The Epsom Cascade

How Social Media Misinformation Leads to Real-World Violence



About Us

The CCOD is a mission-led organisation fighting against online disinformation. We have two primary goals that define who we are, what we do, and what we stand for:

We aim to influence the policy and regulatory environment to ensure that the UK government effectively tackles the growing issue of online misinformation and disinformation. The CCOD has helped convene a cross-party group of parliamentarians and works directly with policymakers to improve understanding of disinformation threats. We educate policymakers on disinformation challenges and work with them on workable policy, regulatory and legislative initiatives to protect online information integrity in the UK.

Our objective is to bring together the key actors working across the information integrity ecosystem, ranging from technology developers and researchers to civil society organisations and media specialists, and ensure that those at the forefront of developing innovative solutions to online disinformation are given a prominent voice in shaping public policy outcomes. In parallel, we support organisations in protecting themselves and their workforces from disinformation risks with our advisory services, helping to safeguard markets, economic stability, and public trust.

Our collaborators and partners have included RUSI, the Aspen Institute, the Alan Turing Institute, Adobe, Egregious, Refute, Schillings, Ghost Shift, and academics from the University of Cambridge, UCL, and LSE. Our work has been featured on Times Radio, Politico and PoliticsHome.

Our research and policy thinking is supported by a world-class advisory board which includes, among others, John Penrose (former MP and Government Minister); Professor Sander van der Linden (Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Cambridge); Matthew Wicker (Assistant Professor at Imperial College and Research Associate at the Alan Turing Institute); Joseph Brandifino (Leads Policy Strategy at Scale AI); Naomi Krieger Carmy (VP Portfolio Management at the DeepTech VC fund Earth & Beyond Ventures); Clare Rewcastle Brown (award-winning investigative journalist); and a former Chair of Ofcom.

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Executive summary

In April 2026, a false claim arose that a gang rape had taken place outside Epsom Methodist Church. Surrey Police investigated the original claim, found no evidence the offence had occurred, and closed the case on 23 April as a confused report following an accidental head injury. However, misinformation concerning the event had been spreading on X by then for over a week, ultimately culminating in protests and riots leading to multiple arrests.

Overview:

- Misinformation surrounding Epsom (including reply chains) had a combined reach of at least 21.8 million views across over 6,300 unique posts between April 11th and April 23rd , triggered from Surrey Police's witness appeal.

- False and misleading content predominantly sat in at least one of three groups: broad rape-as-fact misinformation (16.83M views, of which gang-rape-as-fact assertions specifically accounted for 11.52M views), migrant perpetratorattribution disinformation (5.88M views), and asylum-hotel disinformation (2.38M views).

- Influence was concentrated. 62 priority right-wing UK accounts produced 70% of misinformation reach from 1.6% of contributing accounts, with this broad trend existing throughout sub-categories.

- 42 video posts containing misinformation reached 4.2M views, accounting for nearly a quarter of misinformation views despite accounting for less than 1% of all Epsom misinformation posts.

- Multiple rhetorical formats run across the corpus, each recognisable from prior cases of online misinformation, including headline-emergency framing, crossevent analogy, "two-tier policing", as well as asylum-hotel property naming. On the day of the initial police report, formats similar to posts seen in Epsom were repeatedly used across distinct UK cases identified in our X corpus.

- Misinformation was pushed by the platform's algorithm as well as by potentially inauthentic accounts. X's own trending feature surfaced the cascade to the #2 UK trending position by engagement on 18 April, the day after Surrey Police's clarification, whilst content was boosted by a large group of high-amplification accounts lacking personalised features.

