



How the UK Department for Culture, Media & Sport use Pulsar to detect misinformation narratives

Case Study – DCMS

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Challenge

Misinformation can be found in almost all of today's online conversations – recognising it, and putting in place strategies to address it, is fast becoming an important function of PR & communications teams. This is easier said than done, however, when the conversation you're monitoring is drawing the whole world's attention.

The department of Culture, Media and Sport is the UK governmental body tasked with taking the pulse of conversations that swirl around the nation's largest events, and using that information to guide both policy and clear government communications.

Senior Digital Communications Officer Kieran Moriarty, who along with his team is responsible for analyzing public conversations and incorporating their insight into public conversation, knew that one of the most important events of the year for his team to keep tabs on would be the Maytime coronation of King Charles III.

The attention this event garnered was colossal – with direct mentions across social channels, print media and online news coming to over 2.3 million. This presented a challenge for Kieran and team, whose efforts on the day were predominantly focused on public safety and wellbeing.



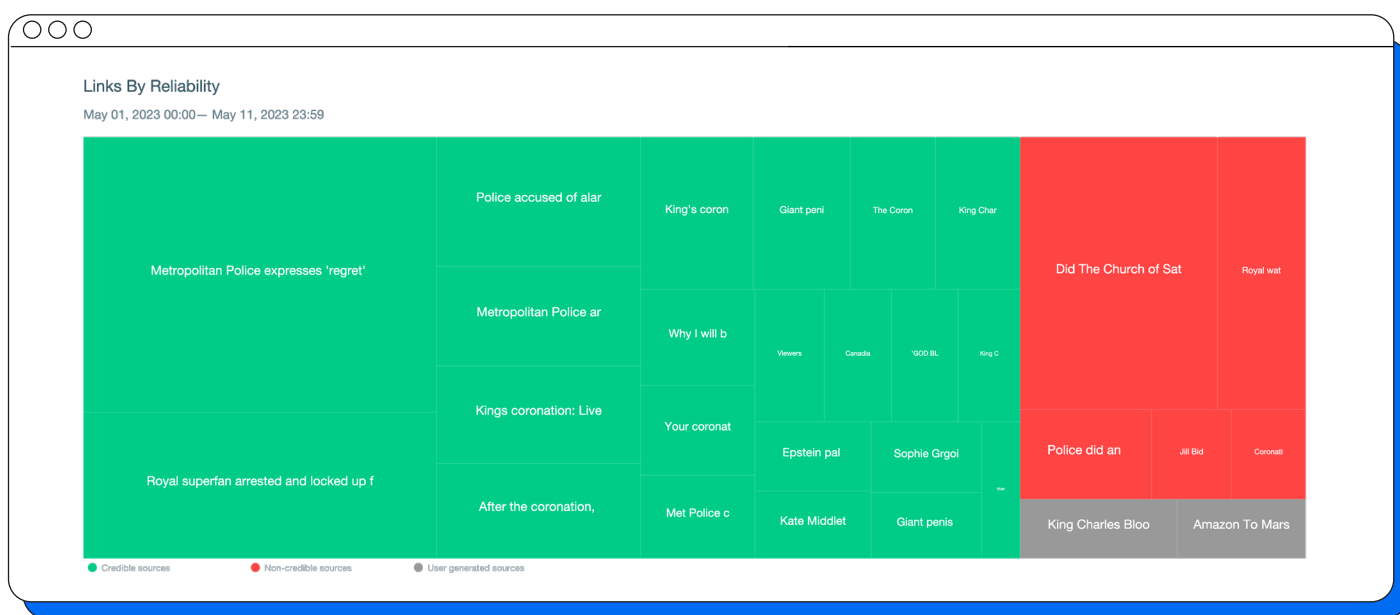
We wanted to understand the spread of misinformation, both across socials and on news platforms, and Pulsar was really helpful in enabling us to get a fuller picture of this.



