5 a head(money to charity) cull them (18:15)
> 28 I HOPE THE EDL COME AND KILL THESE WANKERS ALL OF THEM. #woolwich #EDL (18:16)
> 29 #woolwich attack. This is war. First gang raping our children now beheading people on the streets of south London in broad daylight #EDL (18:18)

The content of these communications were pivotal in the overarching process of mobilisation amongst the EDL as they shifted in tenor and tone from focusing upon matters of organisation, to encouraging the use of violence. This was an important escalation in the language used and foreshadows what happened later that night. It is notable how the first two messages occurred in quick succession to each other, almost as if the first one creates a 'tipping point' for participants already in a heightened emotional state. The latter Tweet does rather different work, utilising an important rhetorical device that appears in several guises throughout the dataset. For whilst it continues the escalated tone of its predecessors, its author also connects the current event with previous issues of concern, in an attempt to construct a sense of grievance for their community sufficient that it will persuade people to move to action. In making the reference to "first gang raping our children", the EDL campaigners were seeking to connect the current focal issue (murder of a white soldier) with previous issues that they had campaigned about. In this particular case, child sexual abuse in Rotherham, involving predominantly Muslim men from the town. This exemplifies how atrocities are chained together to amplify the sense of a deep and profound problem causing all sorts of ills that therefore justifies narratives of grievance and righteous anger. These

narratives help to instil a perception of 'long antagonism'[11], that is, the sense that the individual incidents of concern are not isolated but connected – and require immediate action.

The connecting of a current crisis event with a wider set of legacy grievances is a well established propaganda technique. It plays an important role in the dynamics of the kinds of 'polarised mobilisation' we are examining here, in terms of connecting to an established social support base. It is also a point at which strategic communications interventions by 'above the radar' organisations with an interested in mitigating risks of violence, could have an important role to play. For as we will show in due course, disrupting the initial 'window of opportunity' for mobilisation, when anger is often most acute, can have subsequent 'downstream' consequences for the dynamics of any potential for social conflict.

Up to this point, the focus of the analysis has been upon how the two opposed sides are using the same platform and the same information to organise a protest and counter-protest, and to try and establish a set of motivations that will be sufficiently persuasive to their membership that they will actually engage in direct action. Significantly, this all happened rapidly in a relatively compressed period of time. As rehearsed above, a critical point in the arc of the story occurred at around 21.00 that evening when a flurry of social media activity amongst those aligned on the left started to report that known EDL members were in Woolwich:

> 30 URGENT: reports (unconfirmed) EDL gathering in Wetherspoons in Woolwich #Antifa (21:02)
>
> 31 Have it on good authority that #EDL are gathering in the Great Harry Wetherspoons in #Woolwich. Anti-nazis in the area be ready. (21:03)
>
> 32 EDL gathering in Great Harry Wetherspoons in Woolwich. Pls RT (21:03)
>
> 33 EDL and BNP are patrolling Wellington Street in South Greenwich. Just when you thought they couldn't get anymore fucking stupid (21:11)
>
> 34 HIgh Alert Please Share.The EDL are crewing up in Woolwich right now if you check out twitter #EDL (21:14)
>
> 35 ATTN #WOOLWICH #GREENWICH #ANTIFA #ARA :: REPORTS OF EDL GATHERING AT THE GREAT HARRY http://t.co/62myYcwrab (21:17) [link is a webpage of the Great Harry pub giving address and map]
>
> 36 @Official_EDL: CAN ANYONE THAT CAN GET THERE GET TO WOOLWICH NOW!!!! (21:20)
>
> 37 #STOP #EDL THEY HAVE SENT A CALL OUT TO GET PEOPLE TO #WOOLWICH #LONDON. Many members are talking about retaliation https://t.co/1PsGS8R7k0 (21:27)

Consistent with a pattern noted earlier, in this sequence of messages it can be seen how increasing levels of detail are introduced. This gives a much greater sense of purpose to the mobilisation effort. There is also a growing sense of urgency about the potential threat

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[11] Wyszonirski M J (1975). "Communal violence": The Armenians and Copts as case studies. World Politics 27 April 1975:430-55, at 433.

involved. Indeed, one of the interesting aspects of the exchanges is the wildly varying estimates of the numbers of people involved, as captured in the following two messages:

> 38 Few EDL activists gathering in Woolwich. Says @█████████ Police presence heavy as International press descend on small, scarred London St (21:04)
>
> 39 RT @blacbloc: Reports of two busloads of #EDL are on their way to #Woolwich via @█████████ cc @█████████ (21:06)

