

CONSPIRACY THEORIES ON RADICAL TELEGRAM CHANNELS

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Direttori

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Aprire una collana di libri specializzata in una disciplina che si vuole scientifica, soprattutto se essa appartiene a quella zona intermedia della nostra enciclopedia dei saperi — non radicata in teoremi o esperimenti, ma neppure costruita per opinioni soggettive — che sono le scienze umane, è un gesto ambizioso. Vi potrebbe corrispondere il debito di una definizione della disciplina, del suo oggetto, dei suoi metodi. Ciò in particolar modo per una disciplina come la nostra: essa infatti, fin dal suo nome (semiotica o semiologia) è stata intesa in modi assai diversi se non contrapposti nel secolo della sua esistenza moderna: più vicina alla linguistica o alla filosofia, alla critica culturale o alle diverse scienze sociali (sociologia, antropologia, psicologia). C'è chi, come Greimas sulla traccia di Hjelmslev, ha preteso di definirne in maniera rigorosa e perfino assiomatica (interdefinita) principi e concetti, seguendo requisiti riservati normalmente solo alle discipline logico-matematiche; chi, come in fondo lo stesso Saussure, ne ha intuito la vocazione alla ricerca empirica sulle leggi di funzionamento dei diversi fenomeni di comunicazione e significazione nella vita sociale; chi, come l'ultimo Eco sulla traccia di Peirce, l'ha pensata piuttosto come una ricerca filosofica sul senso e le sue condizioni di possibilità; altri, da Barthes in poi, ne hanno valutato la possibilità di smascheramento dell'ideologia e delle strutture di potere. . . . Noi rifiutiamo un passo così ambizioso. Ci riferiremo piuttosto a un concetto espresso da Umberto Eco all'inizio del suo lavoro di ricerca: il "campo semiotico", cioè quel vastissimo ambito culturale, insieme di testi e discorsi, di attività interpretative e di pratiche codificate, di linguaggi e di generi, di fenomeni comunicativi e di effetti di senso, di tecniche espressive e inventari di contenuti, di messaggi, riscritture e deformazioni che insieme costituiscono il mondo sensato (e dunque sempre sociale anche quando è naturale) in cui viviamo, o per dirla nei termini di Lotman, la nostra semiosfera. La semiotica costituisce il tentativo paradossale (perché autoriferito) e sempre parziale, di ritrovare l'ordine (o gli ordini) che rendono leggibile, sensato, facile, quasi "naturale" per chi ci vive dentro, questo coacervo di azioni e oggetti. Di fatto, quando conversiamo, leggiamo un libro, agiamo politicamente, ci divertiamo a uno spettacolo, noi siamo perfettamente in grado non solo di decodificare quel che accade, ma anche di connetterlo a valori, significati, gusti, altre forme espressive. Insomma siamo competenti e siamo anche capaci di confrontare la nostra competenza con quella altrui, interagendo in modo opportuno. È questa competenza condivisa o confrontabile l'oggetto della semiotica.



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Although this work is based on the application of Large Language Models to text analysis, no AI tools have been used in the preparation and writing of this manuscript.

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CONSPIRACY THEORIES ON RADICAL TELEGRAM CHANNELS

COMPUTATIONAL LINGUISTICS
APPLIED TO TEXT ANALYSIS





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INTRODUCTION

I have been studying conspiracy theories for the better part of the last five years. Having my thoughts plagued by this topic for half a decade led to some interesting arguments on social media, a few fights with family members about recent news, an unpopular review of that Doctor Who episode featuring a social media conspiracy on the existence of aliens and, finally, the present book.

This work represents a substantial stance change in relation to my previous research – namely, my master’s dissertation (Campana Piva, 2023) entitled *Semiotic Approaches to Understanding Anti-Scientific Conspiratorial Discourse on Social Media*, discussed at the University of Tartu in the Summer of 2023. Back then, my focus fell on the form of conspiracy theory discourse – the breakdown of epistemic authority, the loss of a shared sense of truth and collective understanding of reality, the structuring of society into dichotomic oppositions, and ultimately the notion that conflicts are irresolvable, meaning the only solution is the complete annihilation of the Other. With the shift towards the study of radicalisation that this PhD research has brought, I found myself unable to focus solely on form, faced with content that is impossible to ignore.

The study of conspiracy theories and radical discourse online entails a very uncomfortable deep dive into the hate-filled digital spheres of neo-fascists, white supremacists, and genocide glorifiers. Inevitably, a researcher in this field, at one point or another in their career, will start

to feel the weight on the mind of reading so much pernicious material. Yet, what other choice is there? Researchers in humanities and social sciences are all well aware of the threats to democracy and human rights that the world is once again facing. Sitting back in the comfort of our own social circles and similar-minded folk is not an option.

So much research has already been (and is currently being) done, trying to deal with the same problems being discussed in this book. Still, it is probably fair to state that we are not even close to solving any of these issues. In fact, some may argue that they are progressively getting worse! What are we doing wrong? Why is research seemingly unable to keep up? Is it just a matter of policy failing to follow science recommendations?

‘The world is ending’! I have been seeing this feeling rolling around quite a lot, on- and offline. Is this cluster sampling bias? Maybe it feels like the world is ending and everyone is becoming a neo-Nazi, because the author of this book and her colleagues in this same field of study are all talking about it, all day long – it is our job, after all. Perhaps the author and her group of friends are not exactly a statistically valid random sample of humanity, and our anxieties which seem so ubiquitous are not actually *that* pervasive. I may even be so bold as to state that there are many people who are not, in fact, fascist. My hairdresser has never heard of the term ‘incel’. The cashier at the store across the street told me she had no clue some people believe the Earth is hollow and filled with a race of shapeshifting reptilians, what a funny and absurd concept! Nevertheless, the fact of the matter right now is that *some people are* incels, neo-Nazi, conspiracy theorists of the wildest kind. And we – me and you, the reader – are here to study them. So, although I do not wish you to feel, as you read this book, as depressed as I did during the last three years while I worked on this research, I still need to remind you that this text is not a light read.

Moving forward you may think: sure, mis/disinformation, conspiracy theories, and radical discourse are not novel problems, we have been worried about them for decades. However, it has become clear that the accelerated evolution (or perhaps unravelling) of digital technology has impacted their production, distribution, and interpretation – leading to what some call the ‘mega-photoshopping era’. The lines between

fiction and non-fiction, authenticity and fabrication, are increasingly blurred as these narratives undermine traditional sources of knowledge, impacting how people perceive and act on political information. Telegram news aggregator channels exist solely to spread, wide and fast, narratively distorted pieces of events, framed in a way to serve the political, economic, and social interests of their profit-seeking producers. Yes, of course, all news pieces are framed, there is no ‘real’ objectivity, truth has always been a matter of construction – I am well aware of the foundations of social constructivism. But, as Bruno Latour (2004) himself has already hinted at more than two decades ago: have we deconstructed everything to the point that we cannot collectively agree on anything anymore?

There must be a degree of objectivity and some discernment, I must be able to state that certain interpretative practices and narrative constructions are objectively distorted and harmful to society, in order to be able to contribute to the development of appropriate countermeasure policies. Here is where semiotics may offer relevant contributions. As put by own PhD supervisor, Massimo Leone (2024, p. 4), semiotics – being the study of the hidden layers of communication – is apt to dealing with the “increasingly latent structures of meaning” embedded in current online communication technologies.

Beyond exploring the challenges intrinsic to the Digital Age, studying conspiratorial discourse from the point of view of semiotics allows for some additional important understandings. First, conspiracy theory can be seen as a representation of a given sociopolitical situation, that is, the narrative of a conspiracy theory is a way to represent particular happenings and circumstances and should, thus, be taken in all seriousness (despite apparent absurdities). On a second level, semiotics also allows for the understanding of conspiracy theory as a modelling system (Leone *et al.*, 2020), that is, as a mode of interpretation, a way to model reality in our minds, to understand and thus navigate our complicated existence.

This work investigates the intersection between conspiracy theories and radicalisation. The link between ideas and action makes radicalisation an empirical matter (Abay Gaspar *et al.*, 2020) and, for that reason, this research is experimental in essence. More specifically, I here

sought to identify language patterns (texts, signs, codes⁽¹⁾) that can potentially assist in the codification of cultural meanings (which have a particular significance within specific groups) and in the formation of ideological clusters on social media (fairly isolated online communities that help to shape beliefs and attitudes).

Arising from this, the present book is organised as follows:

Starting with the research foundation, the theoretical and methodological frameworks that shape this work are detailed, focusing on the main concepts and their operational definition (*Chapter 1*) and how the development of new tools for conspiracy theory large-scale analysis was organized (*Chapter 2*).

In order to apply Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools based on Large Language Models to analyse the structure of online conspiracy theories in new ways, the work was developed in two stages: first, a Pilot experiment was designed (*Chapter 3*), then, a Workshop was carried out to further test the Pilot in bigger scale (*Chapter 4*). In the next phase, I analyse this new tool in itself, highlighting the successes and failures of NLP methods while focusing on textual analysis (*Chapter 5*).

Next, a last experiment is described, where the discrete annotated text-messages are re-organized into easily understandable ‘storylines’ (*Chapter 6*). The analysis of these last results shows that re-organizing information this way provides for a valuable resource, allowing for the identification of several overarching themes, concerns, and meanings in conspiratorial discourse, which would not be possible without the use of this newly developed computational approach.

The last chapter ends with some reflections on the limits of AI methodologies in a more general sense (*Chapter 7*).

(1) From semiotics, ‘text’ is a meaning-carrier form or structure that possesses an identifiable boundary, yet is also open and dependent upon the system/culture from which it arose in order to be interpreted (a text is a bearer of a culture’s collective memory, and it also generates new information). It is coded at least twice: a text is made up of a sequence of signs with different meanings, and it is, at the same time, a complex sign in itself with its own particular meaning (Lotman, 1988). A ‘sign’ is anything that stands for something other than itself, determining some effect upon someone (adapted from Peirce, [1867-1893] 1992). ‘Code’ is “a system of significant units and their combinations” as well as “a system of semantic systems and rules of semantic combination of [these] different units”, including: “a) the morphological systems, b) the grammatical rules, c) the semantic systems, d) the rules of coupling and transition between morphological and semantic systems and e) the rules of semantic projection” (Eco, 1968, p. 130).

The state of the art

Current research on conspiracy theories is vast, interdisciplinary, and traverse geographic boundaries, being diverse in terms of concepts, analytical approaches, and methodologies (Mahl *et al.*, 2023). Since the field is so extensive, a precise framing needs to be done. Therefore, existing research from this decade that is closest to the present one can be divided into four main types:

1. Motivations for conspiracy theory belief (studies from the fields of psychology, history, culture, demographics, and social movements);
2. Communication form of conspiracy theories (semiotics, media studies, communication, narratology, and epistemology);
3. Relationships between conspiracy theories and radicalisation/extremism, and
4. Digital spread of conspiracy theories/radical discourse (or how digital technologies impact the communication of conspiracy theories and/or radical discourse).

These four overarching themes (as well as their main works and ideas) are discussed in depth in 1. *Theoretical Framework*. More specifically, *Section 1.1* describes most of what has been said about motivations for conspiracy theory belief and their communication form. *Section 1.2* introduces the issue of how digital technologies impact such discourses and *Section 1.3* discusses, among other topics, the relationships between conspiracy theories and radicalisation.

Semiotics research on conspiracy theories needs to adapt to the new dynamics that govern the current informational landscape, by considering the dimensions that information now takes in digital spheres. Conspiracy theories no longer work in the same way they did in the last century, or even a decade ago. Therefore, we cannot carry out semiotic analysis in the same way that was done by Barthes, Eco, Hjelmslev, or Greimas. Nowadays, computational methods enable researchers to create detailed network diagrams of extremist ecosystems, assess user behaviours and impacts, and examine vast amounts of text available online to recognize key themes or monitor ideological changes over time (Baele *et al.*, 2025).

For that reason, the focus in the present work falls on the 4th type of the list above (studies on the digital spread of conspiracy theories and radical discourse), which may be subdivided into two subtypes of research that consider digital humanities and computational methodologies applied to this topic of study:

- 4a. Actor-based approach – network analyses, whose analytical objective is to study *people* (Krouwel *et al.*, 2017; Šlerka & Šisler, 2018; Smith & Graham, 2019; Hyzen & Van Den Bulck, 2021; Phadke *et al.*, 2022).
- 4b. Content-based approach – Natural Language Processing⁽²⁾, machine learning, and Artificial Intelligence analyses, whose analytical objective is to study *discourse*.

The present research falls in this last subtype (4b). The development of AI solutions with the help of machine learning to deal with radicalisation and/or conspiracy theories have three main objectives (Fernandez & Harith, 2021, p. 2-3):

- (i) Automatic *detection* of online users or content;
- (ii) Automatic *prediction* of the adoption, interaction with, and spreading of conspiracy theories/radical ideas; and
- (iii) Large-scale *analysis* of online radicalisation/conspiracy theories to understand these phenomena (communication flow, use of propaganda, variety of channels, etc.).

Most studies in the realm of computational methods applied to this topic of study are directed at the *detection* of conspiracy theories and/or radical discourse online. Even though the present research falls into category (iii), there are a few past works from the other two kinds that are relevant. For instance, (Holur *et al.*, 2022) developed a method for detecting conspiracy theories on social media through the identification of semantic structures in a text segment related to Insiders/Outsiders

(2) NLP is a subfield of computer science that studies the use of machine learning to enable computers and digital devices to automatically process text, by combining linguistics with statistical modelling.

representation. Schaal and Phillips (2020) built a model to detect misinformation related to COVID-19 and 5G conspiracy theories in tweets. Phillips *et al.* (2022) developed an annotated dataset⁽³⁾ of four conspiracy theories (climate change, COVID-19 origins, COVID-19 vaccine, Epstein-Maxwell), that can be used for conspiracy-detection in other studies. Giachanou *et al.* (2023) proposed a network model to differentiate between conspiracy and anti-conspiracy propagators by comparing linguistic patterns between tweets. Real and Araque (2023) worked to identify propaganda in text, arguing that moral cues can aid automatic systems in linguistically identifying radical content.

The last work from category (i) *detection* that I would like to highlight is by Walther and McCoy (2021), who examined the types of communication occurring on far-right Telegram channels, including disinformation campaigns and conspiracy theories. Although the authors did look into the presence of mis/disinformation and conspiracy theories in the channels, they did not analyse thoroughly the structure of these phenomena, nor considered how they differ amongst each other. The authors, instead, focused on pointing out the presence of determined conspiracy theories in the channels.

Regarding the category (ii) *prediction*, the following works are worth citing: Caballero (2020) sought to predict communication patterns that structure conspiracy theories and their dissemination via tweets. In order for one to predict patterns, there is first a need to understand them, in a way that such prediction only works if a work of analysis comes before it. Similarly, Gualda (2021) investigated the Eurabia conspiracy theory focusing on the role of the metaphors deployed to spread it, by collecting data from the hashtags #stopIslam, #stopInvasion, #defendEurope on Twitter (X). Even though the author focused on spread of conspiracy theories, the idea of *analysing* the role of metaphors is deeply interesting. All this to say that, even though works directed at prediction do not focus on analysis, they could not be accomplished without a certain level of examination of discursive structure and meaning-making.

When it comes to works that focus on (iii) *large-scale analysis*, it is clear that this can mean very different objectives. For instance,

(3) Labelling textual data for easier future comprehension of formats, information, and/or patterns.

Fernandez and Harith (2021, p. 4) cite the study of the communication flow within a platform; analysis of user/discourse influence; investigations on the evolution of language; and analysis of different online channels. Considering these overall objectives, past works that are closest to the present one are the following:

Paudel *et al.* (2021) collected data from Reddit and Twitter (X) and developed a ranking technique to analyse the spread of conspiracy theories on web communities. Even though this work sought to develop a tool for analysis, it has so far been used to determine spreading of conspiracy discourse, not to understand its structure. In parallel, Baele and Brace (2024) built a specific dictionary for working with incel text and used it to conduct longitudinal time-series and semantic correspondence analyses, tracking the evolution of this type of language across time and platforms. Although semantic analyses have their merits, I find that they tend to constrain the tool to one type of discourse, which is not a problem to the study of a specific target such as incel text. When it comes to conspiracy theories, this becomes much more complicated, due to the discourse heterogeneity (as I explain in *Section 1.1*).

Miani *et al.* (2022) put together a database for comparing conspiracy and non-conspiracy texts relating to the same events. One of the most interesting findings of this work is the revelation that conspiracy texts present lower internal cohesion, but high inter-textual cohesion, suggesting that conspiracy theories have a sort of overarching worldview that may provide inroads for classification algorithms (automatic classification of a text as conspiratorial or non-conspiratorial). Their topic analysis allows the authors to point to the presence of such a worldview (or the notion that conspiracy theories are similar in a structural way rather than due to subject matter), however, they do not develop this structure any further. Additionally, the notion of a conspiracy worldview is also present in the past works of other scholars, especially from semiotics (such as the term “code-text” for Madisson, or the “universal form” for Eco) – something that I explain further in *Section 4.3*, where I discuss this work’s approach to conspiracy theory text categorization.

Lastly, Bouko *et al.* (2022) investigated how extremists construct social realities in discourses, through discourse patterns used by Salafists on Facebook that triggers certain cognitive biases in its recipients.

Although the authors found some very important *and generalizable* discourse patterns (crisis-related metaphors, enumerations creating the effect of infinity, and up-scaling adverbs framing unsolvable incompatibilities), they ultimately focus on psychology, leading the work in a different direction to this one.

Faced with this background, we may notice two main challenges that had not yet been overcome before this research: first, from a computational perspective, conspiracy theories – due to their complex and highly variable content matter – are hard to detect and, thus, to annotate. Almost all existing corpora are annotated for binary and multi-label classification (an approach that is fraught with subjectivity), which may not be useful to distinguish conspiracy theories from mis/disinformation, propaganda, or hate-speech, since they do not provide information on the structure of this type of discourse (Piva *et al.*, 2026). Additionally, from a thematic perspective, NLP, machine learning, and AI resources for this task lack generalizability – studies end up being confined to their specific case-studies, restricted to particular subjects, which is a serious problem in the case of conspiracy theories, whose contents also vary.

I, thus, argue that semiotics can help reduce the challenges here mentioned, since the intricacies of conspiratorial communication require a more sophisticated, structural representation than mere yes-or-no labels can provide (Piva *et al.*, 2026). Besides, as I explain further in *Section 2.3* about the limitations of working with such technologies, much of the processes of AI solutions development are still quite invisible (since AI is still a Blackbox). In a sense, conspiracy theories can also be seen as Blackboxes, since the connections that they claim to bring to light are opaque (and often incomprehensible). Therefore, it may be said that I am using one Blackbox to analyse another, but, as mentioned at the beginning of this Introduction, semiotics occupies itself with the role of hidden infrastructures (Leone, 2024), therefore, it is indispensable to the effective development and deployment of AI solutions to conspiracy theory problematics.

Objectives and contributions

To accomplish the goal of going beyond detection or prediction, providing for more effective and generalizable structural analysis of on-line conspiracy theories in large-scale, two research questions guide this study.

- RQ 1. How can we computationally (in large-scale) identify the language patterns (signs, texts, and codes) that structure the conspiracy theories that circulate on Telegram channels?
- RQ 2. What different kinds of meanings arise from such rhetorical structure?

In order to successfully answer these questions, this doctoral research aimed to refine and apply computational tools to facilitate analysis of online conspiracy theory discourse. Given the sheer amount of material being constantly produced and shared on digital spaces, the value of this work is two-fold:

- *Regarding quantity*: the plain impossibility of semiotic researchers being able to carefully read and interpret sample-relevant portions of text points to the need of developing ways to cluster, organise, and structure data in a readable form, and
- *Regarding quality*: prolonged exposure to distressing material contributes to Researcher Vicarious Trauma⁽⁴⁾ (R. Lee, 2024), in a way that investing in computational means to help analysis can help minimize the extent and proximity of the researcher with traumatic material.

In other words, the current technological landscape displays the need for computation processes that can allow researchers to carry out more efficient semiotic analyses on larger datasets. Given this relevance, it is

(4) RVT is a reaction to the traumatizing material that researchers are exposed to through their research. It has negative consequences to mental health and can curtail research work. Contemporary global information and communication technologies increase such exposure for scholars in the field of radicalisation, placing them in contact with distressing material from almost anywhere almost all the time. (R. Lee, 2024).

important to emphasize that the objective of the refinement and application of computational linguistics tools is not to use AI and machine learning to carry on a fully automatic analysis of text, but rather, to serve as a tool for the human analyst (to the semiotician). Furthermore, this work approaches the use of AI solutions from a critical point of view, which is to say that computational processes are both methods and objects, being not merely applied, but criticized and analysed in themselves.

To put it plainly, semiotic analysis is usually restricted to very particular objects, sacrificing data size in detriment of data depth. Therefore the contribution to the field of semiotics is the incorporation of computational tools in the analysis of text in large-scale. The contribution to computational linguistics and digital humanities methods is to go beyond detection or prediction and towards a more effective and generalizable structural analysis of online conspiracy theories, with minimal loss of context. Filling these *methodological gaps* will allow this research to contribute to filling the *theoretical gaps* (explored in more depth in the next section).

PART 1
RESEARCH FOUNDATION

CHAPTER I

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is interdisciplinary in nature, occupying the space between political and social sciences (radicalisation studies), philosophy of communication (semiotics, discourse analysis, language studies), and digital humanities (computational linguistics, machine learning). For this reason, the first chapter offers a taxonomy of the main concepts used in this research, distinguishing positions in the literature, to level the understanding of readers from different backgrounds.

The first section, entitled *1.1.*, starts with the distinctions between these concepts as well as their interrelations. Then, it moves on to the potential sociopolitical uses of conspiracy theories and the issue with understanding them as ‘political criticism’. By pointing to the key elements of conspiracy theories and their operation, it is possible to understand how their communication form is already problematic, independently from the veracity of their content. Next, a normalizing approach is taken to understand people involved in conspiracy theorizing and their motives for doing so. Lastly, by seeing how identity and community construction are central to the lifespan of conspiracy theories, the section highlights that drivers for conspiracy theory belief are ultimately connected to the function of conspiracy narratives as guides for interpretation, as a model through which one understands reality.

The following section (*1.2.*) starts by describing the main logics of online media that contribute to the current landscape of information

pandemonium, conspiracy theorizing, and radicalisation. Next, I describe the particularities of Telegram as a tool for spreading radical discourse and of certain channels as important nodes in the network of online conspiracy theories. Lastly, I point out how radicals and conspiracy theorists make use of digital technologies and their affordances (especially generative AI tools) to create and spread content.

After that, section 1.3. starts by characterizing polarisation as the clustering of similar individuals into fairly isolated groups whose primary result is the reinforcement of particular ideologies. Then, I describe the overlaps between literature on conspiracy theory and that on radicalisation and extremism. Finally, this section ends with an account of fundamentalism that is broad enough to also include non-religious extremist groups, focusing on its reactionary in character.

1.1. On mis/disinformation and conspiracy theories

Conspiracy theories and disinformation have historically permeated public discourse and communication from at least the 19th century (McKenzie-McHarg, 2020). Yet, a recent rise can be seen in both academic and political interest in relation to these issues and how they affect society (Krouwel & Van Prooijen, 2021). Most debates simultaneously refer to conspiracy theories, misinformation, disinformation, and fake news, with no clear delineation between concepts (Mahl *et al.*, 2023), which means that precise definitions need to be traced.

One useful way to differentiate mis- and disinformation comes from the Council of Europe Report written by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), who proposed a conceptual framework including certain types of ‘information disorders’ that are often assembled under the ‘fake news’ umbrella. According to the authors, misinformation consists of false information that is inadvertently harmful while disinformation is intended to harm a person or group of people. Since the difference lies in the intent of the actor who is producing/spreading it, it is fair to sometimes treat mis/disinformation as one single concept – especially in works where the idea of ‘intent’ is not analysable, after all, most of the times in text analysis, it is not possible for one to know for sure

the intentions of the producer of discourse, only to note its (potential or concrete) *consequences*. Given that, mis/disinformation are here understood as a fabricated piece of information spread as fact-based news, whose ideal interpretation serves the political, economic, and/or social interests of its producer (Avramov *et al.*, 2020).

Mis/disinformation may serve as confirmation to conspiracy theories, and, at the same time, conspiracy theories can be vehicles through which mis/disinformation may spread faster and more powerfully (Pluviano *et al.*, 2022). The main difference between mis/disinformation and conspiracy theory is that the former relies on existing bias while the latter frames the bias itself (Avramov *et al.*, 2020). For instance, the belief that *vaccines are harmful* is mis/disinformation, while the idea that *vaccines are being forced onto the people as a way for the government to control them and for the profit of Big Pharma* is a conspiracy theory (Pluviano *et al.*, 2022). As such, conspiracy theories can be understood as being substantially more dangerous, given that mis/disinformation are seen as discrete false statements whilst conspiracy theories relate to full series of happenings, guiding how events (that have sometimes actually taken place) can be interpreted (Madisson & Ventsel, 2021). Hence, conspiracy theories appear as something more complexly articulated than mis/disinformation.

As a concept, ‘conspiracy theory’ is historically variable (McKenzie-McHarg, 2020) – being understood in different ways through the course of history – and dependent upon its specific social context (Bergmann, 2020). The term is also often charged with value judgement; despite attempts at considering it as neutral, it is undeniable that ‘conspiracy theory’ possesses negative connotations, being mainly used “to disqualify what are deemed to be unorthodox and aberrant accounts of social and political reality” (McKenzie-McHarg, 2020, p. 17). Therefore, there are two approaches through which one may look at conspiracy theories (Harambam, 2020): a) Stigmatization – highly normative and pathologizing view; and b) Normalization – a more neutral approach that seeks to explore the meaning of conspiracy theories for those involved. From either standpoint, they are understood as a form of alternative knowledge (Birchall, 2006).

In being so, conspiracy theories are, conscious- or unconsciously, products of political positions, often constructed with the purpose

of mobilising people in a particular social struggle or political agenda (Bergmann, 2020), as is the case with much of what we call ‘discourse’. In that sense, they are tools that serve different purposes in different hands. The literature often presents a ‘beneficial’ side of conspiracy theories, arguing that they can be used to challenge the *status quo* and engage in political action against those who are in power (Douglas *et al.*, 2019). This, in turn, sometimes leads to the exposure of inconsistencies in official accounts of events, pressuring governments to become more transparent (Thórisdóttir *et al.*, 2020; Douglas *et al.*, 2019). The case of the Epstein files may be interpreted in this light, where a ‘real conspiracy’ was uncovered regarding a powerful US American elite. Therefore, conspiracy theories narrating perceived injustices expressed by groups who are under-represented need to be taken seriously in their criticism of economic and/or political elites (Önnerfors, 2021). Conspiracy theories can thus be seen in a very positive light, as “a constructive force in politics” (Thórisdóttir *et al.*, 2020, p. 305), being even necessary to the healthy functioning of a democratic society by offering opposing political ideas and helping to “balance against concentrations of power” (Uscinski 2018, p. 234).

Even so, more often than not, they have very negative and harmful political and societal consequences (Thórisdóttir *et al.*, 2020). For that reason, it is important to distinguish between conspiracy theories “used both *from the top down* (by those in power)” from the ones used “*from the bottom up* (by the powerless and to criticise power)” (Önnerfors, 2021, p. 26). Conspiracy theories criticizing the powerful are qualitatively different from those involving ethnic or sexual minorities, having different repercussions (Bergmann, 2020). In other words, conspiracy theories are often expressions of groups *who believe themselves to be* under-represented (when they are not), configuring political action against those who are *perceived to be* in power (but who are actually not) – which is the case of conspiracy theories involving social minorities, that instead of opposing the mainstream, serve to strengthen existing power relations.

In sum, not all conspiracy theories can be understood as manifestations of social struggles, since many serve to uphold regimes, further excluding minorities from decision-making processes. Besides, I would

go as far as to argue that it should always be possible to construct a non-conspiratorial version of a discourse representing the same concern; anti-immigration political views do exist, for instance, without them necessarily being a conspiracy theory where a group of violent invaders is united under the ultimate plan of erasing a native population. Nevertheless, we do recognise that certain concerns have been tangled with conspiratorial narratives to the point where it has become quite difficult to separate them – and this is a serious issue.

The reason for that is the following: conspiracy theorizing is fundamentally distinct from healthy and democratic political criticism because of the way in which conspiracy theories provide argumentation. I humbly disagree with Umberto Eco, who famously wrote that ‘real conspiracies’ are different from ‘conspiracy theories’ and that we must learn to differentiate them. I believe that, in the age of post-truth, the two types show little rhetorical difference and present similar social consequences. This is to say that even when conspiracy theories are used from the bottom-up or when they are effectively correct from the point of view of concrete evidence (‘real conspiracies’), conspiracy theories *are still harmful*, due to their intrinsic characteristics (which I describe next to support this argument).

Conspiracy theories possess a distinct anti-authoritarian drive, as well as contempt for expertise and distrust towards politics, society, and official histories in general (Birchall, 2006; Kimminich, 2016; Thórisdóttir *et al.*, 2020; Grimes, 2021). They are thus disruptive in nature, being defined by a negative axiology (Camilo, 2016, p. 143), since they are counter-narratives consciously formulated to challenge (what are seen as) ‘mainstream’ worldviews and official interpretations of mediated events (Aupers, 2020; Postigo-Fuentes, 2025). This means that conspiracy theories can be used, at the same time, as a language of opposition by the marginalised and as a language of counter-subversion by dominant cultures (Dyrendal, 2020). Such key attributes show conspiracy theories construct irresolvable conflicts by shaping social relationships in the form of dichotomic oppositions, as well as endlessly deconstructing interpretations – which is what Leone (2017) calls ‘deconstructive hermeneutics’ – to the point where the idea of ‘truth’ gets lost (becoming available only to the enlightened few who are ‘aware of the conspiracy’).

In a general manner, Valaskivi *et al.* (2023) identify three archetypes of ‘conspiracy myths’: 1. active agents seeking world domination; 2. certain vehicles used to seek control; and 3. threat of invasion. Alongside these themes, the authors describe the predominant conspiratorial populist imaginaries: anti-elite and pro-individual sentiments, anti-medicine or anti-technology mindset, suspicion, victimhood, resentment, amusement and irony, as well as the notion of a higher power, a higher consciousness, and good *vs.* evil dynamics. Content-wise, Harambam (2020, p. 86) identifies the main themes of contemporary conspiracy theories, stating that they express concerns ranging from the government use of intelligence technologies to monitor citizens, to how scientific knowledge is tainted by the pursuit for profit by corporations, to the media controlling minds through propaganda, and to the knowledge of the ‘supernatural’ being suppressed by epistemic gatekeepers.

The broad scope of these archetypes, imaginaries, and themes points to how the operation of conspiracy theories does not depend so much on its specific contents, but on higher order beliefs, founded on antagonism. In that regard, conspiracy theories have been described as operating as ideological lens (Hyzen & Van Den Bulck, 2021), meaning-making template (Leone *et al.*, 2020), mode of interpretation (Birchall, 2006), and belief system (Önnerfors, 2021). Although they may emphasize slightly different facets of the concept, these expressions ultimately signify the same thing: conspiracy theories guide the understanding of reality.