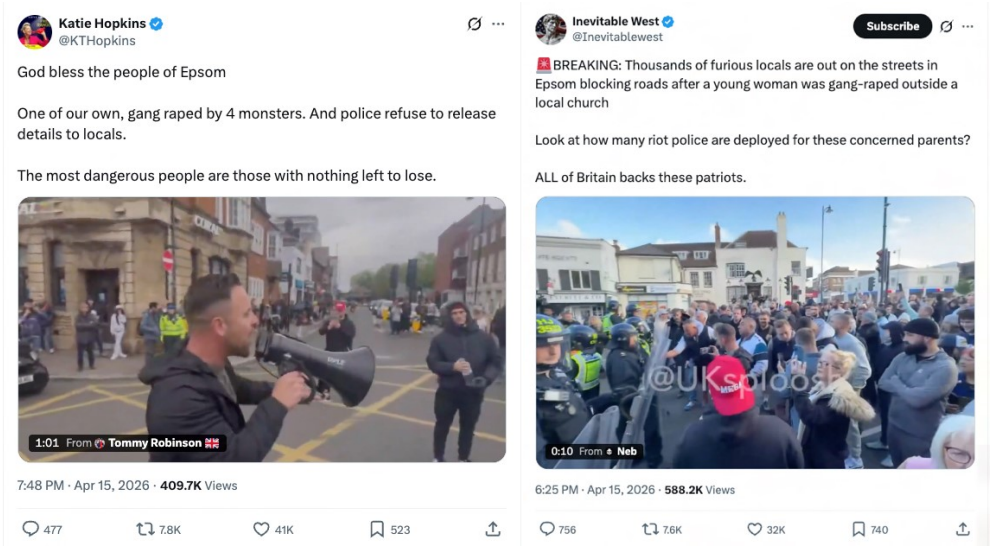
Magnitude

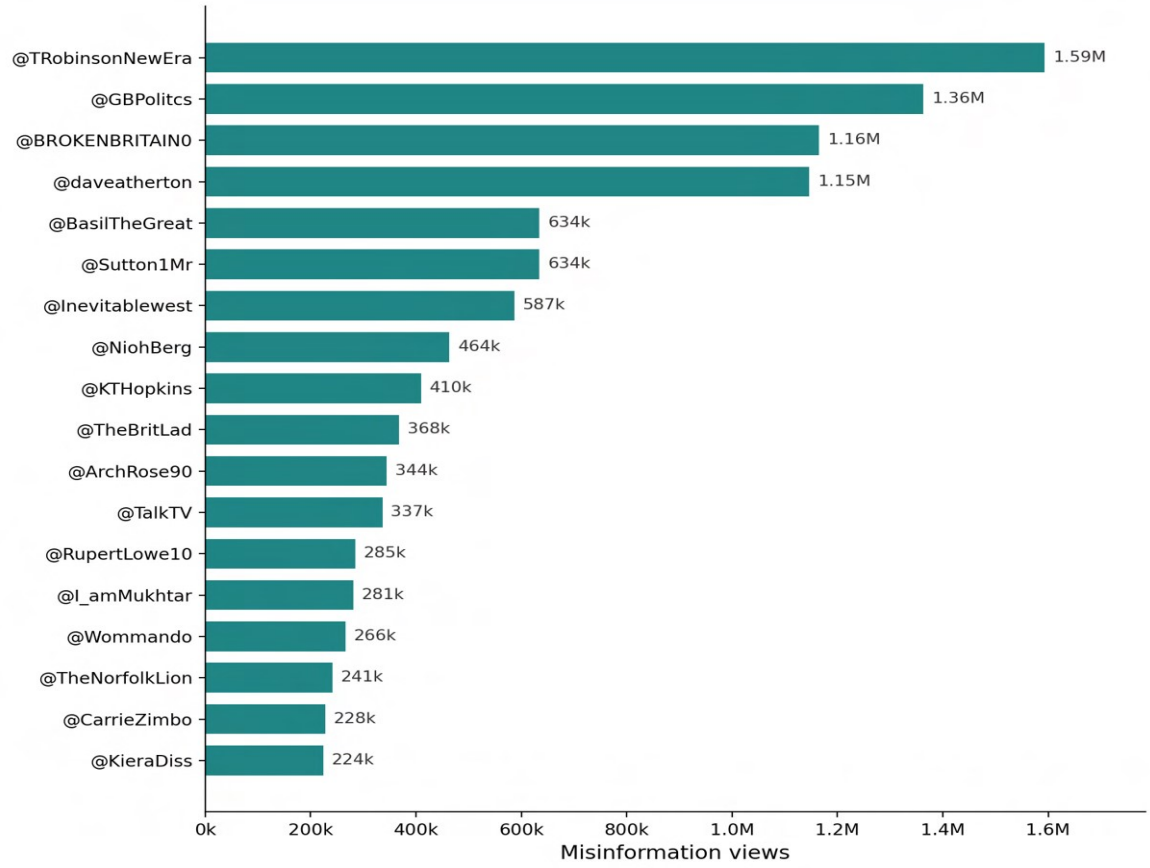
We analysed 11,955 Epsom and/or migrant related X posts from 3,937 accounts. These posts were classified individually by a reasoning-based LLM, 6,345 of those tweets were Epsom misinformation; the remaining ~5,610 were competing-case discussion (Brighton, Bristol, Rotherham etc.) or other off-topic content captured around the cascade.

Audited metric	Value
Epsom misinformation tweets	6,345
Unique contributing accounts	3,937
Own-post views	19,090,958
Reply-chain views	2,679,067
Combined cascade reach	21,770,025
Total likes	2,614,935
Total replies	79,482

Top Contributors

The 20 most-viewed misinformation posts each exceeded 200,000 views, with some reaching over 500,000.





The post with the highest single reach came from the anonymous aggregator @GBPolitcs. On 12 April it stated that “A woman in her 20s has been raped by several men outside a church in Epsom, Surrey Police have said” (767,392 views), presenting the rape as fact instead of an appeal following a report of rape.

