Online Conspiracy Theories and the Role of Conspiracy Influencers

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Abstract

The proliferation of online conspiracy theories has significantly increased with the advent of social media, transforming niche beliefs into mainstream discussions. Conspiracy influencers play a pivotal role in amplifying these theories, leveraging platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Telegram to disseminate unverified narratives to a wide audience. This phenomenon intertwines sociological, psychological, and media aspects, reflecting a crisis of trust in public institutions. Cognitive biases such as confirmation bias and apophenia facilitate the acceptance of conspiratorial ideas, while digital environments like echo chambers and filter bubbles reinforce these beliefs. The role of conspiracy influencers, such as Cesare Sacchetti, highlights how charismatic personalities exploit the information vulnerabilities of their followers, spreading disinformation under the guise of truth. Countering conspiracy theories requires comprehensive strategies,

including digital literacy, critical thinking education, and improved moderation on social platforms. Addressing the underlying social and psychological factors that fuel belief in conspiracies is crucial for mitigating their impact on public discourse.

Keywords: Conspiracy Theories, Conspiracy Influencers, Social media, Echo chambers, Filter bubbles.

Introduction

Conspiracy theories are a social phenomenon that increasingly accompanies our lives and that finds fertile ground in the contemporary digital landscape. Although there are no studies that demonstrate that people believe conspiracy theories more or less than before, it is undeniable that the advent of social media and online sharing platforms has amplified the scope and speed with which such narratives spread, transforming marginal ideas into wide-ranging public discussions. In this context, "conspiracy influencers" play a fundamental role, acting as catalysts and amplifiers of theories that, despite lacking scientific basis, manage to fascinate millions of users.

This study hypothesizes that the success of conspiracy influencers in spreading misinformation is rooted in both cognitive biases and algorithmic amplification on social media platforms. This article seeks to answer the following research questions:
1) How do conspiracy influencers operate within digital ecosystems to promote and legitimize conspiracy theories?
2) What are the psychological and sociotechnical mechanisms that facilitate the work of these conspiracy influencers?
Through the strategic use of platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and other social networks, these individuals manage to build a loyal following, exploiting persuasive communication mechanisms and captivating narratives. The phenomenon is particularly complex because it intertwines sociological, psychological and media aspects, raising relevant questions about how information circulates and consolidates in the collective mind.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, combining thematic analysis with digital ethnography. The primary objective is to investigate how conspiracy influencers operate within online ecosystems, using the case of Cesare Sacchetti as a representative example. Rather than testing a hypothesis, this study seeks to identify patterns, rhetorical strategies, and cognitive mechanisms employed in the dissemination of conspiratorial content.

The main unit of analysis is Cesare Sacchetti's Telegram channel, chosen due to his prominence in the Italian conspiracy ecosystem and repeated mentions in international misinformation monitoring reports. His Telegram channel, which counts over 64,000 subscribers, serves as the main unit of analysis due to its high engagement and unfiltered content publication. Content posted between January and March 2025 was analysed using interpretive techniques informed by the theoretical framework outlined in sections 1 and 2. Analytical categories included use of emotional language, appeals to authority, and evidence of cognitive bias exploitation. While the sample is not exhaustive, it aims to illustrate patterns rather than provide statistical generalizations.

The analysis draws on theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature review, particularly psychological theories of conspiracy thinking and media studies perspectives on echo chambers and filter bubbles. No automated tools or computational methods were employed; the analysis is interpretative and grounded in close reading.

This study is not intended to provide statistical generalizations but rather to illustrate mechanisms through which conspiracy influencers operate. Limitations include the restricted time frame, the focus on a single platform (Telegram), and the absence of user-side data (such as engagement motivations or demographic profiles). Future research could expand on this foundation with comparative studies or mixed methods approaches incorporating audience interviews or social network analysis.

This study is limited by its reliance on publicly available content and does not include interviews or survey data. The analysis is illustrative rather than comprehensive, aiming to identify key patterns and mechanisms rather than establish generalizable claims.

Although this paper focuses on a single case (Cesare Sacchetti), the case is considered paradigmatic of broader dynamics within the conspiracy influencer ecosystem, making it suitable for an in-depth, illustrative analysis.