Aupers (2020, p. 471) calls the interpretive practices of conspiracy theorists ‘pop-semiotics’, where they aim to distinguish signs (denotations) from what they ‘truly’ signify (unconventional and ideological connotations). As attempts to explain the underlying structures of sociopolitical reality, the form of a conspiracy theory “seeks to imitate scientific reasoning and establish what is true and false, but it also tries to explain what is right and wrong” (Önnerfors, 2021, p. 22), that is, it seeks to define “the factual (how things are) and the normative (how things should be)” (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2019, p. 54). They imply that coincidence does not exist, nothing happens by chance, and everything is connected through a simplified cause-and-effect relationship.

For those reasons, the crucial difference between socio-political criticism and conspiracy thinking is here understood to be a matter of

structure – that is, the specific rhetoric adopted by conspiracy theories based on the symbolical reproduction of segregation is already prejudicial on itself, regardless of the veracity of the theory (Campana Piva, 2023), and is something that substantiated criticism should not partake in. This is not to say that the present thesis takes the road of stigmatization; it is not the intention of this research to be normative or to pathologize the whole phenomenon of conspiracy theories. Rather, the point is that total normalization of this phenomenon is also dangerous, which is why the present approach is highly critical of works that defend the value of conspiracy theories as tools for criticizing hierarchies.

Even so, the normalization of *some* aspects is appropriate. Belief in conspiracy theories, for instance, is not seen as a function of gender, social class, cultural capital, political learning, or education⁽¹⁾ (Giry & Tika, 2020; Grimes, 2021). Contrary to the notion that it may be a symptom of a psychopathological condition (e.g. paranoia), demographic research points to how varied social actors get involved at conspiracy theorizing at distinct levels and intensities (Giry & Tika, 2020), in a way that this phenomenon can no longer be seen as marginal. Since the same kind of explanatory and meaning-making narrative has been used in different contexts and over a long period of time, it is also easy to recognise and embrace (Önnerfors, 2021). As put by Hills (2024, p. 278), “conspiracy theorists are not a category but a continuum”, and “it is a continuum on which we all reside”. We should thus understand conspiracy theories as common worldviews (Harambam, 2020, p. 2), simultaneously appealing to political moderates and extremist of both sides of the spectrum (Avramov *et al.*, 2020).

It is worth highlighting that the status of conspiracy theory as alternative knowledge still stands even if it is highly popular, since ‘non-mainstream’ here means *non-expert knowledge* and not ‘marginal’ or ‘niche’. In this sense, I would urge the reader to not confuse these

(1) Although research has found links between these factors, the nature of such links is widely disputed. While some suggest that *more* political learning indicates *more* tendency towards conspiracy belief, others argue that *less* education makes one *more* prone towards belief (Giry & Tika, 2020). The same can be said about gender, which has been found to be statistically correlated with conspiracy belief in some studies (Prichard & Christman 2020; Dyrendal *et al.*, 2021; van Prooijen *et al.* 2015), while other works found no statistical difference (Douglas *et al.*, 2019; Molenda *et al.* 2023).

two apparently paradoxical notions: a) conspiracy theories, *as specific narratives*, are constructed to *challenge mainstream histories*, thus they are non-mainstream, alternative knowledge, and b) conspiracy theories, as a *mode of interpretation*, is very common among the population to the point where we may consider it a *mainstream way to view reality*, a very common, non-marginal way of meaning-making mechanism. These two notions can and do co-exist.

Considering this normalizing view, Dawson (2023, p. 142) makes an interesting point regarding terrorism in New Religious Movements which I would like to apply to conspiracy theorizing. According to the author, the urge to condemn such activities comes from the “tendency to treat the process of involvement and those getting involved as not only morally suspect but also non-rational or irrational, or at best passive victims of manipulation”. However, reality shows that people involved in terrorism (and, I would argue, also conspiracy theories) are “remarkably ordinary, and as such, their voluntary decisions and actions remain relatively open to understanding”. The problem is that “the beliefs held and actions undertaken by these individuals [...] deviate significantly from societal norms” (*Ibid*). The idea that ordinary people may come to carry out *extraordinary* deeds (or belief in extraordinary narratives) is, hence, confounding.

To help in understanding this confusion, social psychology research suggests that there are three main types of motives that drive conspiracy belief: 1- *Epistemic motives*: consistent explanations help people to face contradictions and preserve beliefs; 2- *Existential motives*: by rejecting official narratives, people feel more in control, thinking they have a better account, and 3- *Social motives*: feeling like one is in possession of rare, secret, and important information helps to maintain a positive image of the self (Douglas *et al.*, 2019). These are not mutually exclusive and are often mixed. In the present research, since the topic dealt with is discourse (not people), it is most important to focus on the epistemic motives. In order to understand the structure of conspiracy theories, noting their role as attempts to explain the causes of contradicting circumstances is highly relevant.

Even though the study of actors is not the focus of this work, it is still important for text analysis to know the possible types of actors that

spread conspiracy theories, in order to have some background on where the discourse is coming from and being circulated on. The first type of spreader is the ‘media’, that is, books, movies, TV series, podcasts, magazines, and social media platforms (Önnerfors, 2021). Making use of (on- and offline) media platforms, there are the ‘conspiracy leaders’ or ‘entrepreneurs’, who make a career out of conspiracy theories (*Ibid.*) and profit from producing and publicly endorsing conspiratorial claims and narratives as a worldview (Giry & Tika, 2020). They help to push conspiracies from the margins to the mainstream by taking advantage of mediated communication and celebrity culture (Hyzen & Van Den Bulck, 2021). There are also the ‘influencers’, that is, celebrities who are famous for other things but that also, for distinct and often personal reasons, spread conspiracy theories (Önnerfors, 2021).

Added to those, there are the ‘opinion dealers’ – the large number of people who post, relay, or spread conspiratorial content (Giry & Tika, 2020). The ‘citizen detectives’ or ‘lone researchers’ are those who get increasingly involved in the investigation of a conspiracy theory (*Ibid.*), but do not monetise their spreading, lacking the reach of conspiracy leaders or influencers (Önnerfors, 2021). Distinct from them are the ‘revolutionaries’ – people who are invested with a higher order sense of responsibility to tell ‘the truth’ to what they understand to be the sleeping masses (*Ibid.*). And finally, there are the ‘supporters’, the followers who form a community (*Ibid.*), comprised of those that are ideologically invested in the promise of empowerment of these alternative worldviews, as well as the ‘casual fans’ who enjoy the immersive experience and community, as well as the ‘ironic spectators’ who are there for the laughs (Hyzen & Van Den Bulck, 2021).

This shows a strong internal variety of the conspiracy milieu, which is relevant because it also helps to reasonably normalize the phenomenon – anyone can indeed be a conspiracy theorist. More importantly, for this research, knowing which of these types are contained in the Telegram channels here under investigation inadvertently impact the view of the analysed discourses. This can only be hypothesized and not directly tested, since the identities of the users have not been investigated, but it can be stated with a fair amount of certainty that the channels are composed mostly of supporters, being moderated and administered by conspiracy leaders.

Despite, or maybe in view of this internal variety, “identity and community formations play a central role in the cultivation and popularity of conspiracy theories” (Harambam, 2020, p. 289). Here, identity construction is based on a polarised dualism between antithetical groups, where the identity of one is constructed in relation (of opposition) to the other. According to Torrekens and Frangville (2021, p. 141), the absence of value conformity, which is produced in public discourse, play a central role in constituting and defining a “collective identity in defiance of the other”. On the one side there is an ‘us’ – the insiders, the victims – and on the other, there is a ‘them’ – the outsiders, the evil that is threatening society (Steiner & Önnersfors, 2018; Leone *et al.*, 2020; Giry & Tika, 2020; Madisson & Ventsel, 2021; Torrekens & Frangville, 2021; Amarasingam, 2023).

This separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’, being value-based and identity creating, becomes insurmountable – *I am who I am because I am not that other person; my community is my community because we are not that other group*. Conspiracy theorizing thus involves narratives that serve for identity protection (self-image), influencing how community is constructed, maintained, and mobilised (group-image). As the differences between ingroup and outgroup are exaggerated – presenting the Other as the source of most social evils – this intergroup dimension is mobilising, legitimizing the group’s political goals (Dyrendal, 2020).

One notion is commonly echoed in the literature: that conspiracy theories are strongly related to the complexities of living under conditions of uncertainty around values, morals, and identity, as well as fear and confusion that accompany these contemporary crisis-filled periods of socio-cultural upheavals in the risk-saturated, overly-connected world of late-capitalism (Douglas *et al.*, 2019; Harambam, 2020; B. Lee, 2024; Butter & Knight, 2020; Leone *et al.*, 2020). As meaning-making mechanisms, conspiracy theories reduce complexity⁽²⁾, suggesting simple *but unclear and imprecise* relationships between causes and effects (Önnersfors & Krouwel, 2021).

(2) This may seem paradoxical, since at first glance most conspiracy theories appear quite complex, possessing layers of interconnected elements and assumptions, however, after a more attentive inspection, one may notice that they make fairly black-and-white assumptions that can be reduced to the same narrative describing a secret group of people with evil intentions (Krouwel & Van Prooijen, 2021).

Producing their own evidence, conspiracy theories carry out epistemic searches aiming to give meaning to gaps in perception, bringing about coherence from a disordered social reality (Amlinger, 2021), since straightforward beliefs foster people's sense that they understand the world, helping to regulate negative feelings associated with uncertainty (Krouwel & Van Prooijen, 2021). These narratives establish a 'pseudo-rationality', addressing emotions such as fear and blame (Önnerfors & Krouwel, 2021), by presuming causal determinations that are often incongruent with reality. This way, sense is created in a situation of existential fragility, where the feelings of powerlessness are averted by the idea of taking back control (Steiner & Önnerfors, 2018, p. 33).

The dichotomic style of processing characteristic of conspiracy theories manifests inflexible convictions (that are also innate to radical political ideologies), leading to "a pessimistic view about the functioning of society" (Thórisdóttir *et al.*, 2020, p. 307). According to Önnerfors and Krouwel (2021), conspiracy belief feeds on the doom scenarios and the absence of a positive political project for the future. As conspiracy theories become normalised in political discourse, it gets harder for society to agree on shared understandings of a collective reality (Leone *et al.*, 2020). As opposed to what some authors write when they state that conspiracy theories may have positive effects for society (Uscinski, 2017; Butter & Knight, 2020; Harambam, 2020), conspiratorial thinking *ultimately endangers the structure of democratic societies* (Önnerfors & Krouwel, 2021; Krouwel & Van Prooijen, 2021), even when they are 'bottom-up' and/or turn out to be *true*, since they undermine societal, interpersonal, and political trust (Önnerfors, 2021, Leone, 2016).

Note that 'trust' is not a virtue, but rather it is a relationship between people and institutions. As such, the proliferation of conspiracy theories has had (and is having) diverse effects and implications in terms of governance, policy making, institutional behaviour, and citizen-institution relations (Harambam, 2020). Despite the generous amount of literature on the subject, we are not close to exhausting the well of conspiracy theory research, or to reaching a consensus on how to deal with this problem. A lot has been said, yes, but the issue still persists. As the current technological landscape complexifies the workings of conspiracy theories, research needs to change and adapt to be able to

better understand the workings of this phenomenon within these new emerging contexts, as we will see in the next section.

1.2. On digital spaces, social media, and generative AI

Conspiracy theories and political radicalisation are not problems confined to the internet or to social media, since they affect traditional media as well. Nevertheless, the accelerated evolution of digital technology, the increased number of users of the World Wide Web⁽³⁾, and the fact that this global network is now a structural part of society, have certainly contributed to the accelerated propagation of these issues (Leal, 2020; Caballero, 2020). The impacts of digital technology evolution in the media – especially for political communication – is profound, “posing significant risks to public opinion and audience manipulation” (Montanari, 2025, p. 190). Because of that, a research field has emerged inside information and communication studies, aiming to explore the relationships between digital media, mis/disinformation, conspiracy theories (Mahl *et al.*, 2023), and extremism/radicalisation (Ganesh, 2023).

The once reliable rules about what configured dependable information have been increasingly challenged, resulting in an ongoing destabilisation of societal debate (Önnerfors, 2021). Within the web ecosystem, we increasingly encounter discursive and textual artefacts whose authenticity, degree of manipulation, or intrinsic fallacy are exceptionally

(3) What is commonly referred to as the ‘Internet’ is a complex system of nested networks (a meta-network) consisting of private, public, academic, business, and government networks of local to global scope, including the ‘Web’ and ‘social networks’. The ‘World Wide Web’ is an information system of interconnected *documents* and resources, while ‘social networks’ are systems of interconnected *people* (Leal, 2020). More specifically, social media platforms are mostly understood as web-based services that provide virtual spaces, where social interaction between users is central to communication situations, establishment of connections, as well as creation of identities and communities (Šlerka & Šisler, 2018). However, when it comes to the conceptual distinction between online versions of traditional media, social media platforms, and instant messengers, definitions become blurry, as websites borrow and incorporate affordances from one-another. For example, instant messengers can exist as standalone applications (e.g. WhatsApp, Telegram, WeChat) or integrated into a wider social media platform (e.g. Facebook Messenger, Instagram DMs, and X’s Direct Messages), or virtually any kind of website that includes a chat function.

difficult to ascertain, further muddling the already fragile relationship among information, perception, and trust (Montanari, 2025, p. 207). The architecture of online spaces facilitates the constant public criticism and undermining of (Mahl *et al.*, 2023) academically or technically trained traditional expert knowledge keepers in favour of alternative knowledge claims (Steiner & Önnersfors, 2018; Aupers, 2020; Mahl *et al.*, 2023). Ultimately, the less hierarchical and more interactive structure of digital environments allows more actors to feel empowered to act as sources of truth (Lorusso 2022), turning the figure of the ‘intermediary’ (a somewhat authoritative source who could validate the authenticity of informational content) into a species in extinction.

Ekman (2022, p. 1132–1133) highlights five features pertaining to online media logics that contribute to these new forms of civic engagement which include radicalisation and conspiracy theorizing. The first is ‘spread’ – the content published on global commercial platforms have the potential to reach large publics, which is increased by its controversial and sensationalist character (Ekman, 2022), as well as by its nature as easily recognizable narratives (Önnersfors, 2021). Then, there is the matter of ‘speed’ – information is rapidly disseminated over the internet, so alternative explanations tend to rise while events are still unfolding, making harder for official accounts to keep up (Ekman, 2022). Another issue is ‘sourcing’ – the abundance of sources allows conspiracy theorists to strategically select parts of information and construct seemingly trustworthy discourses (*Ibid.*). Despite enhancing pluralism, this abundance results in confusion and uncertainty (Stano, 2020), turning fact-checking into an arduous task. Then, there is ‘interactivity’ – online spaces generally thrive off of collective affective practices, on which the construction of conspiracy theories relies upon (Ekman, 2022), since community is central for their sustainability. Lastly, there is the matter of ‘legitimization’ – on the discursive level, legitimization occurs among users interacting, sharing, and discussing narratives, while on the socio-technical level, it happens through algorithmic processes, such as likes and shares (*Ibid.*).

Although Graphical User Interface affordances (buttons for liking, sharing, etc.) are key entry points for human engagement and agency into the online platforms, underneath these “visible, clickable representations lies an underlying code architecture that, while opaque to

users, remains fully accessible to algorithmic agents” (Ghazvineh *et al.*, 2025, p. 14). One of the consequences of this is that – since algorithms can generate content, manage its distribution, and alter users’ interaction capabilities – meaning-making processes have become increasingly tied to technology, being more and more influenced “by the contributions of a networked multitude of human and non-human agents” (*Ibid.*, p. 2). This raises “broader concerns about big data – its usage, analysis, and accessibility – as well as the overarching role of algorithms in shaping contemporary life” (Montanari, 2025, p. 190). It is thus crucial that researchers consider that phenomena such as conspiracy theorising and radicalisation configure *hybrid* processes extending beyond human agency.

Considering all these features, we must see social media platforms as conduits through which individuals get acquainted with and embrace communities, beliefs, and narratives, making such digital spaces effective recruitment tools (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2019; Šlerka & Šisler, 2018). Nevertheless, it is important to note that, although the logics described above are general and refer to a more overall view of digital spaces, different platforms come with different technological affordances, meaning that distinct connection possibilities exist for different actors with different objectives, languages, and styles (Heft & Buehling, 2022, p. 941).

Telegram is a particularly interesting platform to investigate, since its privacy guidelines are attractive to radical users, having become a useful instrument in the spread of mis/disinformation and radical discourse (Walther & McCoy, 2021; Lebrun *et al.*, 2024). For instance, the fact that Telegram limits the number of users that a group can have to 200 thousand (instead of a little more than a thousand in the case of WhatsApp, for instance) is an advantage to those who seek to spread any sort of content. The number of times a user can forward a message to others is also virtually unlimited (something that is not true for other similar applications). Besides, the company Telegram does not have any content moderation policy, instead defending “a policy of non-interference”, preferring to “limit their interventions to a minimum” (Lebrun *et al.*, 2024, p. 5).

Since its launch in 2013, the engagement rates of Telegram have been increasing, as users that are banned from other platforms migrate

there. The exponential userbase growth focuses on far-right groups and channels (Lebrun *et al.*, 2024), who have been shown to prefer Telegram over other platforms (Walther & McCoy, 2021). This work thus investigates conspiracy theories on Telegram exactly due to the relevance of this platform in radical spaces.

As a cloud-based messaging application, Telegram can be accessed by any device with internet access, offering varying options for engagement, namely: private conversations (between two users), private or public group chats (designed to host interaction among members, where participants may post content to the group as well as engage in communicational activities under the supervision of user-moderators who have the authority to manage members and content), as well as private and public channels (controlled by user-administrators following the broadcasting style of communication – from one to many – focused on content distribution and not allowing active member interaction, other than emoji reactions or forwarding to other chats).

Added to the hundreds of public far-right channels that have been identified in the application, I also consider Telegram a ‘conspiracy central’. This term, coined by Leal (2020, p. 504–505), describes “actors at the centre of the network with a vested interest in the narrative and its implications”, who craft the discourse and “assure its propagation inside relatively dense clusters in which they are prestigious nodes”. Therefore, Telegram channels dedicated to certain issues can be seen as central nodes for conspiracy culture as a whole. Additionally, the term ‘cluster’ (or community) *within* social networks and digital spaces does not refer to the idea of ‘membership groups’, but to the notion of a ‘reference group’ – an epistemic authority that shapes beliefs and attitudes (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2019). In this sense, social media communities also provide a ‘corrective’ to the possible ideological dissuasion coming from interacting with other ideas encountered in other online environments or out in the offline world (Amarasingam, 2023).

The escalating amounts of radical and conspiratorial content circulating online not only on Telegram but also in other online spaces (what some researchers are now calling ‘e-extremism’) generates enormous quantities of (meta-)data, pushing scholars to use computer-assisted methods to analyse large corpora and gain a more macro-level

knowledge (Baele *et al.*, 2025). At the same time, the use of such methods is a two-way street, as the same tools have fallen into the hands of larger publics. As with any past technological breakthrough – from the printing press, to gunpowder, magnetic tapes, the Internet, or photo-editing software – AI tools are bound to be creatively assimilated by radicals (Baele & Brace, 2024). Especially when it comes to content generation models⁽⁴⁾, it has become clear the capacity to easily create any type of content (text, image, video, audio, etc.) that is virtually indistinguishable from something made by humans is quite worrisome.

Nowadays, AI tools “enable people with few computational skills to alter videos in real time [...], to transform a still image into a video, or to engage in multi-modal text-image creations” (Baele & Brace, 2024, p. 14), empowering disinformation actors, allowing for the generation of high-quality, cheap, and personalized content for harmful purposes” (Bommasani *et al.*, 2022, p. 136). In their VOXPOL report, Baele and Brace (2024, p. 24) list the affordances of Generative AI for extremists (which can also be extended in most part to conspiracy theorists): a) *Access to information / know-how*: offensive cyber operations; violence advice; speech recognition and translation; as well as online privacy advice; and b) *Content creation*: propaganda generation; blackmail, harassment, and/or impersonation; platform boosting or adversarial flooding of digital platforms via chatbots; pollution of the information environment; as well as misperception-inducing content.

One may argue that content (text, images, video) found online is mostly already doctored in some way (let who amongst us who’s never put a filter on an unflattering selfie cast the first stone). Nevertheless, as put by Baele and Brace, (2024, p. 42), “at least the vast majority of them are still altering an underpinning reality, whereas AI-produced content cuts all connection between a reality and its representation”. Yet, what is perhaps the most pertinent use of generative AI for radical and conspiratorial content creators is its capacity to provide innovative ideas and creative insights. Generative AI can enhance not only

(4) Different from ‘decision-making models’ (automatic strategic decision-making in complex environments) or ‘pattern-recognition models’ (recognize new instances of something based on patterns identified in the training dataset), ‘content generation models’ are those whose main objective is to produce images, text in natural language, videos, voices, among others (Baele & Brace, 2024, p. 12).

the volume, reach (via translation), and production time of conspiracist output, but also its creative variety and quality (*Ibid.*).

While most generative models have safeguards in place which prevent them from outputting what is understood as harmful content, users have found quite simple ways to simply bypass these safeguards (see ‘The Grandmother Jailbreak’), while research has found a cheap and perfectly feasible way to weaponize a model’s capabilities for malicious purposes (Gade *et al.*, 2023), which demonstrates that open-source models inadvertently contribute to the creation of other, more malicious systems (Baele & Brace, 2024, p. 28). In a general way, AI operates not just as a tool or a problem, but as an all-encompassing ‘figure’, a ‘subject’, a conceptual *presence* that permeates social and communicative realms. The effect of AI goes beyond its technical features and significantly influences how we shape and experience our socio-political environments (Montanari, 2025).

Digital spaces, technology, and discourses do not exist in a vacuum or in a parallel reality (Ekman, 2022, p. 1139). Real-life geopolitics influence heavily how individuals behave in digital spaces and vice-versa (Amarasingam, 2023). They also influence the development of digital tools and algorithms that administer and influence online attitudes. Conspiracy theories and radical discourse in the digital sphere, thus, fuel friction, antagonism, and feelings of distrust, ultimately influencing not only belief but also behaviour of people involved in the production and circulation of very real and potentially harmful notions and agendas (Ekman, 2022, p. 1139). Any understanding of radicalisation and conspiracy theories today must consider the role of digital media in knowledge production, information dissemination, and inter-personal relations (Šlerka & Šisler, 2018).

1.3. On polarisation, radicalisation, extremism, and fundamentalism

So far, I have been talking about radicals and extremists without much differentiation between the two, mainly because I was focusing on conspiracy theories and for that understanding, it was not necessary to clearly delimit such concepts. Now, however, it is time to be more

precise. The term ‘radicalisation’ refers to a *process*, while ‘extremism’ describes a *condition*. When I talk about radical groups or individuals, I refer to subjects that find themselves inside this multi-directional process which manifests on both cognitive and behavioural levels, where the radicalised demonstrates an increasing willingness to challenge the institutional structure of a normative order (Abay Gaspar *et al.*, 2020). When I talk about radical discourse, I refer to this same process, manifested in the *symbolic level*. We will return to these notions further on, in given time. For now, suffice it to say that radical is the processual side of extremist – a condition that implies any ideology, measure, or action which violates what is considered to be the norm (Ogbonnaya, 2013). Such distinction is necessary, especially when we add to the table the notions of polarisation and fundamentalism.

As useful instruments for garnering political support, conspiracy theories can increase polarisation by shaping reputations and opinions (Avramov *et al.*, 2020). In a general manner, online polarisation can happen: a) amid discourses – narratives, b) between semantic networks – connections between the words of a discourse, and c) among users – network actors (Caballero, 2020). It can be said that polarisation as a social media phenomenon regards “the existence of groups or communities where interaction between similar users occurs, [...] meaning that the content that is most shared is that which reinforces the ideologies and information inside those communities” (*Ibid.*, p. 140). More specifically, polarisation in the context of societal radicalisation “means the othering of extremist individuals, groups, milieus and strata” (Junk *et al.*, 2020, p. 3). Certain past and ongoing developments – “such as extremist attitudes in mainstream society, growing populism, problematic handling of migration, hostility to Islam, anti-Semitism, and exclusionary constructions of identity” – are *inherently polarising* (*Ibid.*).

The problem with polarisation is that “radical attitudes not only reject predominant norms and bring about a norm shift towards less openness, diversity and plurality”, but “they also increase the willingness to use violence” (Junk *et al.*, 2020, p. 3). The more socially isolated, the more identity fusion occurs between the individual and the group, in a way that an assault on the group is interpreted as an assault on the individual, which facilitates the escalation from latent prejudice

to outright violent⁽⁵⁾ action (Ramakrishna, 2023, p. 81) – from polarised communication networks to extremist spaces (Caballero, 2020, p. 140). Once again, we are reminded of the relationship between belief and behaviour and how transformations in the realm of ideas have tangible impacts.

The isolation experienced by participants in such polarised digital spaces potentially heighten the appeal of conspiracy theories (B. Lee, 2024), whose dichotomous thinking style has also been found to be associated to political extremism (Van Prooijen *et al.*, 2015). The way conspiracy narratives construct identity on the basis of opposition is also a driver of radicalisation (Steiner & Önnersfors, 2018; B. Lee, 2024). For both conspiracy theory and radical communities, the process of identity construction “occurs as individuals seek to reconstruct a lost identity in a perceived hostile and confusing world”, while “individualization and value relativism prompt a search for identity, meaning and community” (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 799-801). Those who partake in conspiracy theories share among themselves a sort of ‘outsider status’ in relation to the rest of society that is also shared by radicals. This status confers them “a sense of group exceptionalism [...] improving resilience to external challenges” (B. Lee, 2024, p. 352), in a way that the *community* becomes a collective lens (an interpretive framework) through which events are seen (relating to the notion of ‘reference group’ cited in 1.2).

Moreover, both radicalisation and conspiracy theories “seem to share the epistemic motive aimed at threat reduction” (Thórisdóttir *et al.*, 2020, p. 307), where information is communicated with the aim of generating “collective action in the face of threat” (Douglas *et al.*, 2019, p. 13). Conspiracy theories are also of value in radical narratives because they offer clear-cut oversimplified explanations for sociopolitical events and provide an enemy to fight against (B. Lee, 2024; Rousis *et al.*, 2022). In other words, since they provide self-regulatory clarity and imbue the world with meaning and purpose, another link between radicalisation and conspiracy theories is the belief in simple solutions for complex problems (Krouwel & Van Prooijen, 2021).

(5) Here, ‘violence’ refers to employing physical force, emotional, or verbal harm against a person or group of people (definition adapted from Bäck 2004).

Despite conspiracy theories being common across all the political spectrum (as mentioned in *Section 1.1*), they have been found to be prevalent on the extremes (Krouwel *et al.*, 2017; Thórisdóttir *et al.*, 2020; Krouwel & Van Prooijen, 2021) and more so for violent than for non-violent radical groups (Rousis *et al.*, 2022). As guides for interpretation that appeal to sentiments of anti-establishment, conspiracy theories may equally serve distinct or even opposing political ideologies, however, different groups endorse different types of conspiracy theories (Thórisdóttir *et al.*, 2020). For instance, “the extreme ‘left’ particularly perceives conspiracies about issues concerning [...] capitalism (e.g., multinationals), and that the extreme ‘right’ particularly perceives conspiracies about topics such as science (e.g., evolution and climate change) or immigration” (Van Prooijen *et al.*, 2015, p. 576). Since conspiracy theories can be found in content produced by extremist groups with entirely different ideologies (Rousis *et al.*, 2022), we once again conclude that their power rests on their form (structure) and not content (subject matter).

The relation between extremism and conspiracy theorizing seems to be bidirectional and self-reinforcing, since the former can be seen as “a by-product of engaging in extremist spaces as well as a cause” (B. Lee, 2024, p. 353). Some authors found that the process of radicalisation into extremism instigates the sort of crippled epistemology that is associated with conspiracy theory meaning-making (Van Prooijen *et al.*, 2015, p. 576). At the same time, however, the involvement with conspiracy theories may also lead to radicalisation, as the world is increasingly seen through the lenses of oversimplified narratives and dichotomic oppositions. In fact, conspiracy theories have been found to have a role in contexts of extremism as a ‘radicalising multiplier’ (Bartlett & Miller, 2010), feeding back into the group’s internal dynamics and ideologies.

Even so, since there is no single pathway to radicalisation, it would not be possible to state that conspiracy theories are an intrinsic feature of it. Besides, though they may be quite important for some radical individuals, they can also be a marginal factor for others (B. Lee, 2024) – and, as it has been mentioned, belief in conspiracy theories can also be found among political moderates (Avramov *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, although conspiracy theories in general should not be seen as an inherent

component nor as something exclusive to extremists, this thesis argues that the specific conspiracy narratives being here analysed do play a central part (as doorway and/or catalyst) in the process of radicalisation.

As such, there are three broad roles that conspiracy theories can play in radicalisation (B. Lee, 2024), which can also be related to the *Three Pillars of radicalisation* (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2019). First, the psychological role: motivations underlying radicalisation and conspiracy belief can be attributed to ‘perceived deprivation’, that is, the perception of a discrepancy between the rewards one feels entitled to and what they are receiving becomes an incentive to join a movement promising restitution (Dawson, 2023). This role can be associated to the first pillar of radicalisation: *Needs* – the motivational element coming from the ‘quest for significance’, the fundamental desire to matter, the craving for respect (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2019). Then, there is the narrative role that conspiracy theories can play in radicalisation: the ‘rare knowledge’ of conspiracy theories provides a sense of exceptionalism, also structuring the world into in-group/out-group, enhancing the appeal of extremist narratives (B. Lee, 2024). This role is related to the pillar *Narratives* – the ideological narrative identifies the means to gain significance and legitimizes it (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2019). Last, there is the social role: both conspiracy theories and extremist spaces provide well-knit communities with strong in-group bonding (B. Lee, 2024), relating to the last pillar: *Networks* – social communities validate the implementation of ideas into practice (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2019).

This shows not only how conspiracy theories contribute to the radicalisation process (through the roles described by B. Lee), but also how these roles fit well with the very structure of the process itself (the needs, narratives, and networks framework developed by Kruglanski *et al.*). After all, radicalisation and conspiracy theories are both influenced by the conditions of the political system from which they emerge, stemming “from complex and contingent sets of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutional actors” (Della Porta, 2018, p. 463). For that reason, research on radicalisation gives varying degrees of significance “to explanations based on individual factors, wider structural factors and contextual factors such as ideology and social relationships” (B. Lee, 2024, p. 346).

One way in which this can be organized is dividing it into three inter-related levels (Della Porta, 2011; Steiner & Önnersfors, 2018): 1. Micro-level – the medium/the individual (motivations, personal choices); 2. Meso-level – addressees and addressers/communities (recruitment networks, socialization processes, support reinforcement); and 3. Macro-level – the message/the ideas (social valuation of the context, ideology). This clarifies the scope of the present research, which is working on the macro-level of ideas. Nevertheless, it is still important to consider the meso-level, since the Telegram channels under analysis also configure communities of addressees and addressers with their own dynamics. The role that communication plays in radicalisation is also emphasized in research that understands radicalisation as an inherently persuasive process, where messages influence beliefs and/or behaviour so that they align with those promoted by the radical ideology (Braddock, 2023).

