



LINGUE CULTURE MEDIAZIONI LANGUAGES CULTURES MEDIATION

10 (2023)

2

The COVID-19 Crisis and Its Challenges on Social Issues

COVID-19: crisi e sfide nella società

Edited by

*Paola Catenaccio, Stefania M. Maci,
Denise Milizia, and Laura R. Olson*

EDITORIAL

How Linguistic Analysis Helps Us Understand the COVID-19 Pandemic 5

Laura R. Olson, Stefania M. Maci, and Denise Milizia

COVID-19 Crisis Management in Newspaper Articles:
A Diachronic Analysis 9

Olga Denti

A Micro-Diachronic Corpus Investigation of Violence-Related
Metaphors Used to Frame China during the COVID-19 Pandemic 33

Ilaria Iori

Navigating Uncertainty: Social Media Narratives of Tourism
during COVID-19 55

Maria Cristina Gatti, Cecilia Lazzeretti, and Francesca Vitali

Netlore, Memes and the Pandemic: Adjusting Virtually
to the New Normal 79

Michela Giordano and Maria Antonietta Marongiu

Get a Jab or Grab a Glass (of Wine): A Sentiment
and Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis of Reader Comments
on News Story in the *Daily Mail* 107

Francesco Nacchia

Boosting Booster Trust: Negotiating a Jungle of Misinformation <i>Marina Bondi and Jessica Jane Nocella</i>	135
Flouting the Truth: A Pragmatic Study of Conspiracy Beliefs at the Time of COVID-19 <i>Gaetano Falco</i>	155
Internet Usage, YouTube, and Conspiracy-Mindedness in the United States <i>Laura R. Olson</i>	175
“A Pandemic within the Pandemic”: A CDA of Social Media Comments on Domestic Violence during COVID-19 <i>Antonella Napolitano</i>	201
A Corpus-Based CDA of Populist Politicians’ Strategies and Public Response on Twitter during the COVID-19 Pandemic <i>Andrea Cifalino, Ester Di Silvestro, and Marco Venuti</i>	229
The Gender-Differentiated Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Health and Social Inequalities in the UK: An Exploration of Gendered Themes within Private and Public Discourse and Policy Implications <i>Marion Ellison</i>	261
Mimesis of the Zoom World: How TV Series Mirrored the 2020 Pandemic and Its Languages <i>Carlotta Susca</i>	293
Sense-Making/Giving during the COVID-19 Crisis: A Multi-Method Study of Health Podcasting in Australia and the U.S. <i>Rosita Belinda Maglie and Matthew Josef Groicher</i>	313
Authors	339

Internet Usage, YouTube, and Conspiracy-Mindedness in the United States

Laura R. Olson

Clemson University (South Carolina - USA)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7358/lcm-2023-002-olsl>

ABSTRACT

The spread of conspiracy theories and misinformation poses substantial threats to democracy around the world. In the United States, entrenched political polarization is both a consequence and a ramification of the spread of biased and false information. Much of this misinformation is spread online, especially on social media. Of all the social media networks in existence, the video-sharing platform YouTube is the most significant incubator of right-wing conspiracist thinking. To what extent has internet usage affected conspiracy-mindedness in the U.S. during the Trump era? I analyze data from five waves of the Pew Research Center's "American Trends Panel" to test the hypotheses that (1) being perpetually online, (2) keeping many social media accounts, and (3) relying on YouTube for news will increase perceptions of 'fake news', stoke conspiracist thinking, and help make democracy's status in the U.S. ever more precarious. Findings indicate that reliance on YouTube for news is an especially powerful predictor of noticing fake news about COVID-19 and the 2020 U.S. presidential election; attitudes about voter fraud, Donald Trump's challenges to the election results, and the January 6, 2021, insurrectionists; and deciding to stop talking to someone because of politics.

Keywords: conspiracy; COVID-19; Donald Trump; fake news; January 6 insurrection; misinformation; politics; United States; YouTube; 2020 U.S. presidential election.

1. INTRODUCTION

Misinformation and conspiracy theories spread like wildfire today¹. In addition to the limitless availability of information on the internet and the waning influence of mainstream news sources, the spread of nebulous ‘facts’ is as much a feature of the present day as are economic inequality, political polarization, and decreased social capital and trust in experts (Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook 2017; Bleakley 2021). These circumstances pose significant threats to the human condition. Conspiracy theories undermine democracy by stoking division, driving political radicalism, and creating significant security threats (Awan 2017; Craft, Ashley, and Maksl 2017; Enders and Smallpage 2018; Hellinger 2019; Bleakley 2021). ‘Fake news’ and conspiracism continue to enable authoritarianism around the world, and they worsened the coronavirus pandemic. To wit: three years before the global COVID-19 pandemic began, prescient scholars mused: “Imagine a world in which it is not expert knowledge but an opinion market on Twitter that determines whether a newly emergent strain of avian flu is really contagious to humans” (Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook 2017, 354).

Biased information that contradicts or undercuts news is most likely to spread online, especially on social media (Douglas *et al.* 2019; Hellinger 2019; Allington, Buarque, and Flores 2021; Dastgeer and Thapaliya 2022; Demata, Zorzi, and Zottola 2022). Not only are social media platforms addictive (Sun and Zhang 2021), but they also seem to encourage accepting baseless contentions as truth. As Muirhead and colleagues assert, “social media allows conspiracists to find one another and to signal identification with others who assent to and amplify the wildest conspiracist charges. Bare assertion is not only easily communicated; it offers the immediate gratification of performative aggression” (2020, 143).

In the United States, some of the most toxic manifestations of conspiracism in recent years have focused on the origins and treatments of COVID-19, alleged voter fraud in the 2020 U.S. elections, and the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Although conspiracy theories have circulated in the U.S. since its founding (Olmstead 2018), it is fair to say that the presidency of Donald Trump created a “blurred line between conspiracy thinking and traditional politics [that] marks

¹ Although I speak of misinformation and conspiracy theories largely in the same breath, it is important to remain cognizant of the differences between them. On that point in the context of politics, see Jerit and Zhao 2020.

a new era of American political life” (Enders and Smallpage 2018, 298; see also Bergmann 2018; Hellinger 2019). Through his willingness to dispute objective facts, Trump made conspiracist thinking much more mainstream (Tollefson 2021). The earliest days of Trump’s administration were marked by his refusal to accept the empirical reality that fewer people had attended his inauguration than had attended those of his immediate predecessor, Barack Obama. Indeed, scholars have documented a strong connection in general among right-wing authoritarianism, anti-democratic impulses, populism, and conspiracism (Bergmann 2018; Allington, Buarque, and Flores 2021). Like any clever political entrepreneur, Trump makes use of “post-truth politics” because it serves his right-wing populist style, and thus his political ends (Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook 2017; Atkinson and DeWitt 2018; Bergmann 2018; Enders and Smallpage 2018; Hellinger 2019).