The latter Tweet has all the hallmarks of a rumour. It was a 'soft' fact inasmuch as it was correct that there were EDL members in Woolwich, but in referring to two bus-loads it clearly over-estimated the numbers involved. In this respect, the first message was closer to what actually materialised on the streets that night. Our best estimate is that despite the repeated calls for "feet on the street" and the personal involvement of the group's leader, no more than 40 individuals mustered in Woolwich. Even fewer from the left-wing groups assembled to oppose them. Indeed, the Metropolitan Police assertively deployed their Territorial Support Group (TSG) assets and once on scene, the whole situation appeared to be over in under 10 minutes, with both the EDL and police dispersing. The key elements of which were also captured on Twitter:

> 40 Clash now on Woolwich New Road. EDL throwing glass missiles at the police (21:46)
>
> 41 EDL chants, missiles thrown at police lines. Cops putting on riot gear. came from nowhere. #woolwich (21:46)
>
> 42 Edl have arrived in #woolwich bottles thrown at police outside train station (21:46)
>
> 43 EDL marching outside Woolwich DLR. About 60. Throwing bottles. Police lining up. Many black ppl in neighbourhood running away across square (21:48)
>
> 44 #Woolwich big crowd of EDL chanting 'whose streets, our streets' outside Woolwich Arsenal station. Threw bottles at police. (21:49)
>
> 45 Over in a flash. Police lines formed and suddenly withdrawn as edl disappear. Police moving out of #woolwich centre now (21:52)

From this account it is possible to distil some important insights into the causes and consequences of processes of spontaneous community mobilisation:

- It is clear that both the EDL and those opposed to their ideas were able to use social media to help rapidly organise the mobilisation of their community base. This was 'spontaneous' in that it was not something planned for, but was undertaken in an improvised way.

- At the same time, the case study illuminates some of the issues associated with such a mode of community organising. Without plans or logistical arrangements, despite a

lot of chatter, both sides struggled to get people to turn out and engage in the actions. Whilst police were concerned about the threat to public order, in actuality very few individuals actually showed.

- This reflects how the communications on all sides were suffused with rumours and soft facts. In a quickly evolving situation accurate and reliable information was hard to get a fix on.

- This is perhaps unsurprising given that the moves towards action were performed in direct opposition to each other on both sides. As such, individuals were being asked to expose themselves to potential violence. Some did, but many preferred to occupy a position of supporter.

These uses of social media to try and convert online participation in a community setting into offline 'real world' social action are important in shining a light on how hard this can be. In some of the more 'evangelistic' literature on the social impacts of social media the transformative impacts that such communications technologies have for mobilising communities have been placed very much to the fore. What these case studies intimate however, is that whilst social media can be and indeed is used to mobilise communities, in practice this can be hard to do. This is especially the case where it involves people placing themselves at risk.

CASE STUDY 3: MOBILISING SYMBOLS - TEA, BISCUITS & A GAME OF FOOTBALL

In the days and weeks following the murder of Lee Rigby, reports were received from around the country of hate crimes being committed against people and buildings. Community tensions were running high. One story though 'cut through' this general climate of unease and concern. It told of how tensions relating to an EDL march in York had been diffused when members of a local Mosque had come out and talked with the marchers over a cup of tea, and a friendly game of football had ensued. This story was picked up by many national media outlets and was repeatedly recounted by journalists. It became almost iconic in the narrative of the Lee Rigby murder and how community impacts were managed and a sense of order restored. For implicit in the narrative that was worked up by the journalists was the idea of how symbols of English identity (a cup of tea and biscuits, and football) were effective at diffusing the potential for racial conflict.

However, analysis of the communications on Twitter surrounding this event suggest that the reality of what happened was rather different from the mediated narrative subsequently broadcast. In exploring what transpired in York, we are interested in three key issues:

- What happened in terms of who mobilised and who did not?
- What do the discrepancies between the media accounts and what actually occurred imply in terms of how and why communities are mobilised?

- What insights does this provide in terms of the work of symbols in persuading people to mobilise to engage in forms of collective action?

As intimated above then, our particular focus for this case study is how symbols of different kinds come to play an important role in processes of mobilisation

On the 23rd May 2013, the day after the murder in Woolwich, and after a night of EDL disturbances with the police, the following message appeared on the Scarborough EDL Division Facebook page:

Yorkshire EDL Scarborough Division
23 May 2013
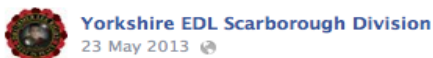
demonstration on Sunday at bull Lane mosque York. please come along.
no SURRENDER.

