

CALL FOR PAPERS OF THE OPEN ACCESS JOURNAL KOMMUNIKATION.MEDIEN (#15)  
<https://eplus.uni-salzburg.at/JKM>

Special Issue:

# From Apollo to Forced Vaccination: On the Trail of Conspiracy Theories

+ OPEN CALL FOR PAPERS (Submission Deadline for Abstracts: 16.12.2022)

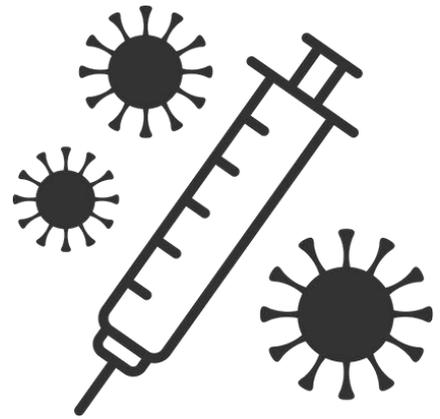
“The earth is flat”; “The corona virus was deliberately created by Bill Gates”; “Man-made climate change has been scientifically disproved”. These statements illustrate just a few of the numerous conspiracy theories that are presently circulating and spreading rapidly on the Internet. However, this phenomenon is not new (Appel & Mehretab 2020). The belief in conspiracies has always been booming, especially in times of crisis, and has recently been further fueled by the outbreak of the Corona pandemic. People strive to understand and explain complex interrelationships – conspiracy theories, with their narratives of secret powers striving for world domination and the division of the world into good and evil, offer supposedly simple answers.



## Conspiracy Theories – a Danger to Democracy?

Although conspiracy theories have been around for a long time, interest in them has increased significantly in recent years, both in academia and among the general public. While conspiracy theories used to be disseminated in narrow circles and through limited channels, the development of social networks in particular has created new opportunities to reach a large number of people with rumors, false reports, fake news, or so-called alternative truths. This poses a growing threat to democracy – not only because trust in the state and politics is undermined, but also because conspiracy theories often refer to antisemitic and far-right backgrounds and, according to Bartlett and Miller (2010), represent “radicalization multipliers”. By serving to legitimize violence (Butter 2022), they can lead to discrimination and hate crimes. Calls for greater regulation and content moderation of online spaces are therefore growing louder. While successes in this regard have so far been recorded mainly on established platforms, the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) regulation promises more far-reaching measures in the fight against untruths, fake news campaigns and hate speech online.

From the perspective of communication and media studies, the topic is relevant on various levels, for example, with regard to the communicative networking of key actors, the role of different media and platforms in the spread of conspiracy theories, or the emergence of publics when news media are strategically accused of being the “lying press” or suspected of manipulation.



This highly topical theme is the subject of the 15th issue of the Open Access journal *kommunikation.medien*, which invites abstracts on the topic of “Conspiracy Theories”. In addition, proposals for contributions on other areas in media and communication studies are also welcome. *kommunikation.medien* is aimed specifically at early career researchers in order to present research results, which are based on master's or bachelor's theses or as work in progress during the doctoral phase, to a broader specialist public.

## Main Topic



Within the scope of the main topic, articles will be published that deal with conspiracy theories from various perspectives of media and communication studies. Empirical studies as well as theoretical papers are encouraged. For example, contributions are invited on individual conspiracy groups, on the role of social and alternative media for the conspiracy milieu, on the connection between media use and belief in conspiracy

theories, or on the associated social and (media) political consequences and challenges at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. In addition, contributions are welcome that address technological, legal and democracy-endangering aspects of conspiracy theories. Possible topics and questions are:



### Conspiracy Theories from a Media Historical Perspective

What role do different media (radio, television, Internet) play in the emergence and dissemination of conspiracy theories? What are the particularities of current conspiracy discourses with regard to the media in which they circulate? How do the dynamics of 'old' and 'newer' conspiracy theories differ?



### Networking and Networks

How do conspiracy theorists network and how do they communicate their content? Which communicative processes, phenomena and developments can be identified within conspiracy networks? What role does the infrastructure of social networks (platform design, algorithms, business model, etc.) play in the dissemination of conspiracy theories? What significance do so-called dark platforms have in the conspiracy milieu and beyond?