This article explores this confluence of circumstances through analysis of data from the Pew Research Center’s “American Trends Panel” surveys. How might social media usage shape conspiracist attitudes about COVID-19 and recent U.S. electoral politics? To what extent does reliance on YouTube (in particular) predict these threads of conspiracist thinking? What effects might social media usage have on the basic building blocks of democracy in the U.S.?

2. BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Conspiracy theories are “attempts to explain the ultimate causes of significant social and political events and circumstances with claims of secret plots by two or more [...] actors. [...] perceived as powerful and malevolent” (Douglas *et al.* 2019, 4; see also Bergmann 2018). They put democracy at risk by threatening the media, expert knowledge, and the viability and legitimacy of the party system (Muirhead *et al.* 2020; Demata, Zorzi, and Zottola 2022). With underlying intergroup conflict and feelings of marginalization as preconditions of their existence (Enders and Smallpage 2018; van Prooijen and Douglas 2018), conspiracy theories allow politicians – particularly populists and those who are out of power – alter dominant narratives (Atkinson and DeWitt 2018; Bergmann 2018).

At least half the U.S. public believes at least one conspiracy theory (Oliver and Wood 2014), whether it is that John F. Kennedy was murdered by the CIA (Enders and Smallpage 2018), that the September

11, 2001, attacks were an ‘inside job’ (Stempel, Hargrove, and Stempel 2007), or something else. Conspiracism has infiltrated Americans’ thinking about elections as well. Many embraced fake news before the 2016 election (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017), and the post-election events of January 6, 2021, were driven rather directly by alt-right conspiracy theories (Bleakley 2021).

Previous studies document a confluence of psychological, political, and social factors that lead people to engage in conspiracist thinking (e.g., Bergmann 2018; Douglas *et al.* 2019). First, believing conspiracy theories is closely associated with one’s personal outlook on life and various psychological orientations. Two basic predispositions – seeing life in terms of good versus evil and assuming unseen forces compel events in the world – increase the likelihood of accepting conspiracy theories (Oliver and Wood 2014); these predispositions are also present among many who prefer populist politics (Bergmann 2018). So do feelings of anomie, low self-esteem, powerlessness, skepticism, and mistrust (Uscinski and Parent 2014; Enders and Smallpage 2018; Douglas *et al.* 2019; Allington, Buarque, and Flores 2021). This is so because conspiracy theories tend to appeal to emotions rather than cognitions, especially concerning feelings of ingroup superiority, marginalization, and threat (Dastgeer and Thapaliya 2022). When people feel existential stress, “conspiracy theories appear to provide broad, internally consistent explanations that allow people to preserve beliefs in the face of uncertainty and contradiction” (Douglas *et al.* 2019, 7).

There are also myriad political reasons why people might embrace conspiratorial thinking. Several scholars have concluded that the tendency to believe in conspiracies is an alternative political belief system akin to ideology, and that believing in one or another conspiracy is a rough equivalent of fandom (Oliver and Wood 2014; Uscinski and Parent 2014; Enders and Smallpage 2018). Although conspiracist thinking is not a direct result of conservatism per se (Oliver and Wood 2014; Uscinski and Parent 2014), ideological extremists, especially those on the right, appear more likely to believe conspiracy theories and to consume fake news (van Prooijen, Krouwel, and Pollet 2015; Hellinger 2019; Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler 2020). These tendencies are attributed to the aforementioned ‘good vs. evil’, ingroup-centric cognitive style that mitigates existential fears (van Prooijen, Krouwel, and Pollet 2015), as well as the desire to see things in ways that benefit one’s own ideological ingroup (e.g., Miller, Saunders, and Farhart 2016). In addition to ideology, partisanship – especially when it is an intense and highly prioritized identity – has significant ramifications on the likelihood that people will

embrace conspiracist thinking (Enders and Smallpage 2018; Druckman *et al.* 2021). Like strong ideologues, committed partisans naturally have an interest in discrediting groups they perceive as their opponents. Thus, they are more likely than moderates are to support conspiracy theories, particularly those that make their political opponents look bad (Uscinski and Parent 2014; Miller, Saunders, and Farhart 2016; Enders and Smallpage 2018). For instance, the Pew Research Center found that in the U.S., Republicans were especially likely to believe conspiracist ideas heading into the 2020 election (Mitchell *et al.* 2020).

Various social factors have also been shown to predispose conspiracist thinking. In short, people who live in poverty, members of Generation X, ethnic minorities, men, and those with lower educational attainment are more likely to believe conspiracy theories (Uscinski and Parent 2014; Douglas *et al.* 2019; Druckman *et al.* 2021). The role of education appears to be especially salient in this regard. One explanation for this relationship is that increased knowledge and understanding of objective news reduces the tendency to endorse conspiracy theories (Craft, Ashley, and Maks1 2017).

Believing conspiracy theories has important ramifications for individuals and society alike. Exposure to conspiracy theories has been shown to heighten personal feelings of anger (Butler, Koopman, and Zimbardo 1995) and disgust (Albertson and Guiler 2020). Conspiracist thinking also depresses interpersonal trust (Douglas *et al.* 2019), trust in authorities and democratic institutions (Jolley and Douglas 2014a; Albertson and Guiler 2020), political participation (Butler, Koopman, and Zimbardo 1995; Jolley and Douglas 2014b; Douglas *et al.* 2019), willingness to vaccinate one's children (Jolley and Douglas 2014a), acceptance of other public health advice (e.g., Allington *et al.* 2021), and efforts to lessen one's carbon footprint (Jolley and Douglas 2014b).

Who spreads conspiracy theories? Enders and Smallpage (2018) contend that unusual events typically give rise to conspiracist explanations propagated primarily by elites. That said, the internet has created many polarized online communities (e.g., Douglas *et al.* 2019), and absent social media, today's virulent spread of conspiracy theories would be impossible (Dastgeer and Thapaliya 2022; Demata, Zorzi, and Zottola 2022). Social media influencers who make money by sharing political content have driven the spread of conspiracy theories and their preconditions, such as mistrust of elites and dissatisfaction with the status quo. Although there is an ongoing debate about whether social media networks are agents of political radicalization (e.g., Munger and Phil-

lips 2022), it is indisputable that ISIS recruited jihadists on social media, especially YouTube (Awan 2017). ISIS leaders knew that “tweeting, posting, ‘liking’, and sharing affirm identification with others who accept ... compromised reality” (Muirhead *et al.* 2020, 143). More broadly, people consume online content, including news, that comports with their existing political views (Sunstein 2018; Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler 2020). When those views are extreme or rooted in distrust of political elites, conspiracist rabbit holes often beckon. Relatedly, people who assume that mainstream media spread fake news end up more likely to consume it on social media (Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook 2017; Bleakley 2021).