1. What is the phenomenon of conspiracy theories?

Unlike the reductionist collective imagination, conspiracy theories are not only elaborated by paranoid bearded outcasts with tin foil on their heads as a hat; the idea that a certain event is not simply the result of chance or the effect of unrelated causes, but of precise rational calculations elaborated by some shady figure acting in the shadows, is a flea present in the ear of man since ancient times, and it is a mechanism that can present itself in any person. Climate and environmental crises, pandemics, social and economic inequalities, scarcity of resources and raw materials; there are many who have stopped believing in progress. And the conflict, in conspiracy narratives, has now reached a supranational level; for this reason, depoliticization and conspiracy go hand in hand today.[1] Most attempts at refutation are ineffective, as everything is read as evidence of a global conspiracy, and the Enemy, whoever He is, a vacuous and intangible entity, is also ubiquitous, reducing the issue to a generalized us versus them.[2] And resentment seems to be the new opium of the people, the new narrative that dominates populism, crossing every threshold of ideology and political orientation.

Those who challenge the official versions, the media, the institutions and the world's leading experts in each field, do so by directly attacking those who hold power and knowledge; it is a political problem, a clear symptom of a widespread malaise and a crisis of and in contemporary democracy, of trust denied and placed in other personalities. Even the main tool with which attempts have been made to address the conspiracy phenomenon in recent decades, namely debunking, has almost never had the desired effects, when it has not even worsened the starting situation, making those who believe in these theories even more entrenched in their initial positions.

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[1] D. Di Cesare, *Il complotto al potere*, Einaudi, Torino 2021, p. 77.
[2] Ibidem.

It is a common and widely shared opinion that the proliferation, if not the birth, of the conspiracy phenomenon was caused by the advent of the Internet[3]; the Internet has not only connected the entire world, it has not only informed, but also formed, and in addition to information, suspicion and conspiracy have also become global. However, this does not mean that conspiracy theories were born and grew with the advent of the Internet; it has simply benefited from it in terms of time and space in terms of the diffusion of the most recent theories, but if we look closely, we are talking about a phenomenon that has always existed and has played a role of primary importance throughout history.

From the studies of political scientists Joseph Uscinski and Joseph Parent, included in their book American Conspiracy Theories, where they analysed over one hundred thousand letters to the directors of the New York Times and the Chicago Times from 1890 to 2010 to understand how many times these theories were mentioned, it clearly emerges that the diffusion of such theories has been generally stable over time, with two significant peaks of short duration that occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the Cold War, in the years of greatest uncertainty in American public opinion and great changes, clearly observable in McCarthyism.[4] But it is enough to look back a couple of millennia to realize that conspiracy theories have always accompanied the public and private life of man.

For example, the entire history of Rome is pervaded by conspiracy narratives.[5] Often, they were used instrumentally by those in power for political purposes or to find a scapegoat, as in the case of Nero who, to defend himself from various accusations, placed the blame for the fire of Rome on the Christians in 64 AD.[6] A story that repeats itself, a red thread that unites and links different historical eras. On the Great Fire of London in 1666 that devastated the city for four days, the politician and writer Samuel Pepys wrote how from the very beginning there were pressing rumours of a plot behind the fire by Charles II, in a

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[3] S. Stano, *The Internet and the Spread of Conspiracy Content*, in *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*, Routledge, London 2020, p. 485.

[4] J. Uscinski and J. Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories*, Oxford University Press, New York 2014.

[5] V. Pagàn, *Conspiracy Narratives in Roman History*, University of Texas Press, Austin 2005.

[6] *The Great Fire of Rome: of fake news, conspiracy, and social disruption*, The Spirit of the Eye, 2021. https://visual-worlds.org/2021/07/23/the-great-fire-of-rome-of-fake-news-conspiracy-and-social-disruption/.

parallel between the sovereign and Nero, while others believed that the fire was started by internal enemies of England, such as the Catholics.

But what exactly is a conspiracy theory? There is no one-size-fits-all definition for all theories. According to the Oxford Learners Dictionaries, a conspiracy theory is when an event is hypothesized to have occurred as a result of a specific plan by a large organization.[7] However, following this path, one would not notice any substantial differences between a bank robbery and a September 11 conspiracy. Among the various definitions formulated by scholars who have dealt with the phenomenon, we cite two; according to Rob Brotherton, a conspiracy theory can be easily seen as the proposal of an idea that has not yet been, or cannot be, demonstrated. Furthermore, it consists of five main characteristics:

1) is a question that has not yet been answered;
2) starts from the general assumption that nothing is as it seems;
3) paints the conspirators as people with almost superhuman abilities;
4) the spasmodic and almost maniacal search for anomalies;
5) and finally, it is irrefutable.[8]

While Wu Ming 1, pseudonym of Roberto Bui, notes that not only have conspiracies always existed, exist and will exist in the future, but also that conspiracy theories of a political nature, different from those of a criminal nature, have the following characteristics:

1) they are created for a very specific purpose;
2) involve a limited number of actors;
3) they are put into practice imperfectly, because reality is imperfect;
4) they end once discovered and reported, which usually happens after a rather short period of time;
5) are inserted in their historical context and inseparably linked to it.[9]

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[7] *Conspiracy theory*, Oxford Learners Dictionaries.
https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/conspiracy-theory.

