7-1-2023

Conspiracy Theories: An Exploration of the Linkage between Human Emotions, Characteristics, and Intentions

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CONSPIRACY THEORIES: AN EXPLORATION OF THE LINKAGE BETWEEN HUMAN EMOTIONS, CHARACTERISTICS, AND INTENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore the relationship between individual beliefs about conspiracy theories that affect cyber security, emotional behavior, and security decisions among students and faculty in a mid-size university. Data will be collected in three phases. First, a pre-test survey will be administered to assess participant attitudes about conspiracy theories. Second, participants will watch 2 video clips about conspiracy theories in action. Third, participants will complete a 10 question survey to assess their decision-making habits about cyber security.

Keywords

Security behavior intention, personality, risk-taking, decision-making style, biometric sensor

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The Internet has recently been plagued by conspiracy theories and disinformation campaigns, making both cyberspace and the physical world increasingly unsafe. These conspiracy theories and disinformation campaigns travel through social networks and reach millions of people within a very short time before any attempt to verify the veracity of the information can be made. Most conspiracy theories and disinformation campaigns are designed to evoke strong emotional response and reaction in people. Often, the consequences become far-reaching, violent and even fatal. To minimize risks of such incidents emanating from disinformation campaigns and conspiracy theories and build a secure and sustainable cyber-infrastructure, we need a deeper understanding of cyber-mediated changes in human psychology and behavior.

Our work seeks to extend the extant literature by expounding upon the study of Gratian et al which offered a comprehensive examination of how risk-taking preferences, decision-making styles, demographics, and personality traits influenced specified security behavior intentions [4]. It also seeks to contribute to Egelman and Peer's work on security behavior intentions [3]. The biometric technology employed in this study offers deeper insights in understanding the relationship between human characteristics and human emotions, and conspiracy theories. Our research falls under the newly emerged discipline "social cybersecurity" [1], an applied computational social science that aims to "characterize, understand, and forecast cyber-mediated changes in human behavior and in social, cultural, and political outcomes".

According to previous research this biometric technology supports the uninterrupted collection of facial and bodily reactions that create the basis for measuring human emotions [2]. The facial expression tracking and skin conductivity technology employed in this study are recommended as useful, nonintrusive methods of data collection. Using this technology in addition to traditional data collection methods to explore the link between emotions and interactions will offer insights that are less biased than those that can be concluded from self-reported survey responses.

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