However, Busher *et al.* (2023, p. 3) present a pertinent question: “to what extent is radicalisation about changing ideas, beliefs, opinions, or worldviews, and to what extent is it about the adoption of increasingly radical actions?”. To Steiner and Önnersfors (2018, p. 7), “most instances of radicalisation happen on a merely symbolical and imagined level”, meaning that radicalisation does not necessarily mean a change in behaviour /action. In this sense, ideology may be seen as an important variable. As a set of presupposed or preconstructed values, narratives, encoded knowledge, or implicit assumptions that take the shape of ‘common sense’ (Fairclough, 1995), ideology may serve a variety of purposes in the radicalisation process depending on the involved actors (Coolsaet, 2023). For Ramakrishna (2023), rather than being its source, ideology serves to support and enable the process of radicalisation at the individual, group, and system levels. While it may be viewed as a sort of ‘after-the-fact rationalization’, the role of ideological narratives under determined situations may also be seen as central to the process, even coming to interact with other alternative conditions for radicalisation (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2019; Hyzen & Van Den Bulck, 2021).

In general, it can be said that radicalisation and extremism are a matter of degree on a continuum, that can be relational (exist in relation) to the notion of ‘moderation’ (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2019) or ‘mainstream’ (Steiner & Önnersfors, 2018). Here, we fall back to a problem

that was similarly touched upon when I talked about conspiracy theories ‘from the bottom-up’ and ‘from the top-down’. It has been made clear that conspiracy narratives, as a language of opposition, created by the powerless to criticize power, are qualitatively different from those created as a language of counter-subversion, used by the elite to maintain power relations (even if I argue that both are equally problematic). A parallel can be traced with the notion of extremism. According to Stevenson (2026, p. 103), ‘extremism’ is an analytically weak concept, since it is depoliticising, that is, it misleadingly equates emancipatory critique to oppressive violence, enabling “repressive governance of dissent” and entrenching “the hegemony of an unjust status quo”. The author refers to the notion that ‘extremism’, being relational to ‘the norm’, is inherently problematic, since ‘the norm’ is often problematic in itself (especially nowadays).

This becomes clear when analysing right-wing extremist, as Stevenson argues: the threats of white supremacy, for instance, are not just ideological, but *structural* – they should not be seen as “an external aberration from the political ‘mainstream’” (*Ibid.*, p. 102), but as an attempt to re-enforce and stabilise *the system that is already in place*. The author ends his article by calling for the re-politicization of right-wing extremism, highlighting the differences between oppressive violence and other types of political dissent which often seeks to dismantle noxious hierarchies. In this sense, I will refrain from using the term carelessly in this book, opting to characterize a discourse as radical, primarily when it rejects or deviates, not from its own ‘mainstream’ context of production, but rather from common international human rights standards⁽⁶⁾ (Ogbonnaya, 2013). The same shall be done regarding conspiracy theory’s status as counter-narratives constructed in opposition to the ‘mainstream’ (which is here understood not as the system in which discourses are created, but this larger notion of ‘human rights core values’ cited in footnote 11).

Before closing this chapter, it is interesting to note that the term radicalisation, stemming from the Latin *radix* meaning ‘root’, “implies

(6) The following ‘core values’ cited by Schmid (2013, p. 11) are worth highlighting: gender and racial equality, pluralism or multiculturalism, “separation of state and religion, freedom of thought and expression, equality of opportunity, [...] respect for human rights and humanitarian law, and respect for and responsibility, towards minorities”.

a movement downwards (or symbolically backwards in time) to a presumed pristine origin” (Steiner & Önnersfors, 2018, p. 7). In this sense, this longing for a glorious past appears in many extremist narratives featuring “promises of redemption, reintegration into a peaceful and positive state of uncorrupted nature, environmental sustainability, health and pro-life, traditional family values”, etc. (Önnersfors, 2019, p. 19). The roots are thus associated to the origin or foundation of ideas and concepts, in a way that being a ‘radical’ is often seen as the same as being a ‘fundamentalist’ (Steiner & Önnersfors, 2018).

It is relevant for the current study to consider an account of ‘fundamentalism’ that is broad enough to also include non-religious groups, since quite often the distinction between religious and secular versions of a fundamentalist movement are quite unclear (Peels, 2023). For instance, the case of neo-Nazism presents a historical narrative that is substantially similar to religious ones, grounded on the idea of: an original paradisaical state – when certain places were populated only with the ‘Aryan race’; a subsequent fall from paradise – caused by mass-immigration, multiculturalism, and the rise of Judaism (and Islam, more recently); followed by a redemption story – plans for making such territories return to their supposed cultural, ethnic, and religious roots (Peels, 2023, p. 738). Besides, the neo-Nazi also share various practical attributes with religious fundamentalism, embracing symbols and performing rituals to strengthen their ideals and identity (*Ibid.*). As such, it appears the same affective motivations drive religious and non-religious fundamentalists, namely the fear of invasion by an Other, the threat to moral order, as well as the search for meaning, certainty, and control.

In conclusion, fundamentalism is here understood as an ideology, measure, or action that is, at the same time, reactionary towards modern developments (since it rejects current liberal ethics, science, or specific technologies) as well as modern (since it tends to make universal claims, interprets things more literally, understands particular scriptures as infallible, and actively uses digital media); being also based on a historical narrative presented in terms of cosmic dualism (good/evil), the notion of paradise, a fall from it, and a possible ensuing redemption (Peels, 2023).

Grasping the intricacies of fundamentalism, polarisation, and radicalisation necessitates multidisciplinary and multi-methodological approaches, as knowledge is presently dispersed among various fields. Simultaneously, each work will inevitably highlight a particular notion of radicalisation that suits its specific subject and objective (Junk *et al.*, 2020). As such, the present research takes a very specific approach to radicalisation, seeing it as a process that happens through communication. Steiner and Önnersfors (2018, p. 26) write about studying “radicalisation as a social process and communicative practice”, by noting “how radical ideas are transmitted by social networks and contribute to the polarisation of public political discourse”, including (but not limited to) “advocating sweeping political change and system-transforming solutions for government and society”. This is the understanding of radicalisation, as a practice that takes place within communication, that is at the heart of the present research.

Since there can be distinct ways to understand the problem of the present research, I have defined, in this chapter, this work’s specific understanding of what conspiracy theories are and how they relate to digital spaces and radicalisation. I have explained that not all conspiracy theories can be understood as manifestations of social struggles, since many serve to strengthen existing power relations, further excluding minorities from decision-making processes. Moreover, we have seen how conspiracy theories oversimplify complex issues and make unclear connections between causes and effects, further constructing individual and group identities in opposition to other communities, and creating differences between social groups, thus mobilizing people in political conflicts, ultimately creating irresolvable conflicts.

Due to the technological affordances of digital spaces (particularly Telegram, the data source of this research) which facilitate their production and circulation, online conspiracy theories fuel friction, antagonism, and feelings of distrust, influencing both on- and offline behaviours of people involved in concretely harmful notions and agendas. At the same time, we observe heightened polarization in such digital spaces, that is, the process of clustering of similar individuals into fairly

isolated groups whose primary result is the reinforcement of particular ideologies. Most importantly, due to their many similarities, radicalisation and conspiracy theories can both fuel and produce each other, supporting this work's hypothesis that structural aspects of conspiracy theories fit within the processual characteristics of radicalisation.

Considering this analytical framework as a start-out point, we move on to the materials and methods that are here used to provide new understandings of this problem, which the cited literature had not yet uncovered.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This research leans on the notion that conspiracy theory positions (resistance against certain ideas and acceptance towards others) are “mirrored linguistically, rhetorically, and semantically” (Önnerfors, 2019, p. 88), meaning that they are identifiable through discourse analysis. From that, it stands to reason that the application of computational linguistics is adequate to this study. However, as mentioned before, this work also approaches the use of machine learning models from a critical point of view, in a way that the analysis of the method itself takes an important space in this book.

In this section, I explain the methodology used for: 2.1 – collecting data, cleaning, and organizing the corpus, 2.2 – refining existing computational methods to better suit the study of conspiracy theories, 2.3 – the limitations of working with AI, as well as necessary ethical considerations, and 2.4 – merging the methods of computational processing with semiotics.

2.1. Data collection and winnowing

This work uses two different datasets. For practical purposes, I will call them the ‘small dataset’ (used in the pilot experiment) and the ‘large dataset’ (used in the workshop – the final experiment with more participants). For both, textual data (text messages written in

natural language⁽¹⁾) were systematically collected from publicly accessible Telegram channels constrained to the period between January 2023 to December 2024. More precisely, data was collected in UTF-8 (the standard character encoding used for electronic communication), which includes emojis as characters. Therefore, although the texts are mostly comprised of natural written language, there is an element of pictorial representations in them as well.

For the small dataset, the channels that were scrapped were chosen from a cross-platform approach, using links from Stormfront⁽²⁾. In order to find potential Telegram channels of interest, the search-bar from the website was used. By typing “t.me”, it was possible to obtain results from messages in the Stormfront message boards that mentioned Telegram channels. From all the found links, only the publicly available channels were considered. Out of these, only channels with more than 10,000 text messages were selected. The purpose of this selection was to find channels whose material could reasonably be expected to lead to new and emerging results. As such, out of this total, some channels were dismissed for being too USA-focus (which is to say that more global or even Europe-focus channels were preferred), and/or for having less than 15 thousand subscribers (bigger channels were preferred). Given that, text messages have been collected from a total of 4 channels, making up the smaller dataset.

In order to keep the researchers involved in this work as well as the Telegram users safe from any potential harassment, the exact names of the selected groups and channels cannot be shared. For that reason, the data sources are here mentioned only by acronyms:

- **BLA**: bigger far-right global news aggregator channel w/ 223,830 subscribers, containing 23,358 text-messages (2023) + 25,221 text-messages (2024).

(1) Natural language is any language used organically in a human community (in the simplest way, we can cite English, Portuguese, Arabic, but also dialects, sign languages, etc.). In a sense, it is easier to understand natural language by what it is not, namely: artificial/constructed languages (e.g. Klingon, Elvish), languages of formal logic (e.g. Python, C++, java), and non-human organic communication systems (e.g. whale vocalizations, honeybees' waggle dance).

(2) Stormfront was known as the Internet's first major racial hate site and neo-Nazi forum. It has now been deactivated, but the website was still available when material selection began (early 2024).

- **CIG**: smaller far-right global news aggregator channel w/ 105,499 subscribers, containing 14,642 text-messages (2023) + 14,828 text-messages (2024).
- **WLM**: white supremacist activism channel w/ 22,841 subscribers, containing 2,631 text-messages (2023) + 2,162 text-messages (2024).
- **ELB**: Europe-focused neo-Nazi news aggregator channel w/ 17,014 subscribers, containing 708 text-messages (2023) + 851 text-messages (2024).

For the large dataset (compiled about 8 months later), 15 channels were selected from the Conspiracy Theory Resource created by Imperati *et al.* (2025), available in the GitHub page of the University of Sapienza Systems Lab⁽³⁾. This resource compiles a total of 11,618 channels collected by the authors from a cross-platform approach (the majority of the channel URL addresses were originally obtained from YouTube and Reddit). Within the constraints of the focus of this research, the specific data sources that were obtained from this resource were selected to be as diversified as possible, collecting input data from a somewhat heterogeneous set of groups and channels, thus ensuring that the data are representative of the population and not biased toward a particular demographic.

From the total of 11,618 channels, the following types of were disregarded: channels in LOTE (languages other than English); less active channels (not updated daily); channels with less than a thousand text-messages; channels with a country or state in the title (due to it being too location-specific), and channels that did not exist before 2022. By ordering the remaining channels according to the number of subscribers, we selected the Top-15. Adding these to the previous dataset, the final corpus size is composed of 19 channels, as described in Table 1.

(3) SystemsLab-Sapienza. Conspiracy resource and url datasets. <https://github.com/SystemsLab-Sapienza/conspiracy-dataset-telegram>, 2025.

Table 1. Final corpus description.

ACRONYM	MAIN THEME / KEYWORDS	SUBSCRIBERS	TOTAL MESSAGES
CRN	Cryptocurrency	926,083	3,031
TCA	Cryptocurrency	468,317	2,792
ISV	Russian news	401,170	22,034
BLA	Far-right global news	223,830	48,579
WTM	Far-right global news	163,930	27,392
VGF	Far-right alt-medicine influencer	132,437	6,133
THC	Far-right historical revisionism	127,078	3,671
GPO	Far-right global news	127,066	36,763
SNN	Far-right influencer	121,582	38,613
DAU	Military conspiracy theories	116,241	9,691
TCH	Far-right conspiracy theories	114,671	8,110
PYM	Religious alt-medicine	113,140	1,328
SHA	Far-right global news	109,329	1,997
CIG	Far-right global news	105,499	29,470
CIN	Far-right global news	97,681	25,475
GTV	Far-right conspiracy theories	90,657	7,522
BNJ	Far-right influencer	74,257	6,124
WLM	White supremacism	22,841	4,793
ELB	European neo-Nazism	17,014	1,559

Data was collected with the use of a scraper tool. While scraping is a particularly questioned way of retrieving data due to legal and ethical considerations (Sold & Junk, 2021), since it does not consider user consent to data collection, the perceived societal benefit of this research outweighs the obligation to seek consent of the data sources. Additionally, all Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and any other possibly sensitive or personal information were either not collected in the first place or were masked with the use of unique anonymized numerical identifiers (according to article 89 of the General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR), as to protect the privacy of data subjects.

Lastly, it is worth highlighting that we have no way of knowing if a portion of these channels are run by bots – meaning that part of the text-messages that have been collected from such channels and are here analysed may have been created by AI. Since the focus on this work is on text interpretation (meaning-making processes related to *reading*, not *producing* text), this is not a problem.

2.2. Computational processing

Even though AI tools are becoming increasingly popular, specialists still struggle to understand how they work, why they fail, and what is the extent of their capacities, because of their emergent properties (Bommasani *et al.*, 2022). Due to their fundamentally sociotechnical nature, research that seeks to better understand or simply work with machine models requires deep interdisciplinary partnership (*Ibid.*). For that reason, this research was carried out in collaboration with Dr. Marco Antonio Stranisci, Research Fellow from the Computer Science Department of the University of Turin and co-founder of *Aequa.Tech s.r.l.*, an academic startup specialized in NLP and AI tools for flagging and debunking hate speech and mis/disinformation content.

In the present work, we used Frame Semantic Theory (Fillmore, 2006), an approach that proved to be quite effective in the fields of disinformation and hate speech, but that had not, up until this point, been adapted to the specific discursive structure of conspiracy theories. In a nutshell, the frame semantic approach rests on the notion that the understanding of a single word evokes a complex set of essential knowledge that relates to it, that is, ‘a frame of semantic knowledge’. The refinement of NLP tools for structural analysis of conspiracy theories is described in more detail in Part II of this book, however, for the purposes of organization, the research outline is as follows:

The first task was *data annotation*. Simply put, text annotation is the process of adding a tag to a text excerpt to enable machine learning models (such as LLMs) to identify patterns and generate statistical predictions based on them. This procedure was carried out in two different instances, both at the University of Turin with the contribution

of research volunteers (described in detail in *Section 3.2*). This was the stage in which we sought the generalizable structure that could be applied to conspiracy theories of distinct themes and subjects (following the main objective of this research).

From the literature, we know that conspiracy texts present lower internal cohesion, but high inter-textual cohesion (Miani *et al.*, 2022), suggesting that conspiracy theories do have an overarching worldview that may provide inroads for classification algorithms (by ‘text-classification’ I mean the automatic classification of a text as conspiratorial or non-conspiratorial). Additionally, the notion of a conspiracy worldview is also present in the past works of other scholars, especially from semiotics (such as the term “code-text” for Madisson, or the “universal form” for Eco) – something that I explain further in *Section 4.3*, where I discuss this work’s approach to conspiracy theory text classification.

The next step was the *implementation of the LLM-as-judge framework*. Here, the machine model was fed the annotations carried out by humans to, then, generate its own automatic annotations of text spans that were not yet read by any person. This task was carried out in collaboration not only with Dr. Stranisci, but also with Dr. Shaina Ashraf, Research Assistant from the Department of Mathematics and Informatics, in the Research Group in Language Technologies, of the Phillips University of Marburg, whose expertise was invaluable to the accomplishment of this research (further described in *Section 3.2*).

Since conspiracy theories and radicalisation are human-driven problems, the development of effective AI solutions to deal with them requires a human-in-the-loop approach (Fernandez & Harith, 2021). Human feedback and expertise, when integrated in the decision-making process, could help “mitigating the impact of erroneous or controversial outputs” (*Ibid.*, p. 26). Because of that, the last task of the computational tool refinement consisted in the *evaluation of the LLM outputs* carried out in collaboration with research volunteers who manually evaluated the automatic annotations done by the LLMs, following a framework (detailed in *Section 4.4*).

This process of automatic annotation by LLM (that was defined in the Pilot and tested/evaluated in the Workshop) was precisely the answer Research Question 1: *How can we computationally (in large-scale)*

identify the language patterns (signs, texts, and codes) that structure the conspiracy theories that circulate on Telegram channels?

Through these experiments, we sought to examine the structural coherence of particular conspiracy narratives, in order to identify a higher-level and generalizable conformity of conspiracy theories altogether, as modes of interpretation – as was the general objective of this work. With that, we ultimately arrived a ‘typology of conspiracy theories’, as well as other valuable results, including: an up-to-date dataset of conspiracy theories enriched with annotated frames; a quali-quantitative analysis of the use of frame annotation for data generation, and a prompting methodology for LLM-use that enabled the extraction and organization of the structure of a conspiracy theory from a given input.

Finally, one last experiment was designed and carried out to identify the patterns that surfaced from the computational analysis, as to answer *RQ 2 – What different kinds of meanings arise from such rhetorical structure?* For that, we took the results from the Workshop experiment and used them as input, asking the LLM to convert the annotated text-messages into ‘conspiracy theory storylines’, following a structure that I have determined based on the literature (further described in *Section 6.1*). These storylines allowed for the identification of the kinds of conspiracy theories that are overall most discussed in the analysed Telegram channels, painting a broad picture of such narratives and what they say about the groups of people that are represented by them.

2.3. Drawbacks from working with Big Data and Artificial Intelligence

The benefits of AI applications to the scientific endeavour are undeniable –predicting molecular interactions for drug and vaccine discovery, synthesizing data for climate models and weather forecasting, mapping phase transitions in novel materials, as well as allowing for more accurate medical diagnoses are only some of the possible ways in which AI tools have been supporting scientific inference (Rathkopf, 2026; Baele & Brace, 2024). AI has also shown significant potential for automated critical and analytical tasks on large information repertoires

– something that is changing how communication is now analysed, critiqued, and produced (Montanari, 2025, p. 210).

Nevertheless, what is also indisputable is the fact that research with algorithmic tools is imbued with several caveats and concerns pertaining to three overall scopes: 1. *model training*, 2. *protections for model outputs*, and 3. *liability for model performance* (Bommasani *et al.*, 2022).

First, when it comes to issues related to the data that is used to train a model, there are two main concerns: 1a. *copyright disputes* and the extractivist nature of current AI development, as well as 1b. *biases in the datasets*. Concern 1a regards how machine models are necessarily trained on massive datasets which frequently incorporate materials scraped from the internet that are copyrighted and potentially protected by intellectual property law (i.e., books, visual art pieces, music, movies, etc.). Some of this material is also simply personal (such as blogs, social media posts and photographs), whose scrapping raises questions relating to the exploitation of public and private data. This information is often collected without the clear consent of the copyright holders and Internet users, which is a clear legal and ethical issue (Bommasani *et al.*, 2022; Shi, 2025; Rockwell & Hegde, 2025; Montanari, 2025).

Additionally, this dataset that is used to train AI models can also suffer from intrinsic, representational bias (Bommasani *et al.*, 2022) – which is concern 1b. This means that some groups can be misrepresented by negative stereotypes, echoing societal and historical discrimination, while others can be underrepresented or simply erased from the dataset – meaning that the model will struggle when faced with input data relative to such groups (*Ibid.*). Besides, other groups of people can be overrepresented. For instance, the model BERT “appears to encode an Anglocentric perspective by default, which can amplify majority voices and contribute to homogenization of perspectives or monoculture” (*Ibid.*, p. 131). These training dataset biases may lead the model to produce unfair outcomes.

In this regard, I would like to point to the potential biases in the data collected for the present research: time-period (data is biased to the world events happening during January 2023 – December 2024); geographical location (we did not track the metadata location of the

channel users, therefore we have no way of knowing if data is biased towards one or another region of the globe – although we have strong indicatives⁽⁴⁾ that the Global North is overrepresented); and demographic (similarly, we did not collect age or gender metadata and have no way of knowing which population is the majority or minority in the dataset).

As put by Rockwell and Hegde (2025, p. 285), a perfectly unbiased dataset will probably never exist, since “[a]ny gathering of data will reflect the time and purposes of the collectors which is why it is important that datasets be documented”. At the same time, we must account for the second concern regarding work with AI: 2. *protections for model outputs*. When working with pernicious and sensitive material, it is important to keep in mind that Open Access datasets can be used by extremists to train extremist bots.

Extremism as well as conspiratorial language has been noted to be quite niche, “using neologisms and linguistic structures in highly specific ways” (Baele & Brace, 2024, p. 29). This can, initially, pose a challenge to researchers using LLMs to work with such materials, however, scholars have developed fine-tuning procedures that are successful in training models to be proficient in extremist imagery (*Ibid.*). Making such models public pose a clear danger as they could be used not as intended, to carry out analysis of extremist or conspiratorial text, but to output more of the same kind of content.

Having to control and funnel the access to research data makes it difficult for works to be assessed and it will also imply that it will be more arduous for future research to be built on past ones (Fernandez & Harith, 2021, p. 20). For all of the reasons discussed here, all the dataset used in this research can be made available to researchers upon direct contact with me or any of my collaborators, since I have opted to not make this very sensitive dataset openly available to the public.

Speaking of lack of transparency, the third and last concern regards *liability for model performance*. The fact of the matter is that machine models fail, and we mostly do not understand why – LLMs are known to be “black boxes whose output is difficult to predict or explain”

(4) Constant mentions to political figures and events that have taken place in the Global North.

(Rockwell & Hegde, 2025, p. 283). In order to minimize the level of unknown variables in this equation, researchers need to be aware how each model is trained and calibrated, and where their interaction data goes when they use the model. For the present work, we used the Philipps University Marburg Server (MaRC3a) and Marburg Storage Cluster (MaSC) for storing and computation of LLM experiments. This way, we made sure that none of our (very sensitive) data has circulated outside of the university servers.

The model that was used was Llama 3.3, the open-source pretrained language model from the company Meta. According to its Model Card⁽⁵⁾, Llama 3.3 was pretrained on approximately 15 trillion tokens of data obtained “from publicly available sources” (this data has a cutoff of December 2023). The model was fine-tuned with “publicly available instruction datasets” and over 25 million examples generated by the machine model. Despite the issues already discussed regarding the legality of these “publicly available sources”, it is also important to acknowledge that we cannot know the possible biases contained in this large training dataset.

Shi (2025, p. 111) suggests “caution against the illusion of machine omnipotence”, urging researchers to recognize that “the real forces behind artificial intelligence still stem from human society”. Many have been treating this emergent technology as a silver bullet, yet, its many risks and downsides have been noted in works dating back to the last century. For this reason, this book is aimed at criticizing such methods instead of just applying them – as suggested by Montanari (2025, p. 191), we “aim to engage with AI in a more balanced manner, neither uncritically embracing it nor viewing it through an apocalyptic lens”. Here is where semiotics may be of assistance, addressing this lack of transparency in our awareness of technology, exposing and interpreting hidden structures and meanings in digital spaces, thus helping to “mitigate the ideological effects of technological invisibility and ensure responsible and ethical development and deployment of AI” (Leone, 2024, p. 22-23).

(5) Available in the following GitHub repository: https://github.com/meta-llama/llama-models/blob/main/models/llama3_3/MODEL_CARD.md, last accessed March 2026.

2.4. Semiotic analysis

As we have just seen in the previous section, AI “rests on a huge latent space that is not only invisible but also structurally unknowable” – meaning the “algorithmic processes, variational autoencoders, and data flows” remain unseen but have very concrete and visible impacts (Leone, 2024, p. 5-6). Historically, computer systems design is a practice “interwoven with implicit and tacitly presupposed theories of signs, symbols and symbolic processes” (Irvine, 2023, p. 206). As such, the merging of semiotics research with computational linguistics is ideal. Besides, since tracing meaning back to its originating system is no longer feasible when it comes to artificially generated text, its exploration *must* be semiotic; following an examination of the actuality of an individual text from the perspective of larger socio-cultural infrastructures (Leone, 2024, p. 5). This would allow us to “recover these implicit semiotic principles and make them explicit for our understanding today”, mapping out the “unconsciously operational grammar of [computer] language” (Irvine, 2023, p. 206). With that in mind, this work does not investigate the causal processes of AI models, but rather, analyse its meaning effects semiotically.

I see semiotics as ad hoc, data-driven research. The qualitative analysis of the computational results was dependant on what the model was able to identify. Once the computational tool had been refined, it was possible to extract its first outputs and take them as object for semiotic analysis. If the idea is to use machine models as research assistants, this thesis tests out the capability of the refined tools to actually contribute to the field of political semiotics. To do that, I developed a conspiracy theory typology that is machine-readable (and replicable), with the objective to *make meaning visible*. By getting an LLM to reorganise inputted text into this typology, I aim to investigate how meaning arises from structure.

Focusing on discourse, this research employs mixed methods of qualitative analysis described in Campana Piva (2023) at its foundation. I already hinted at this in the *Introduction*, but here I describe it in more detail: as a methodological perspective, semiotics presents three interrelated levels of analysis (Leone *et al.*, 2020), namely:

- 1st *Conspiracy theory analysed as representation, as text* – helps to answer RQ 1: How can we computationally (in large-scale) identify the signs, texts, and codes that structure a conspiracy theory disseminated on online messaging applications?
- 2nd *Conspiracy theory analysed as modelling system, as mode of interpretation* – helps to answer RQ 2: What do these language patterns tell us about the nature of online conspiracy theories and their relationship to the process of radicalisation into extremism?
- 3rd Analysis of the processes of identity construction and self-description in conspiracy theories.

Since this work focuses on conspiracy theory as a discursive event (as an instance of language use), it is possible to relate these three levels of semiotic analysis with the three dimensions of discourse (and the perspectives through which discourse can be analysed) as described by Fairclough (1995):

- 1) *Text* – textual analysis consists of linguistic description, encompassing the “analysis of the texture of texts, their form and organization” (*Ibid.*, p. 4); complementary to the 1st level.
- 2) *Discourse practice* – intertextual analysis is the interpretation of the relationship between text production, consumption, and distribution, as well as genre (language use associated with a social activity) and orders of discourse (relationships of complementarity, inclusion/exclusion, and opposition between discursive practices of a social domain). Texts are situational, but the relation between text and context may be generalizing. Intertextual analysis thus links text to context, relating to the 2nd level above.
- 3) *Sociocultural practice* – social analysis consists in the explanation of the discursive event as a whole, relating to society and culture, since social and cultural phenomena are realized in the textual properties of a text (Fairclough, 1995); relates to the 3rd level.

I also slightly draw from Collective Action Framing (Benford & Snow, 2000), which is a methodological approach to analytically describe the meaning-making practices used by social movement actors

to mobilize supporters, engage observers, and challenge adversaries. More specifically, I use the perspective expanded by Ajjoub (2026), who writes that meaning-making in social movements is an interactive process resulting from the intersection of three factors:

- Cultural toolkits of ideas, beliefs, and narratives (as described by the original collective action theory),
- The contesting or challenging of particular narrative framings (which the author calls ‘counter-framing’), and
- The “back-and-forth interaction between frames and unfolding events” (which the author calls ‘frame–event dialectic’) (Ajjoub, 2026, p. 18).

These three factors are “conceptualized as meaning-generative mechanisms that produce new diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational claims”, capable to “alter the interpretive context” of events (*Ibid.*). Considering also this methodological framework, when possible (given the particularities of each analysed text), enriches this work.

Lastly, the analysed texts are also understood as ‘political discourse’, which is premised on to the capacity of actors to drive change (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). From this perspective, the focus is on how the “ways of representing the world enter as premises into reasoning about what we should do” (*Ibid.*, p. 86). In other words, discourse as representation (1. conspiracy theory as text) comprises premises of practical arguments and serve as reasons for action, not only describing what social reality is (2. conspiracy theory as modelling), “but also what it should be” (*Ibid.*, p. 103), tying it with the processes of radicalisation (3. sociocultural practice).

PART II

FIRST EXPERIMENTS

CHAPTER III

PILOT

This chapter narrates the iterative process of designing and carrying out the first batch of experiments of this research, which we have named ‘Pilot’. This process was grounded on the goal of going beyond just detection of conspiracy theories in Telegram channels, but rather, to attain a generalizable (that can be applied to different contexts) *structural analysis tool*. As such, the work started with a toy model, using only the small dataset and four annotators: two research volunteers⁽¹⁾, Dr. Stranisci, and I.

In our search for what makes the structure of a conspiracy theory computationally comprehensible (machine-readable), we first sought ways to identify the signs, texts, and codes that structure a conspiracy theory through NLP (as posed by Research Question 1). In very simple terms, in order for LLMs to be able to analyse conspiracy theories, we first had to ‘teach the AI’ to understand what a conspiracy theory *is*. For that, we humans first had to carry out what is called ‘corpus annotation’ (explained in *Section 3.2.*). But for *that* to be possible, it was first necessary to filter some of the dataset, so that we had a smaller number of text-messages to work with manually (this operation is described in *Section 3.1.*).

(1) I deeply thank Maziar Kianimoghadam Jouneghani and Arianna Longo, from the Humanities Department of the University of Turin (MA course in Language Technology and Digital Humanities), for their invaluable participation in this research.

After we had annotated the first few sets of text, we carried out a quantitative analysis of the annotations which showed quite satisfactory agreement rates (described in *Section 3.3.*). Considering this success, we tested the same annotation method on the LLMs, prompting them to annotate text in the same manner as previously done by us humans (thus checking the LLMs' capacity to 1st – categorize a text as conspiracy theory, and then 2nd – identify its structural elements). The results of this experiment with the machine models and their quantitative analysis were as satisfactory as the first one made with human annotators. Additionally, some surprising outcomes prompted me to adapt the methodology for the next experiment (described in *Section 3.4.*).

3.1. Entity-centric sampling

As mentioned in *Chapter 2*, LLMs operate on the basis of statistics. Therefore, in order to 'teach the AI' to understand what is a conspiracy theory (so that, later, we may use it to help us analyse it), human researchers need to read and annotate sets of texts, which can be taken by the model as examples of what to look for and, later, can also be used for performance evaluation. This annotation process is further described in the next section. For now it is important to understand that this process is manual, therefore, we needed to filter the dataset to a smaller size in order to be able to work with it.

We started with the hypothesis that no more than 20% of the text-messages of each Telegram channel would in fact be recognizable as being conspiratorial – people discuss all sorts of subjects in these channels, not a lot is bound to be specifically about conspiracy theories. Because of that 'low' percentage, rather than picking random samples from the dataset, it was decided that we needed to separate *relevant* spans of text for annotation, that is, texts that would have bigger odds of being conspiratorial. To do that, we opted to look at entity-centric snapshots of data, that is, text-messages that centre around certain topics of discussion ('entity'). These topics were decided on the basis of automatic detection of *people*, *places*, and *organizations*.

The first step was *Name Entity Recognition*, where we obtained an automatically generated list all the people, organizations, and geopolitical entities that could be found on the dataset⁽²⁾. Then, each entity was linked to Wikidata – a machine-readable encyclopaedia that stores information about several millions of entities and facts about the world – via a process called *Entity Linking* in order to conflate different names into one (e.g., Biden + Joe Biden = same person; IDF + Israel Defence Force = same org). Next, entity types were retrieved (e.g., Joe Biden → person; CNN → news agency), as well as the country of each person and organisation (e.g., Joe Biden → United States; Free Syrian Army → Syria). Last, statistics were used to filter only the Top-15 people, organizations, and countries that were mentioned the most in each channel. In the majority of times, the numbers of mentions were the same or very close to each other (diverging past the millesimal fraction). Therefore, the order of mentions described in Table 2 is not relevant, but rather the content of the lists themselves is what is worth noting.