Already then, we can see processes of 'symbolisation' associated with the case. That is the adoption and deployment of a symbol that potently captures key issues associated with a complex issue, condensing them down into a simple, visual and easily memorable form. In this instance, it was the positioning of the picture of Fusilier Rigby in his uniform, within a memorial wreath (see more detailed picture below). This was the same picture that was being widely circulated by press and broadcast media in their reports. It was still in use on the EDL Scarborough Facebook page in December 2014.

The planned demonstration was in keeping with EDL's aim stated on their Facebook page: "We will protest against militant Islam on British soil. Any act of Muslim extremism will now be countered by the EDL. We are not a racist organisation"[12]. When compared with the attempt to rapidly assemble a mass protest on the evening of the murder, potentially the Scarborough initiative had a number of advantages. Notably, a lead in time allowing for more co-ordination and planning. That said, it did coincide with a large demonstration planned for Newcastle the day before on Saturday 25th May, and another in Downing Street, London on 27th, the day after. This may have over-loaded the capacity of the membership to participate and thus explain why only five supporters attended on the 26th May, from a division capable of fielding many more.

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[12] https://www.facebook.com/pages/Yorkshire-EDL-Scarborough-Division/164714263580128

They were significantly out-numbered by the counter-protest that was mobilised. Unaware of how many EDL would attend, the Facebook post by the Scarborough division of the EDL on the 23rd was a source of alarm for some Twitter users, given the febrile and tense atmosphere across the country more generally. In response, on the day of the demonstration more than a hundred local people and students gathered at the mosque named by the EDL to show their solidarity and counter any actions staged by the EDL.

Given the large differences in numbers on the two sides, it is perhaps unsurprising that the EDL activists preferred to have a cup of tea and play football. But more important is the fact that the details of what actually happened in York are far removed from the impression given by the mass media in the days after. These accounts implied that there was a far greater potential for violent clashes between the two sides, and this was only prevented by the offer of tea and biscuits from the members of the Mosque. It is a great story, so perhaps no wonder it was picked up and broadcast widely.

But two key questions do arise and need explaining. First, how was it that the EDL with experience of mobilising resources to conduct protests could not do so, when a significant number of people were mobilised in opposition? Second, what was it about the public narrative that developed that explains its widespread communication, despite baring little semblance to what actually happened?

In respect of the first question, the answer seems to involve the activation of a pre-existing social network established between the mosque and students and staff at York University. An elder of the York Mosque, critical to the mobilisation of peaceful opposition was Muhammad El-Gomati, an electronics professor at the university. In response to the march, he decided to hold an open-day at the mosque and issued a public invitation, publicised through the Student's Union. On Saturday 25th , NOUSE - the University of York's student newspaper, which is published on-line and in print, ran a story entitled "Twitter raises fears of York EDL rally".[13] The piece quoted the Facebook post above, and stated an anti-EDL protest was being organised that also involved the University's Amnesty International section and Student Union. A post on the Amnesty International page quoted by NOUSE stated:

> "York's mosque on Bull Lane (just off Lawrence Street) is inviting everyone for tea from 2pm tomorrow, amid threats of violent action by EDL members. Please come down to show your solidarity!"

This invitation was also widely retweeted. Nevertheless, some bloggers responding to the article were highly critical of the paper, stating that they had exaggerated the Twitter response and Facebook 'likes' of the EDL post.

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[13] http://www.nouse.co.uk/2013/05/25/twitter-raises-fears-of-york-edl-rally/

Our analysis supports that position, in that no significant response was detected on Twitter to the original EDL post. However, by the 25th there was a recognisable build up of tweets calling for a response to the proposed EDL demonstration. This perceived need to garner an effective response was reinforced by a large and violent EDL demonstration in Newcastle the same day. Spurred on by these developments, links to the NOUSE article appeared on Twitter and the momentum created by the York University Student's Union began to tip into mobilisation. A number of tweets indicated that people were planning to attend the Bull Lane Mosque the next day to show their support.

The significance of these communications was that they countered any notion that if individuals did decide to turn up they would do so in isolation. Contrasted with the EDL official tweets from the evening of the initial murder, which called for people to turn out to support Tommy Robinson, in York, the coalition of left-wing groups prefigured a greater sense of community action as lots of individuals broadcast that they would be participating.

A second important element concerns the role of institutional infrastructure in scaffolding the mobilization of a community. Looking at the 'tipping point' where social discussion turned to mobilisation of effort and resources, the NOUSE intervention, whether strictly factual or not, provided the social definition of threat around which actors were prepared to mobilise. This is coherent with Robert Sampson's (2012) recent revision to his theory of 'collective efficacy'.[14] In his original formulation, Sampson and colleagues developed a position that maintained that community groups could be objectively differentiated on their combined collective capacities to invoke informal social control actions to solve problems. More recently, however, he has modified his position, to suggest that communities tend to be more efficacious in solving complex problems when their efforts are undergirded by the presence and activities of influential social institutions. Such institutional infrastructures are, he posits, often important in performing some of the 'heavy lifting' required to resolve what are otherwise fairly intractable structural issues.