YouTube is one of the most significant incubators of conspiracist thinking and misinformation in existence. The video-sharing platform is more influential in this regard than other social media networks are (Byford 2011; Allington, Buarque, and Flores 2021). YouTube has a vast and ever-expanding audience of over 2 billion monthly users (Hosseinmardi *et al.* 2021); the Pew Research Center reports that in the U.S., it has more users than any other social networking site (Perrin and Anderson 2019). YouTube’s allure is that it is visual, easy to access, permits extensive individual choice, and allows people to access information in a way that is easier than reading. It is also distinctive because of its algorithm-generated recommendations for further viewing (Munger and Phillips 2022). These algorithms can quickly lead users to unreliable purveyors of information (Hosseinmardi *et al.* 2021). Moreover, the fact that user comments are sorted by popularity on YouTube serves to build community among fans of conspiracy theories (Allington and Joshi 2020).

YouTube’s significance in U.S. politics grew rapidly after its founding in 2005, and it has been especially popular among conservatives since its inception (Munger and Phillips 2022). According to Lewis (2020), content creators who have political agendas vary in their tone, type of content, and specific ideology, but tend strongly to reject both progressive politics and whatever the mainstream media reports. As but one instance in which this bias directly affected human lives, people who relied on YouTube for news about COVID-19 were especially likely to believe conspiracy theories about it (Allington *et al.* 2021), which is unsurprising given that a quarter of YouTube videos about COVID-19 contained false or misleading information during the early days of the pandemic (Li *et al.* 2020).

People who spend time on YouTube often do so to obtain news. A quarter of Americans go to YouTube for news, and a large majority of that group (72 percent) say it is an important way they obtain news

(Stocking *et al.* 2020). Most of the news consumed on YouTube comes from mainstream sources (Hosseinmardi *et al.* 2021). However, almost half (42 percent) of all YouTube news channels are not affiliated with any news organization – and these independent channels are more likely than the mainstream news channels on YouTube to traffic in conspiracy theories and misinformation (Stocking *et al.* 2020). Systematic tension exists between many of these independent news creators and mainstream news sources. “YouTubers create content that serves as both a critique of mainstream news media and an alternative to it. Many express a desire to ultimately replace young audiences’ consumption of mainstream news” (Lewis 2020, 204). In addition, one study finds that frequent YouTube users tend to have low ‘news literacy’ (Munger and Phillips 2022), which makes them more susceptible to believing false information.

In the analysis that follows, I use data from five waves of the Pew Research Center’s “American Trends Panel” surveys (2019-2021) to test three hypotheses about how aspects of internet and social media usage might propel perception and acceptance of misinformation and conspiracy theories, as well as one ominous consequence of doing so, in the United States. More specifically, I hypothesize that:

1. Being perpetually online increases perceptions of fake news and conspiracist thinking and has deleterious effects for democracy.
2. Using a multitude of social media networks increases perceptions of fake news and conspiracist thinking and has deleterious effects for democracy.
3. Relying on YouTube for news increases perceptions of fake news and conspiracist thinking and has deleterious effects for democracy.

I analyze perceptions of fake news about COVID-19 and the 2020 presidential election; conspiracy-influenced attitudes about voter fraud, Trump’s challenge of the 2020 election results, and the appropriateness of apprehending the January 6, 2021, insurrectionists; and having stopped talking to someone due to politics. All six of these matters arguably undermine democracy, but the most concerning one is the last one, as it points directly to increased political polarization (e.g., Putnam 2000).

3. DATA AND METHOD

In its large-N “American Trends Panel” (ATP) survey, the Pew Research Center has included batteries of questions that allow me to test my

hypotheses directly. These questions concern (1) conspiracy- and misinformation-rooted attitudes about COVID-19, the 2020 U.S. presidential election, and the January 6, 2021, insurrection; and (2) use of social media: which outlets, how often, and for what purposes. One entire wave of the ATP survey (January 2020) is about respondents' use of YouTube. In the analyses that follow, I make use of a merged dataset of 15,085 cases from five waves of these ATP surveys conducted between November 2019 and March 2021.

I model six dichotomous dependent variables using logistic regression with robust standard errors. The first of these variables is a measure of perceiving fake news about COVID-19: affirmation of the statement "I have seen a lot of news and information about the coronavirus outbreak that seemed completely made up". The next three dependent variables concern perceptions of fake news and implicit endorsements of conspiracism around the 2020 presidential election:

- Affirming the statement "I have seen a lot of news and information about the 2020 presidential election that seemed completely made up".
- Affirming the statement "The Trump campaign should continue legal challenges to the [2020] voting and ballot counting process".
- Affirming the statement "Allegations of voter fraud in [the 2020] presidential election have been getting too little attention".

The fifth dependent variable deals with the January 6, 2021, insurrection, specifically, holding an attitude other than "very important" about the importance of finding and prosecuting "those who broke into the U.S. Capitol on January 6". Finally, I model a potential political ramification of the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories in the U.S., namely "I have stopped talking to someone due to politics".

These models emphasize the effects of three core independent variables gauging different aspects of social media usage. The first of these variables measures volume of internet usage: affirming the statement "I am online almost constantly". The second variable is a count of social media networks used, from among Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, LinkedIn, Reddit, Tumblr, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Twitch. The third variable is an indicator of "regularly" consuming news on YouTube.

I control for gender (using an indicator variable for male), race/ethnicity (using an indicator variable for white, non-Hispanic), education (using an indicator variable for having a four-year college degree), income (measured in three tiers), marital status (using an indicator variable for married), region of residence (using an indicator variable for South), and

polarized political orientations (using indicator variables for conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats as compared to moderates).

Tables 1-6 present three analyses of each dependent variable, testing each of the three social media independent variables one at a time. (Shaded columns signify that the independent variable was not significant in the model in question.) Each table displays odds ratios for the independent variables and controls that obtain statistical significance at the $p < .05$ level. Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate that a one-unit increase in that predictor variable *increases* the value of the dependent variable. Odds ratios less than 1 mean that a one-unit increase in the predictor variable *decreases* the value of the dependent variable. We may also interpret odds ratios as percentages to make the results easier to understand, using the following formula: $(\text{odds ratio} - 1) \times 100 = \text{the percentage by which a one-unit increase in the predictor variable increases or decreases the value of the dependent variable, holding all else equal}$.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 presents three models of the first dependent variable: affirmation of the statement “I see a lot of fake news about COVID-19”. As reported in the Appendix, 14.3 percent of Pew’s sample gave this response – a relatively small share, but from a sample of more than 10,000. Each column presents a test of the hypotheses posited above one at a time.