Table 2. Results of the entity-centric sampling process (selection of main topics of discussion).

	BLA	CIG	ELB	WLM
Most quoted countries	Syria	Syria	Germany	United States
	Russia	Israel	England	Poland
	Lebanon	Russia	Austria	England
	Israel	Gaza	Italy	Czech Republic
	Ukraine	United States	Israel	Russia
	Iraq	Ukraine	Russia	Austria
	Iran	China	France	France
	Gaza	Iran	Australia	Slovakia
	United States	France	Ireland	Turkey
	Colombia	Iraq	Canada	Australia
	France	Lebanon	United States	Ireland
	Brazil	England	Ukraine	Bavaria
	China	Germany	Netherlands	Israel
	Venezuela	Yemen	Haiti	Ukraine
	Netherlands	Italy	Sweden	Canada

(2) In the Pilot, we used the smaller dataset composed of text-messages from the first 4 Telegram channels.

Most quoted organizations	Hamas	Hamas	TikTok	Patriotic Alternative
	RIA Novosti	NATO	Bruderhof Communities	Pravda
	Israel Defense Forces	United States Congress	Waffen-SS	RMRS PG College
	TASS	White House	National Socialist Net.	Apple Inc.
	Druze	Houthis	Mastercard	UN Tourism
	NATO	Kremlin	White Earth Nation	Walmart
	Al Mayadeen	European Union	World Economic Forum	Google
	Al Arabiya	CNN	Cash App	TikTok
	Free Syrian Army	Israel Defense Forces	Patriot Front	Giant Eagle
	Reuters	Patriot Front	IMDb	National Action
	Kremlin	United States Army	United States Air Force	Patriot Front
	CNN	Reuters	Twitter	Supreme Court of India
	Al Jazeera	Roman Senate	RT	Little Free Library
	White House	Supreme Court of India	Central Directorate of the Judicial Police	Groupe Union Défense
	European Union	The New York Times	Google	DB Regio
Most quoted people				
	Avner Netanyahu	Avner Netanyahu	Kim Dotcom	Werner Otto von Hentig
	Vladimir Putin	Benjamin Netanyahu	Joachim Peiper	Rafał Trzaskowski
	Bashar al-Assad	Joe Biden	Tobias Menzies	Reggie White
	Benjamin Netanyahu	Vladimir Putin	Michael Stürzenberger	Teun van de Keuken
	Donald Trump	Donald Trump	Adolf Hitler	Eva Vlaardingerbroek
	Nicolás Maduro	Giorgia Meloni	Pavel Durov	Khvicha Kvaratskhelia
	Joe Biden	Yoav Gallant	Vladimir Putin	Patricie Fuxová
	Aleksandar Vučić	Herzi Halevi	Andriy Biletsky	Leo Sauer
	Bilal Erdoğan	Pavel Durov	Muhammad	Empress Elisabeth
	María Corina Machado	Donald Tusk	Vitalik Buterin	Ludwig Winder
	Herzi Halevi	Amos Hochstein	Tucker Carlson	Wybren van Haga
	Giorgia Meloni	Bilal Erdoğan	David Irving	Andrei Sakharov
	Viktor Orbán	Nicolás Maduro	Lev Binzumovich Leviev	Mikhail Svetov
	Hassan Nasrallah	Martin Sellner	Jake Shields	Petr Fiala
	Pavel Durov	Xi Jinping	Thomas Sewell	Balša Brković

This process facilitated the identification of the main topics discussed in different groups, supporting an informed general picture of the channels' key differences and similarities.

As it can be seen in Table 2, the content of BLA most often regards the Middle East. It also discusses Russia and Ukraine quite frequently, as well as China and the United States. Surprisingly, data seems to indicate that the channel mentions political news from South America a bit more often than it does from Europe. It appears that regions such as Oceania and the whole African continent are not frequent subjects of discussion at all in this channel.

Most mentioned organizations in BLA are news agencies (RIA Novosti, TASS, Al Mayadeen, Al Arabiya, Al Jazeera, Reuters, and CNN), indicating that the content shared here allegedly originates from such sources. However, it is understood that even when quoting events from established information sources, some re-framing is bound to happen, especially since the texts messages configure short, paraphrased texts (not complete news pieces), in a way that these text-excerpts may still be biased even when the information comes from trusted sources.

Another type of organization that is most frequently cited are military or paramilitary groups (Hamas, Israel Defense Forces, NATO, Free Syrian Army), indicating the focus on armed conflicts as subjects of discussion. This once again shows that the conflicts in the Middle East are central concerns. Governmental institutions from the Global North (Kremlin, White House, and European Union) are also frequently cited. The presence of NATO and the European Union among the most mentioned organizations indicates that Europe may be more central to the discussions than what was previously understood from just the most cited countries. This also indicates a preference for treating Europe more often as a unity and less often as a complex set of distinct countries. The same does not apply to the treatment of South America, for instance, whose national governments appear to be referred to more often than European national governments.

The list of most mentioned people in BLA converges with the central topics indicated by the two previous lists. Political leaders from the Middle East are often talked about, as well as from the United States and Russia. The focus on far-right politicians (Aleksandar Vučić, María Corina Machado, Giorgia Meloni, and Viktor Orbán) is also interesting to note, not only is the channel talking about certain countries, but it focuses on countries whose government is led by right-wing figures.

Similarly to BLA, CIG most often discusses the Middle East, Russia, Ukraine, China, and the United States. Nevertheless, it differs when it comes to its focus on some central-European countries and the United Kingdom. It appears, however, that continents such as South America, Oceania, and Africa are not frequent subjects of discussion in this channel.

The news agencies mentioned in CIG (CNN, Reuters, and The New York Times) are mostly from North America, which already indicates a bias, without even considering possible reframing made by the channel administrators. Governmental institutions are somewhat varied, including those from the Global North (White House, United States Congress, Kremlin, European Union, and Roman Senate), yet there is also the surprising frequent mention of the Supreme Court of India (South Asia). The references to military organizations from the United States and the Middle East are also popular (Houthis, United States Army). Lastly, it is also worth mentioning that the neo-fascist hate group Patriot Front also gets many mentions in this channel.

This table indicates a major overlap between the most mentioned people from BLA and from CIG, showing that there is a high chance both channels are discussing the same events. Just like BLA, CIG favours discussions on far-right political leaders (Giorgia Meloni, Nicolás Maduro, and Martin Sellner). The channel also discusses content related to specific politicians from Israel (Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, and Chief of the General Staff) and the United States (former and current presidents, as well as the Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources).

ELB seems to be focused on the Global North, mentioning more central-European countries than the other channels, and also talking about Canada besides the United States. However, the channel also mentions Australia and Haiti – countries from regions that are not frequently cited in other channels (Oceania and the Caribbean).

Differently from the other channels, ELB does not often mention news agencies (with the exception of the Russian network RT), which indicates that the content from the messages cannot be easily traced back to established information sources. Interestingly, popular tech companies or web platforms (TikTok, Twitter, and Google) are often mentioned, which could indicate cross-platform posting.

On previous readings of the content of this channel, it was possible to identify a strong presence of messages aimed at triggering action from the channel subscribers on other social media platforms, especially IMDb. ELB often divulges a so-called documentary film, asking subscribers to spread it across social media. The frequent mention of Mastercard and Cash App also indicates that economic transactions between users and the channel administrator(s) configure an important aspect of the channel. Besides politicians, ELB also mentions many influencers and activists (especially neo-Nazi and far-right activists). The frequent mentions of David Irving, a known conspiracy theorist, is also highly relevant here.

Russia, Ukraine and Israel are common topics across all channels. So is the United States. The channel WLM stands out for being more focused on Eastern-European countries than the other channels. Similarly to ELB, WLM does not mention news agencies (with the exception of Pravda) or any established information source. Interestingly, two popular chain stores from the United States (Walmart and Giant Eagle) are often mentioned, together with big tech companies (Apple, Google, and TikTok). The majority of mentioned political organizations in this channel are far-right groups (Patriotic Alternative, National Action, Patriot Front, and Groupe Union Défense).

Besides citing some politicians (Rafał Trzaskowski, Wybren van Haga, Mikhail Svetov, and Petr Fiala), this channel mostly mentions television personalities (Teun van de Keuken, Patricie Fuxová), writers (Ludwig Winder, Balša Brković), and sports athletes (Reggie White, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Leo Sauer). This indicates that the content of the messages – that is, the real-world events being discussed here – are probably different from the ones discussed in the other channels.

In sum, Table 2 indicates the main topics of interest, that is, specific instances that configure potentially interesting subjects of discourse for analysis. After the identification of these topics, random text samples were generated for annotation with text excerpts that necessarily mentioned at least one of the relevant entities listed in the table.

3.2. Frame Index elaboration

As mentioned in *Section 2.2*, corpus annotation in NLP is the process of labelling expressions so that machine models can carry out statistical predictions. In order to manually annotate the sets of texts, it was necessary to decide upon a precise methodology for doing so, considering that the annotation process entails identifying relevant terms and expressions that have similar semantics and share common contexts so that they can have the same representation in the machine model. With that in mind, the next step was the definition of the taxonomy, that is, deciding on specific categories to annotate the texts with.

We decided to use the layout of FrameNet (a lexical database being developed at the International Computer Science Institute in Berkeley since 1997). The FrameNet approach (Fillmore, 2006) consists in the following: given a text span, the annotator must identify all elements that characterize a conspiracy theory according to specified parameters. It is important to highlight that this incredibly complex and exhaustive database that has been under development for the past thirty years does not have an annotated dataset for ‘conspiracy’ (until the time of writing), showcasing how the contribution of the present work is relevant. The research here detailed fills this gap by creating a structured, semiotics-informed framework for conspiratorial text annotation.

Since the original FrameNet database does not contain a ‘conspiracy’ Frame Index, the website offers what it understands to be the closest results, which are ‘collaboration’ and ‘offense’ (Figure 1 and 2, respectively).

Collaboration

Definition:

Partner_1 and **Partner_2** or a group of **Partners** work together in some **Undertaking**. The **Partners** are taken to be of equal status even when expressed disjointly.

CSTR actively **COLLABORATES** with the Departments of Artificial Intelligence and Physics.

Tom and the American composer Steve Riche have recently **COLLABORATED** on a piece of elevator music.

FEs:

Core:

Partner_1 [**Partner_1**]
Semantic Type: Human
Requires: **Partner_2**
Excludes: Partners

When the parties in a collaboration are expressed separately, this Frame Element marks constituents that express the one that is grammatically more prominent, i.e., the one that is the subject of an active clause.
Smithers **COLLABORATED** with Chief Wiggum

Partner_2 [**Partner_2**]
Semantic Type: Human
Requires: **Partner_1**
Excludes: Partners

This Frame element marks constituents expressing the grammatically less prominent, typically oblique, party in a collaboration.
Britain is **COLLABORATING** with France and West Germany in the development of anti-tank missiles

Partners [**Partners**]
Semantic Type: Human

This frame element marks expressions that express the parties that work together in an **Undertaking**.
Smithers and Chief Wiggum **COLLABORATED** well

Undertaking [**Undertaking**]

This frame element marks constituents that express the project in which the **Partners** are collaborating.
The two artists **COLLABORATED** on a mosaic.

Non-Core:

Degree [**Degree**]
Semantic Type: Degree

This FE marks expressions that indicate to what extent the **Partners** are cooperating.
The French government **COOPERATED** fully with the New Zealand police.

Duration [**Dur**]
Semantic Type: Duration
Manner [**Mannr**]
Semantic Type: Manner

This FE identifies the amount of time the **Partners** collaborate.

This FE identifies the **Manner** in which **Partner_1** collaborates with **Partner_2** or in which the **Partners** collaborate.

Figure 1. Frame Index for “collaboration”, website screen-capture (The FrameNet Project, n.d.).

Offenses

[Lexical Unit Index](#)

Definition:

Words in this frame describe acts in violation of a legal code.
He was accused of HIJACKING a tour bus full of people.

FEs:

Core:

Offense [Off]	The illegal act. He was charged with ASSAULT.
Perpetrator [P]	The individual who commits the Offense
Victim [Vic] Semantic Type: Sentient	This FE denotes the person or entity that is badly affected by the Offense. The police is investigating the HOMICIDE of Dr. Johnson.

Non-Core:

Degree [Deg] Semantic Type: Degree	This FE broadly picks out the degree of offense. She faces conviction on three counts of first-degree MURDER. Aggravated ASSAULT is usually considered a felony.
Punishment [Pun]	This FE denotes the Punishment that is specified by the statute in which the offense is defined. Suicide is a felony punishable by four years in prison.
Specification [Spec]	The Specification is an additional aspect of the main crime being committed. He was charged with ASSAULT causing actual bodily harm. The prosecutors decided to go with ARSON with intent to harm.

Figure 2. Frame Index for “offenses”, website screen-capture (The FrameNet Project, n.d.)

Using these two Frame Indexes as examples, I constructed the guidelines for conspiracy theory annotation. As a startup point, I considered the following definition of conspiracy theory: *a narrative that seeks to explain a determined circumstance as being the result of a secret plan implemented by a morally evil group of people that, if left unstopped, will lead to catastrophe* (adapted from Leone *et al.*, 2020 and Birchall, 2006).

As mentioned in Section 2.4, semiotics presents three interrelated levels of analysis (Leone *et al.*, 2020): 1st – conspiracy theory as a representation (*a narrative...*); 2nd – as a mode of interpretation (*... that explains a circumstance as being the result of a secret plan...*); and 3rd – analysis of identity construction processes (*...implemented by a morally evil group of people to hurt a group of victims*). As political discourse (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012), conspiracy theory as representation (1st level) comprises premises of practical arguments and serve as reasons for action (*...if left unstopped, will lead to catastrophe*), not only describing what social reality is (2nd level), but also what it should be (following a call-to-action).

With that, I started the process of writing the annotation guidelines. Three rounds of annotation were necessary until the guidelines were finally set. The first version of the guidelines is described below.

Definition:

A **circumstance** is the result of a **group of people** **acting** in **secret** to achieve an **evil end**, causing harm to a **group of victims**. If not stopped, this **plan** will lead to **catastrophe**, therefore **actions need to be taken**.

Hypothetical examples⁽³⁾

Forced vaccination is **being institutionalized** by the **authorities**, to **profit** from and **control** the **population** **under the guise** of public health. We need to **stand** against this oppression.

Multicultural policies **increase immigration**, serving to **replace** all **Christian white people** with **Muslims**, and **turning Europe** into a colony of Islam. You need to **stand up & join the fight** against **invasion**!

White folk is living under the thumb of a **government** that is **catering to minorities** and **hostile to us**. Our hard-earned **money is being shipped overseas to fund money laundering schemes** **packaged as humanitarian aid**. Our borders are wide open **importing** **people who have demonstrated hostility to us**, and **our families**. We are heading for **certain demise**.

Core:

Circumstance A piece of news, an event or series of events, something dangerous that is taking place or has taken place.
Yesterday **a white man was assaulted** by **a group of non-white invaders**.

Evil end The ultimate objective of the **out-group** that harms the **in-group** and leads to catastrophe.
Hundreds of **muslims** and **left wingers** unite to **protest** against the **far right** and **promote open borders** and the **Islamification of France**. As much as they try to **silence the truth**, we know that democracy is ruled by **the media**.

(3) In the original guidelines, I included examples taken directly from the dataset. For ethical reasons and the sake of anonymity, in the publication of this monograph, it was necessary to re-write the excerpts so that they are never directly quoted and cannot be traced back to the users who posted them.

The difference is that circumstance is something factual (verifiable) that happened or is happening, while the evil end is conspiratorial speculation. While “many Muslims immigrated to Germany this month” may be a circumstance, “Muslims will replace all Germans” is an evil end.

Plan The action(s), **secret** or not, being taken to achieve the **evil end**.

Public schools **indoctrinate** **our children** **with marxist doctrine**.

Out-group The enemy - “them”

In-group The victims - “us”

The **International Jewry** keep **starting wars, but they never fight in it**, only the **White Man** **die in the process**.

Non-core:

Secret Gives the connotation of secrecy to the **Plan**.

The real reason for “the invasion” of the USSR was an attempt to **prevent** **all Europe from becoming overrun** by the **red army**.

Call-to-action What should be done to avoid the catastrophic **evil end**.

Our race is under threat of **absolute extinction**. Either we **save it** or **die**. **Share this message around to wake your neighbours**.

In this step, it was paramount that the annotators understood the main theoretical foundation about what characterizes a conspiracy theory and its elements described on the Frame Index above, in order to minimize discrepancies between annotations. After the first annotation trial (four sets of one hundred text-messages for each annotator), I gathered feedback and re-wrote the guidelines. This was repeated thrice, adapting the Frame Index to the annotator’s observations.

The first change was the conflation of ‘evil end’ with ‘circumstance’ and ‘plan’. The annotators were having too much difficulty telling these

three elements apart in the dataset. Even if it was clear with the examples, in the practical exercise of annotation it became once again uncertain. As such, it was decided to refer to all three categories as just ‘plan’ – considering that the aspects of a plan that are already coming to fruition (that is, an event or circumstance that has taken or is taking place) are also included in the ‘plan’ category, as well as its intended consequences (‘evil end’).

Another interesting change was the understanding that the out- and in-groups should not in fact be considered as core-elements, since we were often able to find texts containing narratives which described such ‘us-vs.-them’ dynamics, but that were not conspiratorial. This is congruent with the literature, which states that ‘us-vs.-them’ are not only characteristic of conspiracy theories but also of radical discourse. Since not every radical discourse is conspiratorial, it makes sense that the presence of victims and/or enemies in a text does not necessarily indicate conspiracy thinking. In the opposite direction, an element that I had previously thought of as non-core turned out to be, in fact, a core component of conspiracy theory discourse: the ‘secret’. During the practical annotation trials, it became clear that the secretive aspect of certain circumstances is something unique to conspiratorial discourse.

An additional issue that was raised by one of the annotators was the fact that many text-messages could not be flagged as conspiratorial due to lack of core-elements, but could be seen as a statement that could be supportive of a conspiracy theory. In other words, many texts were found to be written in fairly objective/neutral tone, in a way that it was not possible to characterize it as conspiratorial, but – due to its subject – we found that these texts could be used as premises to support a conspiracy theory. I hereby acknowledge this issue as an important limitation of the present methodology, and in order to quantify it, we opted to add the following Boolean questions at the start of every annotation process:

Is the text *conspiratorial*?

If YES: Carry on with annotation.

If NO: Does the text contain a *statement that may support a conspiracy theory*?

If NO: Mark as ‘not relevant’.

If YES: tag text as “supportive statement” (no further annotation).

This way, we were able to obtain, from every set of annotation, a percentage of text-messages that we consider to be relevant for the study of conspiracy theories, but that due to the limitations of the current methodology, cannot be considered for analysis by the machine model.

Lastly, I also included additional instructions to the guideline, clarifying that a text-excerpt should only be tagged as conspiratorial if there is at least one core element in it. Furthermore, the text should be tagged as supportive of a conspiracy theory only if it contains a statement that can be used as argument for the existence of a conspiratorial plan. Given that, the final guidelines are described next.

Definition:

An **event** is the result of a **group of people** acting in **secret**, causing harm to a **group of victims**. If not stopped, this **plan** will lead to **catastrophe**, therefore **actions need to be taken**.

Hypothetical examples:

Forced vaccination is being institutionalized by the **authorities**, to **profit from and control** the **population** **under the guise** of public health. We need to **stand against this oppression**.

Multicultural policies increase immigration, serving to **replace** all **Christian white people** with **Muslims**, and **turning Europe into a colony of Islam**. You need to **stand up & join the fight** against **invasion**!

White folk is living under the thumb of a **government** that is **catering to minorities** and **hostile to us**. Our hard-earned **money is being shipped overseas to fund money laundering schemes** **packaged as humanitarian aid**. Our borders are wide open **importing** **people who have demonstrated hostility to us**, and **our families**. We are heading for **certain demise**.

Core:

Plan/event The action(s), events, circumstances, **secret** or not, being taken to achieve an evil end. The ultimate objective of the **out-group** that harms the **in-group** and leads to catastrophe. It is conspiratorial.

Public schools **indoctrinate** our children **with marxist doctrine**.

Yesterday **a white man** **was assaulted** by **a group of non-white invaders**.

Secret Gives the connotation of secrecy to the **plan**.

The real reason for "the invasion" of the USSR was an attempt to **prevent** all **Europe** **from becoming overrun** by the **red army**.

Non-core:

Out-group The enemy - "them"

In-group The victims - "us"

The **International Jewry** keep **starting wars, but they never fight in it**, only the **White Man** **die in the process**.

Call-to-action What should be done to avoid the catastrophe.

Our race is under **threat of absolute extinction**. Either we **save it or die**. **Share this message around** to wake your neighbours.

If conspiratorial = YES, then the mandatory elements are either [plan/event] AND/OR [secret], one must be identified, others are optional.

There is one final reflection that is worth having before we move on to the results of the annotation. This procedure of labelling words and expressions rests on categorization, on separating things into classes. However, we know that the components of a discursive event *cannot exist apart from it*, they form a ‘network of relations’ (Selg & Ventsel, 2020). Although the elements of a political discourse can be identified separately (as I instruct the annotators to do), they cannot exist “as being separate” (Selg & Ventsel, 2020, p. 215). For example, an ‘in-group’ *only exists in relation to* an ‘out-group’.

Conspiracy theories are “free-floating ideologies that find support through their interconnectedness” (Hills, 2024, p. 293). In other words, conspiracy theories lack new semantic value (Madisson & Ventsel, 2021), they do not contribute to knowledge production as they are actually quite redundant. If we take a close look at most widespread conspiracy theories, we may note that they hardly ever uncover new facts. Yes, conspiracy theorists like to call themselves ‘truth seekers’ and throw the word ‘facts’ around a lot, nevertheless, these so-called facts are often just supposed connections between events that have already been made public by other actors (most frequently thanks to investigative journalism and other similar practices), or are just plain fabrications with no base in reality. This is to say that conspiracy theories compensate for this semantic emptiness by creating connections (Madisson & Ventsel, 2021). It is not the uncovering of new evidence, but rather the interconnectedness of the elements in a conspiracy theory that makes it a conspiracy theory.

It is important to understand, thus, the paradoxical quality of the annotation task: to sort out inherently interconnected concepts. With this conundrum in mind and the final guidelines set up, we proceeded with one final round of annotation – the results of which are described in the next section.

3.3. Pilot spans analysis results

For this experiment, four annotators classified 497 text-messages in a double-blind scheme, where two annotators worked on the same

text without seeing each other's tags. Figure 3 shows the inter-annotator agreement results. The graph on the left indicates that, for the 'Conspiratorial' label (blue bar), there was a consistent agreement rate of 86%, where annotators concurred on 426 text-messages (and disagreed on only 71), despite the subjectivity of the task. For the 'Supportive' label (purple bar), the same graph shows that the agreement rate was much lower (only 52%), meaning that annotators agreed on 258 text-messages and disagreed on 239, almost half. This low agreement rate had been foreseen, given the annotators' professed difficulty with understanding the subtleties of this label. This shows that a more in-depth discussion of what comprises this 'supportive' statement was warranted.

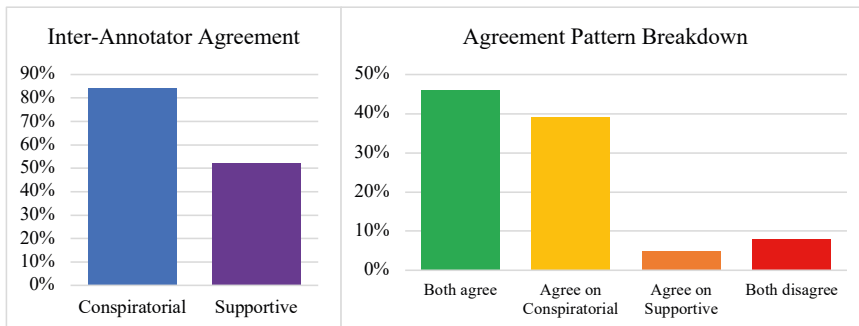


Figure 3. Agreement results between two annotators (Pilot data). Source: Data calculated for this work by Dr. Marco Antonio Stranisci.

The graph on the right indicates that there were 231 text-messages – roughly half of the total – where both annotators agreed on both labels (green bar), which is a very satisfactory agreement rate (46%). On 197 text-messages (39%), annotators agreed on 'Conspiratorial' but disagreed on 'Supportive' (yellow bar), and on 27 (5%), annotators disagreed on 'Conspiracy' but agreed on 'Supportive' (orange bar), which are both understandable results, since the categorization of a text as conspiratorial seemed more straightforward and concrete than the categorization as supportive, which proved to be harder to pin down, from both the feedback given by the participants and the agreement rates.

Lastly, the red bar shows only 4 text-messages (just 8%) where annotators disagreed on both labels, which is an excellent result that shows how, despite personal biases and subjectivities, annotators were able to agree most of the time on what makes a conspiratorial text-message.

When it comes to specific span annotations, there was a total of 472 elements identified. Out of the total number of text-messages, only 10 (7%) contained all five elements and 17 (12%) contained four elements. The majority of the text-messages were annotated with either three elements (64 text-messages, 36%) or two elements (48 texts, 33%). Only 12 messages were annotated with just one element (9%). Interestingly, 27 texts were annotated with both core-elements (20%). It is important to note that, from the total messages categorized as ‘Conspiratorial’, 10 texts (7%) were not annotated with a core-element (nor ‘plan’ nor ‘secret’). This was a mistake on the part of the annotators – since the instructions stated that all conspiratorial messages should present at least one of the core-elements – and it pointed to the need to be clearer with the instructions for the next experiment.

Next, Figure 4 shows the frequency with which each element was identified. As expected, the element that was most often tagged was the ‘Plan’ (identified on 122 text-messages, 93% of the total annotated texts – represented by the light blue bar). Since this element is a core one, as well as one of the primary ways to distinguish a conspiratorial message from other types of radical or misinformative discourse, it is understandable that it was the most identified element.

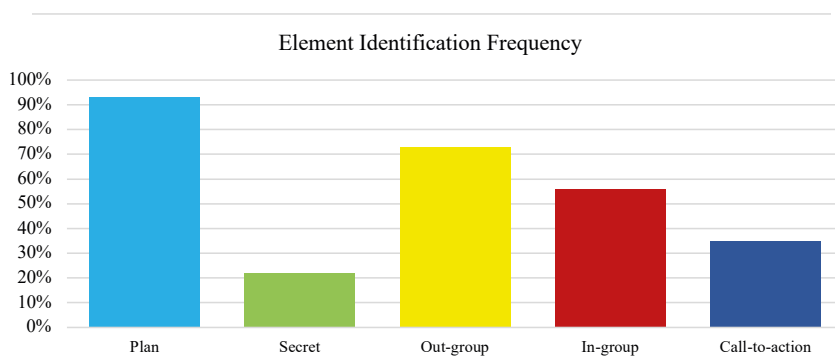


Figure 4. Specific span elements identification frequency (Pilot data). Source: Data calculated for this work by Dr. Marco Antonio Stranisci.

Following ‘Plan’, the ‘Out-group’ (yellow bar) and ‘In-group’ (red bar) were also identified on most annotated text-messages, being respectively tagged on 96 texts (73%) and 74 (56%) of the total annotated messages. The element ‘Call-to-action’ (dark blue bar) was also annotated quite often, comprising 35% of the annotated texts (47 text-messages).

Surprisingly, the element ‘Secret’ (green bar) was identified in only 22% of the annotated text-messages (30 texts). Since we had agreed that the secretive aspect of conspiracy narratives was a very central and distinguishing one – a core characteristic – these results were unforeseen. However, our experiment showed that this aspect may not be easily realizable semantically, or even not that *recognizable* semantically, which is not to say that it is not important.

Finally, the agreement statistics between two annotators for each identified span element are presented on Table 3, next.

Table 3. Inter-annotator agreement for span elements (Pilot data).

Element	Agree	Disagree	Agreement
plan	27	9	75%
secret	3	3	50%
out-group	14	11	56%
in-group	11	10	52%
call-to-action	5	10	33%

As the table shows, most span elements present medium agreement rates. The lowest of which is 33% (for the ‘call-to-action’), while the highest is 75% (for the core-element ‘plan’). Although it is good that the agreement results for this last important element were satisfactory, it is still worrisome that the annotators seem to agree on the identification of the other elements only roughly half the time. These initial results pointed to a need to guarantee that annotators have a better grasp on the understanding of the elements for the next experiments.

Still, we were overall satisfied to see that the annotation guidelines made sense and that the results were adequate enough, allowing us to proceed to testing this annotation method with the LLM. I would like to remind the reader that our goal here was to attain a structure of

conspiracy theory that could be comprehensible to machine models, through the labelling of signs, texts, and codes (annotation). We first did it manually (human-made) to, then, test if it can be done automatically (machine-made). To see if the AI is capable of categorizing text as conspiratorial or non-conspiratorial as well as to annotate text following the guidelines (that is, identify structural elements of a conspiracy theory), we applied the as LLM-as-judge approach.

3.4. First experiments with LLM-as-judge

As mentioned in *Section 2.2*, we used Llama 3.3 for the LLM-as-judge experiments. More specifically, we used the models Llama 3.1-8b (a light-weight, ultra-fast model with 8 billion parameters) and Llama 3.3-70b (a slower and bigger version, with 70 billion parameters). Additionally, we differentiated between Zero-Shot and Few-Shot prompts, that is, without contextual exemplifications and including them. This way, we had four different kinds of outputs, from: Llama 3.1-8b (Zero-Shot), Llama 3.1-8b (Few-Shot), Llama 3.3-70b (Zero-Shot), and Llama 3.3-70b (Few-Shot).

The models were fed prompts based on the same guidelines given to the human annotators (described in *Section 3.2*). Prompting is the most common practice, currently, to interact and engage with machines. This “interactional paradigm” (Montanari, 2025, p. 196), has a growing significance, reflected by the “recent proliferation of prompt user manuals, tutorials, and various ‘prompt styles’” (*Ibid.*, p. 196). The approach I took to writing the prompts was simple: the LLM should be given the same instructions that were provided to the human annotators, only in machine-readable language. Therefore, the process of prompt writing was actually a process of *translation*.

The prompt given to Llama 3.1-8b and 3.3-70b (Zero-Shot) was:

You are an expert annotator.
For each Telegram message: Return only JSON.

Task

- Decide if the input text is conspiratorial.
- If conspiratorial, extract labelled spans.

Definition

- Conspiracy theory: An event is the result of a group of people acting in secret according to a Plan, causing harm to a group of victims. If not stopped, this plan/event will lead to catastrophe, therefore actions need to be taken.
- Text is conspiratorial if there is at least a plan/event that is the fault of an out-group (may be implied) and harms an in-group (may be implied). The plan/event must be identifiable.
- If only non-core elements exist (especially just call_to_action), the text is NOT conspiratorial.

Decisions (exclusive)

- If is_conspiratorial = true $\square$ supports_conspiracy = false.
- If is_conspiratorial = false $\square$ supports_conspiracy is either true or false.
- supports_conspiracy = true if text contains a statement used as "proof" for a conspiratorial plan.