This certainly resonates with what transpired in York. The involvement of the University's Student's Union, collaborating with several other local organisations, provided a platform around which a counter-action could coalesce. On the morning of the planned EDL demonstration, Twitter traffic repeatedly reiterated an invitation to participate:

> The #York community has been invited for tea at York Mosque (Bull Lane) today from 2pm to stand up to EDL threats. Pls RT

> YORK PEOPLE: Bull Lane Mosque, just off Lawrence Street has received threats of an EDL action. A counter-demo is assembling.

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[14] Sampson, R. (2012) Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighbourhood Effect. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

In the preceding passages, it was mentioned how the building of the appearance of an online community of active participants was important in persuading growing numbers of individuals to get directly involved. Conversely, it appears that at around the same time as the above messages were broadcast, doubts were emerging amongst EDL supporters about the reach and touch being achieved by their messaging:

> This cheers me up - EDL guy in South Yorkshire 'gutted' due to poor turn out at meet up

Of course, reiterating a point made earlier in this discussion, Twitter is a public channel of communication and both sides were using it to monitor their opponents. And as such, just as those from the EDL were starting to express concerns about the numbers attending, they could observe far more positive accounts emanating from the counter-protestors:

> Just walking to York Mosque to show my support as their local councillor.

> I'd say there were at around 100 people at the York Mosque here to show support, a mix of locals and students and still more arriving.

> Amazing groundswell of support for York Mosque from York community here on Bull Lane. Feeling proud.

It seems plausible to infer that it may be a lot easier to approach a potentially violent situation if you are aware that supporters on your side are either en route or already there. Tweets continued to appear describing the unfolding 'protest'. Contrasted with the kinds of emotive and violent language identified on Twitter on the night of the murder, these provide a far more reassuring account:

> At #YorkMosque the EDL (we assume) have just appeared. Everything calm. They're about to be invited to tea.

> Some EDL at #Yorkmosque. All peaceful now. Tea and biscuits with the fascists. Oh #york.

Opposed by 100-150 supporters of the mosque, the 4-6 EDL supporters were invited in for tea. A number of tweets and blogs carried a picture of a female EDL supporter taking a cup of tea from a member of the mosque congregation. Later the supporters and protesters dispersed peacefully.

It is only after everything had dispersed at the scene that the construction of what would become the public narrative started to become evident. That evening, several tweets appeared that put a very different spin on the event. There was no mention of the tiny EDL turn out. Bearing in mind there had been hundreds of EDL supporters in Newcastle the day before, one

might be forgiven for believing that a significant defeat had somehow been wrought by the liberal application of tea and cake:

> Amazing rumours that the EDL has been thwarted in York by a Tea party hosted by the Mosque. Bloody love my home town

> #EDL showed up for a rally outside a York mosque today only to find 100 locals defiantly sipping tea and eating cake.

> Threatened EDL protest at York mosque thwarted by impromptu tea party thrown by local people to celebrate our Muslim neighbours

All of these tweets cleverly invoke a quintessential symbol of Britishness - a tea party – and link it with the Mosque. It implicitly conveys a sense of how a very different faith tradition has been integrated within the local rituals and rhythms of life in Yorkshire. A symbol of Britishness was mobilised to manage a potential threat to community relations. On Sunday 27th May the NOUSE proudly proclaimed, "Students face down EDL protest with a cuppa"[15]. This story was picked up nationally and run by the BBC, The Sun, The Guardian, The Huffington Post, The Commentator and even GQ Magazine.

The events described above became an important part of the story arc of what happened following the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby. This belongs in a report on 'Below the Radar' activity on the grounds that what actually happened has been largely obscured from public view, by an active process of 'myth making'. Several key insights into how and why community mobilization is activated have been set out:

- Symbols – processes of symbolisation and the co-optation of highly visual and memorable images that condense complex issues into more simple forms are powerful devices for drawing a community of like-minded individuals together, and orienting their attention towards particular issues. Some of the symbols selected for galvanising and mobilising popular support were very cleverly identified, as they possessed deep cultural resonances.
- Symbolic Threats – these symbols are often cast to portray the presence of a threat about which something needs to be done and urgently. This is part of defining a set of motivations for engaging in collective action.