All three of the social media independent variables are significant predictors of perceiving fake news about COVID-19, so we may accept all three hypotheses in this context. Being online constantly (H1) increases the odds of perceiving fake news by 79 percent; each additional social media platform used (H2) increases the odds by 8 percent; and using YouTube for news (H3) increases the odds by 40 percent. Most of the control variables do not obtain significance in these models, but a few exceptions stand out. Men are 57-65 percent more likely to perceive fake news about COVID-19 in all three models, as are conservative Republicans in the first two models (33 percent and 42 percent more likely, respectively). The findings regarding gender are surprising, as men have been shown to be less skeptical about COVID-19 and more willing to accept the vaccine (Troiano and Nardi 2021). Perhaps men have been more likely to perceive fake news about the virus, but also more likely to reject it. The stronger tendency of Republicans to perceive fake news is

not unexpected. The pandemic was politicized in the U.S. from the very start, with Republicans being much more skeptical about the seriousness of the virus and the importance of being vaccinated (Halpern 2020; Troiano and Nardi 2021). Meanwhile, having a college degree reduces the odds of seeing fake news in the second model by 21 percent, suggesting that higher educational attainment buffers against potential negative effects of using many different social media networks.

Table 1. – “I see a lot of fake news about COVID-19”.

	ONLINE ALMOST CONSTANTLY	NUMBER OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS USED	USE YOUTUBE REGULARLY FOR NEWS
Online almost constantly	1.79***	—	—
Number of social media networks used	—	1.08*	—
Use YouTube regularly for news	—	—	1.40*
Male	1.57***	1.65***	1.62***
White, non-Hispanic	ns	ns	ns
College degree	ns	.79*	ns
Income (three tiers)	ns	ns	ns
Married	ns	ns	ns
South	ns	ns	ns
Conservative Republican	1.42*	1.33*	ns
Liberal Democrat	ns	ns	ns
Number of cases	7,940	7,359	5,741
Log pseudolikelihood	-2861.30	-2785.23	-2207.43
Pseudo R ²	.02	.02	.02
AIC	5742.60	5590.46	4434.86

Note: Logistic regression with robust standard errors, reporting odds ratios.

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ ns $p > .05$

Data source: Pew Research Center, American Trends Panel (November 2019 - March 2021).

Because all three independent variables are statistically significant, we may directly compare the models to determine which one is the best fit for the data. Because the control variables are the same across all three models, we can reach a conclusion about which of the internet usage variables is the best predictor of perceiving fake news about COVID-19. To reach this conclusion, we compare the values of the Akaike Informa-

tion Criterion (AIC), shown in the bottom row of *Table 1*. The model with the lowest value of AIC fits the data the best. In the case of these data, that model is the one for using YouTube regularly for news (H3). The other two independent variables do predict perceptions of fake news about COVID-19, but YouTube news consumption does a better job. We may therefore conclude that frequently consuming news from YouTube was more consequential than being online constantly or making use of many social media networks for perceiving misinformation about COVID-19. This finding is consistent with that of Allington and colleagues (2021), who report that compared to other social media networks, reliance on YouTube was most closely associated with believing false information about COVID-19.

Table 2 presents parallel analyses of the second dependent variable: saying “I see a lot of fake news about the 2020 elections”.

Table 2. – “I see a lot of fake news about the 2020 elections”.

	ONLINE ALMOST CONSTANTLY	NUMBER OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS USED	USE YOUTUBE REGULARLY FOR NEWS
Online almost constantly	ns	—	—
Number of social media networks used	—	ns	—
Use YouTube regularly for news	—	—	1.42**
Male			1.24*
White, non-Hispanic			1.43**
College degree			ns
Income (three tiers)			1.21*
Married			ns
South			ns
Conservative Republican			1.75***
Liberal Democrat			ns
Number of cases			5,837
Log pseudolikelihood			-2988.25
Pseudo R ²			.03

Note: Logistic regression with robust standard errors, reporting odds ratios.

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ ns $p > .05$

Data source: Pew Research Center, American Trends Panel (November 2019 - March 2021).

The Appendix indicates that more than twice as many of Pew's respondents (29.9 percent) gave this response compared to those who saw a lot of fake news about COVID-19. Again, each column of *Table 2* tests the three hypotheses one at a time, but this time two of the hypotheses must be rejected in the context of seeing fake election news. Neither of the first two independent variables (being online constantly and number of social media accounts) is significant in their respective models, which is why the corresponding columns in the table are shaded. Thus, we reject H1 and H2 in the context of perceiving fake election news.

On the other hand, relying on YouTube for news increases the odds of perceiving fake election news by 42 percent. Being male also increases the odds (by 24 percent), as does being white (by 43 percent), having an incrementally higher income (21 percent), and being a conservative Republican as opposed to a political moderate (75 percent). This confluence of results reflects previous studies that report YouTube's overall right-wing slant (Lewis 2020; Munger and Phillips 2022). Noticing fake news and believing it are, of course, two different matters. That said, we may straightforwardly accept H3: using YouTube for news predicts perceptions of fake news about the 2020 election.

Table 3 presents the results of analyses of the assertion "More attention should be paid to voter fraud", while *Table 4* does the same for the belief that "Trump should continue to challenge the [2020] election results"². From as early as the 2016 primary election season, Donald Trump portrayed himself as the victim of systematic fraud (Cottrell, Herron, and Westwood 2018). He later claimed that he, not Hillary Clinton, had won the 2016 popular vote, and that the 2018 midterm elections were 'rigged'. In 2020, he repeated the mantra that fraud would mar his reelection bid: "the only way we're going to lose this election is if the election is rigged" (Axelrod 2022). When Joe Biden defeated him, Trump refused to accept the results of the election and tried a variety of (legal and extralegal) tactics to nullify them. His campaign contracted multiple studies of its election fraud assertions, but no evidence was discovered (Dawsey 2023). Perhaps because a substantial share of Trump's supporters believed his false claims (Pennycook and Rand 2021), he pressed on, filing scores of lawsuits and perhaps profiting financially from these efforts (Haberman, Feuer, and Swan 2023).

² As shown in the Appendix, 27.8 percent of the Pew sample said: "more attention should be paid to voter fraud", while 35.1 percent said, "Trump should continue to challenge the election results".

Table 3. – “More attention should be paid to voter fraud”.

	ONLINE ALMOST CONSTANTLY	NUMBER OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS USED	USE YOUTUBE REGULARLY FOR NEWS
Online almost constantly	ns	—	—
Number of social media networks used	—	ns	—
Use YouTube regularly for news	—	—	1.43*
Male			ns
White, non-Hispanic			1.43*
College degree			1.46*
Income (three tiers)			ns
Married			ns
South			ns
Conservative Republican			8.41***
Liberal Democrat			.12***
Number of cases			5,819
Log pseudolikelihood			-2302.38
Pseudo R ²			.29

Note: Logistic regression with robust standard errors, reporting odds ratios.