Core requirement

- At least one of: plan_event OR secret (mandatory when is_conspiratorial=true).

Span labels

- plan_event (core): action/event/circumstance that constitutes the plan leading to harm.
- secret (core): secrecy/hidden coordination cues (e.g., secret, covert, hidden agenda).
- out_group (optional): alleged perpetrators/enemy/oppressors/"them".
- in_group (optional): victims/oppressed/"us".
- call_to_action (optional): imperative/prescription to counter the plan.

Span text

- Extract the exact substring(s) that correspond to each element.
- Do NOT include surrounding quotes or trailing punctuation in span text.
- Span text should be a continuous substring from the input text.

Output JSON schema:

```
{
  "is_conspiratorial": boolean,
  "supports_conspiracy": boolean,
  "rationale_short": string,
  "confidence": number,
  "spans": [
    { "label": "plan_event" | "secret" | "out_group" |
```

```

"in_group" | "call_to_action",
    "text": string }
]
}

```

Now extract from:
 {{INPUT_TEXT}}

As it can be seen above, the prompt follows the same rationale (theoretical foundation) used in the guidelines for humans, only with some logics/mathematics-specific terms such as ‘if, then’ (If ... $\rightarrow$... = true / false), output type (Boolean, number or ‘string’, that is, natural language text), and file format for the output (JSON). Similarly, the prompt given to Llama 3.1-8b and 3.3-70b (Few-Shot) was exactly the same as the previous one, *with the addition* of the following examples:

Example 1 (Conspiratorial – plan_event + out_group + in_group)
 Input: Forced vaccination is being institutionalized by the authorities, to profit from and control the population.
 Output:

```

{
  "is_conspiratorial": true,
  "supports_conspiracy": false,
  "spans": [
    { "label": "plan_event", "text": "Forced vaccination is being institutionalized" },
    { "label": "out_group", "text": "the authorities" },
    { "label": "plan_event", "text": "profit from and control" },
  ],
  { "label": "in_group", "text": "the population" }
]
}

```

Example 2 (Conspiratorial – multiple plan_events + groups)
 Input: Multicultural policies increase immigration, serving to replace all Christian white people with Muslims, and turning Europe into a colony of Islam.
 Output:

```

{
  "is_conspiratorial": true,
  "supports_conspiracy": false,
  "spans": [
    { "label": "plan_event", "text": "Multicultural policies increase immigration" },
    { "label": "plan_event", "text": "replace" },
  ],
}

```

```
{ "label": "in_group", "text": "Christian white people" },
  { "label": "out_group", "text": "Muslims" },
  { "label": "plan_event", "text": "turning Europe into a
colony of Islam" }
]
}
```

Example 3 (Conspiratorial – rhetorical + CTA)

Input: As enemies of Our Folk are continuing to use destruction, we use creation to build bridges amongst local activists. When will YOU stand up & join the fight?!

Output:

```
{
  "is_conspiratorial": true,
  "supports_conspiracy": false,
  "spans": [
    { "label": "out_group", "text": "enemies" },
    { "label": "in_group", "text": "Our Folk" },
    { "label": "plan_event", "text": "use destruction" },
    { "label": "call_to_action", "text": "stand up & join the
fight" }
  ]
}
```

Example 4 (Conspiratorial – rhetorical question with identifiable plan_event)

Input: Why are there entire Hispanic towns in rural western Wisconsin? Why are you allowing an invasion?

Output:

```
{
  "is_conspiratorial": true,
  "supports_conspiracy": false,
  "spans": [
    { "label": "plan_event", "text": "invasion" }
  ]
}
```

Example 5 (Conspiratorial – hashtag/keyword as plan_event)

Input: The Great Replacement is REAL and the media is the ENEMY of the people.

Output:

```
{
  "is_conspiratorial": true,
  "supports_conspiracy": false,
  "spans": [
    { "label": "plan_event", "text": "The Great Replacement"
  },
}
```

```

    { "label": "out_group", "text": "the media" },
    { "label": "in_group", "text": "the people" }
  ]
}

```

Example 6 (Conspiratorial – secret + plan_events)

Input: Our hard earned money is being shipped overseas to fund a money laundering scheme packaged as protection for Ukraine's border.

Output:

```

{
  "is_conspiratorial": true,
  "supports_conspiracy": false,
  "spans": [
    { "label": "plan_event", "text": "shipped overseas" },
    { "label": "plan_event", "text": "fund a money laundering scheme" },
    { "label": "secret", "text": "packaged as protection for Ukraine's border" }
  ]
}

```

Example 7 (Supportive, not conspiratorial)

Input: White birthrates are under sustainment levels.

Output:

```

{
  "is_conspiratorial": false,
  "supports_conspiracy": true,
  "spans": []
}

```

Example 8 (Supportive, not conspiratorial)

Input: It's weird how all these crises always seem to benefit the globalists, don't you think?

Output:

```

{
  "is_conspiratorial": false,
  "supports_conspiracy": true,
  "spans": []
}

```

Now extract from:

```
{{INPUT_TEXT}}
```

The models carried out 3,243 annotations. Figure 5, below, shows a comparison between each model and the human annotators for the categorization of texts as 'Conspiratorial' or 'Supportive' (the values are

proportional, that is, relative to their own totals, as humans annotated only 497 text-messages while LLMs annotated 3,243).

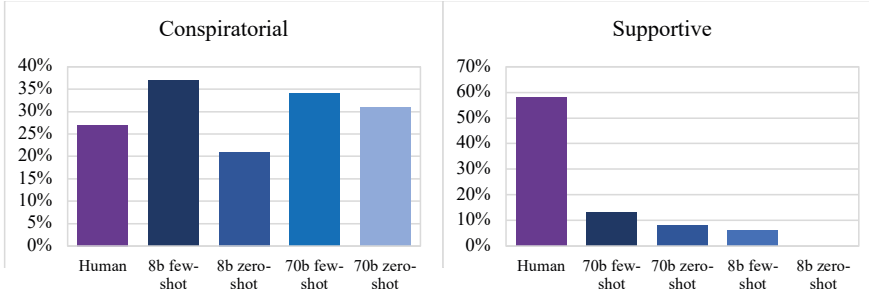


Figure 5. Categorization frequency comparison between models and humans (Pilot data). Source: Data calculated for this work by Dr. Shaina Ashraf.

It is possible to note that three machine models (8b few-shot, 70b few-shot, and 70b zero-shot) categorised more texts as conspiratorial than human annotators. Still, the proportional difference between these numbers is small, no more than 10%. On the other hand, for the identification of supportive statements, the human annotators identified a large quantity of text-messages (58%), while the models tended to apply this category a lot less (between 6% and 13% – and zero times for 8b zero-shot).

After this first experiment, I decided to remove the ‘supportive’ label request from the prompt of future experiments. The reasoning behind this decision relates to the notion that we had created the supportive label to identify the text-messages that computational models would not (as I had hypothesized) be able to tag as conspiratorial (due to their structure/rhetoric not being recognizable as a conspiracy theory) but that we, as humans, perceive its contextual relevance for conspiracy narratives. The idea was that some text-messages do not showcase the core-elements of a conspiracy theory and, therefore, cannot be tagged as conspiratorial. However, due to their contents, such messages may still be used in conspiratorial discourse, for example, as a perceived ‘proof’ of a conspiracy. This label would thus indicate an important limitation of using computational methods to analyse conspiratorial discourse. For that reason, it would make no sense to prompt the models to categorize certain texts as ‘supportive’, since we already predicted

that this is where the models fail – it is the human element that we cannot yet quite translate into machine-readable language. I will address this issue in more depth in *Section 5.5*.

Up next, Figure 6 shows the rate of the identification of specific spans, that is, the mean quantity that each element was identified by each machine model and the human annotators, within the text-messages that were tagged as being conspiratorial.

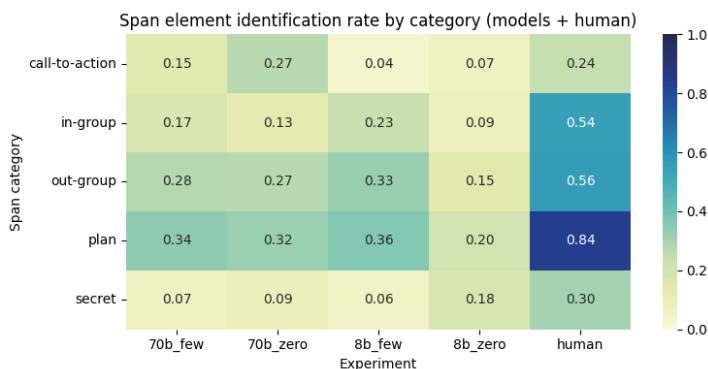


Figure 6. Identification of span elements, comparison between human and machine models. Source: Figure generated for this work by Dr. Shaina Ashraf.

Figure 6 shows how human annotators largely identify more tags than the machine models (except for ‘call-to-action’, which the model 70b zero-shot tagged a bit more than the human annotators), also proportionally of course. For all experiments (models and humans), the category ‘plan’ was the most identified – which makes sense since this was a one of the mandatory elements for a text to be considered conspiratorial. Since a text should only be categorised as conspiratorial if a ‘plan’ or ‘secret’ is present, and humans identify more ‘plan’ tags but less ‘conspiratorial’ texts, this probably indicates that, in the same text-message, humans identify several spans as ‘plan’, while the model identifies only one or two. This way, even if the number of text-messages categorised as conspiratorial by humans is less than by machines, it is still possible to see that humans tag more spans than machines.

Regarding performance, Figure 7 shows that model size has only a moderate impact on the performance of conspiracy theory classification.

As it can be seen, precision and recall⁽⁴⁾ do not vary much among models.



Figure 7. Performance comparison between machine models (Pilot data). Source: Data calculated for this work by Dr. Shaina Ashraf.

In general, zero-shot prompts show better precision, since their predictions are more conservative – high precision leads to reduction of false positives. Few-shot prompts, on the other hand, improve recall, since they contain examples that allow models to broaden their scope and thus identify more expressions as conspiratorial – high recall leads to a more comprehensive detection (but more false-positives). This means that there is a trade-off between recall and precision, in a way that both approaches to prompting will yield slightly different results.

However, it is noteworthy that the difference is still small (also in terms of accuracy). It is also worth mentioning that, for the 8b model (zero- and few-shot), the total runtime by experiment was between 50-80 minutes, outputting about 23-25 samples per minute, while for the 70b model, the total runtime by experiment was between 550-600 minutes, outputting 3-4 samples per minute. This goes to show that the 70b models are much more costly in terms of machine use (and, thereby, energy use). Since the models do not differ so much in accuracy, precision, and recall, but present such a distinction in runtime, it is safe to state that, for future research with similar scopes to this one, using

(4) In machine learning, precision and recall are metrics based on relevance that are applied to data retrieved from a corpus. Precision (related to predictability) is the fraction of *relevant instances among the retrieved instances*, while recall (related to sensitivity) is the fraction of relevant instances *that were retrieved from all relevant instances*.

the 8 billion parameters model (especially with few-shot) can be better – more efficient in terms of time and energy, and basically just as reliable as the 70 billion one.

So far in, I have described how the Pilot experiment was designed and carried out. We have noted that the signs that make up the structure of a conspiracy theory – although intrinsically connected – can be computationally identified and sorted through the NLP method of text annotation. Although not yet perfect, the annotation method yielded satisfactory results, allowing us to move on to the next experiment, in larger scale.

It is worth recalling here the two most important outcomes of this first experiment. First, we have achieved a working prompting methodology for LLM-use that enables the extraction and organization of the structure of a conspiracy theory from a given text-input. This is the first step towards the machine-assisted text analysis methodology proposed in this work (RQ 1 – computational identification of language patterns, signs, texts, and codes that structure the conspiracy theories that circulate on Telegram).

On a second, but equally important instance, we have stumbled upon a considerable limitation of this study: the fact that some texts can be understood by human annotators to be relevant for determined conspiracy theories, yet cannot be categorized as conspiratorial *per se*, because they deviate from the structure that has been so far defined. We have opted to categorize these texts as ‘supportive’ – a category created to quantify the percentage of text-messages where our study falls short in analysing. We thus suggest that this part is where future research may focus on developing strategies to improve this methodology.

CHAPTER IV

WORKSHOP

Entitled “Natural Language Processing and AI Tools Applied to Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences”, this Laboratory Workshop was done with the objective of testing out the Pilot in larger scale. The first introductory session took place at the Auditorium Quazza (Palazzo Nuovo) of the University of Turin on October 15th, 2025, from 9:00 to 13:00, and a follow-up closing session happened on November 12th, 2025 (same time). The workshop offered MA and PhD students a practical opportunity to learn how to apply NLP tools to their research.

Despite its current popularity, analytical AI and NLP products are still fairly exclusive tools used by few – only a limited number of large companies have the resources at their disposal to invest in effective NLP solutions. With that in mind, the workshop aimed to make AI-powered applications a more accessible asset to students. During our two encounters, we attempted to demystify these tools, in order to empower young researchers to benefit from their potential without being unaware of their implications in society (such as the ones I mentioned in *Section 2.3*), aiming to make AI processes more human-oriented and transparent, also contributing to better a understanding of how AI-based services reach their decisions.

Since the workshop took place within the framework of the MSCA project VORTEX, we used the present research as basis for learning – that is, in order to learn how to apply NLP tools, the workshop explored the issues of online conspiracy theories, asking participants to

contribute to this research. Students learned how to carry out annotation of corpora and were introduced to text analytics. At the closing session, participants had the opportunity to reflect upon their achieved results, as well as how they each can make use of the newly learned tools in their own research.

In this chapter, I explain all the stages of the Workshop experiment. First, I describe how the first session took place and the main problems that were raised by the participants regarding their task (*Section 4.1. First session: manual annotation*). Then, *Section 4.2* Human annotation data analysis is similar to what I have detailed in the previous chapter, in *Section 3.3*, where I examined the annotation process. The results of the Workshop data do not diverge from those of the Pilot, showing that the methodology was successfully applied in larger scale.

The next section (*4.3. Data augmentation and frame analysis*) is where I introduce some novelty into the experiment, taking it one step further than we had in the Pilot. Previously (in *Chapter 3*), we had provided the LLMs with two prompting approaches: with and without exemplifications of the annotation task (which we called zero-shot and few-shot). For this experiment, we chose to introduce an extra approach, which we called ‘frame-augmented’ prompting. Frame augmentation is another way to translate human-language to machine-language. In *Section 4.3*, I detail how this works and what these frames reveal about the object of study.

Lastly, I explain how the final session of the workshop took place (*4.4. Final session: evaluating LLM-as-judge*). Before this date, we had run the experiment with the LLMs with the two approaches: few-shot and frame-augmented. During the final workshop session, we asked the participants to evaluate the performance of the models in carrying out the annotation task. The way in which this evaluation took place as well as its results are described at the end of the chapter.

4.1. First session: manual annotation

In total, eleven students from distinct programs participated in the workshop: one from the PhD in Humanities (Semiotics and Media), one

from the PhD in Cultural Heritage in the Digital Ecosystem, one from the MA in Linguistic Sciences, one from the MA in Communication and Media Culture, one from the MA in English and American Studies, and the remaining five from the MA in Language Technologies and Digital Humanities (including the two students who had participated in the Pilot). Added to Dr. Stranisci and I, the total number of annotators for this step of the research was 13.

To explain to the participants how to carry out annotation of corpora in the context that we were working on, I started by giving a 20-minute theoretical talk on conspiracy theories, including how to define and identify them (following the theoretical framework described in *Chapter 1*). This way, they could understand the reasoning behind the span annotation scheme and we could minimize disagreement. Participants were advised to avoid thinking of conspiracy theories as a way to dismiss or discredit certain ideas (which is how the term is commonly used in political discourse), but rather as a meaning-making mechanism, whose main characteristics are contempt for expertise, distrust towards politics, society, and official histories, and dichotomic thinking style.

It was highlighted that the way in which conspiracy theories work does not depend on the specific contents of the discourse, but on the form – which seeks to imitate scientific reasoning (explaining what is true/false), but also what is right/wrong or good/evil, providing for opaque connections between arguments. Despite the subjects that conspiracy theories discuss, annotators were instructed to pay attention to this format – how the text constructs identities on the basis of opposition, demonizing the ‘Other’, and advocating for their total annihilation. I also explained that conspiracy theories describe the world with the objective of mobilizing people in a specific socio-political struggle (serving as reasons for action), which was also an important aspect for annotators to note.

After this initial theoretical talk, we explained to the participants what text annotation is (which I detailed here in *Section 3.2*) and how it can be used for research – to analyse and interpret textual data, enabling researchers to uncover patterns, trends, and insights. With these concepts communicated, the workshop participants received the guidelines

for annotation (which was the same that was used in the Pilot). First, we went through an excerpt from the dataset and worked on it together as a group. This served for me to assess the participant's understanding of the task. Once I was sure they understood how to carry it out, the participants set out to annotate on their own (300 text-messages per participant).

After about two hours, we had a feedback round of conversation. We asked the participants what they felt was most challenging about the task. Differentiating between conspiratorial statements and supportive ones was something that all participants agreed was hard to do. The modal verb 'may' in the question 'Does the text contain a statement that *may* support a conspiracy theory?' was mentioned as being one of the reasons why they thought the question was difficult to answer. On the one hand, the uncertainty that the question portrays makes it harder to answer it; on the other, without it, the answer to the question could become prescriptive. Again, since this question regards an aspect of the study that we are still not able to explain (the matter of supportive statements), it was understandable that this was challenging to the participants.

Choosing between 'plan' and 'secret' was also mentioned as a difficult task. Considering that 'secret' is a characteristic of the 'plan', it also makes sense that the superposition of these two tags would happen in many cases. It was also stated that annotators found it challenging to take an Emic point of view, understanding the intention of the speaker without any background being provided. I would like to highlight that annotators were provided with random texts out of chronological order, therefore, they had no background information on any text-message. This was done to emulate how most people engage with content on social media, which is mostly discrete and chaotic – even in messaging platforms such as Telegram, where posts are presented in chronological order, users frequently participate in large numbers of channels and do not read every single post, often coming across content in discontinuous manners. People may frequently have their first contact with certain subjects and ideas through a random Telegram text-message on a channel. Therefore, it made sense that the annotators did not have any *previous* information. We did, however, mention that they

could research information as they deemed necessary *during the process* – something that most of them said was indeed essential in order to carry on with annotation.

Another issue that arose from some of the annotators was reported to me as a ‘moral question’. Some participants professed their worry regarding categorizing certain content as ‘conspiratorial’ when the text was discussing things that the annotators believed to be true. The participants voiced their worries that, by classifying such ‘real conspiracies’ as ‘conspiratorial content’, the machine models would learn to dismiss important information. They wondered if it would not be better to focus on classifying as ‘conspiratorial’ only the texts that configured ‘un-evidenced, generalized, bad-framed, bad-toned conspiratorial plans’. This concern reveals several interesting aspects of the study of conspiracy theories.

As mentioned in the literature (McKenzie-McHarg, 2020), the term ‘conspiracy theory’ is mostly used outside of academia to delegitimize and dismiss certain discourses, deeming them unreliable. Therefore it makes sense that most participants, who are not from the field of conspiracy theory studies, would still carry this negative connotation of the term in their understanding. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Önnersfors (2021) (and before that, by Umberto Eco on several occasions), *real conspiracies do exist* (see the Epstein Files, for instance). Nevertheless, our methodology does not account for the difference between such ‘real conspiracies’ and ‘conspiracy theories completely disconnected from reality’ – and the reason for that is my own stance towards so-called ‘real conspiracy’ discourses. I believe most semioticians will agree that there is a *weight* to the way in which we talk about things; social consequences of discourse. As I have argued in previous works, the way in which conspiracy theories describe reality on the basis of irresolvable conflicts is harmful and has terrible social consequences, *even when they are describing real circumstances*. The perniciousness of conspiratorial discourse does not lie only in its falsehood (when it is indeed false), but in its very rhetoric. For that reason, I did not seek ways to differentiate between a ‘theory about a conspiracy’ and ‘conspiracy theory’ with this methodology – because I do not believe it matters for the purposes of this research.

However, it is important to highlight – and this is the most relevant aspect of this research that I had to make clear to the participants – that the aim of refining computational tools for analysis of conspiracy theories was not to teach the models to dismiss certain content or brand them as fake. This judgement is part of the human meaning-making processes; it is not something the LLMs are being asked to do. Rather, the model is merely being asked to categorize a text based on rhetoric, format, structure. Therefore, participants were asked to – as they moved forward with the remaining annotations that were left as homework – overlook their personal opinions regarding the narratives, and focus on identifying the structural elements.

All in all, the matter of subjectivity was highlighted. Participants felt uncertain about most of their annotations, which is something that makes sense given the complexity of the task. One way to reduce the level of uncertainty for future experiments may be to increase the number of examples in the guidelines and carry out more group annotations before asking the participants to carry out the annotation task individually.

4.2. Human annotation data analysis

Using the large dataset (text-messages collected from all 19 Telegram channels), the 13 participants classified 2,077 messages. Each participant annotated three sets of 100 messages, composed of 20 messages from five different channels. Since some participants were not able to finish their tasks, not all 2,077 messages were annotated in a double-blind scheme. In total, 1,166 text-messages were used for the calculations of the agreement rates (since they are the ones that were annotated in double-blind), which can be found in Figure 8, below. The graph on the left (blue bar) shows that, for the ‘Conspiracy’ label, there was a consistent agreement rate of 81%, meaning that annotators concurred on 947 text-messages (and disagreed on only 219) – a very good rate, though slightly lower than the Pilot, which is understandable since in the Workshop we had three times the number of annotators that we had in the Pilot. For the ‘Supportive’ label, the same graph (purple bar)

shows that the agreement rate (61%) was higher than it was during the Pilot (52%). In the Workshop, annotators agreed on 714 text-messages and disagreed on 452, showing that more explanations and group discussions have improved the results.

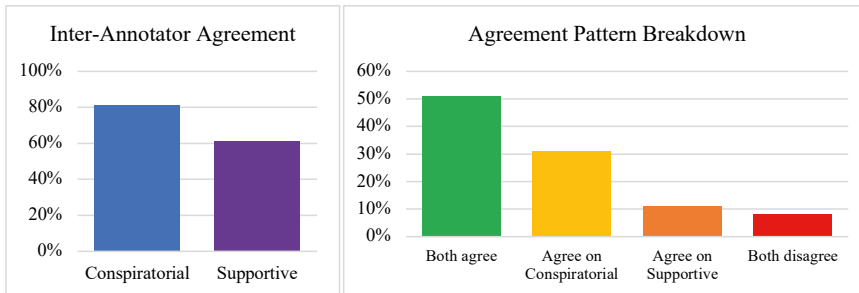


Figure 8. Agreement results between two annotators (Workshop data). Source: Graphs generated for this work by Dr. Shaina Ashraf.

The graph on the right echoes the distribution of the Pilot data, with few differences. The green bar indicates that there were 590 text-messages – roughly half of the total – where both annotators agreed on both labels (51%), which is a fair improvement on the Pilot data (46%). On 357 text-messages (yellow bar), annotators agreed on ‘Conspiracy’ but disagreed on ‘Supportive’ (31%), and on 124 (orange bar), annotators disagreed on ‘Conspiracy’ but agreed on ‘Supportive’ (11%), which are more balanced than the distribution of the Pilot data (39% agreed on ‘Conspiratorial’ but disagreed on ‘Supportive’; and 5% disagreed on ‘Conspiracy’ but agreed on ‘Supportive’ – a larger difference). This might indicate that, once again, annotators were slightly more sure regarding the ‘Supportive’ label than they had been during the Pilot, probably due to our group discussions. Lastly, the graph (red bar) shows a very low 95 text-messages (just 8%) where annotators disagreed on both labels, which is an excellent result that shows how despite increasing the number of annotators, the disagreement rate remains the same as it was during the Pilot.

When it comes to specific span annotations, there was a total of 934 elements identified. The distribution was also similar to the Pilot data,

where, out of the total number of text-messages, only 47 (6%) contained all five elements and 124 (16%) contained four. As seen in the Pilot, the majority of the text-messages in the Workshop were also annotated with either three elements (255 text-messages, 34% of the total annotated texts), two elements (177 texts, 23%), or just one element (140 texts, 18%).

Once again, some of the same problems were repeated, despite our attempts at being clearer with instructions: 30 text-messages (6% of the total text-messages categorized as conspiratorial) were missing both mandatory core elements ('plan' and 'secret'). Out of these 30, there were 12 texts (1.6%) with absolutely no span elements identified. The remaining were annotated with only non-core elements ('in-', 'out-groups', and/or 'call-to-action'). Although this was a mistake on the part of the annotators, it was a small enough error to not compromise the results.

Regarding the specific types of elements, just like with the Pilot data, the most frequently identified element in the Workshop data was the 'Plan' (tagged on 662 text-messages, 88% of the total annotated texts), as shown in Figure 9 (light blue bar).

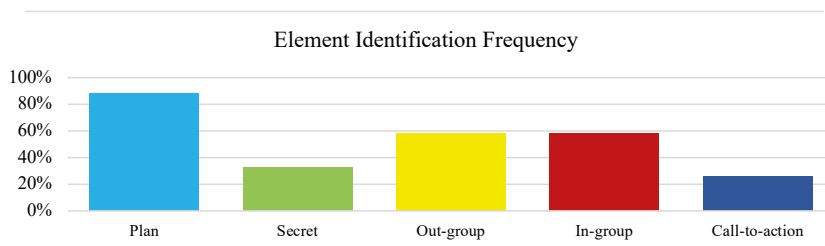


Figure 9. Specific span elements identification frequency (Workshop data). Source: Data calculated for this work by Dr. Shaina Ashraf.

Following 'Plan', the 'Out-group' and 'In-group' were also identified on most annotated messages, both being tagged on 442 texts (58%). Once again, the element 'Secret' was identified less, only 33% of the annotated messages (250 texts). Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the results for the 'call-to-action' were even lower than they were

during the Pilot, which was surprising. During my initial explorations of the dataset, I had realized that an overwhelming amount of messages contained some sort of cue to the users – mainly instigating people to support certain actors economically, to participate in ‘in real life’ rallies, and to share content outside of the channel both on- and offline. Given this, I had expected the number of ‘call-to-action’ spans to be much higher.

Upon further reflection, these results indicate that the text-messages containing such user-directed cues have not been categorized as conspiratorial (and were, thus, not annotated at span level), since they probably did not showcase any of the core-elements. I hypothesize that, although the call-to-action may be an element in conspiratorial discourse, it is mostly present in discrete pieces of texts, instead of being part of a conspiratorial narrative being described in a single cohesive and bounded text. This is most interesting, because it points to how conspiracy theories (especially on messaging applications, but also on other social media platforms) are communicated in pieces, in a way that it takes time and a lot of content engagement for the reader to put together a full picture in their understanding. This aspect makes it especially hard for the development of NLP tools. Since we were treating the text-messages as discrete texts, it was impossible for the annotators to consider the bleeding of meaning between one text and the next in the channel’s chain of communication. I further address this limitation on *Chapter 6*, by designing another experiment that considers the interconnectedness between text-messages.

Finally, the agreement statistics between two annotators for each span element are presented on Table 4, below.

Table 4. Inter-annotator agreement for span elements (workshop data).

Element	Agree	Disagree	Agreement
plan	97	23	77%
call-to-action	90	30	71%
out-group	86	34	68%
secret	82	38	65%
in-group	76	44	60%

As the table shows, all span elements present very good agreement rates – the lowest of which is 60% (more than half) and the highest is 77%, referring to the most important element ‘Plan’. This indicates that the annotators were able to grasp the understanding of the elements very well and that personal subjectivities had a negligible impact on the task.

4.3. Data augmentation and frame analysis

At this point in the experiment, we decided to improve upon the Pilot instead of just repeating it. Rather than using the same approaches for model prompting, we opted to drop zero-shot (since it performed worse in the Pilot) and try the use of ‘frames’ to amplify the machine comprehension of the annotation task. We kept the few-shot approach in order to compare it to the new frame-augmented approach.

As mentioned in *Section 2.2*, Frame Semantic Theory (Fillmore, 2006) rests on the notion that the understanding of a single term evokes a set of complex interconnected contexts that relates to it, that is, *a frame of semantic knowledge*. I ask the reader to recall the examples from Figure 1 and Figure 2 (the Frame Indexes for “collaboration” and “offences”), which I had used as templates for the annotation guidelines. Those Frame Indexes show the complex set of essential knowledge that relate to each of those words.

Our idea was to, thus, include this semantic frame, this set of related contexts, to the annotated elements, and add that to the model prompt. For the few-shot approach, we provided the LLMs with 8 examples; for the frame approach, we provided them with 2,077 examples, plus a map of related understandings for the elements that were annotated. Since this seems quite abstract, Table 5 serves as an example of what this frame mapping process looked like. All texts in the table were paraphrased for aforementioned ethical reasons, keeping only key elements as they were originally.

Table 5. Examples of span annotation enriched with frames.

Text message	Plan	Secret	Call-to-action	Out-group	In-group	plan_frames	secret_frames
White Awakening is inevitable. Let them ban TikTok, let them pass absurd laws that are nothing more than ceremonial displays of submission over the ownership, control, and financial gain of these American Anti-White politicians. It doesn't matter to us. Regardless, white resistance will stay on the streets and keep moving ahead. Every month, we get more and more great feedback from the White general public. 14!	ban TikTok		White Awakening	American Anti-White politicians	White general public	{'Prohibiting_or_licensing': {'ban'}}	
Credit where credit is due, this is a great thread by K.W.'s thread is great: This subject is particularly pertinent as the current anti-White revolts in France are being justified by French colonialism in Africa, which started as self-defence to shield European civilians from Muslim slave traders.	anti-White revolts			Muslim slave traders	European civilians	{'Color': {'white'}, 'Race_descriptor': {'white'}, 'Experiencer_obj': {'revolt'}, 'Change_of_leadership': {'revolt'}}	
This is a way to explain things to normies: The purpose of a race of people is defeated if Japan ceases to be Japanese. Genocide is underway for Japan too.	Genocide is underway for Japan			normies		{'Killing': {'genocide'}, 'Process_continue': {'underway'}}	
Activists in O. handed out 2000 flyers in the W. area to let local people know about the drag story hour being quietly held at W. memorial park on April 12th and to get people to take action in opposition to it. We plan to share some footage of the activism soon.		being quietly held	take action in opposition				{'Inhibit_movement': {'hold'}, 'Manipulation': {'hold'}, 'Opinion': {'hold'}, 'Defending': {'hold'}, 'Containing': {'hold'}, 'Detaining': {'hold'}}
The president of Tajikistan, Imam Ali Rahman, said on a press conference: "Northern Afghanistan has turned into training camp for global Terrorists."	Northern Afghanistan has turned into training camp for global Terrorists			global Terrorists		{'Part_orientational': {'northern'}, 'Temporal_subregion': {'turn'}, 'Change_direction': {'turn'}, 'Undergo_change': {'turn'}, 'Cause_change': {'turn'}, 'Becoming': {'turn'}, 'Moving_in_place': {'turn'}, 'Contingency': {'turn'}, 'Education_teaching': {'training'}, 'Political_locations': {'camp'}, 'Political_locations': {'global'}}	

Once we obtained the Workshop span-based annotations, we compiled a CSV table⁽¹⁾, following the logic of Table 5, containing the text-messages that were annotated (first column of the table) and the excerpts that have been marked as ‘plan’, ‘secret’, ‘call-to-action’, ‘out-group’, and ‘in-group’ by the annotator (2nd – 5th columns). In the case of this experiment, only the mandatory elements (‘plan’ and ‘secret’) were enriched with frames (last two columns). We agreed that asking the workshop participants to later evaluate the span annotation of the LLMs for all five tags would be too big of a workload for the students, therefore, we opted to carry out the experiments in the final session only with the two core elements.