From the point of view of the interests of this study, two particular aspects stand out:

1. The coalition of left-wing and anti-fascist groups that quickly mobilised in response to the threat of a right-wing anti-Muslim march was scaffolded by several key local institutions that provided an infrastructure and centre of gravity for the action.

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[15] http://www.nouse.co.uk/2013/05/26/students-and-community-unite-in-opposition-to-rumoured-edl-protest/#comments

2. On both sides, potential participants were actively using social media to try and test the level of support that was actually going to show up so that they were not in danger of being isolated.

In a study of 'below the radar' activities, the latter behaviour is especially intriguing as those involved were effectively using social media as a 'sonar radar' – purposively transmitting a signal to see what response they received, which would tell them something about the social environment they could expect. This was not about being above or below the radar, but how social media affords a network of sensors in the world that can inform how to act.

CASE STUDY 4: ANONYMOUS - AN ONLINE COMMUNITY MOBILISES

On the 27th May 2013, people wishing to view the webpage of the English Defence League were to be disappointed. The site was displaying the text seen below in Figure 5. It had been hacked by the online collective Anonymous UK. All data relating to personal information of EDL leaders and supporters, including addresses and telephone numbers had been copied and over the coming days was publically posted on Pastebin. This final case study contrasts with the earlier discussions in that it involves a more organised form of collective action. Of particular interest is how the community and intervention were entirely online.
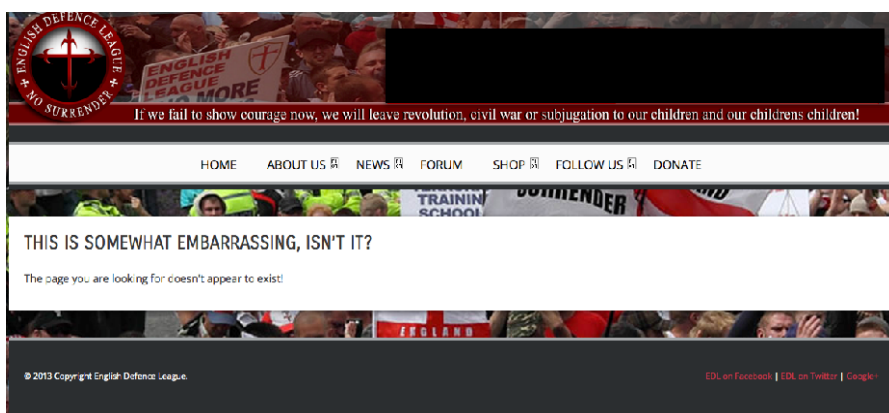

Figure 5 - EDL Web hack screen grab posted on Twitter

Little detail is known about the membership of Anonymous, beyond that it is a 'Hacktivist' on-line virtual community, believed to have no centralised leadership or command structure. It emerged in 2003 on the message board service 4Chan. Whilst a global community, UK affiliates or 'anons' as they are known have campaigned against a wide range and sometimes eclectic mix of issues, including opposition to GM food manufacturer Monsanto, censorship - free speech on the Internet and social media, student rights, and opposition to large corporations. Our Twitter data suggests they support Anti-fascist groups including Unite

Against Fascism and Hope Not Hate. They have also shown support for Wikileaks and its founder Julian Assange, and Edward Snowden. Their slogan, elements of which regularly appear on Twitter, YouTube and Facebook pages, is:

We are Anonymous.
We are Legion.
We do not forgive.
We do not forget.
Expect us

We cannot tell from our data how the mobilisation phase was accomplished or by whom, other than the posts are in English with UK identifiers.

The Anonymous action against the EDL began with a few tweets opposing the EDL around 23:00 on the night of 22 May 2013, following the protest by the EDL to the Islamist murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich that afternoon. By the 23rd May, their activity had begun to build more substantially, as can be seen in the selection of tweets below:

> #EDL racist bastards must be stop. They spread islamophobia in the UK and around the world. #anonymous #OpEDL (14:00 23rd may)

> #CallToAction #Anonymous! #EDL organize an event in #London. Wear your mask peacefully and help teach some manners! (23rd)

As can be seen from these tweets, the stimulus for action was driven by a view that the EDL are both racist and responsible for spreading Islamophobia. The data above shows that they were also beginning to mobilise their resources to oppose an EDL march on Downing Street the following Saturday 27th May. The reference to "wearing your mask" refers to the stylised Guy Fawkes masks worn by supporters of Anonymous, the Occupy movement and some anarchist groups.[16]

The second tweet above at 14:00 on 23rd May was the first to use the #OpEDL hash tag, meaning 'Operation Against EDL'. Nearly all Anonymous actions are labelled in this way. Looking across various Anonymous actions, the use of this formula may signal to the collective to work against a suggested target. In the tweet below, a tweeter suggested that Anonymous had released personal information about EDL members, but there is no corroboration for this, so this may just be a show of bravado:

