Call for Papers: Symposium and Special Issue of the *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*

Uncommon yet Consequential Online Harms

A consistent finding from research on harmful online behaviors in the US is that they tend to be concentrated among a small set of individuals. Whether examining the amplification of misinformation, consumption of radical content, or posting of hate speech, a small set of individuals typically accounts for the majority of the behavior. Despite this statistical infrequency, the social consequences of such behavior can be substantial, especially for groups targeted by these individuals.

The observation that human behavior often follows a heavy-tailed distribution is well established (e.g. the Pareto principle), and applies to a wide range of behaviors, including the number of: webpages people browse, papers scientists publish, and emails people receive. However, in the context of harmful online behaviors, studies have often focused on measuring platform-specific prevalence, leaving gaps in our understanding of the overarching mechanisms driving these behavioral patterns, how to assess their social impact, and how to design interventions for them.

Scholars have noted that in the push to summarize human behavior at scale, "we risk losing sight of a secondary but equally important advantage of Big Data – the plentiful representation of minorities."[1] While the case for "making big data small" was originally aimed at centering groups – including women and minorities – historically been omitted from the scientific record, it also lends itself to studying the individuals perpetuating the patterns outlined here.

So, the question is: We know these uncommon yet consequential[2] actors exist, now what?

1   Symposium and Special Issue

We invite researchers across disciplines to submit their work for a symposium and a special issue on Uncommon yet Consequential Online Harms. The purpose of this symposium and special issue is to bring together an interdisciplinary mix of researchers for a broader conservation on the individuals perpetuating the behavioral patterns outlined above. Questions that authors might seek to address in their submission include (but are not limited to):

- What might we learn from them that could help reduce the prevalence of such behaviors?
- Are interventions designed for the general public ineffective on such individuals?
- What is the efficacy and ethics of focusing interventions on such individuals?

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1. Welles, B. F. (2014) On minorities and outliers: The case for making Big Data small. Big Data & Society, 1(1)

2. A phrase inspired by a related discussion of "events that are statistically uncommon but consequential" in Lazer, D., Hargittai, E., Freelon, D., Gonzalez-Bailon, S., Munger, K., Ognyanova, K., & Radford, J. (2021). Meaningful measures of human society in the twenty-first century. Nature, 595(7866), 189–196.

- Can we come to understand how such behavioral patterns are established?
- How can qualitative work inform quantitative investigations on these behaviors?
- What behaviors fall into this category but have received little research attention?
- How can we measure their emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral impact?
- How do offline or cross-platform sources of information affect these behavioral patterns?
- How does prevalence affect impact, and how might that vary by behavior and platform?
- How do affordances of a platform limit or amplify the influence of these individuals?
- How do the trends observed in the US appear in other countries and for languages other than English?

2   Submission Instructions

Authors interested in submitting an article for the symposium and/or the special issue should follow the journal's standard submission process by sending a letter of inquiry (LOI) by January 15, 2022. Authors should note in their submission whether they wish to be considered for the symposium, special issue, or both. The symposium will be non-archival (no published proceedings), and attendees are not required to submit a full paper nor to make a submission for the special issue. Attending the symposium is not a prerequisite for submitting an article for the special issue.

The symposium will be hosted by the Stanford Internet Observatory and held in-person on Stanford's campus in March 2022 (pending public health conditions), though authors can also participate remotely. Full paper submissions for the special issue are due April 15, and if accepted will be published near the end of July 2022. Questions about the special issue or symposium may be directed to the guest editor, Ronald Robertson, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Stanford Internet Observatory (ronalder@stanford.edu).

3   Timeline

- LOI submission deadline: January 15, 2022
- Desk decisions: February 1, 2022
- Symposium date: March 15, 2022
- Paper submission for special issue: April 15, 2022
- Publication date of special issue: July 31, 2022