Examining **Collective Sensemaking** in Online Communities

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CONSPIRACY THEORY

& RUMOUR SPREAD

60% of British people believe in conspiracy theories.
(Addley, 2018)

WE COVID WAN LABMADE SCIENCE

False news travels 6 times faster than the truth on Twitter.
(Vosoughi et al., 2018)

The amount of deepfake content online is growing at a rapid rate.

DO NOT TAKE THE VAX

The fake news ecosystem preys on some of our deepest human instincts.

FLAT EARTH SOCIETY
THE EARTH IS FLAT

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Echo chambers and filter bubbles reinforce beliefs.

Social media platforms can exacerbate existing biases and increase polarisation.

GLOBAL WARMING is a HUGE FRAUD

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.

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.

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?

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.

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.

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