

COVID-19: Fringe Groups Influencing Panic-Buying

March 25, 2020

Narrative Analysis: Panic Buying at Grocery Stores

- While stories about long grocery store lines, bare shelves, and food shortages peaked in mainstream news around March 15 (the first weekend of widespread panic-buying and empty shelves), Fringe Trolls on anonymous messages boards started spreading rumors of empty shelves in late February.
- The extremist and conspiratorial outlook of these groups, combined with their incredibly high levels of online engagement give them power to shape more mainstream social media.

CORONA'D SHELVES Anonymous ID : vXF s8XBa
Thu 27 Feb 2020 17:00:00 No. 245627885

ITT we'll post pics of corona'd shelves. Let's document the downfall of just-in-time logistics in a globalized world in a black swan habbening. Post pics of malls, supermarkets and stores.

Anonymous ID : uVJFpVFP Thu 27 Feb 2020 17:48:16 No. 245634314
Quoted By: >>245660117

Home Depot in Columbus
This was a few days ago

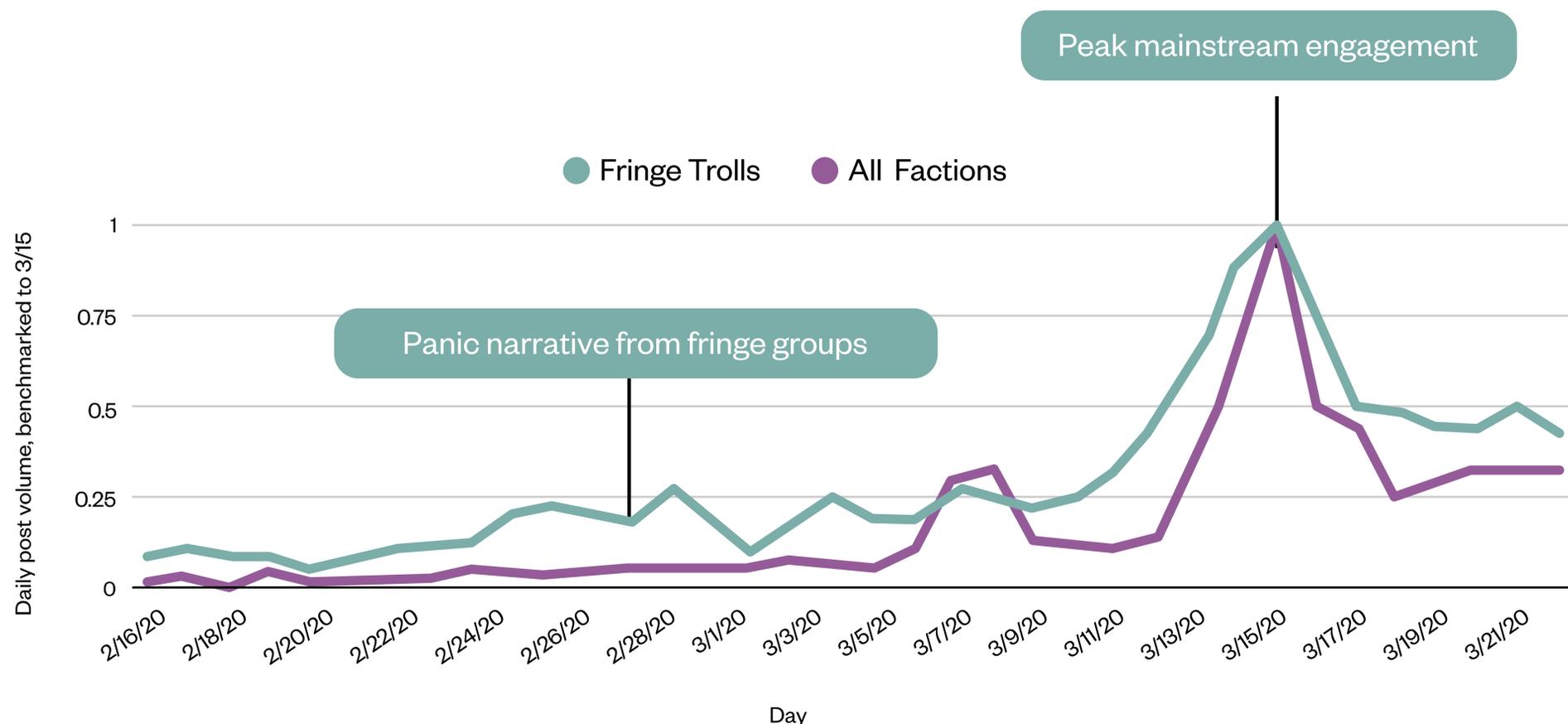
Anonymous ID : k1DWsnr0 Thu 27 Feb 2020 17:49:23 No. 245634456
>>245634302

Anonymous ID : Lotn0Ypf Thu 27 Feb 2020 20:39:10 No. 245655147
Quoted By: >>245655620 >>245656006 >>245655553 >>245659955 >>245660026 >>245654654

Pic related was the haul. Planned on getting more food, but when I realized how quickly other supplies were going I put them on the backburner. I think food will remained stock for awhile, but flashlights, medical supplies, disinfectants, etc. will go fast and first. It was eerie to see the people around you and what was in t heir carts and KNOW who was prepping and who didn't have a damn clue.

