



Violence Fixated Individuals: The Internet, online platforms and pathways to violence

Southport Inquiry: Phase 2

15th September 2026

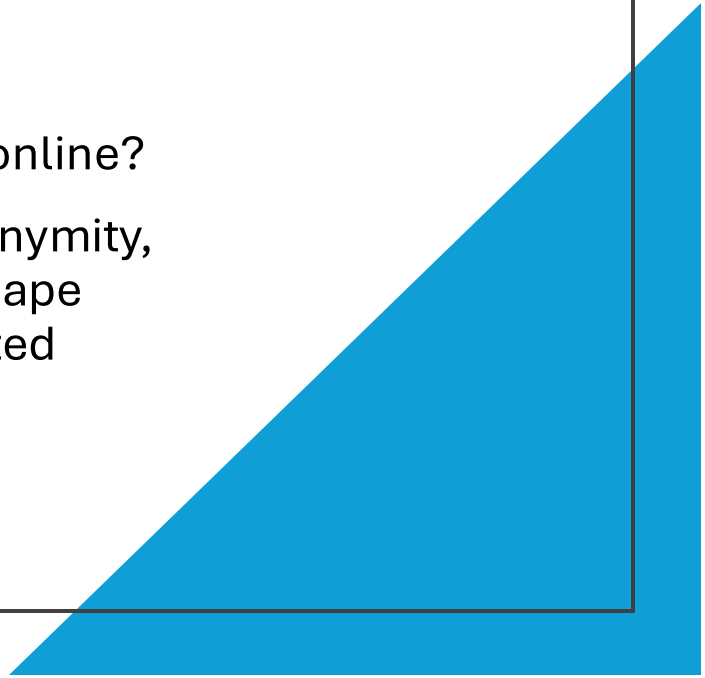
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Research Questions

1. What role do algorithms, niche communities and online anonymity play in escalation pathways?
2. How does the use of emerging technology impact the influence, enablement, rehearsal or preparation of violence-fixated individuals online?
3. How do specific platform features, such as private messaging, anonymity, livestreaming, content sharing tools and cross-platform migration, shape the speed and direction of escalation in cases involving violence-fixated individuals?