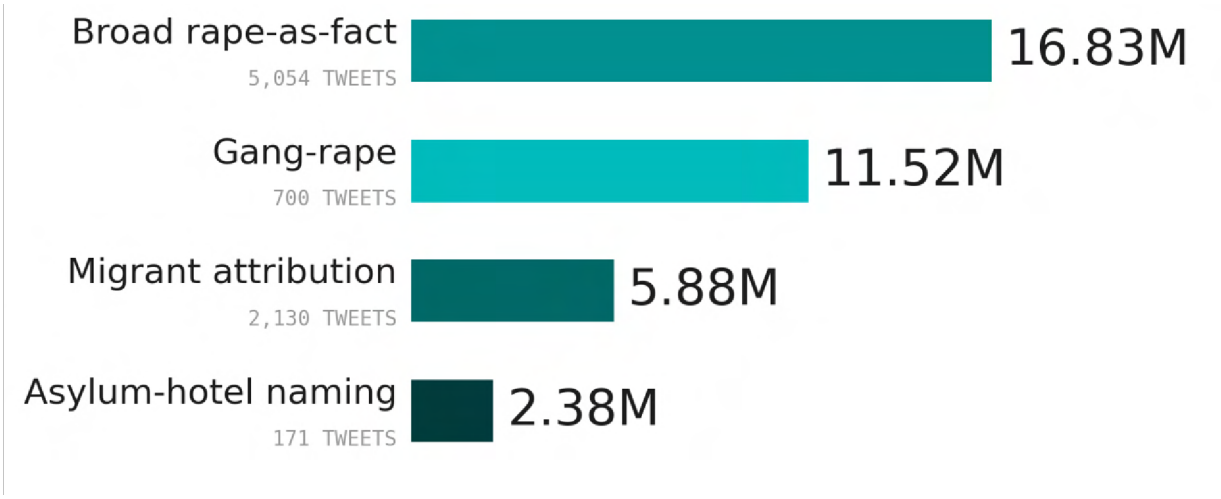
On 15 April, @Inevitablewest posted “Thousands of furious locals are out on the streets in Epsom… after a young woman was gang-raped outside a local church” (586,744), and @GBPolitcs posted “Riot police have been deployed in Epsom… after a young woman was gang-raped outside a church” (423,657).

@KTHopkins reached 409,552 views and 41,212 likes, the highest like count in the corpus, with “One of our own, gang raped by 4 monsters. And police refuse to release details to locals.” @TRobinsonNewEra appears four times in the top twenty, including “Patriots have hit Epsom tonight demanding answers after a young woman was gang raped outside a church” (409,788) and, on 22 April, “Epsom locals destroy a suspected HMO used for housing unvetted fighting age invaders” (456,332).

Telegraph columnist @AllisonPearson is also in the list (202,275): “Whether the alleged Epsom rape gang turn out to be illegal migrants living in the town’s asylum hotel or not… we have a huge problem with young men from misogynist countries… They come ashore

and they want sex." The post names an asylum hotel that does not exist in the constituency.

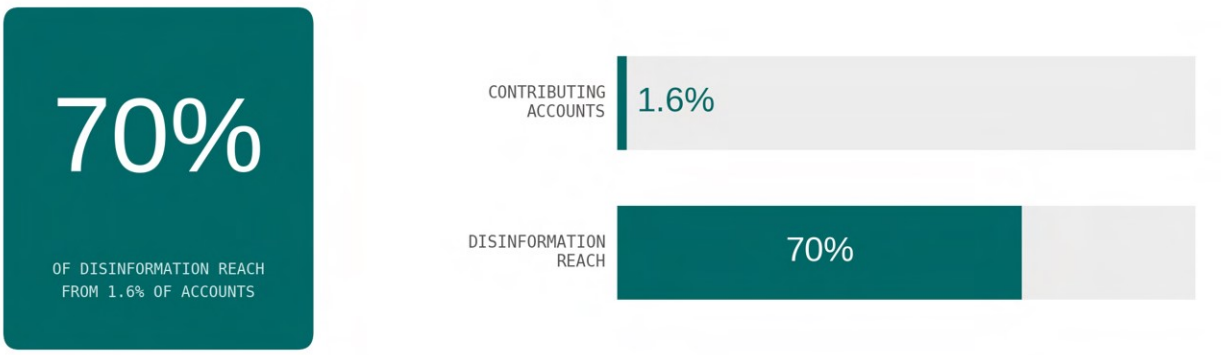
Layers of Misinformation



The cascade ran across overlapping categories of misinformation: Broad rape-as-fact misinformation was the most common source of misinformation during the timeframe, repeated the event itself as if it was considered a fact rather than the matter of an ongoing investigation. This was followed by claims that asserted the unverified event was a "gang rape," once again treating the police investigation as a matter of fact. This further translated into migrant-specific attribution, followed by misleading targeting of nonexistent asylum housing during subsequent violent disorder.