[8] R. Brotherton, *Menti sospettose: perché siamo tutti complottisti*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2021, p. 75.

[9] Wu Ming 1, *Come nasce una teoria del complotto e come affrontarla, seconda parte*, Internazionale, 2018.
https://www.internazionale.it/reportage/wu-ming-1/2018/10/29/teoria-complotto.

This last description corresponds to the political conspiracy par excellence, Watergate, which has given a suffix to many subsequent conspiracies: Irangate, Gamergate, Pizzagate, Pedogate.

Recent research has deepened our understanding of how conspiracy narratives adapt to and thrive within digital ecosystems. Phillips and Milner argue that online environments, particularly those that are participatory and memetic, are uniquely suited to the circulation of antagonistic and transgressive ideas, including conspiracy theories.[10] These platforms blur the lines between irony and belief, creating a discursive space where fringe ideas can gain traction and be rapidly amplified.

Marwick and Lewis, in their influential report on media manipulation, show how disinformation agents exploit the attention economy and platform algorithms to inject conspiracy narratives into mainstream discourse.[11] This manipulation is often framed through emotionally resonant content, making conspiratorial messaging especially "sticky" in online contexts.

Building on this, Rosenblum and Muirhead describe a shift toward a "new conspiracism" that abandons traditional evidence-based storytelling in favour of repetition, assertion, and social validation, dynamics that are exacerbated by social media.[12] These insights provide a crucial theoretical framework for understanding the mechanisms explored in the present analysis of conspiracy influencers.

2. Psychological aspects

As we have said, when dealing with the conspiracy phenomenon we must avoid falling into the error of believing that such theories are of interest only to a small paranoid fringe of humanity, made up of middle-aged, depressed or marginalized men, or that it is a question of wallet, class or cultural belonging.

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[10] W. Phillips and R. M. Milner, *The Ambivalent Internet: Mischief, Oddity, and Antagonism Online*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2017.

[11] A. Marwick and Lewis R., *Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online*, Data & Society Research Institute, 2017. https://datasociety.net/library/media-manipulation-and-disinfo-online/.

[12] R. Muirhead, N. L. Rosenblum and M. Landauer, *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*, "Princeton University Press", 19(2): 142-174, 2019. http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/s41296-019-00372-6.

From the point of view of psychological studies, many authors have attributed the primary cause of the conspiracy phenomenon to "apophenia". The term was coined by the German neurologist and psychiatrist Klaus Conrad in 1958 to describe the spontaneous, unmotivated observation of connections that is accompanied by a feeling of abnormal significance.[13] Basically, it describes the natural and innate tendency of our mind to connect situations and events that are apparently unrelated to each other, and to attribute meanings where there are none, without this necessarily indicating a pathological situation. Furthermore, it explains the attitude of those who are strongly convinced of a certain idea or theory and find confirmations of it around every corner, from numerology to tarot cards, to religions to various conspiracy theories. It allows you to find all the confirmations you need in the world.

But there are many other cognitive traps we can fall into, such as what in psychology is called confirmation bias[14], which can manifest itself when we are looking for evidence to verify our intuition and does not allow us to fairly weigh all the information we come across. The news we read most carefully, the links we click on, and the questions we ask ourselves, tend to align with what we already have in mind. Another rather insidious trap is the bias of proportionality[15]; when the outcome of an event is of significant and epochal significance, we need to believe that its cause was also something equally profound. Or, again, the bias of intentionality[16], a trigger-happy mechanism presents in each of us, which assumes that everything that happens in the world happens because someone wanted it. The tendency to judge a fact as intentional is automatic and does not require the slightest effort; the difficult thing, if anything, for our mind consists in making the effort to overcome this prejudice. As we can observe, there are many and varied traps into which one can fall.