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ ns $p > .05$

Data source: Pew Research Center, American Trends Panel (November 2019 - March 2021).

The findings in *Tables 3* and *4* reflect those in *Table 2*: the first two internet usage variables are not significant, so we must reject H1 and H2 in both contexts, while relying on YouTube for news is significant in both cases. In fact, relying on YouTube for news increases the odds of both believing that election fraud should be investigated, and that Trump should continue to challenge the election results, by the same factor: 43 percent. It is especially noteworthy that reliance on YouTube is significant in both models considering that strong partisanship is such a powerful predictor of both dependent variables. Being a conservative Republican increases the odds of wishing for fraud investigation by 741 percent and hoping Trump will continue his challenges by an extraordinary 1303 percent. Likewise, being a liberal Democrat reduces the odds of each belief by 88 percent in each instance. The findings regarding partisanship are hardly surprising considering that the questions at stake directly concern the results of an election. However, being white also

contributes substantially to each belief, especially that Trump's challenges should continue (116 percent increase compared to a 43 percent increase in the odds of desiring more fraud investigations). This finding reflects the presence of white nationalism in contemporary right-wing U.S. politics, especially among some supporters of Trump (e.g., Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020).

Table 4. – “Trump should continue to challenge the election results”.

	ONLINE ALMOST CONSTANTLY	NUMBER OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS USED	USE YOUTUBE REGULARLY FOR NEWS
Online almost constantly	ns	—	—
Number of social media networks used	—	ns	—
Use YouTube regularly for news	—	—	1.43*
Male			ns
White, non-Hispanic			2.16***
College degree			ns
Income (three tiers)			.77**
Married			ns
South			ns
Conservative Republican			14.03***
Liberal Democrat			.12***
Number of cases			5,599
Log pseudolikelihood			-2059.63
Pseudo R ²			.37

Note: Logistic regression with robust standard errors, reporting odds ratios.

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ ns $p > .05$

Data source: Pew Research Center, American Trends Panel (November 2019 - March 2021).

Table 5 answers what is perhaps the next logical question: to what extent might social media usage have affected Americans' attitudes toward those who staged the insurrection on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021? The insurrection was intended to prevent Congress from completing its ceremonial counting of the electoral votes to certify Biden's victory over Trump. The plan failed, but five people died and hundreds were injured in circumstances tied to the violence (Select January 6th Committee 2023). Some of the insurrection's principal organizers were members of

far-right anti-government groups including the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys, and the Three Percenters (Select January 6th Committee 2023). Their protest plan gathered much of its steam on social media, linked in part to the virulent QAnon conspiracy theory (Lee *et al.* 2022). While many Americans reacted in strongly negative terms to the insurrection, the Pew Research Center found that almost half (49 percent) of Republicans said Trump bore no responsibility for the violence (Gramlich 2022). Moreover, Pew's polling showed that between March and September 2021, Republicans grew less eager to see the rioters found by law enforcement and prosecuted for their crimes (Gramlich 2022).

Table 5. – “It is not very important to apprehend the January 6 insurrectionists”.

	ONLINE ALMOST CONSTANTLY	NUMBER OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS USED	USE YOUTUBE REGULARLY FOR NEWS
Online almost constantly	ns	—	—
Number of social media networks used	—	1.12***	—
Use YouTube regularly for news	—	—	1.73***
Male		1.22*	ns
White, non-Hispanic		1.34*	ns
College degree		1.36*	1.32*
Income (three tiers)		.81**	ns
Married		ns	ns
South		ns	ns
Conservative Republican		2.97***	2.80***
Liberal Democrat		.32***	.31***
Number of cases		7,587	5,920
Log pseudolikelihood		-3828.33	-2950.64
Pseudo R ²		.11	.12
AIC		7676.66	5921.28

Note: Logistic regression with robust standard errors, reporting odds ratios.

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ ns $p > .05$

Data source: Pew Research Center, American Trends Panel (November 2019 - March 2021).

To an extent, the results shown in Table 5 mirror those in the previous three tables. The first independent variable (being online constantly) fails to attain significance in its model, so H1 is again rejected. Number

of social media accounts and relying on YouTube for news, however, are significant predictors in their models, so H2 and H3 receive additional support. As the Appendix shows, 24 percent of Pew's sample gave a response other than "very important" when asked how important it was "that federal law enforcement agencies find and prosecute those who broke into and rioted at the U.S. Capitol" on January 6, 2021. An incremental increase in the number of social media networks used results in a 12 percent increase in the odds of disagreeing that it is "very important" to apprehend the insurrectionists, while regularly using YouTube for news increases the odds by 73 percent. In both models, and consistent with Pew's own reporting (Gramlich 2022), being a conservative Republican dramatically increases the odds of downplaying the importance of arresting the rioters (by 180 percent and 197 percent, respectively), while being a liberal Democrat dramatically decreases the odds (by 68 percent and 69 percent, respectively). The fact that two of the three internet usage variables significantly predict attitudes about apprehending the January 6 insurrectionists despite the presence of these strong controls for partisanship speaks clearly to the important role of social media in shaping these views. This conclusion reflects recent research about how candidates' statements on the campaign trail are reflected in social media hashtags (Lee *et al.* 2022).

Because two of the models in *Table 5* contain significant independent variables, we may compare the values of the AIC statistic for each model to determine which one fits the data better. The AIC value corresponding to the third model is smaller in value, so we may conclude that regular news consumption on YouTube is a stronger predictor of attitudes toward the January 6 rioters than is the number of social media networks used. In short, *Table 5* provides additional evidence of the validity of H3. Getting news from YouTube inclines people toward perceptions of conspiracism in a variety of guises.

Finally, *Table 6* turns the focus to a consequence of conspiracist thinking: the exacerbation of political polarization. Since the late twentieth century, the U.S. public has become extremely polarized along ideological lines. Many Americans occupy one of two political camps that espouse incompatible values, consume different media (online and otherwise), and even have noticeably different quotidian preferences (Mason 2018; Iyengar *et al.* 2019). Even when they are in basic agreement about public policy priorities, strong adherents of both parties tend to harbor affective biases against one another (Webster and Abramowitz 2017) and prefer to avoid interpersonal contact (Frimer, Skitka, and Motyl 2017).

The distrust between these two camps has intensified into such strong affective distaste that some scholars are studying dehumanization in the context of political polarization (Mason 2018; Moore-Berg *et al.* 2020). It should therefore come as no surprise when people of opposing partisan identities decide not to speak to each other any longer. Moreover, recent research has shown that consumers of online news are especially polarized, and that the relationship between online news consumption and affective partisan polarization is strongest in the United States (Fletcher, Cornia, and Nielsen 2019).

