



## Editorial

# Doveray, no proveryay

## [Trust, but verify] *Translated from Russian*

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The efficient management of a civilian high threat environment will involve the engagement of, and teamwork between, multiple components of numerous organisations. An accurate and ongoing assessment of a dynamic scenario and its timely communication within and across organisations is likely to contribute to resolution of the event with optimal outcomes from a policing, intelligence and medical perspective. Developing technologies have communication impacts across organisations and the public, enhanced by the increasing use and abuse of social media, and an amplified potential for both misinformation and disinformation.

In the initial moments of such an event, traditional media is likely to fail to achieve comprehensive timely and accurate information.

Social media provides crowdsourced information. Those nearby can communicate what they are seeing, where events are happening and the types of assistance that may be needed. The various platforms enable the public, responding agencies and the government to disseminate warnings and updates almost instantly to huge audiences.<sup>1</sup> The ability for rapid dissemination, alert notifications and the presence of appropriate hand-held technologies mean that members of communities are increasingly seeking information via social media. Governments and control agencies are also using these platforms to communicate urgent safety messages about incidents.

However, social media communication is not always an accurate description or assessment of unfolding events. Vosoughi and team examined the spread of 126,000 news stories on the Twitter platform between 2006 and 2017.<sup>2</sup> They found that false tweets were 70% more likely to be retweeted than tweets communicating the truth. They described spikes in the number of times a story or claim was independently tweeted. Of interest to those involved in responding to high threat events, significant spikes corresponded with the Boston Marathon bombing, the Sandy Hook shootings and the Paris attacks. Other spikes included the US presidential election.

The actions of an immediately effected individuals will be framed by their own perceptions of the situation. Initial perspectives of some present at the Bondi Beach Hanukkah shootings were that fireworks had released.<sup>3</sup> These initial perceptions will influence their behaviours and the content of communications via social media and to responding emergency services. These communications, into a dispatch centre, are often inconsistent, inaccurate or subject to misinterpretation. In the early confusion in the aftermath of the Madrid Bombings there was a failure to appreciate that the Atocha and Téllez sites were different localities, impacting the appropriate dispatch of resources. This may have been because Téllez is also close to a major road, which can be used to get to Atocha Station.<sup>4</sup>

Kandel describes Information Disorder Syndrome as the development or dissemination of false information, with or without the intent to create harm.<sup>5</sup> He defines misinformation (untruthful content with no intention to cause harm, where the communicator is unaware that the message is false or deceptive), disinformation (intentionally false and designed to cause harm) and malinformation (true information, leaked or taken out of context)

Misinformation may be due to inaccurate perceptions or attributing accurate perceptions incorrectly. There is no intention to be misleading or to cause harm. A recent communication to a hospital notifying of three arrests at a police shooting event could be interpreted as three in handcuffs, or three having CPR. These are obviously very different scenarios. (There were three in handcuffs!)

The sound of fireworks, perceived as gun fire, and communicated as such, can result in an unnecessary or escalated response from emergency services and heightened awareness and reactions from those receiving the 'false' information.

Recent events, in central Australia, following the death of Kumanjayi Little Baby demonstrate that the behaviours of normally civil and law-abiding community members can change

in times of high emotion. Some events which lead to high threat environments may also involve heightened emotions. These emotions may result in a flight or fight response, which can be positive or negative for self-preservation and civil order.

Disinformation is the intentional distribution of false information, with the intention that these falsities will have a beneficial effect on those involved. This may be for 'political' reasons, attempting to further influence views on what happened or who was at fault. Over time, disinformation can erode trust in government or authorities and contribute to the widespread acceptance of conspiracy theories. Many believe that the attacks at Butler and at the White House Correspondents Dinner was a 'false flag' attack. Whether these 'believers' would perceive and respond to some future event in a suboptimal or detrimental manner is unknown.

As terrorist and transnational organised crime organisations become more sophisticated, it is increasingly probable that they may use disinformation around the time of critical events to influence the behaviours and communication of the community and responding agencies. Responding agencies should be aware of the risks and benefits of communications over social networks, develop processes, probably including AI, to evaluate, on both an emergent and ongoing basis, the veracity of information and how this information (true and false) is being disseminated to the community and whether this is affecting the population's actions.

Those with 'boots on the ground' and their commanders should be aware of the possibility of falsehoods in their intelligence and remain alert in their own ongoing assessments. As appropriate, from an operational perspective, these assessments could be communicated within and across the responding agencies, such that each can maintain their own accurate understanding of reality.

"The best teams hold each other in mutual regard. They also work easily across organisational boundaries because of this respect. Good communication and common understanding of a problem ..... is our most valued tool."<sup>6</sup>

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