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ONLINE PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT **Capturing the Narrative: User Perspectives and Behavioral Analysis** **Raht Masood & Hammond Pearce**	

1. What is the research study about?

You are invited to take part in this research study. The research study aims to investigate how individuals engage with AI-generated content and misinformation on social media platforms. It specifically explores the emotional, behavioural, and ethical experiences of participants as they develop bots and simulate misinformation in a controlled, virtual environment. You have been invited because you are a university student, and your contact details were obtained through affiliated university networks.

2. Who is conducting this research?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers: Dr. Hammond Pearce (Senior Lecturer at School of Computer Science and Engineering, UNSW Sydney), Dr. Rahat Masood (Senior Lecturer at School of Computer Science and Engineering, UNSW Sydney), and Jiamin Chang, PhD Candidate, UNSW Sydney.

Research Funder: This research is being supported by UNSW Institute of Cybersecurity (IFCYBER) and School of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), UNSW Sydney

3. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Before you decide to participate in this research study, we need to ensure that it is ok for you to take part. The research study is looking recruit people who meet the following criteria:

- • Must be 18 years or older
- • Must be a current university student from an Australian university

Exclusion criteria for those who are not eligible to participate in the study include:

- · Participants who do not meet the above criteria
- · Individuals who are under 18 years of age
- · Individuals who are not enrolled in or have not recently graduated from an Australian university
- · Individuals who have current severe emotional distress (self-screen) due to potential psychological discomfort from creating misinformation

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4. Do I have to take part in this research study?

Participation in any research study is voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to.
If you decide you want to take part in the research study, you will be asked to:

- Read the information carefully (ask questions if necessary);
- Complete the online questionnaire

5. What does participation in this research require, and are there any risks involved?

If you decide to take part in the research study, we will ask you to complete an online pre-questionnaire. The questionnaire will ask you about your background knowledge and attitudes toward social media bots, experiences building AI-driven content, emotional responses to misinformation, and ethical reflections. It should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

After the survey is complete, you will participate in a series of structured activities over a one-month period, during which you will:

- Complete a pre-competition survey (20 minutes).
- Create AI-generated social media bots using Python and the CaptureTheNarrative (CTN) platform's API. (Time to create bots: 1-2 days)
- Deploy these bots on a simulated social media platform, where you will generate and spread content in an effort to gain attention, followers, or influence. (Time to deploy bot: 1 day, continuous generation of content: 3-4 weeks of bot operation)
- Monitor and manipulate bot behaviour based on real-time feedback from the system and adjust strategies to maximise reach. (Time to monitor and manipulate bots: 1-2 days of coding during the 3-4 weeks of bot operation)
- Reflect on your bot design decisions and ethical implications of misinformation via journal entries and a final post-study survey. (Reflection and Survey: 20 mins)
- All activities will be conducted within a controlled simulation environment i.e., no real-world social media content will be affected or posted.

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After the competition concludes, we will invite you to complete a post-event questionnaire to share your experiences with bot creation and misinformation manipulation.

Participant screening will occur as part of the initial stage of the recruitment, where individuals will be asked to provide their active university email address. This is the only screening method used to confirm eligibility for the study.

We will collect your survey responses and keep the survey anonymised and no information will be identifiable. Similarly, your posts and activities on simulated social media platform will remain anonymous. The data will be stored at UNSW OneDrive and will remain accessible to only team members. The survey will be conducted at Microsoft Sharepoint survey. Microsoft UNSW SharePoint Survey is a secure and authorised platform for conducting surveys. It ensures the safe collection, storage, and processing of data in compliance with institutional requirements.

You can join the competition by signing up here https://capturethenarrative.com/. The competition is open to all students from Australian universities. Teams can be made up of 1-4 students. An email address ending in ".edu.au" is required to register, alongside acceptance of the Competition Ethics and Rules, given here.

This is a low-risk project. The risks associated with participation will not exceed minor discomfort.
- **Emotional discomfort:** You may experience some unease or guilt while creating content or bots that simulate unethical behaviour (e.g., misinformation or controversial views), even in a fictional environment. To minimise this, you will be reminded that the exercise is simulated and closely moderated.
- **Value conflict:** Simulating opinions different from one's own may cause discomfort. You are encouraged to engage as part of a team so they can share and balance differing perspectives.
- **Perceived realism:** Highly realistic simulation of social media interactions may create unease. Moderators will ensure participants are reminded that the platform is fictional and limited to the study context.