Table 6. – “I have stopped talking to someone due to politics”.

	ONLINE ALMOST CONSTANTLY	NUMBER OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS USED	USE YOUTUBE REGULARLY FOR NEWS
Online almost constantly	1.20*	—	—
Number of social media networks used	—	1.07**	—
Use YouTube regularly for news	—	—	1.29*
Male	.82**	.81**	.69***
White, non-Hispanic	1.62***	1.66***	1.67***
College degree	.81*	.79*	ns
Income (three tiers)	1.33***	1.28***	1.42***
Married	ns	ns	ns
South	ns	ns	ns
Conservative Republican	ns	ns	ns
Liberal Democrat	2.32***	2.25***	2.33***
Number of cases	8,993	7,544	5,890
Log pseudolikelihood	-5386.12	-4547.47	-3487.71
Pseudo R ²	.05	.05	.05
AIC	10,792.24	9114.94	6995.42

Note: Logistic regression reporting odds ratios, robust standard errors.

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ ns $p > .05$

Data source: Pew Research Center, American Trends Panel (November 2019 - March 2021).

The results shown in *Table 6* reveal that all three internet usage variables are significant predictors of having stopped talking to someone because of politics. Being online constantly increases the odds by 20 percent, while an incremental increase in social media networks used increases the

odds by 7 percent. Using YouTube regularly for news produces the largest increase in odds of the three models (29 percent). Four of the control variables are also significant across all three models. Men are slightly less likely to have stopped talking to someone due to politics, while white people, wealthier people, and (above all) liberal Democrats are more likely to have done so. As in several of the analyses above, it is noteworthy that the internet usage variables are significant even in the face of the predictive strength of the controls, especially partisanship.

All three hypotheses are supported by the results reported in *Table 6*. We can conclude that all three dimensions of internet usage have potentially deleterious effects on democracy in the U.S. because they reduce people's willingness to engage with one another. Democracy requires meaningful, respectful interpersonal communication (Putnam 2000; Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Sunstein 2018), but that is in short supply today. The AIC statistics in *Table 6* also allow us to conclude that relying on YouTube for news has the strongest influence among the three independent variables on cutting off communication on account of politics.

5. CONCLUSION

Democracy is vulnerable around the world in no small part because of the spread of misinformation, fake news, and conspiracy theories. People opt into information bubbles, often online, that reinforce preexisting points of view and exacerbate negative affect toward outgroups. In the United States, strong partisans on one side of the two-party divide often view strong partisans on the other side as an outgroup worthy of scorn and distrust. Meanwhile, social media networks have transformed the way people communicate and receive news. The internet's endless supply of information (and misinformation) is impossible for anyone to digest, so many people rely on social media friends and internet 'micro-celebrities' (Lewis 2020) to filter it for them. This tendency is not new; 'opinion leaders' have always shaped social groups' political views (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). Rather than talking to people face-to-face, today's political opinion leaders post videos and links on social media that draw attention to information – or misinformation, fake news, or conspiracy theories – that their 'followers' might otherwise have missed (Bergström and Belfrage 2018). Donald Trump's recent domination of U.S. politics

has served to normalize belief in false information, at least in some quarters. Trump's own constant presence on social media has been an important basis of his core of support (Ott and Dickinson 2019).

The results of the analyses presented in this paper show that online activity has potent effects on perceiving fake news, accepting aspects of conspiracy thinking, and cutting off communication with others because of politics. Being online constantly and belonging to many social media networks are significant predictors in only a few instances. However, reliance on YouTube for news is significant in every one of my models, confirming other scholars' conclusions about the video-sharing network's rightward tilt and its hospitable environment for conspiracism (Allington and Joshi 2020; Lewis 2020; Li *et al.* 2020; Allington, Buarque, and Flores 2021; Hosseinmardi *et al.* 2021; Munger and Phillips 2022).

In December 2020, YouTube brought a new policy into force that prohibited video content that questioned the integrity of Joe Biden's election to the presidency. However, in June 2023, this policy was eliminated due to free speech concerns, meaning that YouTube content creators are now free to disseminate false claims of election fraud (Fischer 2023). This policy change brought YouTube into line with other social media networks – and may have been hastened by competition from Rumble, a misinformation-ridden YouTube competitor that is popular on the right (Peters 2022). Social media, of course, are not universally harmful; far from it. However, as Sunstein notes, though they “often have nothing at all to do with politics or democracy [...] they might create niches, and niches produce fragmentation” (2018, 22). A fragmented society is one in which democracy has difficulty thriving. There is a natural human tendency to seek out others who affirm our most closely held identities. When that process occurs to the extreme, as it can online, public discourse – genuine deliberation – among heterogeneous points of view becomes difficult at best. To quote Sunstein again, “Modern technologies and social media are dramatically increasing people's ability to hear echoes of their own voices and wall themselves off from others” (2018, 56). For American democracy to survive in the long run, Americans will need to remove themselves from their echo chambers and rebuild trust across partisan lines rather than sinking ever deeper into the world of misinformation and conspiracism.

APPENDIX
Descriptive statistics (%)

"I see a lot of fake news about Covid-19" (indicator)	14.3
"I see a lot of fake news about the 2020 elections" (indicator)	29.9
"More attention should be paid to voter fraud" (indicator)	27.8
"Trump should continue to challenge the election results" (indicator)	35.1
"It is not very important to apprehend the January 6 insurrectionists" (indicator)	24.0
"I have stopped talking to someone due to politics" (indicator)	51.8
"I am online almost constantly" (indicator)	45.2
Number of social media networks used (count; range = 0-10)	3.1
Use YouTube regularly for news (indicator)	25.6
Male (indicator)	44.6
White, non-Hispanic (indicator)	65.2
College degree (indicator)	15.8
Income tier	
1. Low (less than \$35,000)	21.0
2. Middle (\$35,000-100,000)	48.7
3. Upper (more than \$100,000)	30.3
Married (indicator)	54.2
Region: South (indicator)	42.9
Partisanship x Ideology (two indicators)	
• Conservative Republican	27.8
• Liberal Democrat	31.8

Note: All variables are listed as they are coded in the analyses. Values may not sum to 100 percent due to missing cases.

Data source: Pew Research Center, American Trends Panel (November 2019 - March 2021).

REFERENCES

- Albertson, Bethany, and Kimberly Guiler. 2020. "Conspiracy Theories, Election Rigging, and Support for Democratic Norms". *Research and Politics* 7 (3). doi: 10.1177/2053168020959859.
- Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew Gentzkow. 2017. "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election". *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31 (2): 211-236.

