



## Analysis of tweets made over riots in London 6-8th August 2011

### Introduction

It has been widely reported that social media was used by looters during the recent riots that took place in the UK, and particularly London. We have analysed tweets from this period that either had the word 'riot' or 'rebroadcast' in them. The second word 'rebroadcast' was used since it was a word that was used by the gangs to promote the spread of any organising that they undertook.

### Timeline

To start with, we should familiarise ourselves with the main events that took place. The reader is directed to the BBC's website for a more complete timeline of events, but in summary they were:

- Saturday 6th August
  - Riots begin at Tottenham resulting in buildings, buses and cars burnt
  - Looting takes place from Vision Express, Boots, Argos and JD Sports
- Sunday 7th August
  - 18:28 BST Looting begins at High Street Enfield
  - 22:30 BST Rioting at Oxford Circus
  - 00:45 BST Rioting and burning at Foot Locker, Brixton
  - 00:45 BST Looting at Chingford Mount, Waltham Forest
  - 00:45 BST Looting at Tesco store in Ponders End, Islington
  - 02:20 BST Looting at Walthamstow finally under control
  - 02:38 BST Fires reported in Brixton, Enfield and Walthamstow
- Monday 8th August
  - 17:19 BST Rioting begins in Hackney
  - 18:42 BST Bus set on fire in Peckham
  - 18:45 BST Cars set on fire in Lewisham
  - 20:07 BST Rioting in West Midlands
  - 20:58 BST Fires in Croydon
  - 21:50 BST Fire reported in Clapham
  - 23:05 BST Looting reported in Woolwich
  - 23:27 BST Looting reported in Ealing
  - 23:30 BST Fires reported in Nottingham
  - 00:45 BST Police station in Birmingham on fire



## Analysis of tweets

To begin with our analysis, we will simply look at what words are in context with the word 'next'. The assumption being that if organisation of any sort is going on, this word would be used to identify the next target to loot or attack.

The initial analysis of tweets shows a general blasé attitude on the Saturday evening (between the hours of 11am to early morning), with most people worried that the Tottenham - Everton game in the English Premiership could be affected by the disturbances in the Tottenham area.

We also see the word Olympics coming up in context - showing the general concern that this could affect the Olympics due to take place in London next year.

During the morning of the Sunday, we see some interesting words coming up in context: Bush, Westfields and loot. This would indicate that the Westfield Shopping Centre in Shepherd's Bush was targetted early on as a potential target. Indeed, the shopping centre did come under attack later that evening.

The following hour we see discussion of places such as Stratford and Hackney, all of which had early warning of the potential attacks and took action to prevent them. It is worth pointing out that these words are being found in context in the early hours of Sunday morning.

The next mention of a specific place occurs at 20:00 BST and mentions Brixton. Further place names come up between 22:00 BST and midnight and discusses Walthamstow, Edmonton and Westfield. All of these places were attacked some time after these mentions on twitter. The timeline described through the Guardian website article shows the attacks and looting taking place around 01:50 BST.

We then see mention of Peckham at 02:00 BST on the morning of the 8th August, although incidents did not occur at this location until much later in the day, according to the data currently available.

We also see a spate of locations coming up in context to 'next' at around 17:00 BST on the 8th August. Lewisham, Nottingham, Brighton, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool are all mentioned. However, incidents at Nottingham and Liverpool and the majority of incidents in Birmingham all took place after 23:00.

Analysis of subsequent data shows a similar trend, but is not presented here.

The data presented in Table 1 summarises the first occurrences of each place name when analysed in context with 'next'. Notice that this does not mean the this particular word will appear in the tweet with the placename, just that the placename and 'next' are in context with each other.

Some examples of the actual tweets that were made can be seen below in Table 2. It can be seen that they are a mix of jokes, with warnings about an impending riot, to apparently serious comments about joining in the looting for particular shops.

This perhaps shows that not everyone who received the 'call to arms' responded by participating in the looting, but instead a great many people tweeted their dissatisfaction at the actions of others. It is worthwhile to note that at this early stage it is likely that the demographic of those tweeting the warnings will be similar to those that participated - showing that not every youth or community member went along with what others were suggesting. In fact the evidence shows the opposite, that as soon as they received the message, they



went online and voiced their disapproval of the proposed looting and violence.

## **Conclusions**

This piece of analysis shows the power of Brand Aura's contextual analysis of social media. In most cases, it appears that the gangs that undertook the rioting were well organised and although they used the Blackberry network it seems that other members of the public have either been passed messages or have heard of them second hand and then voiced their displeasure on Twitter. It is noticeable that the bulk of tweets about particular places coincide with the gangs organising themselves and deciding on targets. This shows that the general public were not as passive as at first appears, even though their protest was conducted via a social media and therefore for the most part anonymous.

In any case, for nearly all places identified here, the first instances of a place name in context with the word 'next' appeared on twitter before the attack occurred.

Although this analysis has been conducted after the event, our software can run in real time and could have been used to assist in the early information gathering process, and in particular to help in directing resources to where it was required.

## **Contact**

If you would like to discuss the contents of this whitepaper, or to see how this analysis could be used to benefit your own company, and the pricing level for the service you require, then please contact Mark Polson at [mark@brand-aura.com](mailto:mark@brand-aura.com).



Date	Location	Time Period (BST)
7th August	Westfield, Shepherd's Bush	09:00-10:00
	Stratford	10:00-11:00
	Hackney	10:00-11:00
	Brixton	20:00-21:00
	Croydon	20:00-21:00
	Walhamstow	22:00-23:00
	Edmonton	23:00-00:00
	Westfield	23:00-00:00
	Peckham	02:00-03:00
8th August	Southgate	14:00-15:00
	Lewisham	17:00-18:00
	Nottingham	17:00-18:00
	Brighton	17:00-18:00
	Birmingham	17:00-18:00
	Manchester	17:00-18:00
	Liverpool	17:00-18:00
	Wandsworth	18:00-19:00
	Walworth Road	19:00-20:00
	Bristol	20:00-21:00
	Woolwich	21:00-22:00

Table 1: Timeline of placenames occurring in context with word 'next'

Time	Tweet
2011-08-08 17:23:16	i hope its just a stupid rumour about a riot been planned at 6 in birmingham
2011-08-08 17:30:23	Rumours circulating that people want to riot in Birmingham so they can do all this looting shit as well. You cheap bastards grow up.
2011-08-08 17:16:51	RT @DjSdotda1: Aint no riot going on in birmingham, but if there is I won't mind picking up a Ipad 2! LOL
2011-08-08 16:54:21	Wow my phones going off today it looks like birmingham are gona <em>riot</em>aswell dumb stupid people man.
2011-08-08 17:01:57	LOOOL people gassing Hard About staring a riot in Birmingham at 6 nd now Leicester 2 at 7 #TrulyGassHeadz
2011-08-08 17:03:42	Nope, he's shouting louder but is further away. Back up to cut-purse. This is the shittest riot in South Manchester's history.
2011-08-08 17:47:27	RT @TheBadderMan: Anyone fancy starting a riot at the Trafford Centre later? There's buildings to loot! #ManchesterRiots #LondonRiots
2011-08-08 17:09:08	is it true that Liverpool are having a riot to? .
2011-08-08 17:18:04	i hope Liverpool aint thinking about doing a riot like London. Its nothing to do with Scousers. Its Mark Duggan who was LONDON. #londonriots

Table 2: Example tweets from timeline