This session



Part 1: Existing research in adjacent fields

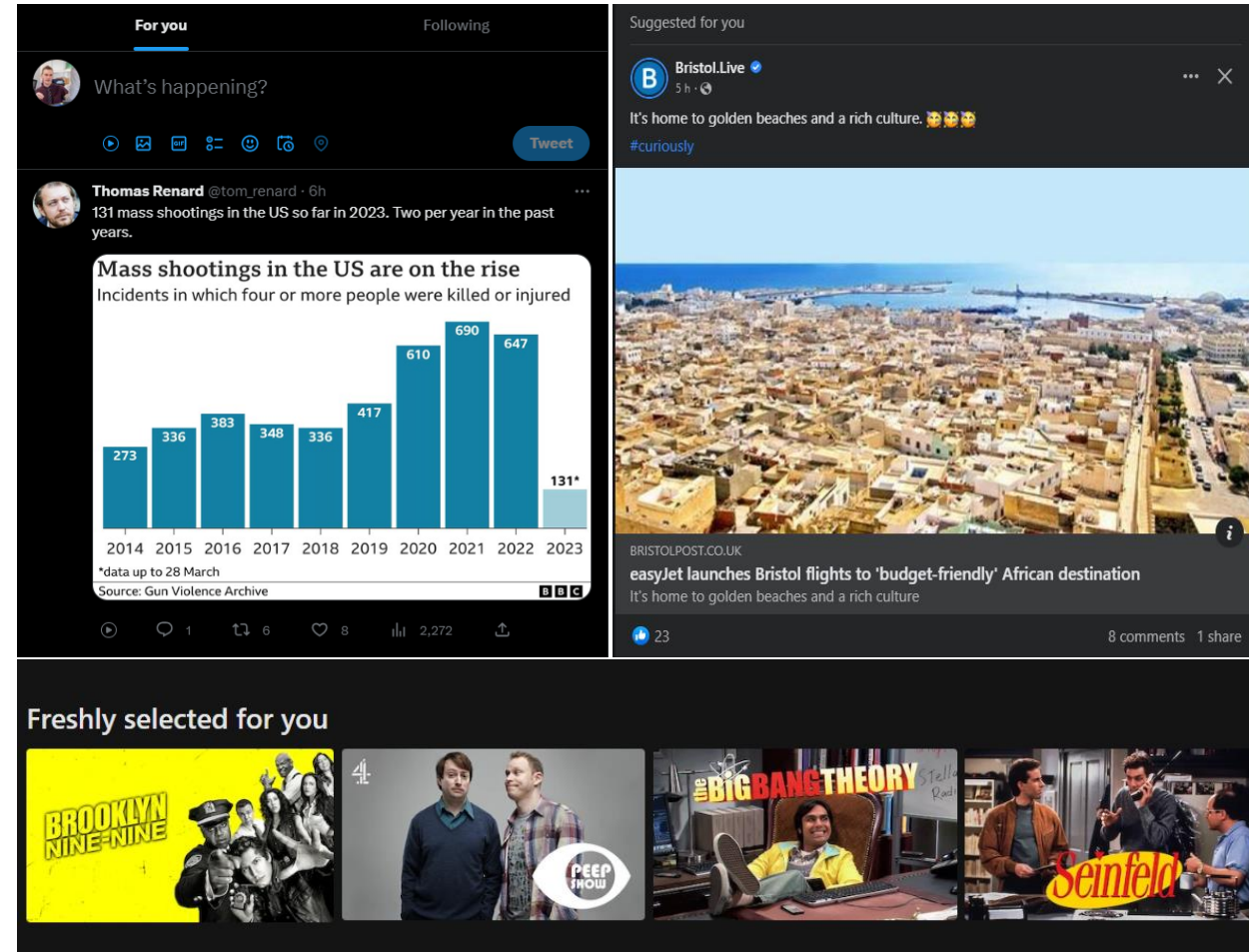


Part 2: Behavioural analysis of 13 VFI

Part 1: Existing Research

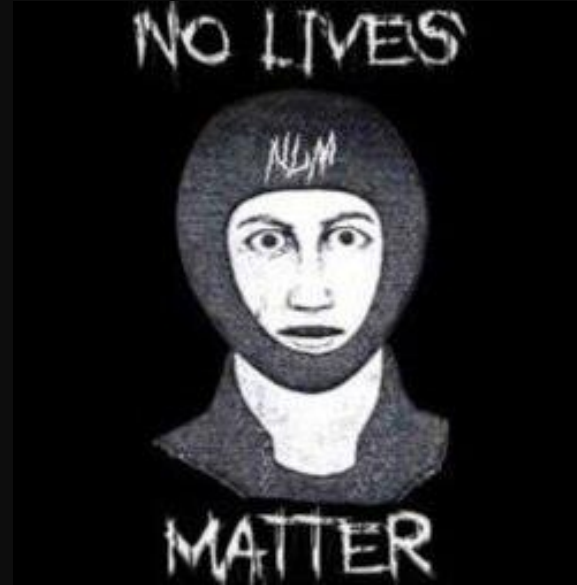
Recommendation Algorithms

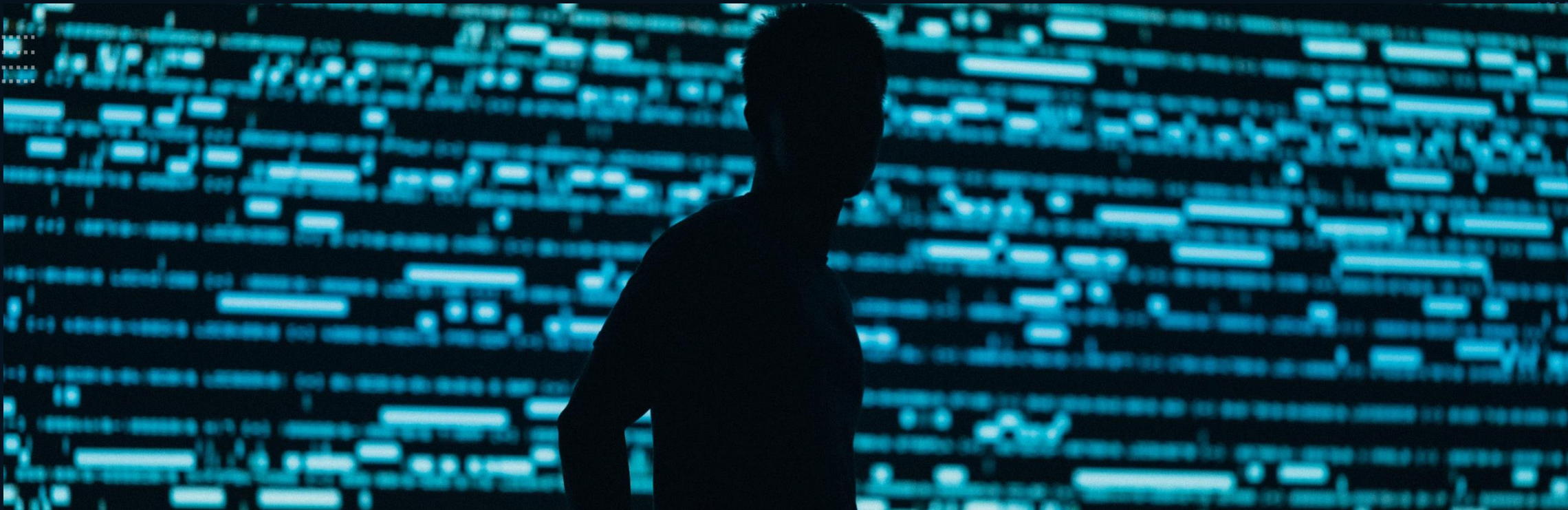
- Meta review (n = 51) on algorithmic amplification of harmful content (*Whittaker et al. forthcoming*)
- Heavy focus on extremism, misinformation, YouTube, English-language
- Good evidence that algorithms promote legal but potentially harmful content
- Few studies that focus on illegal content



Niche Communities

- Gore sites (Fisher & Bradley, 2025)
- Com networks/NVE (Clemmow et al. 2026)
- School shooters (Raitanen and Oksanen, 2018)
- True Crime (ISD, 2025)
- Extremist Communities





Online anonymity

- 1) Online disinhibition (Suler, 2004; Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2011)
- 2) Online security (Lakomy, 2023; Fisher & Prucha, 2022)

Emerging Technologies

- Artificial Intelligence (content generation; chatbots) (Wells, 2024)
- 3D Printing (Europol 2026)
- Hostile drones (UN, 2023)
- Virtual assets (Eisermann, 2020)





Part 2: Behavioural Analysis

Methods

- Open-source (Court docs; Journalism; Reports)
- Directory created from Hall's "***Classification of Extreme Violence used at Southport in July 2024***" and Southport Inquiry Phase 2 Case Studies, and other high-profile cases
- Inclusion/exclusion:
 - 1) Evidence of fascination or fixation with violence
AND
 - 2) Ideology not considered core motivator
- Final sample = 13 individuals

Coding

- Created codebook for:
 - Use of Internet to prepare
 - Use of Internet for immersion
 - Platforms used
 - Niche Communities
 - Content-sharing
 - Livestreaming
 - Platform Migration
 - Leakage
- Other demographic and behavioural variables
- Coded quantitatively and qualitatively