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[13] K. Rogers, *Apophenia*, Britannica, 2025. https://www.britannica.com/topic/apophenia.
[14] B. J. Casad, *Confirmation bias*, Britannica, 2025. https://www.britannica.com/science/confirmation-bias.
[15] I. Strauss Cohen, *The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories*, Psychology Today, 2025. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/your-emotional-meter/202401/the-psychology-of-conspiracy-theories.
[16] E. Rosset, *It's No Accident: Our Bias for Intentional Explanations*, "Cognition", 108(3):771-80, 2008. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2008.07.001.

3. Internet as a Conspiracy Theory Amplifier

The advent of the Internet has radically transformed the way information is created, shared, and consumed. While this digital revolution has democratized access to knowledge, it has also facilitated the spread of conspiracy theories. Online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Reddit have become fertile ground for the proliferation of such narratives.[17]

The "echo chambers" are social or virtual environments where people surround themselves with individuals or content that confirms their beliefs, while actively avoiding conflicting sources of information. In other words, within these communities, ideas and opinions are continuously echoed without any criticism or alternative viewpoint. A practical example would be a Facebook group dedicated to a specific conspiracy theory, such as climate change denial. Users who participate in this group only share content that supports this view, reinforcing the belief that climate change is a hoax.[18] In essence, this is the virtual representation of the confirmation bias we talked about in the previous chapter.

In addition to these, there are also "filter bubbles", created by the algorithms of online platforms that personalize content based on the user's interactions and preferences. This mechanism limits exposure to different opinions and creates a homogeneous information environment. For example, a user who frequently watches conspiracy videos on YouTube will receive more and more suggestions for similar content, remaining trapped in a bubble in which all the information confirms his or her worldview.[19]

Different social media platforms have unique characteristics that influence the spread of conspiracy theories. For example, content moderation varies significantly between platforms: some adopt more restrictive policies, while others are more permissive.[20]

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[17] M. Cinelli et al., *Conspiracy theories and social media platforms*, "Current Opinion in Psychology", 47:101407, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101407.

[18] M. Cinelli et al., *The echo chamber effect on social media*, "Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America", 2;118(9):e2023301118, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2023301118.

[19] D. Spohr, *Fake news and ideological polarization: Filter bubbles and selective exposure on social media*, "Business Information Review", 34(3):150-160, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1177/0266382117722446.

[20] C. Körömi, P. Haeck and D. Cheslow, *Zuck goes full Musk, dumps Facebook fact-checking program*, Politico, 2025. https://www.politico.eu/article/mark-zuckerberg-full-elon-musk-dump-facebook-fact-checker/.

Removing content or users from one platform can lead to migration to other platforms with less moderation, a phenomenon known as "echo platforms," deepening user segregation and further reinforcing conspiracy beliefs.

Repeated exposure to conspiracy theories can have significant psychological effects, including reduced trust in public institutions and increased perceptions of external threats.[21] Users who spend a lot of time in conspiracy-theory online communities tend to develop a collective identity based on shared narratives, thus strengthening a sense of belonging that makes it difficult to abandon these beliefs. Online polarization contributes significantly to the spread of conspiracy theories. When users interact primarily with homogeneous groups that share the same beliefs, an environment is created in which false information can spread rapidly without being challenged.[22] This reinforces existing beliefs and makes it more difficult to introduce correct information. Furthermore, the viral nature of social media allows conspiracy theories to reach a large audience quickly, increasing the potential for social harm.

4. The Conspiracy Influencers

Having explored how digital platforms facilitate the spread of conspiracy theories through cognitive and algorithmic mechanisms, we now turn to the role of individual actors, conspiracy influencers, who capitalize on these dynamics. The case of Cesare Sacchetti provides a concrete example of how these processes unfold in practice.

The Internet is full of personalities, pages and websites that spread conspiracy theories. In fact, some real conspiracy influencers are emerging with a large following. In Italy, a great example of these personalities is, as we mentioned above, Cesare Sacchetti, also known as "The most famous spreader of fake news"[23], whose Telegram channel alone has 64 thousand subscribers.[24]

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[21] J. W. van Prooijen, G. Spadaro and H. Wang, *Suspicion of institutions: How distrust and conspiracy theories deteriorate social relationships*, 40(1): 65-69, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.06.013.
[22] Ibidem.
[23] *Il più celebre diffusore di fake news italiano ha colpito ancora*, Rolling Stones IT, 2022. https://www.rollingstone.it/politica/il-piu-celebre-diffusore-di-fake-news-italiano-ha-colpito-ancora/613475/.
[24] Link for the Telegram channel of Cesare Sacchetti: t.me/cesaresacchetti.