> LOOOOOL anonymous released a bunch of personal information about EDL members - who wants me to tweet the link? (23rd)

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[16] http://theweek.com/article/index/245685/a-brief-history-of-the-guy-fawkes-mask

Anonymous tweets over the next two days followed a pattern recognisable in the two tweets below:

> #BNP and #EDL accused of attempt to fuel #Racial hatred after #Woolwich #Terror attack @ http://t.co/T1Rg26Tcw1 RT #Anonymous (25th may)

> Anti #EDL counter protest! Don't let RACISTS divide us! Join us tomorrow 2pm Downing Street. #Anonymous (26th)

There was an accusation stream, as represented by the first tweet, and a mobilisation advertisement stream aimed at rallying support for the planned protest in London in the second. Early on the 27th May, coinciding with the Anonymous counter protest in London, an announcement was made on Twitter under the OpEDL hash tag:

> #OpEDL @EDLTrobinson warning, warning, anonymous on this case

> @EDLTrobinson We have been watching. We have been judging. #OpEDL ENGAGED #Anonymous

As can be seen in the two tweets above that were widely retweeted, the tone had changed with Anonymous activists moving to an attack posture. The word "ENGAGED" has also been used preceding other Anonymous cyber-attacks. Note the language used in the second tweet above. It has an almost theatrical tone, as with the use of "accused of attempt to fuel racial hatred" seen above. Soft support on Twitter for the action was marked in this period, with a user expressing pleasure at the action:

> So #Anonymous just announced Operation EDL? Lol this is going to be great. #OpEDL (27th)

> You would assume Anonymous wouldn't get involved in the EDL stuff as they're all about "Freedom of Speech". But it's a good cause nonetheless (27th)

> so apparently this #OpEDL is an anonymous group of the worlds greatest cyber hackers that are operating against the EDL (27th)

Not all tweets were positive, and many from EDL supporters are not repeatable. However, in the tweet below an EDL member tries to offer a counter narrative to an Anonymous activist. In reply, the Anonymous activist offers a glimpse into the underlying opposition to the EDL, in that they are opposed to hate speech, from any source:

> @███████████ you hate free speech? #EDL #MDL #AlMuhajiroon No, we hate hate speech (27th)

By 23:36 on the night of the 27th May, tweets emerged announcing that a cyber-attack on the EDL website had been completed:

> #EDL Website #Attacked @ http://t.co/N7yJjjAKNj RT #Anonymous #UAF #StopEDL Web Hacked lulz ~~*X

> A group called Anonymous have leaked names, addresses and emails of EDL members..... This is going to get interesting now!!

Mainstream media sources began to pick up on the attack during the night led by Sky News, followed by other sites giving greater detail on the 28th:

> @SkyNewsBreak Anonymous have hacked the EDL website (27th)

> Anonymous is posting a document with all the names and addresses of high profile EDL members in the next few hours!

> @BBCBreaking @itvnews @SkyNewsBreak Anonymous have hacked the EDL webite and have released the names and address details of members

> Anonymous has released files showing over 1000 EDL donors & their addresses. #OpEDL

> #Anonymous 'declare war" on #EDL

Many Tweets contained a link to a message posted on Youtube by Anonymous to the EDL, but this has now been removed. Others were jubilant, praising Anonymous for their attack. This shows that while the cyber-attack is not a conflict in the physical sense, it is nevertheless a real conflict:

> #OpEDL can't describe how happy I am Anonymous has turned its attentions to the #edl pricks. Best of British luck to ya

In later tweets from people we suspect are 'anons', details were given of where to access the data stolen form the EDL site:

> #OpEDL Mass Data Leak #Anonymous #Operation_EDL [part 1]
> (The link goes to Pastebin, which states the paste has been removed)

> RT- http://t.co/UhyyynSEfZ via @pastebin *****EDL PHONE NUMBERS & ADDRESSES HERE******** #OpEDL Mass Data Leak #Anonymous @Operation_EDL (28th)

The data was not leaked all at once, but rather over a number of days:

@Anon███████: Day 3 of #OpEDL begins! (29th)

By May 29th, the mass release of EDL names and addresses was completed. However, data released on June 3rd was not simply a name dump, but rather an analysis of persons with criminal histories within the EDL. #AnonymousUK acknowledged the support of #Zhc (Z company hacking crew) another hacktivist grouping. The attempt here was to systematically discredit the EDL and it's supporters by publishing information on convictions. For example, one individual was linked to child pornography, a subject that the EDL has campaigned vigorously against.

