Persistence of Rumours and Hate Speech Over the Years: the Manchester Arena Bombing

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Following the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, the ensuing discussions in the media and on social platforms highlighted the potential of terrorism to deepen societal divisions. This study investigates the dynamics of rumors on social media and in the press after the attack, as well as the subsequent discourse on migration policies. We compiled a dataset comprising 3,184 press articles and 89,148 tweets pertaining to the Manchester Arena bombing. The research aims to identify prevalent rumors, assess their short- and long-term effects on user engagement, analyze the sentiment in tweets related to each rumor, and scrutinize perceptions of terrorism threats and migration policies among both the press and Twitter users.

The findings reveal that Twitter acted as an echo chamber for misinformation, amplifying specific rumors related to the attack, while the press demonstrated fact-checking practices and offered nuanced perspectives. Notably, one rumor suggesting the attacker was a refugee gained traction over time, reflecting a surge in anti-immigrant sentiments. Emotional responses on Twitter varied from a neutral tone to heightened distress and anger, underscoring the significant impact of social media narratives on public sentiment. The research highlights the polarization of views on social media, influenced by the concise format of tweets and the rapid production cycle, with Twitter users predominantly expressing very negative attitudes toward immigration. This study emphasizes the crucial role of the media in dispelling misinformation and cultivating a nuanced public understanding in complex socio-political contexts.