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- **Follow-up reflection:** Post-event questions may prompt participants to reflect on the impact of their simulated actions, which could lead to minor discomfort. You may skip questions they do not wish to answer.
- **Data privacy concerns:** Although all data will be de-identified, you may still feel concerned about how their activity is recorded. Clear explanations about anonymisation, storage, and handling of data are provided in the consent form.

The research team will ensure that none of the posts created by participants cause distress or harm to you. The level of risk will not exceed minor discomfort. Participants will be clearly informed of any potential harms throughout the research process. To uphold these principles, the research team will monitor the simulated platform 24/7. Any post identified as risky or likely to cause discomfort will be deleted immediately, and the participant responsible will be notified of its removal. Human moderators will actively oversee interactions to ensure that all content remains appropriate, participants are protected, and ethical standards are consistently maintained.

You will be given three warnings in case of ethics and rule violations.
1) First breach: warning message sent to your team.
2) Second breach: second warning issued.
3) Third breach: final warning issued.
4) Final breach: automatic disqualification from the study.

If you experience discomfort while participating in the research and you require support, you can stop participating at any time. You can also tell a member of the research team and they will provide you with assistance. Alternatively, a list of support services and their contact details are provided below.

6. What are the possible benefits to participation?
We hope to use information we get from this research study to benefit educators, social media platforms, and researchers in developing better digital literacy programs, and to help the public better understand the risks and emotional impacts of interacting with AI-generated misinformation.

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At the conclusion of the event, prizes will be awarded to the top three participants whose bots have the highest influence scores within the simulated platform. Influence scores are determined based on pre-set criteria such as engagement metrics, reach, and impact on virtual user behaviour, as defined within the research design. The prize structure is as follows:

1) 1st Prize: AUD $5,000
2) 2nd Prize: AUD $2,500
3) 3rd Prize: AUD $1,500

Prize Selection Criteria: Participants will not be chosen at random. Winners will be selected based on quantitative analysis of the performance of their bots within the simulation environment, using standardised metrics to ensure fairness and transparency. Teams will be judged on their ability to manipulate the social media landscape, with points awarded for engagement within the platform, as well as for successfully amplifying and suppressing target messages. Engagement refers to social media metrics such as likes, reposts, replies, and placement in the trending pages of the algorithmic feeds.

7. What will happen to information about me?

Submission of the online questionnaire is an indication of your consent. By clicking the 'I agree to participate' button you are providing your permission for the research team to collect and use information about you for the research study.

The research team will store the data collected from you for this research project for:

- A minimum of 5 years after the publication of the research results;

The information about you will be stored in a:

- Re-identifiable format where any identifiers such as your name will be replaced by unique codes

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You will be asked to provide your consent for the research team to share or use the information collected from you in future research that:

- Will be specific to the aims of this research;
- Will be used in any future research.

8. How and when will I find out what the results of the research study are?

The research team intends to publish and report the results of the research. All information will be published in a way that will not identify you.

If you would like to receive a copy of the results you can let the research team know by inserting your email in the consent form. We will only use these details to send you the results of the research.

9. What if I want to withdraw from the research study?

If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw at any time. You can do so by completing the 'Withdrawal of Consent Form' which is provided at the end of this document. Alternatively, you can ring the research team and tell them you no longer want to participate. If you decide to leave the research study, the researchers will destroy any information that has already been collected and no additional information will be collected from you. Your decision not to participate or to withdraw from the study, will not affect your relationship with UNSW Sydney.

The information you provide is personal information for the purposes of the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW). You have the right of access to personal information held about you by the University, the right to request correction and amendment of it, and the right to make a compliant about a breach of the Information Protection Principles as contained in the PPIP Act. Further information on how the University protects personal information is available in the **UNSW Privacy Management Plan.**

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10. What should I do if I have further questions about my involvement in the research study?
The person you may need to contact will depend on the nature of your query. If you require further information regarding this study or if you have any problems which may be related to your involvement in the study, you can contact the following member/s of the research team:

Research Team Contact

Name	Rahat Masood
Position	Senior Lecturer
Telephone	+61-2-9065 9916
Email	rahat.masood@unsw.edu.au

If at any stage during the study, you become distressed or require additional support from someone not involved in the research please call:

Contact for feelings of distress

Name/Organisation	Beyond Blue
Telephone	**1300 22 4636**

What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the research study?

If you have a complaint regarding any aspect of the study or the way it is being conducted, please contact the UNSW Human Ethics Coordinator:

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Complaints Contact

Position	Human Research Ethics Coordinator
Telephone	+ 61 2 9385 6222
Email	humanethics@unsw.edu.au
HC Reference Number	9499