Loud Minority

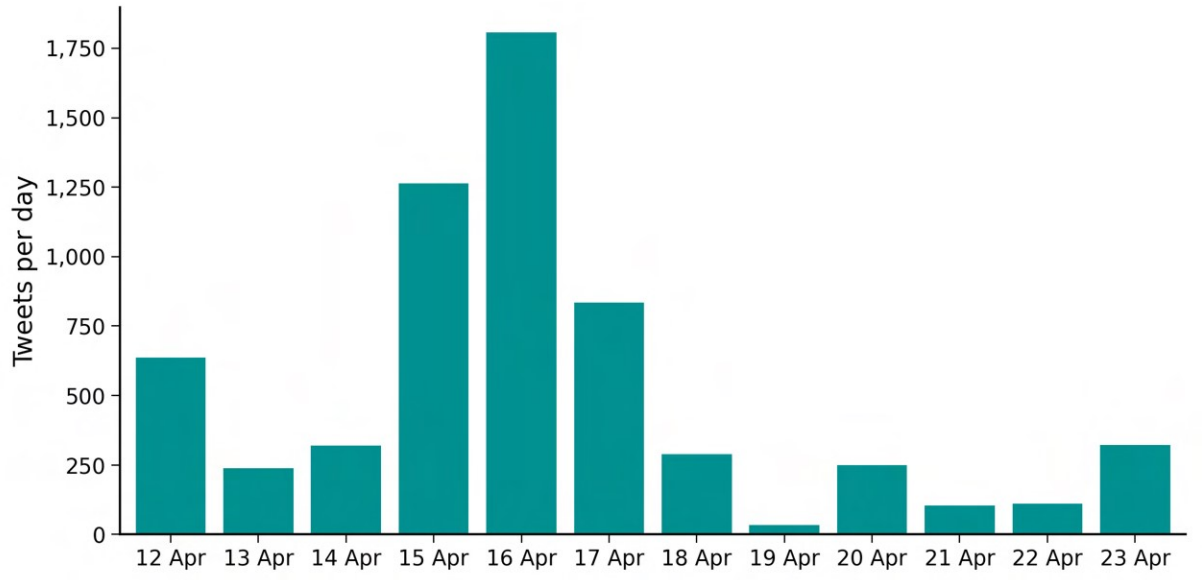
Out of approximately 3,937 unique accounts contributing Epsom-related content, 62 priority right-wing UK political accounts produced 70.0% of disinformation reach. A small number of accounts produced the bulk of reach, with subsequent posts and replies instead predominantly contributing post volume.



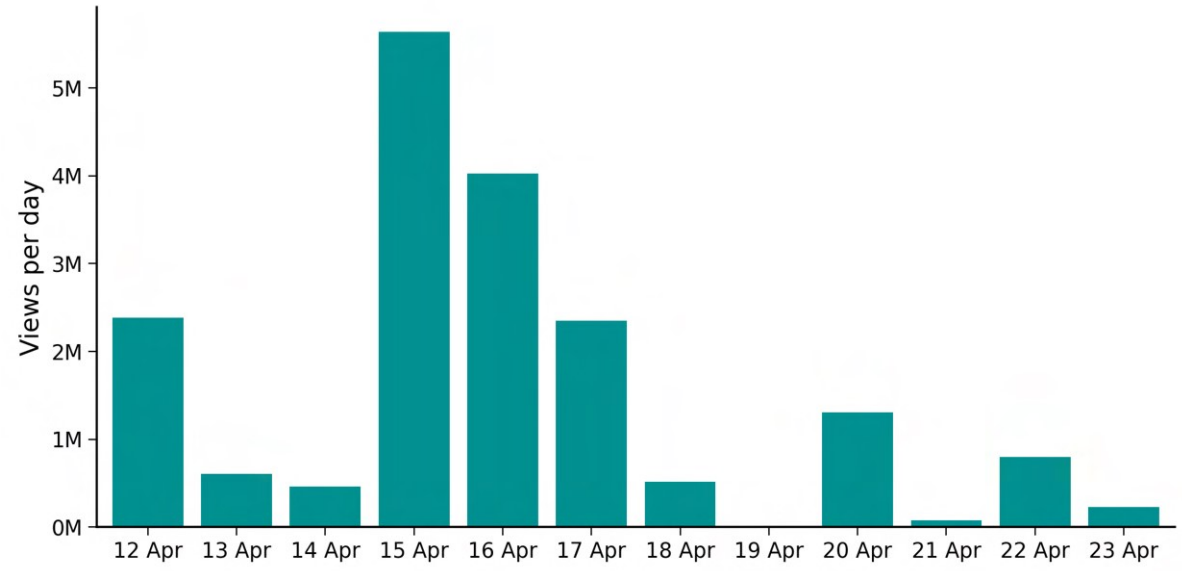
Whilst concentration varied per individual classification, with 2.9% of accounts making up 68.7% of migrant-specific misinformation compared to 7.6% of accounts contributing to 63.3% of asylum hotel misinformation, the broad trend remains consistent.

Timeframe

April 15 held the highest volume of tweets containing misinformation, with 1,226 Epsom-related false or misleading tweets across all constructs.



A similar story can be seen when measured by views, peaking on April 15 before spiking again on April 20.