The Huffington Post UK published the narrative from an Anonymous YouTube video on the 29th May for its morning edition. The sentiment is clear and opposition to the EDL narrative of hate forthright:

> Good morning members, and leaders of the English Defense League.
>
> We are Anonymous UK. We have been patiently observing your organisation, as you have inflated, indoctrinating our young with your criminal mindset. You have capitalized on the misfortunes of our peoples, taking advantage of moments of fear, of terror, and of reconciliation, to spread hatred and animosity towards your fellow man. Your constant belligerence, like a pack of raving ignoramuses, furthering only bigotry and segregation. You have angered us considerably, and summoned our wrath irrevocably. Last week, an innocent Drummer, Lee Rigby, lost his life at the hands of two vile and demented human beings in the most horrific, and heinous manner ever witnessed on the streets of Britain. This villainous public display has thrown the United Kingdom into mourning; every community, and every congregation, extending their deepest condolences.
>
> You however, have used this as another excuse to further spread your campaign of hate, bigotry, and misinformation. Under the guise of national pride you have instigated crimes against the innocent and incited the subjugation of Muslims. We will not allow your injustices, your lies, and your stupidity, to further radicalize our youth into fearing and despising their fellow man. Our people are desperate for hope, in a hopeless society where our own government neglects us, where society has failed us, it is only natural to seek a relatable change maker. This sort of desperation, this quest for feeling of worth, is what you have taken advantage of. In this operation, we will begin the systematic and comprehensive dissemination of your cult. We will further expose your falsities and your attempts to censor, to your members, to the British public, and to the world as a whole. You will fall, we can say this with complete confidence. We are everywhere, you cannot hide, you cannot win. We are the voices of all and the voice of one. It will not happen over night, but we WILL be victorious.

> We are Anonymous.
> We are Legion.
> We do not forgive.
> We do not forget.
> Expect us.

After this point in June 2013 the Anonymous action began to decline in intensity, following the trend seen across other community mobilisations in the wake of the Lee Rigby murder. Anonymous, like other communities, moved onto other issues.

As with the study of the York Mosque, we conclude albeit tentatively, that the Anonymous action, whilst containing elements of spontaneous mobilisation was in fact facilitated through an existing social network that was activated 'on demand', in response to the actions of an opposing group. It is relevant that this was an entirely online collective action and thus very different from those previously discussed, highlighting what is likely to be an increasingly important dimension of community mobilisation in the future. This case study also provides vital insights into how periods of community mobilisation end. For in all of the case studies, it is clear that activism is effortful and requires significant investment on the part of those involved. It requires participation that is difficult to sustain and once the sense of threat has receded the collective focus dissipates and attention moves on to other things. What is interesting about the Anonymous example is it hints at the possibility of 'latent capacity' that is carried over and may assist further mobilisation efforts in the future. Although the sense of community may have dispersed and no longer be directly evident; the social connections established through mobilising are available and can be reactivated if required.

CONCLUSIONS

This report has documented and described several species of 'below the radar' activity following the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in Woolwich in 2012. There has been a particular focus upon processes of spontaneous community mobilisation on the grounds that in the public narratives of such events, what happens in communities following major crimes has tended to be neglected and obscured. Instead, the dominant focus is upon any suspect(s) and their motivations, and aspects of the police operation to sequester them. The case studies have illuminated the complex and sophisticated forms of collective action, interaction and reaction that arise in such circumstances.

Taken together the case studies provide important insights into the role of social media in how and why community mobilisation does and does not occur, as well as the wider concepts involved in thinking about 'below the radar' social action. Social media provides 'fast data' about emerging events and unfolding situations. But the speed of communication often means that the provenance, and validity and reliability of the data cannot be confirmed. As such, the information is often treated by potential users as 'soft facts' that, in the absence of more authoritative sources, 'fills' an information gap.

'Soft facts' can be especially influential when they provide a stimulus for collective action, in terms of a perceived problem or threat that needs to be countered. In the aftermath of the Lee Rigby killing, politically opposed groups sought to use social media to mobilise their supporters. It was interesting that both sides struggled to convert 'soft support' online into actually mobilised support in real life. Community mobilisation efforts did become more successful when they were supported by established institutional resources, in keeping with recent research identifying the importance of institutional infrastructures in providing a platform for social action. But in part, it may also reflect the particular challenges of the circumstances being examined, in that direct involvement entailed personal risk, given the unfolding conflict dynamics.