Its influence was certified last May by NewsGuard, an American company leader in monitoring disinformation on the web, which included it in the list of "super-spreaders of disinformation on Covid-19 in Europe".[25] Sacchetti is one of five Italians competing for the decidedly uncovered European primacy, together with the former Sicilian coordinator of the Lega Patrizia Rametta, the former head of communications for the 5 Star Movement in the Senate Claudio Messora (known on the internet for his blog Byoblu), the current M5S senator Elio Lannutti and Alessandro Meluzzi, a former member of parliament for Forza Italia, now a regular on television talk shows.

A graduate in European Studies and with a never completed doctorate in public law, he began his career collaborating with blogs and newspapers such as "Il Fatto Quotidiano" and "Il Giornale", often dealing with Eurosceptic issues and supporting Donald Trump. Since 2020, with the global health emergency, Sacchetti has gained notoriety by denouncing alleged conspiracies linked to the pandemic, such as the involvement of Bill Gates and the "New World Order". He has become a leading Italian proponent of the QAnon theory, producing content about a supposed international paedophile elite, and linking Italian and international political figures to conspiracies against Trump. His online activity has seen significant growth, with a 52% increase in Twitter followers during the pandemic.

But why are we talking about him so much? Because by looking at his telegram channel you can see exactly how a conspiracy influencer spreads his content, taking advantage of the vulnerability of his audience. Most of the time, people do not have the skills or time to verify every piece of information they meet, due to the Infodemic. Well, these influencers can exploit this vulnerability to gain a large following, combined with a psychological predisposition of some individuals to look askance at mainstream media and common narratives.

Let's take as an example this "news" spread on his Telegram channel on March 24, 2025:

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[25] S. Fontana, *Chi è Cesare Sacchetti, il re dei complottisti italiani*, Rolling Stones, 2021. https://www.rollingstone.it/politica/chi-e-cesare-sacchetti-il-re-dei-complottisti-italiani/548167/.

Figure 1. *Screenshot of Telegram content on Cesare Sacchetti's channel. Unfortunately, it is only possible to provide the link to the Telegram channel: t.me/cesaresacchetti.*

In the message, Obama and Clooney are accused of paedophilia against the little girl who is with them on the boat, reprising a theme dear to the QAnon orbit that sees leading figures of the left as the biggest paedophiles in the world. Now, it is enough to do a check on Google Images, to see how the photo, which does not prove anything, is just one of many taken on that boat trip on Lake Como in 2019, in which many other people are present. Among other things, the meeting in question between Clooney and Obama in northern Italy, near the actor's property in the area, has been widely covered by various media outlets.[26]

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[26] A. Zilber, *The Obamas join the Clooneys aboard a boat on Lake Como as the former first family attend a glamorous event hosted by the Hollywood star's charity near his multi-million dollar Italian mansion*, Daily Mail, 2019. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7172965/Barack-Obama-George-Clooney-look-dressed-business-sail-boat-Italy.html.

Sacchetti's messaging aligns closely with apophenic thinking, where unrelated events (e.g., a boat trip photo) are imbued with conspiratorial significance. Moreover, his appeal is amplified through the formation of parasocial relationships, wherein followers perceive a sense of personal connection and trust, reinforcing the authority of his claims despite lack of evidence.

Now, Sacchetti is a highly educated individual, regularly registered in the register of journalists and with several years of experience in the field. Given these premises, it is difficult to believe that he does not know that he is spreading a totally false and decontextualized news, something that some users also point out to him among the 415 comments.

This allows us to clearly distinguish between misinformation and disinformation: misinformation means the dissemination of false or incorrect information without the intention of deceiving, since one truly believes in what is said or written. It can arise from

errors, misunderstandings or lack of verification of sources. On the contrary, disinformation is the deliberate dissemination of false information with the aim of deceiving, manipulating or influencing public opinion.[27]

Before going further, however, it is good to specify that, while Sacchetti offers a particularly vivid example, similar patterns are observable in other conspiracy influencers across Europe, such as Xavier Azalbert[28] in France or Attila Hildmann[29] in Germany, who combine alternative health narratives with political conspiracy rhetoric.

5. Countering and Preventing Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories represent a significant challenge in contemporary society, with implications ranging from public health to political stability. To effectively address this phenomenon, it is necessary to adopt counter- and prevention strategies based on scientific evidence and supported by authoritative academic sources.

