Title:

Deviant Mobs of the Internet – Bots, Trolls, and Misinformation

Abstract:

Social media platforms are widely used for sharing information. Although social media use is generally benign, such platforms can also be used for a variety of malicious activities, including the dissemination of propaganda, hoaxes, and fake news to influence the public; recruiting and radicalization; and disseminating malwares and coordinate cyber operations. The availability of inexpensive and ubiquitous mass communication tools has made such malicious activity much more convenient and effective. This talk will touch upon our various research efforts that demonstrate how such disinformation campaigns work, examine the critical link among social media platforms (viz., blogs, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, VKontakte, etc.), and the different media orchestration strategies. Using socio-computational models that leverage social network analysis and cyber forensic methodologies, prominent information actors and leading coordinators of disinformation campaigns are identified. These models are grounded in the fundamental social science theory of collective action. Further, the talk will highlight the tactics, techniques, and procedures used by the deviant groups to propagate disinformation. Of the several case studies the research methodology has been applied to, the talk will illustrate massive disinformation campaigns pertaining to NATO's military exercises, the Baltic and the Indo-Pacific regions, conducted primarily through blogs but strategically linking to a variety of other social media platforms. The research has been transitioned into publicly available software programs, viz., Blogtrackers and YouTubeTracker that will be showcased during the talk.