### **Regulation**

What deletion strategies do social networks pursue with regard to conspiracy theories? Where is conspiracy theory content regulated more, where less, and with what consequences? What are the effects of the so-called deplatforming of actors?



### **Conspiracy Theories and Journalism**

How are conspiracy theories reported in journalistic media? To what extent has trust in journalism changed in connection with the spread of conspiracy theories? How do journalistic media deal with fake news, hate speech and false reports?



### **Visual Communication**

What role does the visual presentation of conspiracy theories play in social networks? What kind of visual language is used? What visual comparisons are drawn to support the interpretation of conspiracy theories?



### **Corona Pandemic**

To what extent did the pandemic generate new conspiracy theories or reinforce old ones? How was it communicated to the public? What are the dangers and consequences of false reports and conspiracy narratives about the Corona pandemic?



### **Methods and Theory Development**

Which theories and methods enable the analysis of conspiracy theories and their underlying networks? To what extent can established methodological and theoretical approaches be used and where can new approaches be developed? Which studies can be used and in which areas is there still a need for research?

## **Open Call**



In addition to the above-mentioned fields, suggestions for topics in other areas of media and communication studies are also welcome. For example, contributions about 'classic' communication studies topics in the fields of news, reception and media content research, transcultural communication or organisational communication are called for. kommunikation.medien aims at a wide range of research questions that relate to the interdependencies of communication, media and society and stimulate a critical debate. Theoretical discussions as well as empirical contributions and interdisciplinary perspectives are welcome.

## kommunikation.medien

The media and communication studies open access journal kommunikation.medien has been published by the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Salzburg since 2012 as part of a master course. kommunikation.medien is published once a year, is available as a freely accessible online journal and has been listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) since 2018. All contributions are subject to an anonymous peer review process. In addition to publishing full articles, reviews and conference reports, kommunikation.medien regularly provides insights into the research of students at the University of Salzburg's Department of Communication Studies ("Salzburger Sonderfenster"). Further information is available on the website:

<https://eplus.uni-salzburg.at/JKM>



## Guidelines and Deadlines

Extended **abstracts of between 4000 and 6000 characters** (including spaces and bibliographical information) should be submitted to **kommunikation.medien@plus.ac.at** by **16 December 2022**. The abstract should clearly state the central question or problem as well as the theoretical background, methodological approach and (expected) results. The contributions, to be submitted in German or English, should be formulated in a generally understandable way and comply with the usual standards of scientific writing. After an editorial review of the received abstracts, an announcement on their acceptance or rejection will be made by mid-January 2023. Full papers must be submitted by 3 March 2023. They will then undergo an anonymous peer review process, the results of which will be announced shortly thereafter by email.

Please note: There is no guarantee for a publication of the paper, which will only be published if the reviews are positive. Full papers must not have been submitted or published elsewhere. The 15th issue of kommunikation.medien will be published at the end of June 2023. If you have any questions, please contact Nora Junkert (kommunikation.medien@plus.ac.at) or Dr. Corinna Peil ([corinna.peil@plus.ac.at](mailto:corinna.peil@plus.ac.at)).

More insights into the work of the editorial team + current information on k.m can be found here:

 <https://www.instagram.com/kommunikation.medien/>

 <https://www.facebook.com/onlinejournal.kommunikation.medien>

 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/kommunikation-medien/>

## References

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Bartlett, Jamie/ Miller, Carl (2010): The Power of Unreason. Conspiracy Theories, Extremism and Counter-Terrorism. London: Demos. Online: [https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Conspiracy\\_theories\\_paper.pdf](https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Conspiracy_theories_paper.pdf) (31.10.2022).

Butter, Michael (2022): Verschwörungstheorien. In: Müller, Klaus/ Kirchberg, Christopher (ed.): Verschwörungstheorien. Eine Publikation von Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie e.V. Berlin. Online: [https://www.gegen-vergessen.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Gegen\\_Vergessen/Regionale\\_AGs/Mittleres\\_Ruhrgebiet/Publikation\\_Verschw%C3%B6rungstheorien.pdf#page=13](https://www.gegen-vergessen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Gegen_Vergessen/Regionale_AGs/Mittleres_Ruhrgebiet/Publikation_Verschw%C3%B6rungstheorien.pdf#page=13) (31.10.2022).