Examining **Collective Sensemaking** in Online Communities

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1. **MOTIVATION**

Individuals have long come together in an attempt to make sense of events that threaten the social order.

This often results in the formation of conspiracy theories and/or rumours.

The Internet is a fertile ground for both the development and circulation of such narratives.

Widespread belief in certain conspiracy theories can have harmful and tangible consequences.

2. **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

There is very little research addressing collective sensemaking, and none focused on better understanding how conspiratorial narratives develop at scale and in an online environment.

Exploring why certain interpretations of societal events gain leverage over others during collective sensemaking processes is critical for intervention planning.

3. **PROPOSED RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Can collective sensemaking in online conspiracy communities be identified, tracked, and measured at scale?

Do schisms in narrative uptake occur during such sensemaking processes, and if so, what processes explain them?

What are the implications for countering the development of harmful conspiracy theories and/or rumours?

4. **PROPOSED METHODOLOGY**

Phase 1 will be a systematic review, phase 2 a netnography analysing conspiracy forum discussions and phase 3 a data or simulation driven empirical study.

The first two will allow for a rich understanding of the stages relating to collective sensemaking online, and the third an up-scaling of that understanding.

5. **OUTCOME**

To open up more scope for intervention, whether that be platform specific, counter messaging, regulatory proposals, or a push for improved digital literacy.