Kieran Moriarty
Senior Communications
Officer, DCMS

If they were to also gain actionable insights around misinformation within the conversation, and reveal the deleterious impact false narratives can bear on public perceptions, trust and behavior, then they were going to require a tool able to identify, aggregate and visualize all this information.

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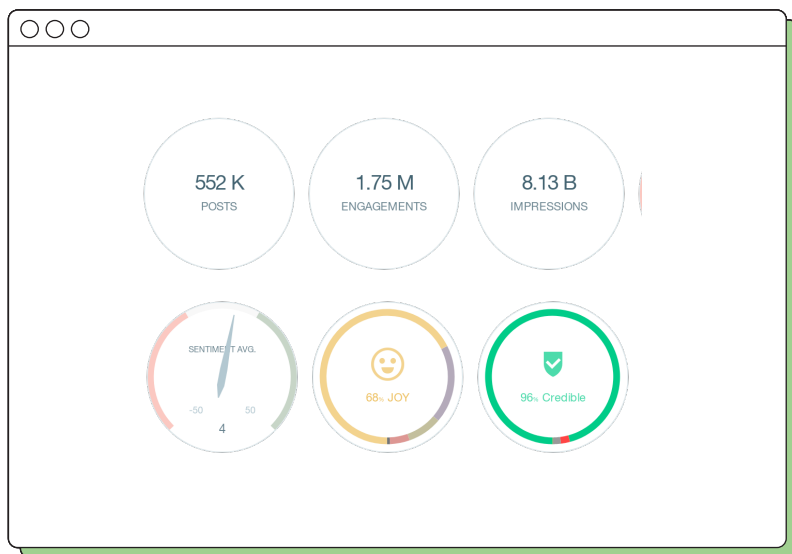


Solution

Kieran and his team leveraged Pulsar TRAC's capacity for detecting misinformation. This stems from an integration with experts in misinformation NewsGuard. The credibility ratings between 0-100 the the NewsGuard journalistic team apply to each news source are made accessible to Pulsar users, allowing them to quickly isolate misinformation content, authors and audiences within a conversation.

So what kinds of insight were Kieran and team able to uncover?

For one thing, they were able to get a snapshot of how prevalent misinformation was. This revealed that, while it made up a relatively small part of the total conversation in terms of pure volume, in terms of visibility (a proprietary Pulsar metric that details how likely a piece of content is to be seen), stories from non-credible sources were playing an outsized part in the conversation. Similarly they could spot and isolate both satire and user generated content.



Dashboard that provides the key statistics in any conversation – including how exposed it is to misinformation

Kieran and team were also able to discern how different types of misinformation were disseminated by publishers and accounts, for consumption by different types of community.

Studying how users who shared these links described themselves and identified online revealed key similarities and differences these communities in the english-speaking world.

“This project highlights for us the impact of non-traditional news media,” says Kieran. “ And helps inform an expansion of our focus beyond more familiar sources like British print media. By following the thread of the links and conversations we see on social, we can see where narratives originate before they pass in the UK mainstream.”

The team also leveraged the platform’s entity detection capabilities to learn who was most discussed in context of the coronation across untrustworthy sites. One macro-level insight revealed both here and elsewhere was the importance of American individuals and news outlets in shaping both global and even domestic, British opinion.



It’s been an intuitive process throughout. Pulsar were really helpful in running us through what we were able to do – the team provided the help we needed to get projects set up on short notice.

Results

Through this analysis, the team at DCMS was able to garner far greater and nuanced understanding as to how misinformation can spread in relation to UK cultural events.

In addition to highlighting new spaces and communities that forment misinformation, it also enabled the team to understand which platforms and users were powerbrokers in its spread, and plan communications strategies accordingly.

Neither news nor social media exist in a vacuum. By visualizing how each can facilitate the spread of misinformation on the other, often across geographical borders, the team could follow such narratives back to their source, and bring shape to a sometimes anarchic conversation.

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