Posts from the anonymous message board, 4chan, claiming empty grocery store shelves due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Fringe trolls introduced a narrative about empty grocery store shelves due to the Covid-19 outbreak in late February, over two weeks before that narrative became mainstream.



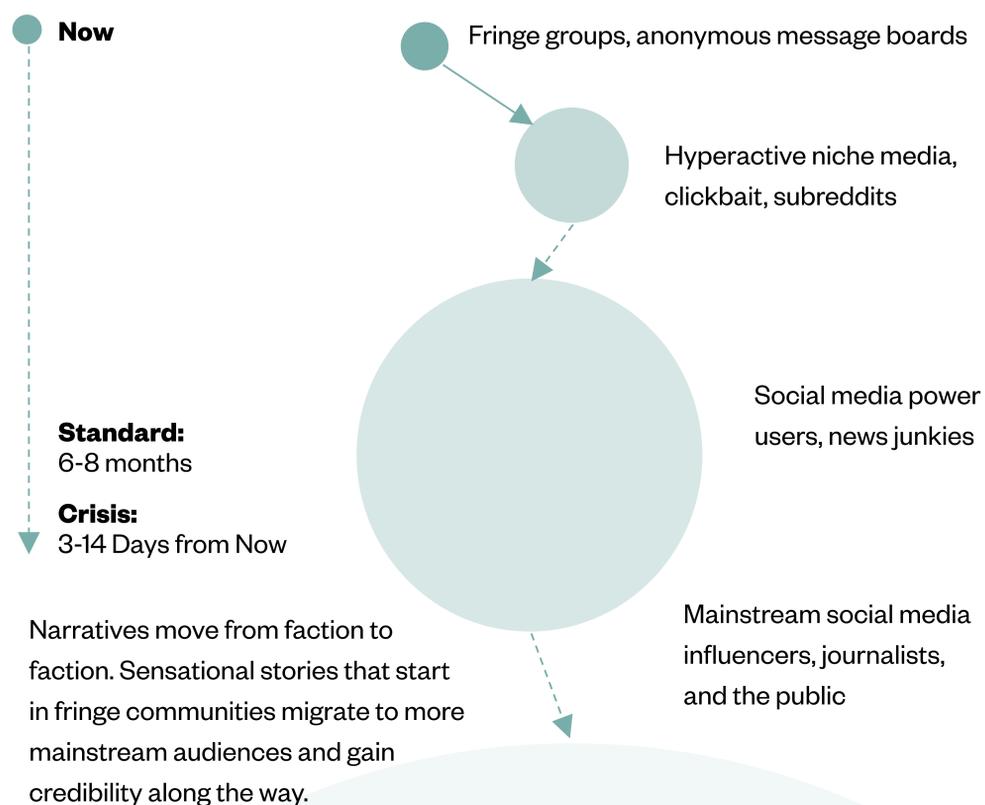
Fringe Stories Travel Faster in Uncertain Times

Key Takeaways:

- Watch fringe narratives even more closely during periods of public uncertainty
- When the public lacks information, mainstream conversation is primed for conspiracy theories, rumors, or panic-inciting narratives
- Fringe factions are early warning signals for extreme, conspiratorial, or false narratives

We've seen extreme, fringe narratives from agenda-driven groups make their way to the mainstream faster than ever during the Covid-19 pandemic. In times of uncertainty, the mainstream is unusually accepting of conspiratorial thinking, rumors, alarm, or panic.

Trending up from fringe to virality



Understanding Influential Fringe Factions

New factions are developed each day as interests, passions and perspectives shift online. Getting to know each one provides great context in anticipating where a narrative will go next, what the tone and perspective will likely be, as well as who will likely be influenced. Here is an introduction to some of the most influential fringe factions.

Fringe Trolls

Entirely anonymous message boards like 4chan and 8chan. Dominated by young, mostly-white, mostly-American men. Language tends to evolve quickly with in-jokes and board-specific jargon.

Most likely to influence:

Conspiracy Theorists

Anti-Vaxxers

Users that oppose vaccinations and spread narratives that they are harmful to humans.

Most likely to influence:

Populist Right, Climate Denialist

Conspiracy Theorists

Self-described "investigators". Networks of accounts and boards that tend to create, discuss or investigate topics like current events, UFOs, politics and corporate affairs.

Most likely to influence:

Modern Espionage & Terrorism News Discussions, Leftist Sharing Memes

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