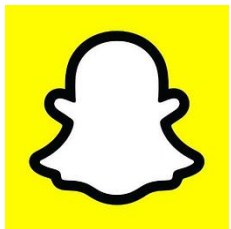


Demographic and Personal

- All male
 - Mean & median age 17 (15-22)
 - 10 with confirmed ASD diagnosis
 - 2 ADHD
 - Other mental health:
 - Suicide attempts (3); OCD (1); ODD (1); Unspecified (2)
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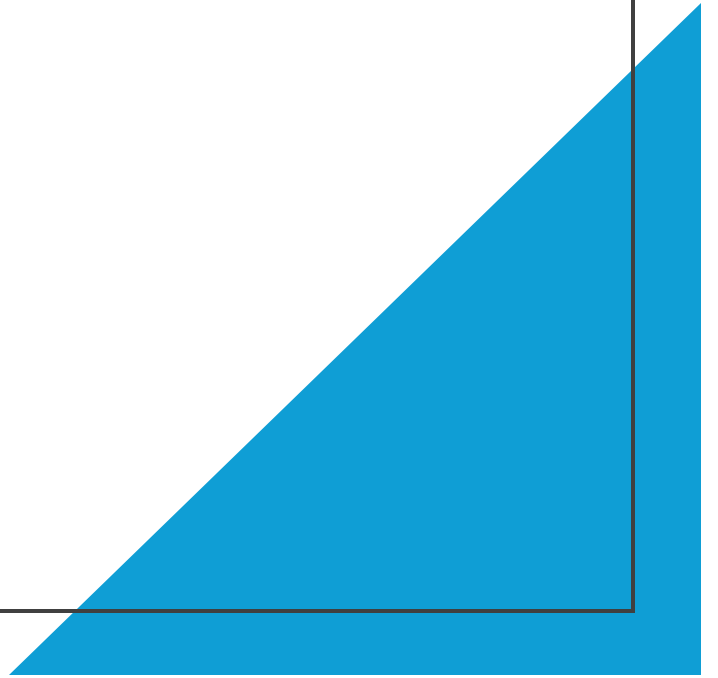
Platforms

- YouTube (n=5); Facebook (3); Instagram (3); Twitter/X (2); TikTok (1); Snapchat (1); Reddit (1)
- **Recommendation Algorithms**
- **Content-Sharing**
- **Cross-platform migration**