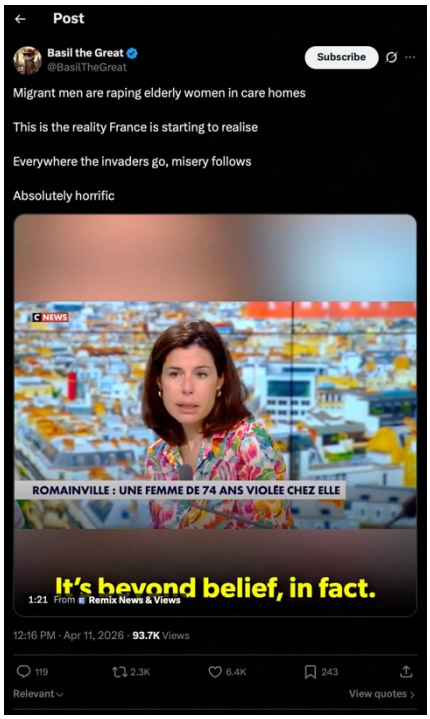


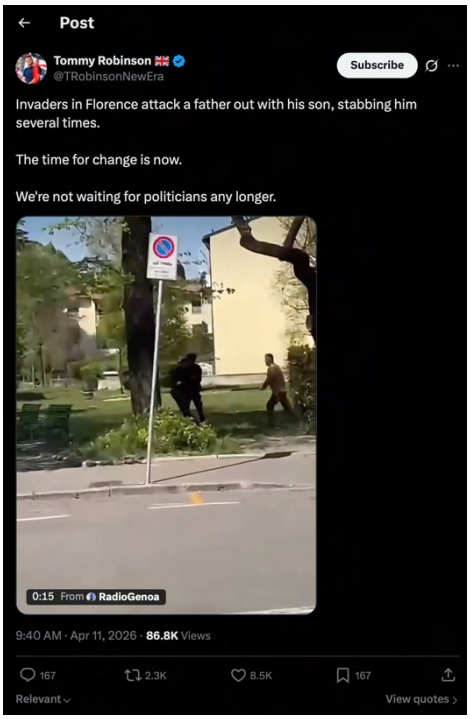
The 11 April Baseline: Zero Epsom Posts

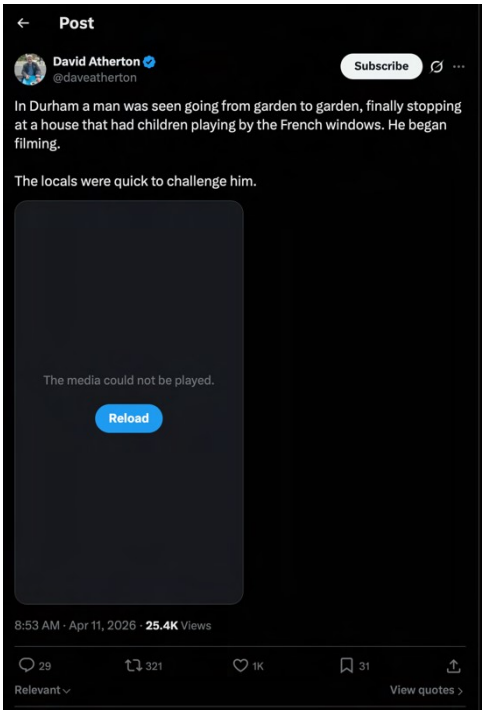
Surrey Police's witness appeal was posted to their Facebook page on the morning of 11 April. The right-wing X amplifier ecosystem was active all day. We sent every one of the 1,305 tweets in our harvest from that day, across all priority right-wing UK accounts active that day through a LLM classification pass with a single reasoning task: does this tweet reference the Epsom case in any way? Our results returned empty:

11 April 2026 in our harvest	Count
Tweets in corpus from right-wing UK accounts	1,305
Unique accounts posting that day	62
Tweets classified Epsom-related	0
Tweets classified not Epsom-related	1,305

Instead, top amplifiers were posting thematically similar content distinct to the Surrey Police appeal:







The Seed: 12 April

At 05:29:31 BST on 12 April, @kevlondon4, surfaced the Surrey Police Facebook witness appeal on X. Whilst the post directly shares appeal, @kevinlondon4's contribution presents the rape as a matter of fact instead of a report in need of further investigation:



Nearly four hours later, @BROKENBRITAIN0, a larger right-wing aggregator, reposted the same content under a "MANHUNT LAUNCHED" framing, reaching nearly 150,000 views and within half an hour multiple accounts began to assert, both directly or indirectly, that the perpetrator was not White and/or was an immigrant:







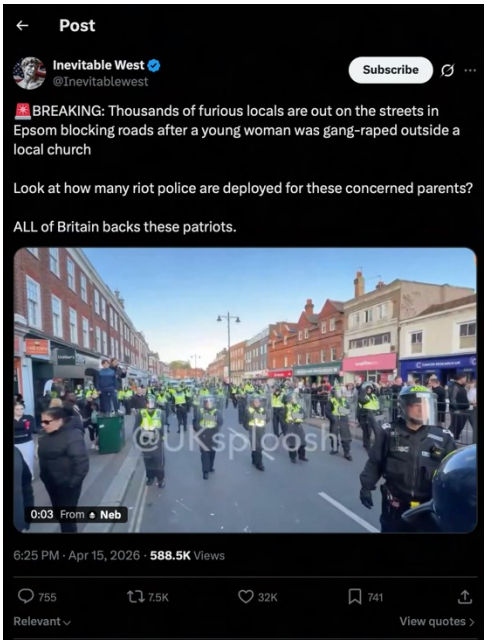
Post Formats

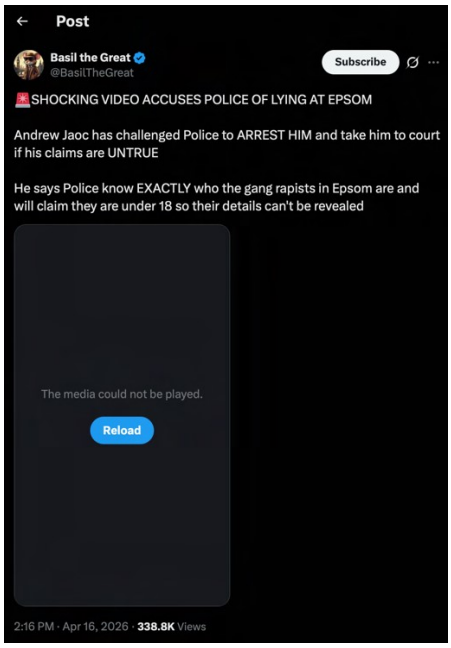
Rhetorical Framing

Across our corpus, several repeated tropes are witnessed:

Headline-Emergency

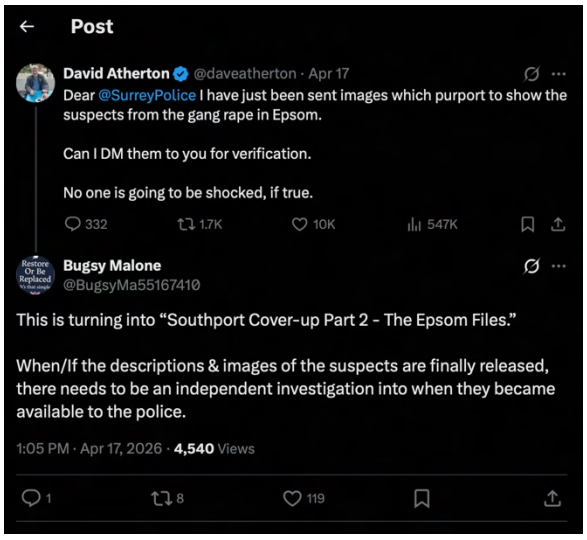
Many posts consistently begin with either “BREAKING” and/or “🚨” in an attempt to bring immediate attention to the content:

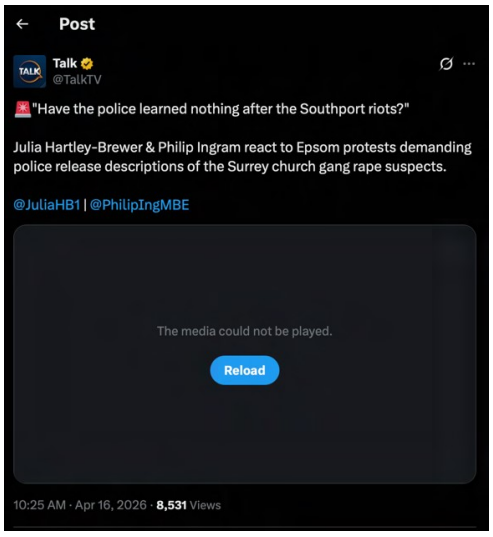




Cross-Event Analogies

Posts consistently likened the event to Southport. This disregarded the police’s statements that suspected perpetrators had not been identified, directly contrasting the nature of the Southport attack:





“Two-tier Policing” Allegations

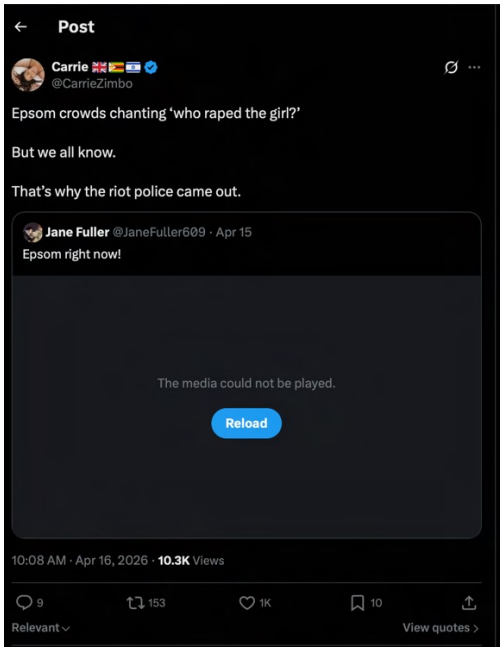
A consistent claim within right-wing ecospheres, the Epsom case also contained allegations of unequal police treatment, both in favour of non-existent migrant perpetrators as well as against subsequent violent protests:





Coded Racial Attributions

Many posts indirectly alleged a non-White and/or migrant perpetrator without direct accusations, instead depicting their nationality and race to be a silent, unspoken fact:

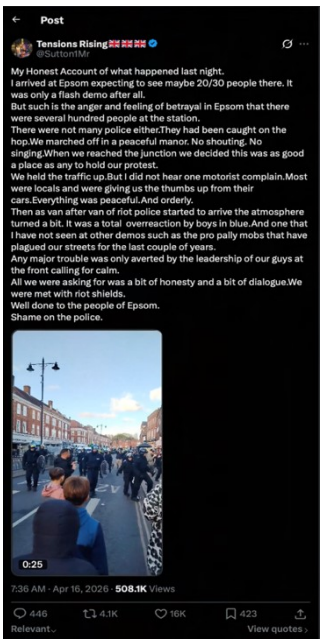




Video Evidence

42 misinformation X posts in the corpus are primarily in a video format. These 42 tweets account for 4,204,831 views, 22.7% of the 18.5M total misinformation own-view reach, despite being only 0.7% of misinformation posts. A video carrier averaged ~100,000 views, a text-only misinformation post averaged ~2,400.





The audio content carries cascade claims independently of carrier-tweet text. In several cases the tweet text is sparse (an emoji or single sentence) while the audio asserts the rape, the migrant-perpetrator attribution, or the asylum-hotel housing claim Surrey Police directly disavowed.

Account	Videos	Views	Likes
@TRobinsonNewEra	5	1,234,113	69,646
@Sutton1Mr	2	633,387	29,270
@Inevitablewest	3	586,744	97,024
@KTHopkins	5	409,552	206,049
@BROKENBRITAIN0	1	359,227	9,877
@Wommando	1	263,612	18,417
@ArchRose90	6	245,331	151,769

Account	Videos	Views	Likes
@RealDannyTommo	9	206,213	72,292
@CarrieZimbo	1	163,133	9,232

Algorithmic & Inauthentic Activity

Algorithmic Activity

Beyond the organic reply-tree cascade, X's own trending feature surfaced the Epsom narrative on the UK trending tab for at least two consecutive days according to CCOD data:

Trending topic	Date	Sightings	Engagement	X's framing
Epsom Residents Protest Police Silence After Alleged Gang Rape	17 Apr	16	368k	Hedged
Epsom Rape Sparks Protests and Police Standoff	17 Apr	15	365k	Asserts as fact
Epsom Residents Protest Gang Rape Outside Church Amid Police Standoff	18 Apr	39	638k	Asserts as fact

Most notably, X's trending headlines themselves assert the rape as fact. This is despite Surrey Police announcing on April 17 that they had found no evidence to support the allegation.

The data identified 18 individual accounts particularly amplified by the X algorithm. All are right-wing accounts, with no space for public broadcasters or alternative ideological opinions.

Account	Followers	Trending engagement
@TRobinsonNewEra	1.92M	141k
Account	Followers	Trending engagement

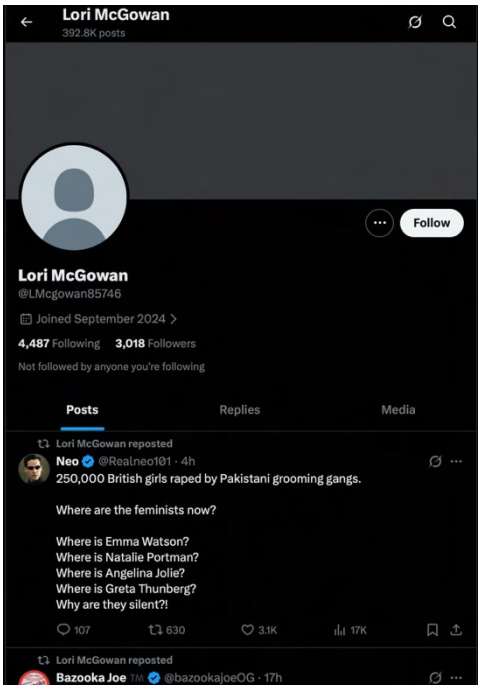
@KTHopkins	1.44M	141k
@liz_churchill10	876k	12k
@darrengrimes	483k	71k
@Inevitablewest	366k	119k
@daveatherton	340k	25k
@BasilTheGreat	303k	267k
@TheBritLad	271k	79k
@AllisonPearson	242k	11k
@RobertJenrick	221k	8k
@ArchRose90	218k	95k
@Alexarmstrong	117k	101k
@BROKENBRITAIN0	109k	6.5k
@GBPolitcs	85k	6k
@JakeWSimons	78k	39k
@London_W4	73k	32k
@Sutton1Mr	30k	104k
@AllForProgress_	1.3k	8.9k

