

UC Merced

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

Loaded Language and Conspiracy Theories on Reddit and Parler

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4jj9s6xf>

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 45(45)

Authors

Klein, Emily
Hendler, James
Golbeck, Jen

Publication Date

2023

Peer reviewed

Loaded Language and Conspiracy Theories on Reddit and Parler

Emily Klein

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York, United States

James Hendler

RPI, Troy, New York, United States

Jen Golbeck

University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, United States

Abstract

Previous research found that loaded language (i.e., words, phrases, and overall rhetorical strategies that have strong emotional implications and intent to sway others) is used with significantly greater frequency by users of an online anti-vaccination forum compared to users of a vaccination-neutral forum. Our present research expands on these findings by examining the presence of loaded language on forums dedicated to discussing a broader range of conspiratorial topics. We compare loaded language usage on the subreddit *r/conspiracy* with usage on *r/science* and *r/wallstreetbets*. Results corroborate the previous literature. We additionally examined the presence of loaded language in a dataset from the alt-tech social networking platform Parler on January 6, 2021, when the U.S. Capitol was attacked because of conspiracy theories regarding the 2020 Presidential Election. Results show that loaded language, whose usage is linked to the cognitive motivations underlying belief in conspiracy theories, is a linguistic marker of conspiracy theorizing.