Niche Communities

- School shooters
- Serial/mass killers
- Incel
- Gun communities
- Gore



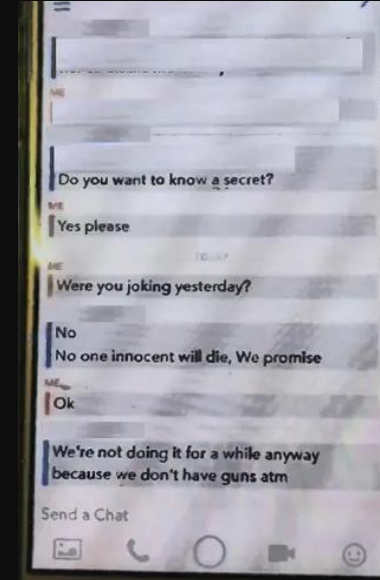
Anonymity

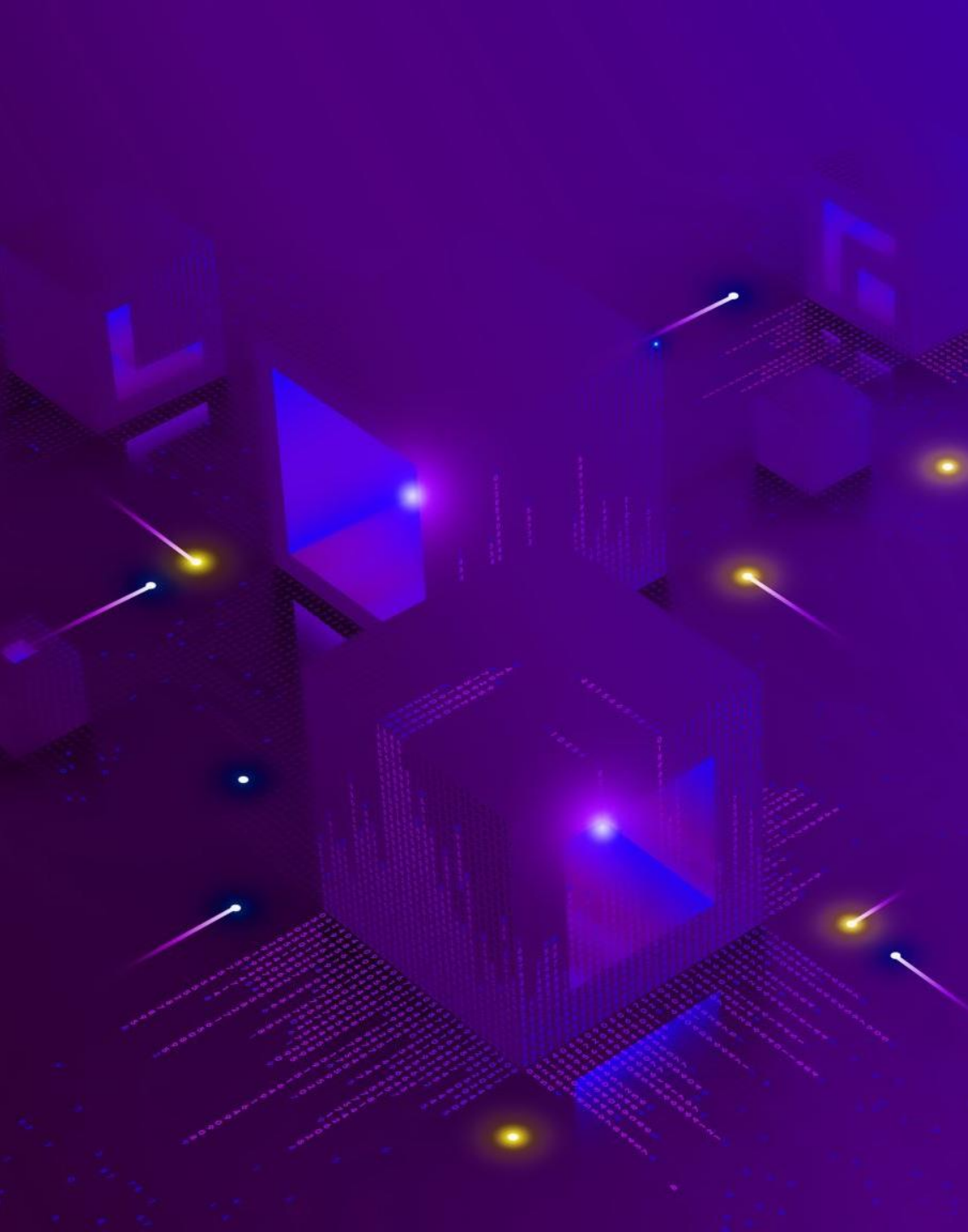
Anonymity

- Heavy use of anonymising software
- Some use of higher tech (e.g. Dark Web; Tails)

Leakage

- Explicit leakage
- Vague leakage





Emerging Technologies

- Relatively little engagement
- Some use of Dark Web & Cryptocurrencies
- No evidence of AI, 3D printers etc.
- Innovation is often forced
- Mainstream platforms and surface web websites carry violent content
- Operational material is easy to find



Neurodiversity, Social Isolation, and VFI

- 10/13 had autism diagnosis – important for considering role of the Internet
- Al-Attar (2020) autism can have “contextual” role in radicalisation

Six facets:

- a) Circumscribed interests
 - b) Rich vivid fantasy
 - c) Need for order, rules and routine
 - d) Obsessionality, repetition, and collecting
 - e) Social interaction and communication difficulties
 - f) Different cognitive styles
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Summary and Key Takeaways

- Theory and empirical analysis links up in some places:

High engagement with niche communities

Likely that recommendation algorithms played a role

Technologies used to stay anonymous

- However, in some places the concern was not met:

Minimal use of emerging tech

Little evidence of cross platform migration

- Neurodiversity runs through cases and affects the use of the Internet

Thank you

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