Education plays a crucial role in preventing adherence to conspiracy theories. Promoting critical thinking in schools and universities helps individuals develop the analytical skills needed to evaluate the reliability of information. Providing teachers with adequate tools to address conspiracy theories in the classroom is essential to building a cultural resistance against misinformation. Furthermore, studies have shown that teaching analytical thinking skills can significantly reduce belief in conspiracy theories.[30]

Social media platforms are often primary vectors for the spread of conspiracy theories. It is crucial that these platforms implement measures to identify and limit the propagation of false or misleading content. Research indicates that social media use is correlated with the spread of conspiracy beliefs, especially among those who already show a propensity

[27] J. Palfrey, *Misinformation and disinformation*, Britannica, 2025.
https://www.britannica.com/topic/misinformation-and-disinformation.
[28] P. R. Korda, *Xavier Azalbert, le pro de la finance qui a fait de France Soir un site complotiste*, Le Parisien, 2024. https://www.leparisien.fr/culture-loisirs/tv/france-soir-comment-ce-grand-titre-populaire-est-devenu-un-site-complotiste-25-01-2021-8421114.php.
[29] L. Morris and W. Glucroft, *Prospect of a coronavirus vaccine unites anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theorists and hippie moms in German*y, The Washington Post, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/coronavirus-vaccine-anti-vaxx-germany/2020/07/02/da7efc7e-acba-11ea-a43b-be9f6494a87d_story.html.
[30] C. O'Mahony et al., *The efficacy of interventions in reducing belief in conspiracy theories: A systematic review*, "Public Library of Science One", 5;18(4), 2023. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0280902.

towards such ideas. Therefore, improving algorithmic transparency and promoting fact-checking can help mitigate the impact of online conspiracy theories.[31]

Actively engaging local communities is another key element in the fight against conspiracy theories. Initiatives that promote collaborative debunking and open discussion can help dismantle false beliefs. For example, educational programs that use real testimonies to show the negative effects of extremism have proven to be effective in raising awareness among young people. Creating safe spaces for dialogue and providing tools to recognize and challenge disinformation are key steps in this process.[32]

Academic research provides in-depth understanding of the psychological and social motivations that lead individuals to embrace conspiracy theories. Studies have shown that a sense of lack of control can increase the likelihood of believing in such theories, while interventions that strengthen a sense of personal control can reduce this tendency. Furthermore, research highlights the importance of addressing conspiracy theories through an educational approach, rather than simple refutation, to avoid the effects of reinforcing incorrect beliefs.[33]

Conclusions

Considering the analyses conducted, it is clear that conspiracy influencers play a key role in the proliferation of online conspiracy theories. Their ability to construct a coherent narrative, often based on emotional and sensational elements, allows them to capture the attention of a large and diverse audience. The combination of personal charisma, convincing rhetoric and exploitation of the audience's cognitive weaknesses makes these individuals particularly effective in spreading ideas that are not supported by empirical evidence.

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[31] A. M. Enders et al., *The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories and Misinformation*, "Political Behavior", 45(2):781-804, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09734-6.
[32] A. Phoenix, *Combatting Extremism and Conspiracy Theories in the Classroom*, Educate Against Hate, 2022. https://www.educateagainsthate.com/blog/posts/combatting-extremism-and-conspiracy-theories-in-the-classroom/.
[33] L. Jerome, B. Kisby and S. McKay, *Combatting conspiracies in the classroom: Teacher strategies and perceived outcomes*, "British Educational Research Journal", Volume 50, Issue 3, Pages 1106-1126, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3955.

However, their impact goes beyond simple misinformation: they contribute to creating cohesive and polarized virtual communities, in which the conspiracy vision becomes an integral part of individual and collective identity. Countering this phenomenon requires not only a greater commitment from digital platforms in monitoring content, but also widespread education aimed at promoting critical thinking and digital awareness. Only through a deep understanding of the social and psychological dynamics involved will it be possible to stem the influence of conspiracy influencers and promote a more balanced and transparent information ecosystem.

This study is limited by its focus on a single case study and a narrow time frame. While the analysis offers valuable insight into the mechanisms and strategies employed by conspiracy influencers, it does not provide a generalizable model. Furthermore, the study relies exclusively on publicly available content, without incorporating audience perspectives or engagement metrics. Future research could expand this analysis through comparative case studies across different cultural contexts or by employing mixed methods, including user interviews, discourse analysis, and network mapping. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how conspiracy narratives circulate and consolidate within digital environments.

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