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Title: “A Comprehensive Approach to Identify the Cognitive Attributes Underpinning Susceptibility to Conspiracy Beliefs”

Abstract: Previous research has pinpointed certain (cognitive) characteristics as being associated with conspiracy belief, however the existing literature suffers from a number of major limitations. First, it is highly fragmented and lacks a coherent theoretical basis. Second, it lacks a quantitatively precise characterization of how any individual cognitive process relates to conspiratorial thinking. Third, most studies to date tend to rely on small (often convenience) samples, which limit the robustness of the findings and their generalizability. The current research aims to provide a thorough description of the cognitive characteristics of individuals more likely to believe in conspiracy theories, using a large online sample and a battery of six cognitive tasks assessing cognitive processes pertaining to the gathering of information as well as to the processing and interpreting of information.

We find that variation in cognitive processes within each of these categories seems to be related to conspiracy beliefs. With regard to the gathering of information, variables describing gathering of less information prior to a decision as well as choice stochasticity when making decisions about gathering information show relevance in predicting conspiracy belief. Conspiracy believers also seem to process information differently, showing a higher tendency to attribute outcomes to the involvement of hidden agents rather than their own decisions. Using this comprehensive approach allows us to get closer to identifying a construct of cognitive processes that may more accurately describe individuals subscribing to conspiracy beliefs, rather than relying on the analyses of isolated processes.

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