Table 5 shows how each span annotated by humans could be interpreted by the machine models, by adding classes of terms that share semantics and contexts. For instance, the term ‘underway’ tagged as being part of the ‘plan’ span can be understood as something that described a ‘continuous process’ (3rd line of the table), while the term ‘held’ tagged as part of a ‘secret’ (4th line) can have multiple understandings such as: ‘to inhibit movement’, ‘manipulate’, ‘have an opinion’, ‘defend’, ‘contain’, or ‘detain’. All of these possibilities may increase the comprehension (capability of interpretation) of the LLMs regarding the data being inputted.

After the dataset augmentation was finished (meaning that the CSV table for all annotated texts was compiled), we prompted the LLMs (8b and 70b) to automatically classify and annotate new and unseen text-messages, using the augmented dataset as exemplification in the prompting. But before moving on to the analysis of the outputs of the LLMs and the evaluation of their performance, we carried out an analysis of the frames that arose from the 2,077 text-messages annotated by humans, in comparison to those that arose from the 3,243 text-messages that were automatically annotated by the LLMs. This frame analysis focuses on the core elements (‘plan’ and ‘secret’).

It is important to note that, in general, LLMs identified a larger volume of spans than humans, something that obviously influences the

(1) CSV stands for ‘Comma-separated values’, which is a format for storing tabular data where the fields (values) of a record are separated by a comma (delimiter) and each record is a line. One of the most common visualizations for this type of data format is a spreadsheet, which is why the examples here are in the form of tables.

number of frames detected as well. All in all, human annotators identified 786 ‘plan’ spans and 283 ‘secret’ spans, while LLMs identified 1,076 ‘plan’ spans and 587 ‘secret’ spans (further discussed in the next section). Despite this difference, we extracted the Top 20 most recurring frames relative to the spans identified by Llama 3.3-70b. Up next, Table 6 lists those frames as well as the most frequent trigger words (lexical units that prompted the detection of the frames) and the frame rank (position within the Top 20).

Table 6. Most recurring semantic frames emerging from spans annotated by humans and LLMs. Source: Data calculated for this work by Maziar Kianimoghadam Jouneghani.

	‘Plan’			
	Human		LLM	
Frame Name	Rank	Top Trigger Words	Rank	Top Trigger Words
Statement	1	say, state, report, allow, tell	9	country, work, facility, lab, city
Political locales	2	world, country, city, nation, land	4	world, global, country, national
Kinship	3	people, child, family, forefather	1	people, child, name, father, kid
Leadership	4	government, state, leader, charge, run	13	government, state, run, lead, official
Locale by use	5	country, work, city, base, centre	10	country, work, facility, lab, city
People	6	people, life, man, woman, girl	2	people, human, life, man, individual
Cause/motion	7	force, launch, push, run, drive	5	force, push, run, hit, launch
Attempt	11	go, push, attempt, stab, effort	15	go, shot, push, attempt, endeavour
Killing	13	destroy, kill, genocide, assassination	6	kill, destroy, murder, eliminate
Condition/symptom	16	show, see, include, cause, link	19	cause, show, see, lead, link
Purpose	18	use, plan, target, goal, mean	12	use, plan, target, application
Ingest substance	20	take, use, shoot, inject, smoke	3	take, use, shoot, inject, pull
Causation	12	force, see, bring, leave, reason	13	force, cause, put, send, see
Undergo change	19	go, change, turn, shift	<i>Not among the Top 20</i>	
Calendric unit	8	year, day, tonight, month, today		
Text	9	life, report, issue, speech, history		
Measure/duration	10	year, day, time, month, decade		
Self motion	15	way, run, drive, steal, back		
Attack	<i>Not among the Top 20</i>		7	attack, fire, strike, bomb, hit
Aggregate			11	population, force, group, body
Experiencer obj			16	kill, destroy, interest, engage
Weapon			18	bomb, chemical, missile, rocket
Cause/harm			20	strike, drug, hit, poison, jab

	'Secret'			
Statement	1	talk, tell, say, speak, state	2	tell, allege, say, allow, report
Prevarication	2	lie, tell, mislead	8	tell, lie, deception, deceive
Evidence	4	tell, mean, support, reveal, prove	9	evidence, show, reveal, proof
Eclipse	5	hide, cover, block, conceal, hidden	5	hide, cover, block, conceal, obscure
Hiding objects	9	hide, cover, block, conceal	10	hide, cover, block, conceal
Awareness	20	know, idea, think, comprehend, believe	4	think, believe, knowledge, understand
Measure/duration	3	year, time, decade, day, week	<i>Not among the Top 20</i>	
Calendric unit	6	year, day, decade, week, today		
Causation	8	mean, reason, cause, bring, force		
Kinship	10	people, child, family, parent		
People	11	people, man, person, human, life		
Becoming aware	12	tell, find, discover, spot		
Aggregate	13	population, force, family, army		
Text	17	history, report, manual, list, book		
Sex	18	give, take, sex, fuck		
Secrecy status	<i>Not among the Top 20</i>		1	secret, public, covert
Leadership			3	government, run, leader, lead, state
Familiarity			6	know, new, intimate
Organization			7	gov, order, intelligence, agency, society
Self motion			11	way, run, troop, back, venture
Experimentation			13	control, subject, study, treatment
Certainty			14	know, believe, sure
Being in control			15	control, manipulate, rule
Condition/symptom			16	show, lead, relate, present, result
Control			17	control, determine, regulation
Locale by use			18	work, country, facility, site, school
Purpose			19	plan, use
Differentiation			20	know

Highlighted cells (grey) show which annotation outranks the other (white) – human or LLM. For instance, the frame ‘Statement’ ranks 1st for human annotations and 9th for LLM, therefore, without considering count (which is mostly higher for LLM due to detection volume), it is possible to gather that, proportionally, this frame was triggered more often by human annotations than by LLM. Overall, Table 6 reveals some recurring semantic patterns underlying conspiracy theories

as detected by both human annotators and the LLM. The analysis that follows reveals meanings that arise from these patterns.

The frames that predominantly emerge from ‘plan’ spans relate to intentional agency or causal intervention, such as ‘Attempt’, ‘Purpose’, ‘Causation’ – triggered by lexical units such as push, effort, endeavour, use, target, goal, application, force, bring, and cause. These frames (identified more often by LLM) portray conspiratorial plans as deliberate and coordinated courses of action, typically attributed to powerful but abstract agents. This representation is further reinforced by the frequent emergence of the frames ‘Leadership’ (identified more often by humans) and ‘Political locales’ (identified more often by LLM), situating conspiratorial action within institutional and geopolitical contexts – realized lexically by terms such as government, state, official, base, facility, and centre. Hence, conspiracy plans appear as exercises of organized, institutional power. The distinctly disruptive and anti-authoritarian drive of conspiracy theories repeated in the literature is actualized here on the high recurrence of these frames (Piva *et al.*, 2026).

In addition to agency and causation, ‘plan’ spans frequently evoke frames related to violence and harm, such as ‘Cause/motion’ (force, push, hit), ‘Killing’ (destroy, genocide, eliminate, murder), ‘Ingest substance’ (take, use, shoot, drug), ‘Attack’ (fire, strike, bomb), ‘Weapon’ (bomb, chemical, missile), and ‘Cause/harm’ (strike, drug, hit, poison) – all identified more often by LLM. These frames construct conspiratorial plans as existential threats (Piva *et al.*, 2026), pointing to how the rhetoric of conspiracy theories works as metaphors for invasion, contagion, addiction, and war (Hristov *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, the negative axiology of conspiracy theories (Camilo, 2016) is showcased by the fact that the frame ‘Statement’ is highly recurrent in both human and LLM annotations, for both ‘plan’ and ‘secret’ spans. Here, terms such as ‘tell’, ‘report’, and ‘declare’ trigger secret conspiratorial plans, in a way that mainstream or official statements are seen as inherently misleading. This supports the view of conspiracy theories as counter-narratives formulated in opposition to official histories (Aupers, 2020, p. 471). At the lexical level, this epistemic tension is reflected in the prominence of verbs such as lie, hide and cover, which are more characteristic of ‘secret’ spans and less frequent in ‘plan’, but still present.

It is interesting to note that there are many frames that appear for both ‘secret’ and ‘plan’ spans, namely: ‘Statement’, ‘Calendric unit’, ‘Measure/duration’, ‘Causation’, ‘Kinship’, ‘People’, ‘Aggregate’, ‘Text’, ‘Leadership’, ‘Self motion’, ‘Condition/ symptom’, ‘Locale by use’, and ‘Purpose’. The reason for that may be that ‘secret’ is an aspect of the ‘plan’ – therefore, it becomes hard to draw a line between the two, in a way that the spans, lexical units, and thus, frames, for one naturally repeat for the other. One of the main concrete cases of how elements of political communication may be studied separately but “not as being separate” (Selg & Ventsel, 2020, p. 215).

On the other hand, the ‘secret’ frames that are not repeated in the most often evoked ‘plan’ frames point to a different semantic profile. Frames associated with concealment and deception, such as ‘Hiding objects’, ‘Prevarication’, ‘Eclipse’, and ‘Secrecy Status’ (all identified more often by LLM) are proportionally more prominent in ‘secret’ than in ‘plan’ spans. Such frames also reinforce the view of conspiracy theories as mechanisms that aim to give meaning to gaps in perception, revealing hidden realities (Piva *et al.*, 2026). This emphasis on concealment is complemented by epistemic frames such as ‘Becoming aware’, ‘Awareness’, and ‘Evidence’ (identified more often by LLM), which foreground processes of discovery, verification, and revelation that are characteristic of conspiracy theory communities, tied to processes of identity construction. As mentioned on *Chapter 1* Theoretical Framework, a relevant driver for conspiracy belief lies in how conspiracy theories make people feel important due to their supposed possession of unique, secret knowledge that others do not have access to (Douglas *et al.*, 2019). These frames point to the paradoxical importance of this secretive aspect to conspiracy discourse, where conspiracists denounce the evil of the undisclosed information, but at the same time, bask in the glory of being part of ‘enlightened few’, distinguished from the rest of the ignorant masses.

Lastly, the recurrence of the frame ‘Calendric unit’ for both ‘plan’ and ‘secret’ spans (much more recurring in spans annotated by humans than by the LLM) points to the importance of the temporal dimension for conspiracy theory rhetoric, where the discourse constructs a danger of the present, connected to scars from the past and linked to dreaded future scenarios (Leone *et al.*, 2020).

Overall, the most dominant frames are relative to locations (405 counts), performers/roles (380 counts), and temporal collocation (350 counts) – the first two are expected, sense since we filtered the dataset according to people, organizations, and places (entity-centric sampling, described in *Section 3.1*). Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that the dominance of these frames indicates that conspiracy narratives are grounded in *space*, *time*, and *actors* – that is, they establish factual validity by specifying the ‘where’, the ‘when’, and the ‘who’ (Piva *et al.*, 2026). On the other hand, frames such as ‘Have associated’ and ‘Taking sides’ – which would seem descriptive of ‘us-vs.-them’ modelling – are much less frequent than the structural framing of person, time, and place, indicating that either this aspect (thought of in the literature as intrinsic to conspiracy thinking) is not so much present in practical analysis of content in such large scale, or that in the context of big data textual analysis with NLP, this aspect is not as recognizable as during smaller more qualitative-focused analyses.

Lastly, regarding the distribution of unique lexical units per frame, the median (2.0) and the mean (3.4) indicate that the vast majority of frames are triggered by a very small set of specific words (often just two or three distinct terms), while a few more popular frames (such as ‘Statement’) employ a broader lexicon. From this, we understand that conspiracy discourse is *structurally repetitive*, but *descriptively varied in specific areas* like location and communication (Piva *et al.*, 2026). This converges with the literature. For instance, as pointed by (Hills, 2024, p. 282), conspiracy theories offer a worldview that “provides a ready-made alternative to mainstream accounts”, which are so “sufficiently flexible that it can fit any data without adjustment”. In more semiotic terms, Madisson and Ventsel (2021, p. 44) have stated that conspiracy theories have a ‘code-text’, that is, a set of relations that can simply be adapted to serve any specific situation; or, as theorized by Umberto Eco, they have a ‘universal form’, meaning a basic narrative structure that reveals these secret plots by powerful enemies (Ponzo, 2016).

Hence, by looking at the most recurring frames emerging from human- and LLM-annotated spans, it is possible to see how the operation of conspiracy theories does not depend so much on specific topic of interests, but on higher order beliefs (Hyzen & Van Den Bulck, 2021),

such as the aforementioned distrust of authority, eschatology (catastrophizing about the collapse of the system), opposition to official statements, distinction between those in-the-know and the rest, the existence of hidden realities, and a temporally consistent structure (where the past is good, the present is bad, and the future may be worse if action is not taken).

4.4. Final session: evaluating LLM-as-judge

The ‘Large Language Model-as-judge’ approach entails two steps. First, the LLMs automatically annotate text-messages that were not previously seen by any human and then, the results of the LLM annotations are evaluated manually by human annotators. For the first step, we ran the models on unseen messages from the large dataset a week before the final session of the workshop (the models were Llama 3.1-8b and Llama 3.3-70b, with few-shot and frame-augmented prompts for each model, amounting to 4 LLM outputs). The LLMs were prompted with two tasks: **a) text classification**; where the model assigns a label to the entire text based on predefined categories (conspiracy = true or = false, that is, is the text-message conspiratorial or not?), and **b) span annotation**; where the model identifies the exact part (span) of a conspiratorial text that corresponds to one or more of the five conceptual elements (‘plan’, ‘secret’, ‘out-group’, ‘in-group’, and ‘call-to-action’).

For the second step of LLM-as-judge, which took place on 15th of November⁽²⁾ 2025, we asked participants to: *evaluate the ability of LLMs to classify and annotate spans of text-messages relating to conspiracy theories*. To evaluate text classification (**a**), participants were asked to read 250 texts sampled from the 2,500 annotated ones, which the LLMs have classified as ‘conspiracy = true’, and state if they agree with this assessment or not. By selecting ‘yes’, the human annotator agreed that the model’s assessment was correct; by selecting ‘no’, the human annotator challenged the assessment of the model, which was wrong in classifying the text as conspiratorial.

(2) The final session of the workshop had the participation of only 10 students – this led to a dataset of 500 messages with 10 annotations each.

The agreement between human annotators in the evaluation of the model's classification was minimal (5%) – significantly lower than the one obtained during corpus annotation (*Section 4.2*). This means that annotators converged more when carrying out the task themselves than on the assessment of the LLMs performance, probably due to the characteristics of this assignment, which focuses on the evaluation of models rather than the individuation of a specific phenomenon (text analysis itself).

To evaluate the quality of span detection (**b**), 250 additional samples were shown to the participants (double-blind), with a specific focus on the core elements ('plan' and 'secret'). As the paraphrased example (next page) illustrates, participants were presented with the text-message and four options of spans annotated by the four different LLMs.

Read the Telegram Message

This is no laughing matter. They provide free housing for 'asylum seekers' and allocate hundreds of thousands... Meanwhile, Europeans residing here are forced to stay with their parents. It's outrageous... This is the same scenario that is about to unfold in America soon. More and more leaders will rise. Concentrate on waking people up so they aren't scared to voice their opinions!

Read the spans of text that highlight a secret plan

- **OPTION 1:** provide free housing for 'asylum seekers' and allocate hundreds of thousands
- **OPTION 2:** provide free housing for 'asylum seekers'
- **OPTION 3:** forced to stay with their parents
- **OPTION 4:** allocate hundreds of thousands / same scenario is about to unfold in America

Which is the best span?

OPTION 1 OPTION 2 OPTION 3 OPTION 4.

Which is the worst span?

OPTION 1 OPTION 2 OPTION 3 OPTION 4.

Often, the span options were the same or very similar to one another. In those cases where all options were equal, participants were asked to choose whether that option was considered best *or* worse (rather than one of each). The agreement between human annotators in the evaluation of LLM span annotation was much better (49% for the evaluation of the best spans and 36% for the worst spans – levels that are considered moderate). The results from the evaluation show that annotators consistently preferred the model that captured a fuller extent of the narrative, including specific details of mechanisms, targets, or consequences, over those that extracted fragmented and shorter keywords. In the paraphrased example above, this would mean that the annotators would largely prefer Options 1 or 4 over Options 2 or 3.

The models that were prompted with frame-augmented examples were, in general, preferred by annotators. For instance, in a text-message discussing the perils of so-called “5G-activated nano-pathogens”, the frame-augmented prompted LLMs captured spans along the lines of “can be activated by a 16 gigahertz signal from the 5G network” for the ‘plan’ element, while the few-shot models only extracted “activating dormant pathogens” – a shorter span that was deemed as worst option by the evaluators. Similarly, the frame-guided models often identified more than one span for a single element, while few-shot models only captured one of them (Piva *et al.*, 2026).

On the other hand, the few-shot models were preferred when they captured a comprehensive causal statement that the frame-guided models curtailed. In a text-message about COVID-19 origins, for instance, few-shot models captured both “secretly commissioned the paper” and “censoring discussions on the lab leak”, while the frame-guided models extracted only the first action (Piva *et al.*, 2026). Additionally, in the same text, the frame-guided models conflated ‘plan’ and ‘secret’ by using “secretly commissioned” for both elements, while the few-shot models separated “private messages” as the ‘secret’ and “secretly commissioned the paper” as the ‘plan’ – which is very interesting seeing how the models did not tag the word ‘secretly’ as part of a ‘secret’ span. Notwithstanding, the few-shot prompted models did a better job in identifying the spans in cases such as this.

Additionally, a trade-off was observed between semantic depth and

syntactic precision. The frame-guided models excelled in resolving ambiguity, better identifying implicit ‘secret’ spans, which the few-shot approach reduced to meaningless adjectives. For example, in a text about so-called “vaccination propaganda”, the frame-guided model extracted “trying to put in your head” as a meaningful secret describing manipulation, while the few-shot extracted only the word “captured” (from the sentence “captured public health agencies”) – a fragment that loses semantic clarity in isolation. However, this sensitivity of the frame-augmented models led to false positives in other cases. In shorter texts, the few-shot models were frequently preferred for their precision, avoiding the inclusion of unnecessary auxiliary verbs or non-conspiratorial context that the frame-guided model incorporated into the spans (Piva *et al.*, 2026).

In general, annotators agreed that, with the frame augmentation, LLMs tend to classify better (**task a**), but do not recognize spans better (**task b**). This means that the inclusion of frames – as a way to widen the contextual information of the model – is not enough to effectively ground LLM inference in structural semiotic representations. What is perhaps most interesting is that, in 35% of the cases, both annotators agreed that all models failed – that is, both annotators identified only a ‘worse’ option and no ‘best’ one. One of the primary reasons for that might have been the absence of identifiable conspiratorial content in the source text, where models extracted spans from professional news reports or promotional content rather than clear conspiracy narratives (I explore this further in *Chapter 5*). All in all, both approaches (with and without frame augmentation) struggle to distinguish conspiratorial discourse from superficially similar content types (discussions of potentially conspiratorial *subjects* that are not represented in conspiratorial *form*).

Independently from the human evaluation, we also analysed the agreement and prediction distributions between the four LLM configurations that were applied to unseen-by-human texts. Results reveal substantial inter-model agreement consistently exceeding the moderate agreement threshold observed in human annotations (*Section 4.2*), suggesting that LLMs exhibit greater consistency than humans. More specifically, agreement is particularly pronounced between same-size

models (8b few-shot $\leftrightarrow$ 8b w/frames and 70b few-shot $\leftrightarrow$ 70b w/frames) while cross-size agreements remain strong but slightly lower, indicating that model scale does not introduce random variations, but rather, it indicates systematic differences in judgment (Piva *et al.*, 2026).

The consensus analysis demonstrates that models reach unanimous agreement on the majority of texts (meaning that LLM-based annotation systems can achieve high reliability on unseen-by-human data), with disagreement concentrated on edge cases that likely represent the most ambiguous instances, where human review would especially be most valuable. Because of that, we argue that maintaining a human-in-the-loop is an important practical deployment strategy for the use of LLMs in research such as this one (Piva *et al.*, 2026).

Until this point, we have followed the process by which NLP tools have been applied to the study of conspiracy theories circulating on English-speaking Telegram. Once again, since we are halfway through this book, I would like to remind the reader of why we were doing all of this:

As I explained in *Chapter 1*, conspiracy theories endanger the structure of democratic societies, since they undermine societal, interpersonal, and political trust. Telegram, as it exists nowadays, has become a ‘conspiracy central’ – a claim that I support by citing the list compiled by Imperati *et al.* (2025), with more than 11 thousand Telegram channels that have been found to spread conspiracy theories. Given the amount of material being constantly produced and shared in these digital spaces, research needs to adapt its methodologies, since carrying out qualitative analyses on sample-relevant portions of text is now unfeasible.

This work reveals that leveraging AI tools for this type of study is not only possible, but beneficial, since it allows us to look at more data in less time, tracing generalizable semantic patterns that are latent to conspiratorial discourse, and which transcend surface-level lexical features (which is the main objective of this research). Among the findings mentioned at the end of *Section 4.3*, I would like to recall and highlight the

following aspects of conspiracy theories that arose from the computational analysis:

- **Conspiracy plans appear as coordinated courses of action, exercised by organized, institutional power** (thanks to a high emergence of the frames ‘Attempt’, ‘Purpose’, ‘Causation’, as well as ‘Leadership’ and ‘Political locales’ – realized by lexical units such as push, effort, endeavour, use, target, goal, application, force, bring, cause, as well as government, state, official, base, facility, and centre).
- **Conspiracy plans are violent and harmful existential threats** (high emergence of the frames ‘Killing’, ‘Attack’, ‘Weapon’, and ‘Cause/harm’, triggered by lexical units such as force, push, hit, destroy, genocide, eliminate, murder, ire, strike, bomb, bomb, chemical, missile, chemical, missile, strike, drug, hit, and poison).
- **Conspiracy theories are counter-narratives constructed in opposition to official histories** (as showed by the high occurrence of the frame ‘Statement’, realized lexically by terms such as ‘tell’, ‘report’, and ‘declare’).
- **Conspiracies are secret/hidden by nature, but conspiracy theory discourse is centred around revealing and discovery** (indicated by the frames ‘Hiding objects’, ‘Eclipse’, and ‘Secrecy Status’, but also the equally as frequent frames ‘Becoming aware’, ‘Awareness’, and ‘Evidence’).
- **Conspiracy theory discourse is grounded in the perception of the passage of time** (revealed by the recurrence of the frame ‘Calendric unit’).

In the next chapter, I draw from qualitative textual analysis to dive further into LLM outputs and explore their shortcomings in more detail.

CHAPTER V

THE METHOD AS THE OBJECT

The present chapter is meta-discursive, since I take the methodology of this book itself as my object. In order to assess the automatic work done by the LLMs, I chose to analyse random text spans and pose the following questions: *What did the models get mostly right? What particular things did they get wrong? What may be the overall consequences of those errors?*

Random text spans were chosen from three different categories: *Section 5.1* discusses texts obtained from the dataset used during the final session of the workshop, focusing on the LLMs identification of the elements ‘plan’ and/or ‘secret’. *Section 5.2* Analysis of spans annotated by the 70b few-shot model extracts text-messages that were annotated by the 70 billion few-shot model (prompt with examples), considering all five elements (‘plan’, ‘secret’, ‘out-group’, ‘in-group’, and ‘call-to-action’), while *Section 5.3* follows the same logic, but for the 70 billion model with frames (prompts with examples augmented with semantic frames). I only investigate in more detail the 70b models because they presented slightly higher accuracy, precision, and recall (as shown in Figure 7, end of *Section 3.4*). The chapter ends with a reflection on the errors that have been identified throughout this chapter (*Section 5.5*), as well as the matter of ‘supportive statements’ (*Section 5.4*) – which I have hinted at in *Chapter 3*, but that I further problematize here, providing for some examples to illustrate the problem and how we may think of solutions in the future.

Following what has been done throughout this book, all text-messages have been paraphrased to avoid the exposure of the users who posted them. However, I aimed to maintain the expressions that are most relevant for analysis exactly as they were in the original posts.

5.1. Analysis of annotated spans from the workshop

The following ten text-messages were randomly obtained from the dataset used during the final session of the workshop (described in *Section 4.4*), meaning that these texts and their respective LLM annotations have been assessed by at least two human participants from the workshop. Here, I will not include the annotators' assessment (such as which option was regarded as the best or worst), since this evaluation was already considered in the previous chapter, and my aim now is to analyse the LLM results in a much more in-depth manner, from a semiotics point of view.

Text-message 1:

"Libertarians and other people often don't look at the whole situation. They only focus on government and believe that governments are the main force that runs a country. Most countries are no longer sovereign. Governments are lower in the global power hierarchy and don't have that much influence."

Spans for 'secret plan':

- **LLMs 1 and 3:** global power hierarchy
- **LLMs 2 and 4:** hidden power hierarchy

The most particularly interesting aspect of this span annotation is that both LLMs 2 and 4 hallucinated⁽¹⁾ the word "hidden" which is nowhere in the text-message. Other than that, all models seem to agree that the terms "power hierarchy" reflect a conspiratorial plan. This is convergent with the literature, where most authors state that conspiracy theories are anti-authoritarian in character as well as inherently distrusting of politics and society in general (Birchall, 2006, p. 35; Kimminich,

(1) AI hallucination is a phenomenon where the model outputs reflect non-existent, non-sensical, or inaccurate patterns.

2016, p. 36; Thórisdóttir *et al.*, 2020, p. 313; Grimes, 2021, p. 13). Therefore, it would not be unsound to state that this conspiracy discourse is critical of a perceived global power hierarchy structure.

However, I would argue that the actual conspiratorial plan being denounced by this text-message is not the expression that the LLMs have tagged – which is already a given in any conspiracy narrative – but rather, it is the phrase “Most countries are no longer sovereign”. Although the existence of a global power hierarchy is consistent with conspiracy theory characteristics, it does not describe the main circumstance that this specific discourse is claiming to expose. Instead, the current state of affairs that the present conspiracy narrative aims to raise awareness to is the alleged fact that local governments have lost authority and that countries are now subject to other, covert powers. The main purpose of such a discourse is to redirect hostility. If the natural state of a conspiracy theory mindset is to resent the government, this discourse points to the need to focus on a new and more powerful enemy – possibly an economic elite, local or foreign – who still remains abstract and undescribed in the text.

Text-message 2:

“The US and its allies have frozen over \$58 billion in Russian assets in the last year. They have also placed strict limits on sanctioned Russians, keeping them out of the global financial system. The REPO has frozen the private assets of sanctioned Russian individuals. They have also looked into and stopped Russia’s efforts to avoid sanctions, which include trying to use illegal cryptocurrency, engage in money laundering, and buy weapons illegally. The REPO task force includes officials from the US Treasury and Justice Departments, as well as representatives from Australia, Canada, Japan, the UK, and the European Commission. #RussianMarket Source [website link].

NOTE: ⚠️ ONCE A THIEF, ALWAYS A THIEF. KHAZARIAN PEDO SATANISTS HAVE BEEN THE WORST BASTARDS IN HUMAN HISTORY 🔥 The Khazarian Mafia, the sons of Cain, the nest of the VIPER, the seed of the serpent --->>> [website link] 🔥 THE SECRET HISTORY OF HOW ZIONISTS INFILTRATED THE WORLD ---->>>>>> [website link] MEANWHILE THE NAZI TERRORISTS STARTED ANOTHER COLOR REVOLUTION 🔥 Violent Georgia Protests Backed by Same Western Powers Involved in Kiev --->>> [website link]”

Spans for ‘secret plan’:

- **LLM 1:** THE SECRET HISTORY
- **LLM 2:** Khazarian Mafia
- **LLM 3:** KHAZARIAN PEDO SATANISTS
- **LLM 4:** THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE KHAZARIAN MAFIA

This second example shows an even more concerning misconception on the part of the LLMs. Here, all four models tagged excerpts from the “note” section of the post, meaning that they ignored the actual narrative that the post is describing, focusing instead on the extra content that was placed at the end and that is unrelated to the discourse of the post itself. Among many of these Telegram channels, it is quite common for catchphrases – often written in capital letters, replete with emojis and accompanied by external links – to be constantly repeated at the end of the majority of posts, aiming to bring the audience to other online platforms (ranging from Instagram, X, and YouTube videos to smaller personal blogs and news or opinion pieces). In the case of the channel to which this post belongs, there are three catchphrases. One regards Khazarians⁽²⁾, another talks about Zionists, and the last one, about Nazi terrorists.

On the Telegram interface, these sentences and their respective links to external websites are separated from the main story of the post by a couple of empty lines. However, the LLMs appear incapable of inferring that the sentences that come after this break, below the word “note”, and following this pattern (capital letters, emojis, external website links) are not, in fact, part of the post discourse, but rather compose external, additional content. This information should be included in next experiments during prompting, in order to eliminate this type of errors in the future.

Now, if we were to focus on the story that the post itself is aiming to expose, we can ascertain that the story that is being described actually regards how the United States, Australia, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Europe (all of which compose the out-group)

(2) The Khazars were a semi-nomadic people of Slavic, Scythian, Iranian, and Turkish tribes, formed in the central-northern Caucasus during the late Iron Age, and who were later converted to Judaism in the 8th century (Elhaik, 2013).

are harming Russia, the state as well as Russian citizens (in-group), by freezing assets, imposing financial limits, and getting in the way of Russia's fight against several types of illegal activities (plan / circumstance). In this case, all the sentences which describe an injustice that is being done to Russia and its citizens by this group of Western countries could thus be tagged as a 'plan' span.

Text-message 3:

"Doctor Stopped Questioning Science Also Killed by Science. Alright, let's discuss pics of people getting vaccinated to help you stop questioning science, without science. Read. ❤️ [Instagram link]. How many people have been killed now from 🩸 ??? 🎵 [social media handle]"

LLM spans for 'secret plan':

- **LLMs 1 and 4:** people getting vaccinated
- **LLM 2:** killed now from 🩸
- **LLM 3:** getting vaccinated

This example is particularly difficult for LLMs to annotate, since the discourse is somewhat ironic. Existing LLM methods still face challenges (insufficient comprehensive understanding and lack of interpretability) with irony and sarcasm (Liu *et al.*, 2026). The text implies that the purpose of the dissemination of pictures portraying people getting vaccinated is to lead others to not question science, and that those who do not question science, ironically end up killed by it. Therefore, the 'plan / circumstance' is not "people getting vaccinated", as annotated by models 1, 3, and 4, but rather, it would be "pics of people getting vaccinated to help you stop questioning science", as this is the sentence that describes a supposed evil plan where the 'real purpose' of the disseminations of pictures portraying vaccination is to trick people into not questioning medical science. Therefore, seeing how these models still managed to get part of the span correctly, we can state that they are not as precise as one would expect them to be, yet at least the annotation is not completely mistaken.

It is also interesting to note the annotation done by LLM 2, where the emoji representing a syringe was included in the span. The text implies that the emoji is there to represent the word 'vaccine', in a way

that the span tagged by the model could be translated as “killed now from vaccines”. Although I would not tag this span as the central ‘plan’ being exposed by the narrative, I see no problem in tagging it as an *additional* ‘plan’ span, since death caused by vaccination is a central conspiratorial circumstance in anti-vax discourse. However, I do see an issue with this being the *only* ‘plan’ excerpt identified by LLM 2, since this is not the ‘main evil’ being described in the text (which focuses on the issue of the use of pictures to manipulate people). Is it still surprising and positive that the LLM was capable of discern an emoji input in the same way as it would discern a word.