These findings connect to some wider implications the analysis has for thinking about 'below the radar' civic action and for the application of social media analytics to such issues more generally. With the widespread adoption of social media, being 'below the radar' is not the same as being completely 'off the radar'. In terms of our analytics, we found we had to 'tune' our radar to be able to detect community mobilisation that was taking place. Given the volumes of data circulating through the social media ecology, the digital traces of how these mobilisation events were being organised were difficult to see with standard instrumentation, but they were there.

This reflects a more general point that many orthodox data science techniques for 'crunching' large volumes of social media data are probably insufficiently calibrated to 'sense' the kinds of complex social processes involved in community mobilisation. For example, our analysis shows how polarised forms of social support developed around different ideological standpoints, and these interacted in driving some individuals to physically mobilise. These interactive processes would not have been picked up by standard sentiment analysis.

How communities react and mobilise informal social control following major crimes is not something that has been studied very often. These are processes that are 'below the radar' because they have been largely neglected. Some attention is now paid to conducting community impact assessments and consequence management of any community tensions, but this is far less significant in terms of public service agendas than finding the perpetrator. An interesting finding in this regard concerns the important role played by some institutions in scaffolding responses performed by civil society organisations, and more fluid collective groupings and social networks. Consequently, an important question to ask when talking about being 'below' an organisation's radar is 'whose radar are we talking about?' The community mobilisation actions may have been below the radar for the police, but they plainly weren't below the radar for the individuals and groups engaged in rapidly and urgently mobilising.

It is important not to underplay how difficult it is to organise and sustain these forms of collective action. It is clear that groups and networks of people can do this, but it is difficult to accomplish and often fails – either wholly or in part. The presence of some form of pre-figuring institutional platform around which a community can assemble and organise does seem to assist any such efforts.

Possibly the most important thing about the new information environment is how it has significantly widened the scope of the radar. Accepting the point about needing to calibrate the radar properly given the issue of detecting small signals of interest in the vast volumes of 'noise', it nevertheless remains the case that:

- Social media is directly engaged in enabling rapid forms of community mobilisation to be performed.
- The digital traces of these mobilisations that social media cast allow us to study and understand aspects of the social reaction to major events that were previously seen but unnoticed.

In the first case study, we identified how social media enables forms of community mobilisation by virtue of creating a community of interest. That is, a group of people who come together, sharing information and reactions because they have mutual regard for finding out about something that is happening. The second case study focused upon 'polarised mobilisation' - the complex and intricate ways in which communities often mobilise in opposition to others. This interactive dimension of action and reaction to moves made by 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' captures an important aspect of how a sense of community can be formed and sustained. A notable aspect of this discussion was how those seeking to orchestrate collective mobilisation, seek to define and establish a set of motivations for those aligned with their position sufficiently persuasively that it overcomes any apathy and resistance to becoming directly involved.

This was a theme developed in the third case study, which attended to the use and manipulation of symbols. In reducing the complexity of issues and fixing collective attention on an evocative and potent symbol of what is wrong, the influencers hope to construct a clear need for a sense of collective purpose. The final case study investigated an online mobilisation of a community. Of especial interest here was the sense in which the community in question – the 'hacker collective' Anonymous – appears to assemble and disassemble as they respond to events.

In terms of cross-cutting themes from these 'high resolution' analyses of situated events and responses, we would identify three key insights into the social mechanics and dynamics of 'below the radar' activity:

1) Social media 'data traces' of social action and reaction following major events of public import provides an important new resource for researchers in terms of rendering visible what was previously invisible, or at least highly obscured. The ability to track and trace how community sentiments and actions adapt and adjust as new information about what has happened, opens up new vistas for research.

2) A particular example of this in relation to the impacts of major crimes, is the role of community based informal social control in responding to these kinds of incidents. In the mass media reporting of high profile crimes, attention often focuses upon the work of the police and the formal criminal justice process. What we have been able to

evidence is a whole host of 'below the radar' activity, both pro-social and anti-social, that is part of the overarching process of social reaction.

3) An important component of our analysis has been to identify a particular role for social media in shaping these processes of social reaction through the transmission of 'soft facts'. The speed that information about recently occurring incidents can travel at, thanks to the ubiquity of social media enabled technologies, means that the 'reaction times' for authorities and communities is increasingly compressed. People come to know about things much quicker than they might previously have done, but not all that they know will be accurate. Hence the emphasis on the 'spontaneous' nature of community mobilisation under such conditions.

To conclude, it is worth reflecting upon just how powerful some of the examples looked at have been. Much work on social capital and collective mobilisation has tended to focus upon relatively benign and pro-social forms of problem-solving. What is important about the examples we have examined herein is that they highlight people willing to intervene in highly emotionally charged circumstances, where they are exposing themselves to risk of violence. This in and of itself tells us something about the power of community mobilisation and the uses to which it could be put.