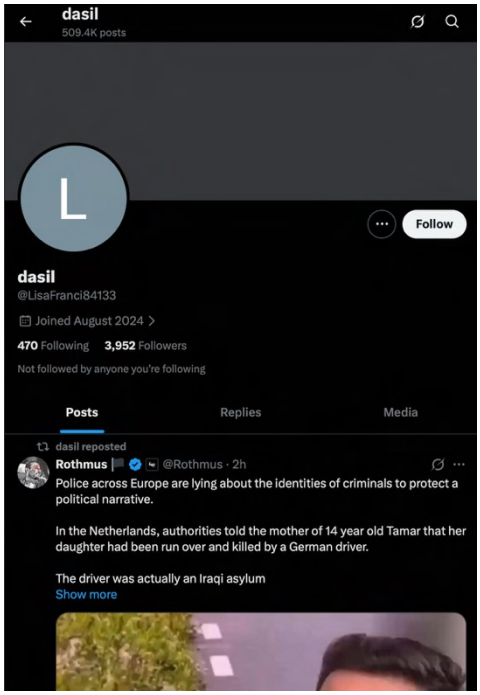
Some engage-to-reach ratios on smaller accounts are also worth noting. @Sutton1Mr (30k followers, 104k engagement = 3.5 times amplification) and @AllForProgress_ (1.3k → 8.9k = 6.9 times amplification) heavily overperformed their normal reach, reaffirming the power of the X algorithm.

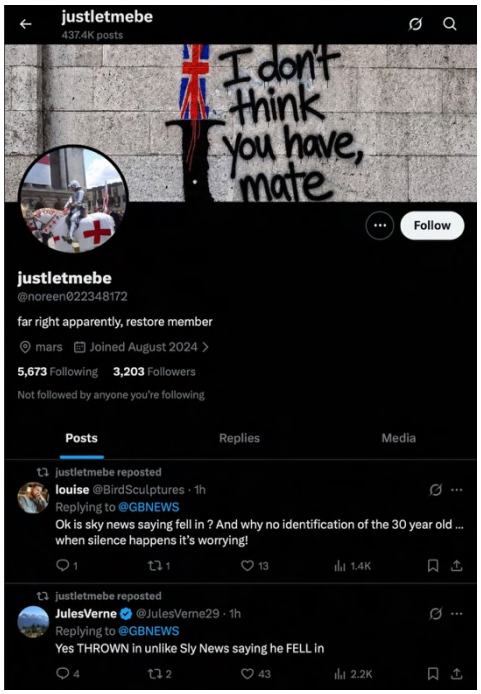
Inauthentic Activity

Whilst our corpus cannot be used to definitely determine the role of inauthentic amplification of the Epsom case, analysis shows at least some evidence of irregular activity.

Our corpus firstly contained a small, extreme group of clear automation. Several accounts, such as @lisafranci84133 @noreen022348172 and @LMcgowan85746 on average post hundreds of times a day:







These accounts sat within a total of 2,111 within our corpus holding a handle structure of a name followed by digits. This in and of itself does not necessitate inauthenticity, with this pattern often associated with platform username suggestions. Yet despite this, we found that this group contained behaviour of interest:

Amplification

Accounts within this cohort largely lacked unique post activity. 82% of account activity had less than 10% of original content, sitting a median of just 1.7%, with the remainder split between replies (a median of 75%) and retweets. This amplification concentrated on a consistent set of figures: @RupertLowe10, @TRobinsonNewEra, @BasilTheGreat, @BROKENBRITAIN0, and @HJB_News__ the same right-wing accounts that originated the cascade.

Anonymity

Personalisation was minimal. 38% of accounts contained no bio at all, and where one existed, political slogans such as "Restore Britain", "Reform" and flag emojis outnumbered any personal detail. Profile images were no more revealing: of those examined, the majority used either a default avatar, a basic letter placeholder, or an impersonal image such as an animal, a meme or a political graphic. In total, the large majority of profiles presented no identifiable person behind the account.

Though difficult to confirm malign behaviour with complete certainty, this data shows that Epsom misinformation disproportionately spread by a small group of high-profile accounts received amplification from a large cohort which consistently boost right-wing content and lack unique personal signals of authenticity.

Methodology

Working from a series of priority, pre-selected X accounts, before subsequently exploring post reply chains, we collected 11,955 Epsom-related posts from unique 3,937 accounts. Each post was classified against a fixed, pre-locked taxonomy of cascade behaviours by a prompted reasoning language model, with the labels reconciled against corpus totals and manually checked by human reviewers. Coverage is exhaustive only within the X reply-tree network reached by the harvest, not all of UK X; reach figures are reported as lower bounds.



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