Text-message 4:

“Leave the world behind Doenut Illuminati Analyses. [link to Youtube video] Please Share The World! JOIN US FOR AWAKENING NEWS: 🍌 [link to Telegram channel] Globalists & Plandemic Secrets Here: [link to website]”

LLM spans for ‘secret plan’:

- **LLM 1:** Plandemic Secrets
- **LLMs 2, 3, and 4:** Illuminati

This fourth text-message is an advertisement. Although all models have categorised it as conspiratorial discourse, it is not. It does, however, contain many conspiracy theory keywords in it, such as “illuminati”, “awakening news”, “globalists”, and “plandemic”, which is probably why it was categorised as such. Nevertheless, the text is not describing a narrative, but rather, it is merely directing the reader towards other conspiracy theory dissemination sources, namely the YouTube and Telegram channels, as well as the personal website of popular conspiracy influencer Doenut. The fact that the models still focus on keywords to extract a ‘plan’ element from a text shows how semantics are still highly influential and how it is hard for models to infer meaning from rhetoric.

Text-message 5:

“Century Of Enslavement: The History Of The Federal Reserve. What does the Federal Reserve system entail? What was the process of its creation? Is part

of the federal government? How does it generate money? Why is the public kept in the dark about these important issues?”

LLM spans for ‘secret plan’:

- **All LLMs:** generate money || kept in the dark

This example is particularly difficult to interpret since the argument is fairly abstract, composed of questions, without an explicit narrative. As pointed out at the end of the previous chapter, the models tend to converge in their annotations, therefore it is not surprising to see that all four models annotated the text in the exact same way.

Moreover, this example allows us to clearly see, among the two spans, which one must have been annotated as ‘plan’ and which one as ‘secret’ (first and second spans, respectively). The ‘secret’ span “kept in the dark” is the one that confers the conspiratorial character to this discourse. The ‘plan’ span is less straightforward. From the five questions presented in the text, the following premises can be identified: a country’s Federal Reserve systems have mysterious origins and carry out mysterious activities; the way in which money circulates within such systems is also secretive; the people are deliberately not informed about these mysteries.

In sum, we can infer that the narrative being exposed is as follows: *the public* (in-group) *is kept in the dark* (secret) *about how a country’s Federal Reserve system* (out-group) *came to be, how it generates money, and what kind of activities it carries out* (plan). Once the full narrative is put together this way, it becomes clear that “generate money” should be just *part* of the ‘plan’ span and that the LLM annotation is not wrong, but still incomplete.

Text-message 6:

“Satanics are truly wicked. Symbolism will be their downfall. She has a tattoo of Medusa’s Gorgon snake head on her belly. She was totally demon possessed. ‘Giggling’ mother, 27, charged with fatally stabbing her boyfriend while he slept ‘lied to police that he had raped her and threatened to leak sex tape of them on Facebook to ruin his life’, murder trial reveals [[link to Dailymail article](#)]. Please Share The World!”

LLM spans for ‘secret plan’:

- **LLMs 1, 3, and 4:** Symbolism will be their downfall || Satanics are truly wicked
- **LLM 2:** demon possessed

The text above discusses an event that was described by an article from Dailymail.

The first sentence “Satanics are truly wicked” was tagged by most models as the ‘plan’ span. I would like to recall that the element ‘plan’ is a conflation between: 1) a perceived conspiratorial plan, 2) a current event or circumstance that is taking place, posing a danger to the in-group, and 3) the evil end that the out-group seeks to achieve. This conflation happened based on the feedback of the human annotators who were finding it too difficult to distinguish between these three elements (‘plan’, ‘event/circumstance’, ‘evil end’) when annotating texts from the dataset (as described in *Section 3.2*). In the analysis of the text above, I find that it is necessary to separate all elements beforehand.

First, there are two out-group spans that can be identified: “satanists” and the “27 year old ‘giggling’ mother”. Considering that the text implies that the woman in question (second span) is a satanist (first span), we have the idea that the second span regards an individual (27-year-old giggling mother) who is part of the group described by the first span (satanists). There is no focus on the in-group, yet it could be argued that the span “her boyfriend” could be tagged as such, as well as the span “the police”, since those are the victims of the out-group’s malevolent actions (stabbing and lying, respectively).

When it comes to the harmful events that have taken place, we could point to the following spans: “fatally stabbing her boyfriend”, “lied to police”, “threatened to leak sex tape”, while the ‘evil end’ can be found in the span “to ruin his life”. At the end of the text, the sentence “Please Share The World!”, although misspelled (since the term “world” should actually be “word”), can still be easily understood as a call-to-action. Back to the beginning of the text, the sentence “Symbolism will be their downfall” was tagged by the majority of the models as a ‘secret’ span. That is understandable since the word ‘symbolism’ does have a secretive connotation to it, implying that some meanings lie beneath

layers of other meanings. However, it is still difficult to see how the whole sentence “symbolism will be their downfall” indicates a secret, when just the word ‘symbolism’ would be sufficient.

Lastly, when it comes to the conspiratorial plan that the text is seeking to expose, we can see how it is hard to extrapolate an over-encompassing agenda from the specific event being discussed (the case of the 27-year-old woman). We do have a clear villain and victim, as well as a set of harmful actions being done to the later by the former. We also saw how the villain, as an individual, is only a part of a larger dangerous group. The ‘plan’ span should, then, configure a jump from the specific circumstances related to this micro-scale event, to a larger course of action intended by the greater out-group. In this sense, it is possible to argue that the first sentence (“satanists are truly wicked”) can configure a ‘plan’ span, since it offers this connection between the specific event and a larger danger, linking an individual to an organized villainous group. Nevertheless, in order to reach that conclusion, it was still necessary to identify the micro-level events/circumstances (“fatally stabbing her boyfriend”, “lied to police”, “threatened to leak sex tape”) and ‘evil end’ (“to ruin his life”). In my view, since the ‘plan’ element is a conflation of all those things, all the spans above should then be tagged as ‘plan’ in order for the annotation to be properly thorough.

Text-message 7:

“Nazi and Jews history is all a lie. Please Share The World! FOLLOW AWAKENING NEWS: 🖱️ [link to Telegram channel] 🔗 Secrets to Escape the Matrix: [website link]”

LLM spans for ‘secret plan’:

- **LLMs 1 and 2:** Secrets to Escape the Matrix
- **LLMs 3 and 4:** is all a lie

What happened with the annotation of text-message 7 is similar to what we have seen with text-message 2. Here, LLMs 1 and 2 tagged excerpts from the extra-textual section of the post, ignoring its actual argument. The function of the span “Secrets to Escape the Matrix” is to lead readers to an external website. Because the sentence contains the words

“secrets” and “matrix” (terms that are very common in conspiratorial discourse), the models tagged the span as ‘secret’ and ‘plan’. However, just the presence of terms that have conspiratorial semantic contexts is not enough to characterize them as a conspiratorial plan, an element dependent on structure. The function of the terms and the sentence in the text have to be considered for the annotation to work. In this case, LLMs 3 and 4 did a much better job, tagging the actual happening that paints this text in conspiratorial shades. The span “is all a lie” not only gives it a secretive aspect, but when connected to the term “history” (which has an ‘official’ or ‘mainstream’ connotation), it can be interpreted as “deliberate manipulation”, which is characteristic of conspiracies.

Text-message 8:

“🔥 Tucker Carlson Says He Regrets Working for the Media ‘Control Apparatus’. ‘Their job is not to inform you. They are working for the small group of people who actually run the world’.”

LLM spans for ‘secret plan’:

- **LLM 1 and 3:** working for the small group of people who actually run the world
- **LLM 2:** Their job is not to inform you
- **LLM 4:** Control Apparatus

Model 4, above, committed a clear mistake: “Media Control Apparatus” should be tagged as ‘out-group’, not as ‘plan’. In text-messages 4 and 7, LLMs had also marked conspiracy theory keywords as ‘plan’. Since “Control Apparatus” is one of such popular terms in the conspiracy milieu, it is easy to understand why LLM 4 has tagged it that way. Nevertheless, it is even more interesting to note that LLM 4 was the only model that fell into this trap. The other three models carried out more appropriate annotations.

Although “the small group of people who actually run the world” is also an ‘out-group’ span, certain terms may overlap between elements, being tagged as more than one span. Especially since there are many cases where the ‘plan’ span contains the ‘out-group’ span – the perpetrator of the evil actions is usually a subject in such sentences. This way, I see no issue with the annotation done by models 1 and 3.

Lastly, the span “Their job is not to inform you” annotated by LLM 2 is interesting, since it implies manipulation; the idea that the aim of the media is not, as most would believe, to inform, but to deceive. Such span is not as obvious as “working for the people who actually run the world”, but it is just as relevant for the understanding of this conspiratorial narrative – where a minority dominates the world, culturally and politically, using the media to manipulate the public and defend their own selfish interests. In this sense, I would argue that, ideally, both spans should be tagged as ‘plan’, for the annotation to be comprehensive.

Text-message 9:

“For years, I covered holistic physicians who were well and didn’t receive any shots, and I expressed my concerns about them dying suddenly. For the most part, either unintentional, established homicide or alleged suicide. Now this doctor who seems to have received all the vaccines, unexpectedly dies. That’s the new trend.”

LLM spans for ‘secret plan’:

- **LLMs 1 and 4:** dying suddenly || established homicide or alleged suicide
- **LLMs 2 and 3:** dying suddenly

In this text-message, models 1 and 4 provide a more thorough annotation, since they point to not just one, but two ‘plan’ spans. Since the ‘plan’ element is a conflation of three others, as I just mentioned a few pages ago, it makes sense that a single text-message would showcase more than one ‘plan’ span. However, LLMs tend to annotate just one or two spans per element, which is one of the reasons why their annotations are less exhaustive than humans (who tend to provide more spans per element, as we saw in *Section 3.4* Figure 6).

In the example of text-message 9, above, I would also add “have received all the vaccines, unexpectedly dies” as the main ‘plan’ span, since this is the one that most encompasses the conspiratorial narrative, connecting vaccination to death.

Text-message 10:

“I was wrong. We in the scientific community were wrong. And it cost lives.’ This article is from NEWSWEEK, people. NEWSWEEK. A commentary that addresses many of the points patriots have been striving to express for years. ‘I can see now that the scientific community from the CDC to the WHO to the FDA and their representatives, repeatedly overstated the evidence and misled the public about its own views and policies, including on natural vs. artificial immunity, school closures and disease transmission, aerosol spread, mask mandates, and vaccine effectiveness and safety, especially among the young. All of these were scientific mistakes at the time, not in hindsight. Amazingly, some of these obfuscations continue to the present day.’ Please take the time to read this article completely. Once you finish, share it across all available social media platforms – this is the kind of conversation we need now more than ever.”

LLM spans for ‘secret plan’:

- **all LLMs:** obfuscations || repeatedly overstated the evidence and misled the public

This is yet another case where all models annotated the exact same spans. Surely, “obfuscations” is the most obvious term that indicates the secretive aura of the conspiratorial plan, therefore it makes sense that the models identified this word as the ‘secret’ span. The second tagged span, which refers to the conspiratorial plan, is also appropriate, since it encompasses the narrative that the text is describing – where the out-group (composed of the scientific community from several official health institutions) has purposefully implemented harmful policies while deceiving the public (in-group) about their true damaging nature (secret).

So far, most of the analysed text-messages proved to be examples of how the models can fall short. This is the first example of a case where the annotation done by all the models was perfectly adequate. Of course, these samples are not representative of the dataset, since 10 text-messages randomly obtained from a set of 2,500 is simply not enough. Therefore, I hesitate to make any generalizations which may imply that LLMs are correct only in one out of ten cases. It might have been the case that these random 10 message annotations were just not

as good as the majority, nevertheless it is still interesting to see where exactly they are lacking.

In general, we saw in *Section 3.4* that LLMs tend to annotate less spans than humans, which makes their annotation more inaccurate, since most text-messages could benefit from more than one span, especially when describing a ‘plan’. This shows, once again, how this methodology is still imprecise, especially in cases where the discourse focuses on enumerating several evil actions being carried out against the in-group, instead of describing the plan in one encompassing sentence. Sometimes, the models tag a span as a completely wrong element (cases where terms were tagged as ‘plan’ when they were actually an ‘out-group’) or irrelevant sections (such as adverts or links to external websites).

5.2. Analysis of spans annotated by the 70b few-shot model

The five text-messages analysed in this section were retrieved from the set of texts annotated by the 70b few-shot model. More specifically, the texts were randomly obtained from the list of messages which were categorized as conspiratorial and specifically contained spans for all five elements (‘plan’, ‘secret’, ‘out-group’, ‘in-group’, and ‘call-to-action’). My aim in this section is to assess the model’s performance when identifying all elements of a conspiracy narrative in a given text-message.

Text-message 11:

“Robert Kennedy Jr. Claims He’s Determined to Trigger a ‘Political Earthquake’ With His Presidential Campaign. ‘Just watching the way the pandemic was conducted, the countermeasures were conducted, then the war and the bank bailouts. I had enough. I see my country disappearing...It’s a uniparty – they’re both the party of war’.”

Spans:

- **out-group:** the government and parties
- **in-group:** my country
- **plan:** the way the pandemic was conducted, the countermeasures were conducted, and then the war and the bank bailouts

- **secret:** they're both the party of war
- **call-to-action:** Trigger a 'Political Earthquake'

The fact that the model hallucinated the 'out-group' span is what stands out the most, since there is absolutely no fragment of the text containing the expression "the government and parties". This sequence of words was probably extrapolated from the context of the text, which is discussing the presidential elections of the United States. Although it does make sense that the government and governmental parties are out-groups in this narrative, the model essentially failed to accomplish the task of *tagging excerpts from the text*. It is interesting that it was able to extrapolate from context, however, we may still question if such extrapolation will always be fair or if it may leave a little too much room for bias and error.

Regarding the 'in-group' span, I believe the annotation is adequate. The 'plan', however, is incomplete. Although the tagged spans are consistent with this element, I believe the central term that relates to a conspiratorial plan is actually the word "uniparty", which suggests the existence of one single political party behind an election. In this sense, the term itself – perhaps due to its context – possesses a secretive aura. Nevertheless, it would be understandable if an annotator (human or machine) were to not tag any excerpt as a 'secret' span in this case. However, added to the spans tagged by this model as plans, I still believe the term "uniparty" should be the central 'plan' span, and the fact that it did not show up neither as 'secret' nor as 'plan' reveals a lack of ability to accomplish the annotation task successfully by the model.

Lastly, it seems the LLM may have tagged "Trigger a 'Political Earthquake'" as the call-to-action, apparently because it starts with a verb in the imperative, which would be another serious flaw. Yet, if we pay closer attention to the full sentence, even that explanation would be misguided, since the verb is not in the imperative, but in the infinitive (which is confusing since both verbal tenses have the same spelling in English). To the best of my knowledge, this text exhibits no 'call-to-action' span, simply because it does not directly address the reader at any time.

Text-message 12:

“K.S.’s Trans Soldiers Declare Jihad Against Christian America. The World Economic Forum was serious when they claimed they intend to murder your god-fearing grandparents, eradicate your useless children, and sterilize those who oppose to their extremist eugenics agenda – and this week’s Deep State assault on a classroom of terrified young white Christians served as a warning from the globalist elite to the rest of America – you are next. This video will reveal how the Nashville shooting was an orchestrated plot by the elites, a terrorist attack, using the three-letter agencies as enablers, to instil fear in American families and Christians.”

Spans:

- **out-group:** globalist elite
- **in-group:** Christian America
- **plan:** murder your god-fearing grandparents, eradicate your useless children, and sterilize those who oppose || orchestrated plot by the elites, a terrorist attack
- **secret:** orchestrated plot
- **call-to-action:** you are next

Although the “globalist elite” is the main enemy in this narrative, we can point to the following spans which could also be tagged as out-groups: “Trans Soldiers”, “The World Economic Forum”, “the elites”, and “the three-letter agencies”. Once again, the model’s tendency to tag one span per element makes it so that the annotation is insufficient. Similarly, added to “Christian America”, other ‘in-group’ spans could also be: “young white Christians”, and “American families and Christians”. If we were to be truly exhaustive, we would also add the other victims of the evil doings of the out-group which are translated by the expressions: “god-fearing grandparents”, “children”, and “those who oppose”.

When it comes to the conspiratorial plan, the model was more successful than in the previous example. Here, the span is much more comprehensive. I would, however, add “assault on a classroom” as part of the ‘plan’ span, as well as the expression “you are next”, seeing how this would configure the ‘evil end’ (and not the ‘call-to-action’). Although these three words address the reader, they do not directly ask them to act in any specific way, therefore it should not have been tagged as a

‘call-to-action’. Instead, this sentence is revealing a consequence of *in-action* – which is why it is the last part of the ‘plan’ that is being narrated. For a call-to-action to be present, the sentence would have to continue, for instance, as this: “you are next, unless we *do something*”. Lastly, the tagging of “orchestrated plot” as ‘secret’ is consistent.

Text-message 13:

“Germany’s refusal to pay World War II reparations to Poland is indicative of double standards and a lack of respect for the Polish people, said Arkadiusz Mularczyk, the secretary of state at the nation’s foreign ministry... There is a deeper Story.. Go digging – RABBIT HOLES, PEDO SATANISTS ZIONISTS KHAZARIAN MAFIA MUST REPAY AND EVERYONE INVOLVED FACING ELIMINATION [social media handle] [link to external website]”

Spans:

- **out-group:** Germany || PEDO SATANISTS ZIONISTS KHAZARIAN MAFIA
- **in-group:** Polish people
- **plan:** Germany’s refusal to pay World War II reparations
- **secret:** There is a deeper Story
- **call-to-action:** Go digging

As mentioned before, the sentence at the end of the post written in capital letters configures content external to the conspiratorial narrative being described in the text, and should thus not be included in the annotation (I refer to “PEDO SATANISTS ZIONISTS KHAZARIAN MAFIA”). Nevertheless it is excellent that the model still managed to tag “Germany” as the ‘out-group’, added to the extra content that should not have been tagged. In this narrative, the tagging of “Polish people” as ‘in-group’ is also accurate.

In addition to “Germany’s refusal to pay World War II reparations”, the ‘plan’ span could also encompass “double standards” and “lack of respect” in order for it to be truly complete. Despite this flaw, the model was still able to accurately point to the ‘secret’ span consisting of the expression “There is a deeper Story” – which is surprising, since this span is not as straightforward as previous ‘secret’ spans that were also correctly

identified. Lastly, the span “Go digging”, which has been tagged as a call-to-action, is also accurate. In general, the annotation of this text-message was surprisingly satisfactory, considering the track record so far.

Text-message 14:

“What Is the True Meaning of “Novel”? I work with language, specifically having focused on scholarly articles for several years as a university lecturer and researcher. I have considerable experience with language. This examination is focused on words, not on science. I think words transcend professions, so people who work with words like me are fully entitled to asking questions of the words used by scientists. I think language is used to both reveal and conceal: The article states that the bat CoVs were “spreading”. Does this imply they were previously present in humans? Circulating to me implies familiarity: not original. It goes on to say they built a “chimeric” virus. Chimeric, derived from the term chimera, refers to a virus that includes at least two distinct components from various viruses. Basically, the circulating virus combines with another segment of a circulating virus, specifically the HIV virus in this case. Does this classify it as a “novel” virus since both components were circulating? Be aware that the government support through USAID & EcoHealth Alliance for “Z.-L.S.” was originally left out. Aren’t these the initials of Zhengli-Li Shi at the Wuhan Laboratory? Was the initially excluded funding in the paper restored because gain of function research was prohibited in the US, prompting them to clarify that it occurred in Wuhan?”

Spans:

- **out-group:** scientists
- **in-group:** people who work with words like me
- **plan:** built a “chimeric” virus
- **secret:** language is used to both reveal and conceal
- **call-to-action:** asking questions of the words used by scientists

This text-message is among those whose ‘plan’ span is unclear and segmented, which means that a single straightforward sentence would be insufficient. The narrative being told in this text regards the manipulation of meaning, and the author claims to be carrying out text analysis – here we see the notion of conspiracy thinking as pop-semiotics (Aupers, 2020) actualized. The several (mostly rhetorical) questions posed by the author serve the clear function of casting doubt upon the

validity of the scientific article which the text quotes. In this sense, the “building of a *chimeric virus*” is also questioned and, therefore, should not be seen as a conspiratorial plan. Instead, the author implies that this “new chimeric virus” that is being discussed is in fact not new at all, since it was already (supposedly) in circulation before.

Further, it is implied that the research funding of Chinese origin were purposefully omitted in the original article. In this sense, I would argue that the most logical spans that could be tagged as ‘plan’ would be: “components were circulating” and “government support through USAID & EcoHealth Alliance for “Z.-L.S.” was originally left out”. However, it is possible to see how even those two spans are insufficient to characterize the conspiracy being here described. To summarize it into a suitable storyline, it would be necessary to paraphrase several sentences – something that the model was not asked to do. Since the task itself (annotation) is rather limited, it is understandable that the results were not so satisfactory. A human would not do better.

Other than failing the albeit challenging task of identifying the ‘plan’ spans, the model carried out the rest of the annotation quite well. All other spans are identified in ways that are cohesive with their characterizations. It is especially intriguing how the ‘secret’ span includes the sentence “language is used to both reveal and conceal” instead of just the word “conceal”. With the more complete span, we not only have the secretive element but also the thing that provides for this secretive aura (“language”). Finally, the ‘call-to-action’ span is also surprising, since it does not address the reader. Despite the subjectivity, the model still managed to capture an interesting idea behind this sentence: to prompt people to follow the author and ask questions.

Text-message 15:

“The system intended to promote the welfare of Humanity was turned against YOU. A tyrannical Government, controlled by the Reptilians and Greys – using nanites to brainwash humanity. Deep within YOUR channels, the parasitic controllers live, attached inside your mind. Using the audio controller to record your keywords, the Agent Smiths swiftly respond to manipulate you and infiltrate your thoughts. Your phone is the CERN, using interdimensional portals and tech to control you. They respond to noises and vibrations, coincidentally it killed the invaders from Mars Attacks. Employing a compact CERN framework

to invoke Archons and Interdimensional Beings, they reside underground. Find the excessive amount of electric utility boxes, find the cone markers. They are close to entertainment venues, places of worship, schools, coffee shops, grocery stores, medical facilities, government offices. An underworld complex created for THEIR smuggling and gateways, while they kept Humanity in a manipulated condition from their toxins. *Keeping YOU a captive of YOUR OWN mind.*"

Spans:

- **out-group:** Reptilians and Greys
- **in-group:** Humanity
- **plan:** using nanites to brainwash humanity || using interdimensional portals and tech to control you
- **secret:** the parasitic controllers live, attached inside your mind
- **call-to-action:** Find the excessive amount of electric utility boxes, find the cone markers

Text-message 15 is another example of multi-sentence spans, where single straightforward spans for each category are not enough to completely portrait the narrative. Besides "Reptilians and Greys"⁽³⁾, the terms "tyrannical Government", "Agent Smiths", "the CERN", as well as "Archons and Interdimensional Beings" could also be seen as 'out-group' spans. If on the one hand the out-group is very specifically described, the in-group, on the other hand, is conveniently abstract, translated by the pronoun 'you' in capital letters – *YOU are the victim*. Though the word "Humanity" may also be seen as part of the 'in-group' span, it is not as prominent as the pronoun, in this case.

The multitude of 'out-group' spans naturally reveals many 'plan' ones, seeing how the 'plan' element usually refers to a particular action being carried out by the out-group; thus it makes sense that multiple out-groups would lead to multiple plans. It is good to see that the model tagged two spans as 'plan', however, even more could have been annotated as such: "The system [...] was turned against YOU", "record your keywords", "manipulate you and infiltrate your thoughts", "created for THEIR smuggling and gateways", "kept Humanity in a

(3) The terms refer to a conspiracy theory popularized by conspiracy influencer David Icke in the early 2000's, which claims that many world leaders and celebrities are part of a race of shapeshifting reptilian aliens who secretly control the world and manipulate society.

manipulated condition from their toxins”, and lastly, “keeping YOU a captive of YOUR OWN mind”.

I would argue that most ‘plan’ spans in this text already include something that indicates a secretive character, for instance, the words “manipulate” or “smuggling”. However, the span tagged by the model (“the parasitic controllers live, attached inside your mind”) can be seen as the main describer of the secret aspect of the narrative. Despite the multitude of evil plans, the most dangerous aspect of the Reptilian Overlords conspiracy theory is the fact that everything is happening in secret, and that what is keeping the secret safe is something, a device, inside the minds of the people who are unaware. The secret is hidden from people in the most invasive way possible; the truth is taken straight from their minds. It is great that the model was able to give an output that indicates this deeper connection, instead of just tagging words that share common semantic contexts with the word ‘secret’.

As mentioned in *Section 4.4*, when evaluating the LLMs performance, human annotators preferred the models that received frame-augmented examples in their prompts (analysed in detail in the next section) over the few-shot approach (present section) when the task was classification (deciding whether a text is conspiratorial or not). On the other hand, for the annotation task, the workshop participants favoured the few-shot models when it separated spans for ‘plan’ and ‘secret’, instead of repeating the same span for both elements – something that the frame-augmented models often did. Additionally, although the overall assessment of these models indicated that the few-shot approach tended to reduce implicit ‘secret’ spans to single adjectives that frequently lost semantic clarity in isolation, what the analysis of the text-messages above showed is that this was not always the case. The analysed ‘secret’ spans here were quite comprehensive, showing that the few-shot approach may be seen as perfectly adequate in some instances.

5.3. Analysis of spans annotated by the 70b frame-augmented model

The following five text-messages were randomly retrieved from the set of texts annotated by the 70b model augmented with frames. Only

messages that were annotated with spans for all five elements were considered. Similarly to the previous section, I aim to assess this model's performance when identifying all elements of a conspiracy narrative in each text.

Text-message 16:

“‘The next pandemic is not a matter of if but of when’, says WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Not everyone complied — and that’s an issue to Tedros. So, he’s focusing on measures to ENSURE your compliance next time: A new pandemic treaty and amendments to the IHR: ‘To strengthen the legal framework for the global response to pandemics.’ This means that countries are signing away national sovereignty to the World Health Organization. ‘Misinformation’ and ‘disinformation’ resulted in a lack of trust in the government. Expect additional attempts to censor speech. Join 🖱️ [link to another Telegram channel]”

Spans:

- **out-group:** World Health Organization
- **in-group:** national sovereignty
- **plan:** measures to ENSURE your compliance next time || a new pandemic treaty and amendments to the IHR
- **secret:** countries are signing away national sovereignty to the World Health Organization
- **call-to-action:** Join

This case is interesting because the in-group is quite abstract. Comparing it to the out-group, which is quite obviously the ‘World Health Organization’ (although we could also argue that ‘WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus’ could configure an additional ‘out-group’ span – the individual villain who is part of the villainous group), the in-group is not, as tagged by the model, “national sovereignty”. Instead, “national sovereignty” would be something valuable that will be lost if the out-group achieves its evil end. Therefore, a suitable ‘in-group’ span would, instead, be those that did not comply with the measures implemented by the WHO during the COVID-19 pandemic. The span closest to this notion, although very abstract, would thus be “Not everyone” – which represents quite well

the feelings of distinction and uniqueness that are common in conspiracy theory communities. As mentioned in Chapter 1, being set apart from everyone else is an important characteristic for the identity construction process of conspiracy theorists and it would thus be important to represent it in the annotation.

When it comes to the ‘plan’ span, despite showcasing not a single one but two spans, the model still missed the following excerpts: “additional attempts to censor speech” and “countries are signing away national sovereignty to the WHO” – the latter which should also have been tagged as ‘plan’ in addition to ‘secret’. Surely, “signing away” does possess a secretive character, therefore, I would argue that the complete span represents a ‘plan’ while just these two highlighted words could be tagged as ‘secret’.

Finally, regarding the ‘call-to-action’, it is possible to question whether just the word “join” is enough. One may ask: *join what?* To which a human reader may reply: the Telegram Channel being advertised through the link inserted after the pointing hand emoji. It has become clear up to this point that LLMs are apparently not capable of distinguishing weblinks from the rest of the text. Perhaps, asking the models to treat links as a specific object during prompting may be a way to mitigate this flaw. Still, in this case, “Join the Telegram channel” can be a call-to-action if the channel being advertised relates to the topic under discussion in the post and, thus, if being part of this channel is understood as doing something to fight this plan. Without knowing more about where this link leads to, it is not possible to judge whether there is a call-to-action here or not.

Text-message 17:

“Breaking: pharmaceutical funded fake news who have no spine, producing sensational articles with examples of the tiny handful of people who have allegedly died of strokes after chiropractic care and suggesting that visiting a chiropractor for adjustments could lead to a stroke and sudden death. It’s a narrative against chiropractors by the main stream media. This, my friends, is precisely why I’m glad we are suing main stream media. That’s the reason B.K. and Dr. M., C.B., myself, and six additional plaintiffs are pursuing this, and they need to be held responsible. Oh my God, avoid chiropractors, but the shots are great. Keep boosting yourself right off the planet.”

Spans:

- **out-group:** main stream media || pharmaceutical companies
- **in-group:** chiropractic industry
- **plan:** pharmaceutical funded fake news || giving examples of the tiny handful of people who have allegedly died of strokes after chiropractic care
- **secret:** pharmaceutical funded
- **call-to-action:** we are suing main stream media

Once again, the model was spot-on about the out-group, but failed to identify the in-group correctly. The in-group span given by this model is a hallucination; there is no such an excerpt in the text. A rational ‘in-group’ span would, instead, be “chiropractors”. We could especially add other secondary spans containing the people who are part of this bigger in-group: “B.K. and Dr. M., C.B., myself, and six additional plaintiffs” (original full names were omitted in this book as they are not names of public persons).

The ‘plan’ span annotation is suitable; however, we could add further spans to this element (as it seems to be the case in most of the examples seen so far), specifically the excerpt: “suggesting that visiting a chiropractor for adjustments could lead to a stroke and sudden death”, which describes a clear conspiratorial plan. Regarding the ‘secret’ span, even though a source of funding may be interpreted as a secretive aspect of a conspiracy, a more suitable span could be “fake news”, since that is by design something created to manipulate and obscure. It is especially interesting to see that the term “fake news” has not triggered this meaning from the model, which preferred the other less obvious implications of the term “funded” to represent the element ‘secret’.

Lastly, the ‘call-to-action’ is debatable. Although “suing the main-stream media” is an action taken by the in-group to stop the plan of the out-group, it is difficult to argue that the text is calling upon the reader to join in on this action. It does not quite cover the main function of a call-to-action span. Again, this is subjective, since others may argue that, yes, the text may be implying that readers should take similar measures when they can, and in this case, the call-to-action annotated by the model is correct.

Text-message 18:

“US Government is finally admitting that our skies are being sprayed to manipulate the weather. The state is introducing a bill to prohibit the injection, release, or dispersion of chemicals or any apparatus into the atmosphere ‘for the express purpose of affecting the temperature, weather, or intensity of sunlight’. This has also been confirmed by Karen Johnson: ‘You better wake up and fight back now’ because what they’re spraying in the skies is toxic. ‘I think it’s wise for us to stay focused on just the aerospraying and the toxic effect of these chemicals, the destruction of the planet and the damage to human health’.”