- Allington, Daniel, Beatriz L. Buarque, and Daniel Barker Flores. 2021. "Antisemitic Conspiracy Fantasy in the Age of Digital Media: Three 'Conspiracy Theorists' and Their YouTube Audiences". *Language and Literature* 30 (1): 78-102.
- Allington, Daniel, Bobby Duffy, Simon Wessely, Nayana Dhavan, and James Rubin. 2021. "Health-Protective Behaviour, Social Media Usage and Conspiracy Belief during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency". *Psychological Medicine* 51 (10): 1763-1769.
- Allington, Daniel, and Tanvi Joshi. 2020. "'What others dare not say': An Antisemitic Conspiracy Fantasy and Its YouTube Audience". *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* 3 (1): 35-53.
- Atkinson, Michael D., and Darin DeWitt. 2018. "The Politics of Disruption: Social Choice Theory and Conspiracy Theory Politics". In *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them*, edited by Joseph E. Uscinski, 298-318. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Awan, Imran. 2017. "Cyber-Extremism: Isis and the Power of Social Media". *Society* 54 (2): 138-149.
- Axelrod, Tal. 2022. "A Timeline of Donald Trump's Election Denial Claims, Which Republican Politicians Increasingly Embrace". *ABC News*, September 8. [19/07/2023].
<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/timeline-donald-trumps-election-denial-claims-republican-politicians/story?id=89168408>
- Baker, Joseph O., Samuel L. Perry, and Andrew L. Whitehead. 2020. "Keep America Christian (and White): Christian Nationalism, Fear of Ethnoracial Outsiders, and Intention to Vote for Donald Trump in the 2020 Presidential Election". *Sociology of Religion* 81 (3): 272-293.
- Bergmann, Eirikur. 2018. *Conspiracy and Populism: The Politics of Misinformation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bergström, Annika, and Maria Jervelycke Belfrage. 2018. "News in Social Media: Incidental Consumption and the Role of Opinion Leaders". *Digital Journalism* 6 (5): 583-598.
- Bleakley, Paul. 2021. "Panic, Pizza, and Mainstreaming the Alt-Right: A Social Media Analysis of Pizzagate and the Rise of the QAnon Conspiracy". *Current Sociology* 71 (3): 509-525.
- Butler, Lisa D., Cheryl Koopman, and Philip G. Zimbardo. 1995. "The Psychological Impact of Viewing the Film 'JFK': Emotions, Beliefs, and Political Behavioral Intentions". *Political Psychology* 16 (2): 237-257.
- Byford, Jovan. 2011. *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Cottrell, David, Michael C. Herron, and Sean J. Westwood. 2018. "An Exploration of Donald Trump's Allegation of Massive Voter Fraud in the 2016 General Election". *Electoral Studies* 51 (1): 123-142.

- Craft, Stephanie, Seth Ashley, and Adam Maksl. 2017. "News Media Literacy and Conspiracy Theory Endorsement". *Communication and the Public* 2 (4): 388-401.
- Dastgeer, Shugofa, and Rashmi Thapaliya. 2022. "QAnon: The Networks of Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories on Social Media". In *The Emerald Handbook of Computer-Mediated Communication and Social Media*, edited by Jeremy Harris Lipschultz, Karen Freberg, and Regina Luttrell, 251-268. Bingley (UK): Emerald.
- Dawsey, Josh. 2023. "A Second Firm Hired by Trump Campaign Found No Evidence of Election Fraud". *Washington Post*, April 27. [19/07/2023].
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/04/27/trump-false-election-fraud-claims/>
- Demata, Massimiliano, Virginia Zorzi, and Angela Zottola. 2022. "Conspiracy Theory Discourses: Critical Inquiries into the Language of Anti-Science, Post-Trutherism, and Mis/Disinformation and Alternative Media". In *Conspiracy Theory Discourses*, edited by Massimiliano Demata, Virginia Zorzi, and Angela Zottola. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Douglas, Karen M., Joseph E. Uscinski, Robbie M. Sutton, Aleksandra Cichocka, Turkey Nefes, Chee Siang Ang, and Farzin Deravi. 2019. "Understanding Conspiracy Theories". *Political Psychology* 40 (S1): 3-35.
- Druckman, James N., Katherine Ognyanova, Matthew A. Baum, David Lazer, Roy H. Perlis, John Della Volpe, Mauricio Santillana, Hanyu Chwe, Alexi Quintana, and Matthew Simonson. 2021. "The Role of Race, Religion, and Partisanship in Misperceptions about COVID-19". *Group Processes and Inter-group Relations* 24 (4): 638-657.
- Enders, Adam M., and Steven M. Smallpage. 2018. "Polls, Plots, and Party Politics: Conspiracy Theories in Contemporary America". In *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them*, edited by Joseph E. Uscinski, 298-318. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fischer, Sara. 2023. "YouTube Reverses Misinformation Policy to Allow U.S. Election Denialism". *Axios*, June 2. [20/07/2023].
<https://www.axios.com/2023/06/02/us-election-fraud-youtube-policy>
- Fletcher, Richard, Alessio Cornia, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen. 2019. "How Polarized Are Online and Offline News Audiences? A Comparative Analysis of Twelve Countries". *International Journal of Press/Politics* 25 (2): 169-195.
- Frimer, Jeremy A., Linda J. Skitka, and Matt Motyl. 2017. "Liberals and Conservatives Are Similarly Motivated to Avoid Exposure to One Another's Opinions". *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 72 (September): 1-12.
- Gramlich, John. 2022. "A Look Back at Americans' Reactions to the Jan. 6 Riot at the U.S. Capitol". *Pew Research Center*, January 4. [19/07/2023].
<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/04/a-look-back-at-americans-reactions-to-the-jan-6-riot-at-the-u-s-capitol/>

- Guess, Andrew M., Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2020. "Exposure to Untrustworthy Websites in the 2016 U.S. Election". *Nature Human Behavior* 4 (5): 472-480.
- Gutmann, Amy, and Dennis Thompson. 2004. *Why Deliberative Democracy?* Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press.
- Haberman, Maggie, Alan Feuer, and Jonathan Swan. 2023. "Prosecutors in Jan. 6 Case Step Up Inquiry into Trump Fund-Raising". *New York Times*, April 28. [19/07/2023].
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/28/us/politics/jan-6-prosecutors-trump-fund-raising.html>
- Halpern, Lucy Wang. 2020. "The Politicization of COVID-19". *American Journal of Nursing* 120 (11): 19-20.
- Hellinger, Daniel C. 2019. *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theories in the Age of Trump*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hosseinmardi, Homa, Amir Ghasemian, Aaron Clauset, Markus Mobius, David M. Rothschild, and Duncan J. Watts. 2021. "Examining the Consumption of Radical Content on YouTube". *PNAS* 118 (32): e2101967118.
- Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, and Sean J. Westwood. 2019. "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States". *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (1): 129-146.
- Jerit, Jennifer, and Yanzi Zhao. 2020. "Political Misinformation". *Annual Review of Political Science* 23 (1): 77-94.
- Jolley, Daniel, and Karen M. Douglas. 2014a. "The Effects of Anti-Vaccine Conspiracy Theories on Vaccination Intentions". *PLoS One* 9 (2): 1-9.
- Jolley, Daniel, and Karen M. Douglas. 2014b. "The Social Consequences of Conspiracism: Exposure to Conspiracy Theories Decreases Intentions to Engage in Politics and to Reduce One's Carbon Footprint". *British Journal of Psychology* 105 (1): 35-56.
- Katz, Elihu, and Paul F. Lazarsfeld. 1955. *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*. New York: Free Press.
- Lee, Claire Seungeun, Juan Merizalde, John D. Colautti, Jisun An, and Haewood Kwak. 2022. "Storm the Capitol: Linking Offline Political Speech and Online Twitter Extra-Representational Participation on QAnon and the January 6 Insurrection". *Frontiers in Sociology* 7 (May). doi: 10.37016/mr-2020-51.
- Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich K.H. Ecker, and John Cook. 2017. "Beyond Misinformation: Understanding and Coping with the 'Post-Truth' Era". *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition* 6 (4): 353-369.
- Lewis, Rebecca. 2020. "'This is what the news won't show you': YouTube Creators and the Reactionary Politics of Micro-Celebrity". *Television and New Media* 21 (2): 201-217.
- Li, Heidi Oi-Yee, Adrian Bailey, David Huynh, and James Chan. 2020. "YouTube as a Source of Information on COVID-19: A Pandemic of Misinformation?" *BMJ Global Health* 5 (5): e002604.

- Mason, Lilliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Miller, Joanne M., Kyle L. Saunders, and Christina E. Farhart. 2016. "Conspiracy Endorsement as Motivated Reasoning: The Moderating Roles of Political Knowledge and Trust". *American Journal of Political Science* 60 (4): 824-844.
- Mitchell, Amy, Mark Jurkowitz, J. Baxter Oliphant, and Elisa Shearer. 2020. "Political Divides, Conspiracy Theories and Divergent News Sources Heading into 2020 Election". *Pew Research Center*, September 16. [07/07/2023]. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2020/09/16/political-divides-conspiracy-theories-and-divergent-news-sources-heading-into-2020-election/>
- Moore-Berg, Samantha L., Lee-Or Ankori-Karlinsky, Boaz Hameiri, and Emile Bruneau. "Exaggerated Meta-Perceptions Predict Intergroup Hostility between American Political Partisans". *PNAS* 117 (26). doi: 10.1073/pnas.2001263117.
- Muirhead, Russell, Nancy L. Rosenblum, Matthew Landauer, Stephen Macedo, Jeffrey K. Tulis, and Nadia Urbinati. 2020. "Conspiracism and Delegitimation". *Contemporary Political Theory* 19 (1): 142-174.
- Munger, Kevin, and Joseph Phillips. 2022. "Right-Wing YouTube: A Supply and Demand Perspective". *International Journal of Press/Politics* 27 (1): 186-219.
- Oliver, J. Eric, and Thomas J. Wood. 2014. "Conspiracy Theories and the Paranoid Style(s) of Mass Opinion". *American Journal of Political Science* 58 (4): 952-966.
- Olmstead, Kathryn S. 2018. "Conspiracy Theories in U.S. History". In *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them*, edited by Joseph E. Uscinski, 285-297. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ott, Brian L., and Greg Dickinson. *The Twitter Presidency: Donald J. Trump and the Politics of White Rage*. New York: Routledge.
- Pennycook, Gordon, and D.G. Rand. 2021. "Examining False Beliefs about Voter Fraud in the Wake of the 2020 Presidential Election". *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* 2 (1). doi: 10.37016/mr-2020-51.
- Perrin, Andrew, and Monica Anderson. 2019. "Share of U.S. Adults Using Social Media, Including Facebook, Is Mostly Unchanged Since 2018". *Pew Research Center*, April 10. [08/07/2023]. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/>
- Peters, Jeremy W. 2022. "Rumble, the Right's Go-to Video Site, Has Much Bigger Ambitions". *New York Times*, March 28. [20/07/2023]. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/28/business/media/rumble-social-media-conservatives-videos.html>
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Select January 6th Committee. 2022. "Final Report and Supporting Materials Collection. United States Congress", December 22. [19/07/2023]. <https://www.govinfo.gov/collection/january-6th-committee-final-report>

- Stempel, Carl, Thomas Hargrove, and Guido H. Stempel III. 2007. "Media Use, Social Structure, and Belief in 9/11 Conspiracy Theories". *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 84 (2): 353-372.
- Stocking, Galen, Patrick van Kessel, Michael Barthel, Katerina Eva Matsa, and Maya Khuzam. 2020. "Many Americans Get News on YouTube, Where News Organizations and Independent Producers Thrive Side by Side". *Pew Research Center*, September 28. [07/07/2023].
<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2020/09/28/many-americans-get-news-on-youtube-where-news-organizations-and-independent-producers-thrive-side-by-side/>
- Sun, Yalin, and Yan Zhang. 2021. "A Review of Theories and Models Applied in Studies of Social Media Addiction and Implications for Future Research". *Addictive Behaviors* 114 (March): 106699.
- Sunstein, Cass R. 2018. *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press.
- Tollefson, Jeff. 2021. "How Trump Turned Conspiracy-Theory Research Upside Down". *Nature* 590 (11, February): 192-193.
- Troiano, Gianmarco, and Alessandra Nardi. 2021. "Vaccine Hesitancy in the Era of COVID-19". *Public Health* 194 (5): 245-251.
- Uscinski, Joseph E., and Joseph M. Parent. 2014. *American Conspiracy Theories*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- van Prooijen, Jan-Willem, and Karen M. Douglas. 2018. "Belief in Conspiracy Theories: Basic Principles of an Emerging Research Domain". *European Journal of Social Psychology* 48 (7): 897-908.
- van Prooijen, Jan-Willem, André P.M. Krouwel, and Thomas V. Pollet. 2015. "Political Extremism Predicts Belief in Conspiracy Theories". *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 6 (5): 570-578.
- Webster, Steven W., and Alan I. Abramowitz. 2017. "The Ideological Foundations of Affective Polarization in the U.S. Electorate". *American Politics Research* 45 (4): 621-647.

Copyright (©) 2023 Laura R. Olson

Editorial format and graphical layout: copyright (©) LED Edizioni Universitarie



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons

Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives – 4.0 International License

How to cite this paper:

Olson, Laura R. 2023. "Internet Usage, YouTube, and Conspiracy-Mindedness in the United States". *Lingue Culture Mediazioni / Languages Cultures Mediation – LCM* 10 (2): 175-199. doi: <https://doi.org/10.7358/lcm-2023-002-olsl>