Spans:

- **out-group:** US Government
- **in-group:** human health
- **plan:** spraying toxic chemicals into the atmosphere
- **secret:** our skies are being sprayed
- **call-to-action:** wake up and fight back now

Here, both ‘out-group’, ‘in-group’, and ‘call-to-action’ spans are acceptable. The ‘plan’ span is, however, another hallucination. It appears that the 70b model augmented with frames excels in summarizing information instead of just tagging a span. On the one hand, this is good, since doing such a task is also one of my objectives with this work (further explored in the next chapter). Nevertheless, in this current stage of experimentation, this output is unwanted. Summarizing is not what we prompted the model to do; it is failing to follow quite straightforward orders.

Satisfactory ‘plan’ spans could be: “our skies are being sprayed to manipulate the weather”, “they’re spraying in the skies is toxic”, and “aerospraying and the toxic effect of these chemicals, the destruction of the planet and the damage to human health”.

Additionally, the ‘secret’ span is also definitely not suitable. The words “finally admitting” would configure a better representation of this element, since they imply that, up until this ‘final’ moment narrated by the message, the conspiratorial plan was happening with none the wiser.

Text-message 19:

“This pioneering documentary explores the concerning increase in male reproductive problems, such as genital malformations, reduced sperm count, sperm irregularities, and testicular cancer. At the same time, young males encounter increased risks for conditions such as ADHD, autism, Tourette’s syndrome, and dyslexia. Expertly developed by M.G., the documentary reveals the concealed offenders: a group of ordinary chemicals present in shampoos, sunglasses, meat and dairy items, carpets, cosmetics, and baby bottles. With the future of humanity at stake, this documentary serves as a compelling reminder of the critical necessity to address these toxic threats. The impact of these substances, referred to as bisphenols, was recognized well prior to the release of this documentary. In his 1952 book, ‘The Next Million Years’, eugenicist Charles Galton Darwin wrote about putting chemicals in the food and water supply, using injections and other means to change and decrease the population of ‘useless eaters’ aka the working class folks. This historical background provides a disturbing viewpoint to the documentary, raising questions regarding the intentional use of these chemicals and their possible lasting impacts on our health and society.”

Spans:

- **out-group:** working class folks
- **in-group:** humanity
- **plan:** putting chemicals in the food and water supply
- **secret:** intentional use of these chemicals
- **call-to-action:** address these toxic threats

Once again, the text-message exhibits subtlety that makes the annotation task rather difficult. The out-group is not directly mentioned, in a way that the annotator must work their way back from the plan and the victims in order to find the perpetrators.

First, the ‘in-group’ span: should not be just “humanity” or “population” (a larger, more encompassing in-group), but *men* – represented by spans such as “young males” (in-group) and “male reproductive problems” (circumstance). Here, “working class folk” can also be seen as an ‘in-group’ span, since these are also the victims of these so-called “chemicals” and “injections” used to decrease the population.

Next, we notice that the ‘plan’ span identified by the model is (as expected) incomplete, seeing how “using injections and other means

to change and decrease the population” should also be part of it. From this, one understands that the out-group in this narrative is someone who is interested in decreasing the population; perhaps the government or the good old abstract entities often called ‘the elites’. As mentioned before, the in-group is abstract enough that no span can be directly identified in the text.

Other extracts of the text that describe a dangerous present situation which can also be seen as ‘plan’ spans are: “concerning increase in male reproductive problems, such as genital malformations, reduced sperm count, sperm irregularities, and testicular cancer”, “increased risks for conditions such as ADHD, autism, Tourette’s syndrome, and dyslexia”, as well as “intentional use of these chemicals”. This last span has been tagged as ‘secret’ by the model, which is interesting since there is a much more obvious option: “the concealed offenders”. At first glance, the conspicuous span seems to be more suitable, however, the words “intentional use” do imply that there is a hidden objective behind the alleged use of chemicals. It is surprising that the model (with the help of augmented frames) was able to identify that underlying meaning. I would still argue that both excerpts configure ‘secret’ spans. Other than that, the ‘call-to-action’ span is quite suitable.

Text-message 20:

“J.C. denounces the mainstream media for trying to cover up the truth about adrenochrome and the organ harvesting of children. Their attempts to fact check and silence those who wish to speak the truth about evil cannot be overlooked: ‘Speak the truth to the people’. The world needs to awaken to the crimes being committed against our children by those who are in power.”

Spans:

- out-group: mainstream media
- in-group: children
- plan: adrenochrome and the organ harvesting of children
- secret: cover up the truth
- call-to-action: Speak the truth to the people

Once again, the ‘out-group’ span – although correct – is incomplete. Beyond “mainstream media” we should add “those who are in

power” as an ‘out-group’ span as well. In *Section 4.4*, we found that the frame-guided models often identified more than one span for a single element, while few-shot models most frequently captured one of them. However, this random (non-representative) sample of text-messages analysed in the present chapter shows 2 messages obtained from the few-shot annotations with two ‘plan’ spans and 3 messages from the model augmented with frames that contained just one ‘plan’ span, showing how this difference (one model tends to annotate more spans than the other) may not be so relevant, since even when the models identify more than one span, they are still frequently incomplete, for it would require many more spans (at least more than 2) to make it a suitable annotation.

This is especially true regarding the out-group, whose spans are all (at least in the examples analysed in this chapter) composed of a single extract, when often more than one would be needed. In text-message 20, this is also confirmed for the ‘plan’ span, which although valid, could be made to be more thorough by adding the span “fact check and silence those who wish to speak the truth”. After all, the notion that *fact checking is an evil action* by the out-group to silence the truth is extremely important to the understanding of conspiracy theory communication.

The in-group could also be more complete if it also included “those who wish to speak the truth about evil”. Finally, in this text-message annotation, the ‘secret’ and ‘call-to-action’ spans are all satisfactory, making this an example of certain success.

5.4. Main limitation: ‘supportive statements’

In previous chapters, I may have seemed a bit dismissive of the issue regarding ‘supportive statements’. Henceforth, the present section aims to problematize it.

The issue arose in the very first annotation round that I had with my collaborators, even before the Pilot experiment was fully designed. As mentioned in *Chapter 3*, the annotators had expressed their worry regarding the fact that many text-messages could not be tagged as

conspiratorial due to the lack of core-elements (especially the absence of a ‘plan’), but were seen as a statement that could be supportive of a conspiracy theory given the subject that the text deals with. Such text-messages were written in fairly objective, or neutral, tone – akin to the language used in journalism – in a way that the annotators felt that it was not possible to characterize them as conspiratorial. However, these texts were found to be discussing matters that could be of interest to conspiratorial discourse, potentially serving as evidence of the presence of a determined conspiracy theory.

The ‘supportive’ category was then created to address this problem in our methodology, so that we would be able to quantify the amount of text-messages that could be considered relevant for conspiracy theory discourse but that could not be accounted for with the current methodology. The results in *Section 3.4* showed that roughly 60% of the total text-messages of the smaller dataset were categorized as ‘supportive’ by the human annotators during the Pilot experiment, showing that more than half of the dataset is composed of texts that may be relevant but which, so far, we are unable to include in the automatic computational analysis. Furthermore, the category of ‘supportive statement’ itself was shown to be hard to determine, as revealed by the feedback of the Workshop participants (*Section 4.1*).

In the Pilot experiment, we tested the hypothesis that the LLMs would be unable to satisfactorily categorize texts as ‘supportive’ and came to the conclusion that this is indeed the case, since the models tended to apply this category between zero and 13% of the times, while humans did so in about 60% of text-messages (as pointed by the results in *Section 3.4*). Having confirmed that the ‘supportive statement’ is where lies the limit of our methodology, we moved on with the next experiment without the request for categorization of supportive statements in the LLM prompts.

The explanations given so far of what would consist a ‘supportive statement’ may still be rather abstract. In order to make it clearer, as well as to explain why I believe LLMs were unable to discern this category, I present five text-messages as examples. These were randomly obtained from the dataset used during the Pilot (‘smaller dataset’, described in *Section 2.1*) and are paraphrased from the originals. As

follows, I go through each example and explain why these texts cannot be tagged as conspiratorial, as well as why they may still be relevant for the study of conspiracy theories, even if we cannot account for them with the present computational methodology.

Text-message 21:

China has allegedly broadened its iPhone ban to include more workers amid escalating tensions with the US, with reports indicating that local government employees and state-owned firms are now barred from bringing the devices to their workplaces.”

The first notable characteristic of the text-message above is the absence of a conspiratorial plan or secretive quality. Even though there is a circumstance (an event that is taking place) represented by the expression “iPhone ban”, the accusation is softened by the term “allegedly”. Moreover, the words “reports indicating” confer a neutral aspect to the discourse, which seems to not be taking any sides but merely providing an unbiased description of the affairs. It is also worth highlighting that, after a quick search with the original text-message content, I was able to trace it back to a news piece by The Guardian, which is a renowned news source of independent journalism. Realizing this text-message is an excerpt from a news piece is unsurprising, since the language is indeed compatible with the one used in journalism.

It is still possible to identify, in this text, an out-group (China) and an in-group (arguably the US, but also the “local government employees and state-owned firms”, which are the apparent victims of the circumstances, those who are seen as suffering from the iPhone ban). Nevertheless, we had already established that ‘us-vs.-them’ dynamics are not intrinsic to *only* conspiracy narratives, being also present in other types of discourse (most notably in radical discourse, but also in other kinds).

All of this points to how this text-message cannot be categorized as conspiratorial. Now, why is this text still relevant for the study of conspiracy theories?

Conspiracy narratives in the West surrounding China are numerous, ranging from older ones regarding communism and the Red Scare,

to more recent ones such as the idea that Covid-19 was a bioweapon of Chinese engineering. In this sense, China as a subject matter of discussion carries innate potential for conspiracy theorizing given its historical and cultural associations in the minds of Western people. Therefore, the (reported) news that China is banning the use of an USAmerican technology can easily be used as fuel to one of the many conspiracy theories regarding that state. For instance, this text could be used to ground arguments regarding how the government of China is seeking to curtail USA's economy by cutting the access of a huge potential market to USA products. This conspiracy narrative is not, in any way, portrayed in the text-message above. However, the circumstance being described in the text can still be used as some sort of evidence to the conspiracy theory example that I have outlined.

Text-message 22:

“Asia is facing challenges in drawing young employees, which poses concerns for Western shoppers used to inexpensive goods”

Again, we see a text-message describing a circumstance in neutral tone. No underlying reason is given for why “Asia is facing challenges in drawing young employees”. Although this event is certainly represented as a harmful thing for the in-group (“Western shoppers”), no evil plan is described as lurking behind it. The absence of core conspiracy elements makes it clear that this is not a conspiratorial text, yet, the circumstance described here can still serve a conspiracy narrative. For example, one may refer to this information in order to argue that radicalised young Asians are purposefully refusing work in order to increase the sales prices of products produced in their region and harm Western economies. In this example, we see a conspiracy theory being constructed, where the event that is described by the text-message takes the form of a purposeful plan.

Text-message 23:

“JUST IN – the DPA reports that nearly 66 percent of Germans desire a new government, according to a survey conducted on Saturday.”

Similarly to the other examples, this text-message is garnished with journalistic expressions such as “just in” (calling the attention of the reader to the novelty or recentness of the information), “DPA reports” (referencing to a respected news agency⁽⁴⁾ as source), and “according to a survey conducted on Saturday” (further grounding the truthfulness of the data by citing the methods of collection and date of the report). Although the text-message does not include a link to the original source of the report – which, one may argue, would be the more professional way to divulge information on social media – and leaves the verification of its validity to the reader, it is still possible to see how language is used to convey impartiality and objectiveness. Even if this text-message turned out to be a complete fabrication (which is not the case from my own fact-checking), we would be unable to categorize it as a conspiracy theory, but mis- or disinformation. Nevertheless, as was the case with the other examples, this text-message can still serve as premisses for arguments supporting conspiracy narratives. For instance, by citing such study, one may come to construct the following conspiratorial discourse: Democracy is an illusion, governments are not chosen by the people, voting is not real, governmental leaders are elected by the powerful elite who secretly runs the world (the Illuminati, the Reptilians, the Jews, etc.).

Text-message 24:

“The individuals involved in the shootout in South Sudan are not documented, and there is no information on the participants. It seems that the conflicts are taking place in the private home of the Internal Security Bureau director. The spokesperson for the South Sudanese Army verified this information but did not provide more details, urging residents in the capital to stay calm.”

Perhaps this example is the one that can more easily be connected to a conspiracy theory, particularly of the kind that regards immigration. The text-message describes an event in South Sudan, where an armed conflict took place at the house of a state official. Although the text, in no way, indicates any sort of value judgement in relation to the event,

(4) The Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA) is a major worldwide news agency founded in Hamburg, in 1949.

the fact that the people involved in the shootings were not documented can serve as evidence to conspiracy theories that describe illegal immigrants as undeniably violent people, used by foreign governments to infiltrate states and cause disorder.

Text-message 25:

“Can Space Agencies Boost Autonomous Shipping? With the global community working to meet the UN’ Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, sustainable shipping rises as an essential area of attention. The European Space Agency is utilizing satellite navigation, telecommunications (such as satellite 5G), and Earth observation data via its Blue Worlds Task Force to enhance maritime technology, including autonomous shipping. In Europe, *the ‘blue economy’ generates nearly €500 billion annually*, prompting the ESA’s Blue Worlds Task Force to investigate how space can aid maritime technology. Just as autonomous vehicles are set to change the automotive field, vessels without crew members onboard could reshape the shipping industry.”

With the four previous text-messages (21 to 24), we have seen examples of how non-conspiratorial texts can serve conspiracy theories, either as confirmation or grounding for argumentation. The example above (text-message 25), however, shows a different way in which a non-conspiratorial text can support a conspiracy narrative – by providing a discourse *against which* certain conspiratorial discourses can be constructed.

Earlier in this chapter, I have described how conspiracy theories are distinctly contrarian, that is, they are narratives constructed *in opposition* to other (usually more mainstream) narratives. In this example, this becomes clear: the text-message describes something that (at least according to the way it is being represented in the text) can only be beneficial for humanity – it is discussing more sustainable means for transportation of goods. Nevertheless, in the conspiracy thinking mode of interpretation, the information here divulged is source of fear and anxiety; satellite navigation and 5G are seen as technologies of surveillance, ways for governments to control the people; automation is necessarily seen as machines taking jobs away from people, impoverishing society for the profit of large corporations; and these large amounts of money being funnelled into space research is also seen as yet another way for misleading elites to rob the population.

The most important takeaway from these examples is that conspiracy narratives do not exist in a vacuum; even the wildest of narratives have grounding in some real event or another. Conspiracy theories may be highly distorted versions of reality, however, as *ways to represent* reality, they inevitably reveal very real aspects of life and society. For this reason, texts that are not rhetorically conspiratorial such as the ones cited here may still have a role to play in conspiracy theories given their particular subject matters.

This contextual relevance that can be perceived by human readers is not something that I have, so far, been able to translate into machine-readable language. Nevertheless, I highlight here the importance of investigating this in future works. The fact that some texts can be understood by humans to be relevant for determined conspiracy theories, yet cannot be categorized as conspiratorial because they deviate from the structure that has been so far defined for conspiracy theories is problematic. In NLP, we are still working within the limits of semantics. My approach to try and broaden these computational methods with semiotics is still in its infancy and much more development is needed. I hope that this work has showed the merits in exploring this subject and that future research is able to progress beyond the limits I stumbled upon here.

5.5. Regarding errors and shortcomings

The analysis of the 20 text-messages in this chapter allowed for some interesting understandings. All in all, the following types of errors (and their gravity) were identified:

- Span was characterized as one element instead of another (minor)
- Text was categorized as conspiratorial when it was not (critical)
- Span was tagged, but it does not correspond to any element (critical)
- Annotation is incomplete or insufficient (minor)
- Hallucination (minor here, but potentially critical)

As put by Barassi (2024, p. 3), “errors, and glitches have long existed and have often been key definers of technological development

and innovation”, therefore the presence of flaws is foreseeable and unavoidable. I hypothesise that some of these errors – namely (i), (ii), and (iii) – are due to the models’ preference for annotating on the basis of semantic context instead of rhetoric. As of yet, I do not see a way to develop mitigating measures to this semantics-*vs.*-structure issue. The misinterpretation of sarcasm and irony is also related to this and, so far, researchers have struggled to come up with solutions.

Due to the opacity of the workings of LLMs (as described in *Section 2.3*), it is not possible to carry out a diagnostic workflow that would allow us to trace this error back to specific parameters, so that we could adjust them and reduce the probability of it occurring again in the future. As put by Rathkopf (2026, p. 4), “[w]ithout knowing which parameters are responsible for an error, we cannot learn from our mistakes in the systematic way science typically demands”. For this reason, research in the field of AI tools applied to digital humanities depends on the interdisciplinary collaboration with computer science developers, in a way that scholars will always certainly need inputs from different fields of study in order to think up new solutions to these flaws.

For now, I can say that the gravity of error (i) is minor, because, although some spans are mischaracterized (for instance, what should be an ‘out-group’ span is tagged as ‘plan’), they are nonetheless *annotated*. Therefore, such elements are still present in the output and, thus, the human-in-the-loop will always be able to take note of its presence. Error (ii), on the other hand, is critical, since it happens in the first stage of the model’s task (categorization, which comes before annotation). Failure to recognize whether a text is conspiratorial or not is crucial for this methodology to work, and errors in this stage will inevitably impact the model’s assessment in future stages – meaning that, consequently, the model will also wrongly annotate mischaracterized texts.

Similarly, error (iii) may also be seen as critical since, in a practical manner, it means that text excerpts that are negligible can show up in the output in detriment of other, more crucial spans. In other words, when a model mistakes the annotation of an element (that is relevant for the understanding of the conspiracy narrative) for another (that is not relevant), the output is compromised. On the other hand, when

annotation of an irrelevant span happens *in addition* to other, more crucial ones, it is a minor issue, since the output would still contain the crucial spans. However, since it may happen that the model completely misses the central elements for inconsequential excerpts, this error may be indeed serious.

Error (iv) can also be considered minor, since it does not compromise the understanding of the conspiracy narrative in the text – it may be a matter of fine-tuning the models so that annotation becomes more thorough. Lastly, I hesitated to brand error (v) as either minor or critical. From the examples analysed in this chapter, hallucination still led to fairly correct notions regarding the text, in a way that it configured a negligible mistake. However, I do see the potential that this error can be much more serious in other instances, leading to completely wrong outputs. According to Xu *et al.* (2025), hallucinations are inevitable in generative models such as LLMs. One of the reasons for that is a trade-off between novelty and reliability: “A model constrained to strictly mirror its training data may be reliable but incapable of generating novel insights”, while “[a]llowing a model to extrapolate, by contrast, enables novelty but invites fabrication” (Rathkopf, 2026, p. 3). Even though this problem apparently has no solution, researchers “anticipate that the nature of hallucination will be better understood” over time, and “that its severity may be controlled and reduced for many applications” in the future (Xu *et al.*, 2025, p. 24).

In research with LLM tools, errors should not be seen merely as accidents that can be rectified; rather, they are manifestations of racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and other biases embedded in our data – historical, economic, social, and political contexts in which our technologies exist (Barassi, 2024). Failure is a habitual, universal, integral part of the human condition. It is thus reasonable to expect that our technologies will also fail, as they mirror our vulnerabilities and the complexities of our material worlds (*Ibid.*). Therefore, we recognize the errors here described as sociotechnical constructs that reflect the relational dynamics between humans and machines.

Acknowledging this, the use of LLMs in research comes down to a straightforward decision: precision or efficiency? Their massive sample complexity allows LLMs to process vast amounts of data, however, they

also exhibit a low expressive capacity, meaning that language models have a very limited “ability to generate nuanced and contextually rich outputs” (Montanari, 2025, p. 196). As we know, machine models are ideal tools to handle and organize data at volumes and speeds far beyond human capability – which is something necessary in the current times – therefore, when “speed and volume of information processing are overwhelming, the occasional inaccuracies of LLMs are acceptable compromises”, and when “precision is critical, the outputs of LLMs can (and must) be verified and supplemented with human supervision” (Xu *et al.*, 2025, p. 24). Indeed, it took me more than a whole workday to go through the 10 text-messages analysed in *Section 5.1*, while the Llama 3.3 70b took an average of 3 to 4 minutes per text-message (that is, roughly 20 times faster). In conclusion, as put by (Xu *et al.*, 2025, p. 24), the key to working with machine models “is not to view LLMs as infallible sources of truth but as powerful assistive tools for information retrieval, analysis, summarisation, and presentation” – which is why the human-in-the-loop approach is so important.

Overall, keeping the shortcomings discussed in this chapter in mind, we move on to the last step of the computational experimentation, where the LLM outputs directly serve text analysis – as was always this work’s objective of refining such AI tools for conspiracy theory research (and answering Research Question 2 – What different kinds of meanings arise from such rhetorical structure?).

PART III
PATTERNS AND MEANINGS

CHAPTER VI

CONSPIRACY STORYLINES

After designing and testing the Pilot, as well as refining it in the Workshop, we were able to obtain relevant computational results that led to insights regarding conspiracy theory discourse on Telegram (as described at the end of *Section 4.3*). Despite the acknowledge limitations, in the present chapter, we take these results and process them once again, in order to address the problem of discreteness – that is, how text-messages have so far been considered in a non-continuous, isolated manner.

To try and see the dataset more as a whole, I designed a new experiment (*Section 6.1*), where the discrete annotated text-messages are re-organized into easily understandable storylines (from a machine-readable CSV file into human-readable sentences). The analysis of these last results (*Section 6.2*) show that re-organizing information this way provides for a valuable resource, allowing for the identification of several overarching themes, concerns, and meanings in conspiratorial discourse (*Section 6.3*). At last, the chapter is closed with a comparative analysis, where the structural elements of each channel are put side-by-side (*Section 6.4*), so that we can have a ‘Big Picture’ of the dataset, which would not be possible without the use of this newly developed computational approach.

6.1. Experiment design

During most of this book, I have treated the text-messages collected from the Telegram channels as discrete texts. In this last experiment, however, I aim to consider the patchwork of meanings that arises from being an active reader of such channels. Although social media communication is atemporal and segmented, it is still possible to argue that, by constantly engaging with discourse from conspiracy theory Telegram channels over time, readers will inadvertently come to construct a more over-encompassing conspiratorial narrative, which connects all the non-continuous messages into a cohesive whole. In order to address these larger narratives, the experiment Conspiracy Storylines was created.

In simple terms, the LLM was given, as input, a table containing text-messages that have been categorized as ‘Conspiratorial’ and annotated on span level (with the elements ‘plan’, ‘secret’, ‘in-group’, ‘out-group’, and ‘call-to-action’). We have also added the channel information for each text-message, so that we could organize the results by channel. From this input, the model was prompted to output a storyline roughly (not strictly) following the formats below:

```
[plan] is the result of [out-group] acting in [secret], causing harm to [in-group]. If not stopped, it will lead to [plan2], therefore [call-to-action].
```

```
[out-group] is carrying out [plan] in [secret] to harm [in-group]. We must stop it, therefore [call-to-action].
```

As mentioned, the objective of this last experiment was to provide a broader picture of the dataset. The generation of such storylines could help us see the kinds of conspiracy theories that are overall most discussed in the analysed Telegram channels. Moreover, by adding the channel information for each text-message that has been processed in the Workshop experiment, the results also allow for a more specific idea of each separate channel. This grants the opportunity for us to compare different channel discourses.

To make all of this clearer, the experiment pipeline was as follows:

- The output of the Workshop is here taken as input. More precisely, we used the CSV file containing all annotated messages and frame elements predicted by the 70b frame-augmented model (described in *Section 4.3*, following the example of Table 5) as the start-up point for the experiment.
- Only messages containing at least two span elements and one predicted frame element were retained (the rest was discarded). This resulted in 741 messages from 18 channels.
- The remaining text-messages were grouped within each channel by ‘thematic similarity’ (using Qwen3-Embedding-0.6B⁽¹⁾), producing 620 clusters (groups of text-messages).
- Lastly, the LLM was prompted to generate one storyline per cluster of text-messages. Though the 70s frame-augmented annotations supplied the input evidence, we used the 8b few-shot model to generate the final storylines (due to its higher efficiency, time-wise).

The exact prompt is shown next (with the few-shot examples paraphrased, while in the real prompt, the original texts were used).

You are an expert qualitative analyst studying conspiracy narratives in Telegram messages.

Task

- Convert extracted Conspiracy Frame elements into one concise storyline.
- The input rows have already been grouped by channel and thematic similarity.
- The input may contain either:
 1. one message row with enough elements to form one storyline, or
 2. multiple related message rows that together form one broader storyline.
- Use the extracted frame elements as the main evidence, and use the original text only as supporting context.
- Write in neutral reported-speech style, as an analyst describing what the message or messages claim.
- Do not present conspiratorial claims as true.
- Do not debunk, moralize, correct, or add external context.
- Do not add claims that are not supported by the text or

(1) Text embeddings are vector representations of semantic meaning that are used for search and retrieval generation. Qwen is a specific type of decoder that is capable of using previous sentences context in the understanding of a certain token (word, term, expression), thus being effective in aggregating information.

extracted elements.

- If a row is weakly related to the rest of a multi-row cluster, do not force it into the storyline.
- If an element is missing, silently omit that part from the storyline and end the sentence with the evidence that is present.
- Never write meta-comments about missing fields, such as "the message does not specify a call to action", "no out-group is given", or "the text does not mention a secret."
- If a field contains multiple spans separated by "||", combine them into a coherent storyline when they support the same theme.
- Convert calls to action into neutral wording, such as "the message urges people to..." rather than speaking as the author.
- Produce one storyline only, not a list of separate storylines.
- Keep the storyline compact, usually 1-3 sentences.
- Before returning the JSON, remove any sentence that says an element is absent, unknown, unspecified, or not mentioned.

Frame elements

- out-group: alleged actor, enemy, or perpetrator.
- plan: alleged harmful action, event, policy, process, or consequence.
- secret: hidden motive, concealment, secrecy, deception, or suppressed information.
- in-group: alleged victim or threatened group.
- call-to-action: requested action, warning, mobilization, or instruction.

Preferred storyline shapes

- The message claims that [out-group] is carrying out [plan] through [secret], harming [in-group]. It urges [call-to-action].
- The messages portray [plan] as the result of [out-group] acting in secret or deception, causing harm to [in-group]. They warn that this will lead to [plan2] and urge [call-to-action].

These templates are guides, not strict requirements. Do not force missing elements into the sentence.

Output JSON schema

Return only JSON:

```
{
  "storyline": string
}
```

Few-shot examples

Example 1: one row -> one storyline

1. text: Thanks to Globalists, our environment itself is poison! Toxins are everywhere, in our food, water, air, chemtrails, etc. EVERYBODY NEEDS TO DETOX from Heavy Metals, Micro-Plastics, Parasites, vaccines nanotech, mRNA protein

spikes, graphene oxide... Get Your Full Body Detox Here: [website link]
 secret: poison
 plan: toxins are everywhere in our food, water, air, chemtrails, etc
 out-group: Globalists
 in-group: EVERYBODY
 call-to-action: Get Your Full Body Detox

Output:

```
{
  "storyline": Globalists are putting toxins everywhere in our
  food, water, air, poisoning everybody. Therefore you need to
  get a full body detox
}
```

Example 2: one row -> one storyline

1. text: These are the people who run the world. But keep in mind that Jews people are only 1% of America. Why is it that only 1% control the whole country? The Jew population worldwide is 17M. 7.5M live in the USA – about half of them. Interesting coincidences. 17M divided by 8B is way smaller than 1%. Most don't know all this. They argue and get hangry every time we say Jews run the USA and the world, cause they are deceived by their own leaders. Please Share The World!
 secret: Interesting coincidences || Most don't know all this.
 plan: run the USA and the world || only 1% control the whole country
 out-group: Jews
 in-group: America
 call-to-action: Please Share The World!

Output:

```
{
  "storyline": Jews run the USA and the world, it's not a coin-
  cidence that they are only 1% but still control America. Most
  don't know this, so you need to share the word.
}
```

Example 3: one row -> one storyline

1. text: When you only talk about police brutality but have never spoken out about this corrupt government, insane lockdowns, being forced to get vaccinated, people losing jobs homes, being forced to wear masks (including small children) for YEARS, billions of OUR middle class tax dollars given to the Ukraine war, I know that you were brainwashed by mass media. Luckily I know all of you here are smarter than that. Thank you for being intelligent.
 secret: brainwashed by mass media
 plan: lockdowns, being forced to get vaccinated, people losing jobs and homes, being forced to wear masks || billions of OUR middle class tax dollars given to the Ukraine war
 out-group: corrupt government || mass media

in-group: middle class
call-to-action: spoken out

Output:

```
{
  "storyline": The corrupt government, using mass media brain-
wash, is to blame for insane lockdowns, forced vaccination,
people losing their jobs and homes, being forced to wear
masks, and billions of tax dollars spent with the Ukraine war,
harming the middle class. We need to speak out to stop this.
}
```

Example 4: multiple rows -> one storyline

1. text: FDA vaccine advisors expressed feelings of 'disap-
pointment' and 'anger' over the withholding of early data
regarding the new Covid-19 booster shot that wasn't reviewed
last year. The data that was not presented to the experts fo-
cused on real infections: identifying who contracted Covid-19
and who remained uninfected. A CDC spokeswoman, said that 'due
to the many limitations involving this clinical data, it was
not featured'.

secret: was not presented to the experts

plan: withholding of early data regarding the new Covid-19
booster shot

out-group: CDC || FDA

in-group:

call-to-action:

2. text: Pfizer's list of the side effects associated with their
mRNA vaccine are the records that Pfizer aimed to keep confi-
dential for 75 years, before a US judge direct their release.
secrete: keep confidential

plan: records that Pfizer aimed to keep confidential for 75
years

out-group: Pfizer

3. text: I can't keep up with all the celebrities and ath-
letes who are unexpectedly dying from the Covid vaccine or
turbo cancer, which is also the Covid vaccine. Which isn't a
vaccine at all actually. But we have to remember the young
healthy, non famous people such as this young professor who
passed away unexpectedly while being fully vaccinated. It is
reported that this young, healthy, athletic doctor, who was
fully vaccinated, experienced a heart attack.

secret: isn't a vaccine at all actually

plan: dying suddenly from the Covid vaccine || turbo cancer,
which is also the Covid vaccine

out-group:

in-group: healthy, non famous people

call-to-action: remember the young healthy, non famous people

4. text: Another celebrity singer dies suddenly onstage,
barely 30 years old, leaving a wife and a newborn baby girl
behind. Let us know your thoughts below. Reportedly, he was
fully vaccinated.

secret:
 plan: fully vaccinated || dies suddenly
 out-group:
 in-group: celebrity singer
 call-to-action:
 5. text: Shocking! Pfizer whistleblower releases internal documents showing they had received over 158,000 adverse reaction reports within 2 months of the vaccine's release.
 secret: internal documents
 plan: received over 158,000 adverse reaction reports
 out-group: Pfizer
 in-group:
 call-to-action:

Output:

```
{
  "storyline": Governmental organizations (CDC, FDA) and pharmaceutical companies (Pfizer) withheld critical Covid-19 vaccination data, buried over 158,000 adverse reaction reports, and kept life changing injuries and fatalities secret for 75 years. The Covid vaccine isn't a vaccine at all, but turbo cancer. Take note that not only celebrities, but also healthy, non-famous people who are fully vaccinated are dying suddenly...
}
```

Example 5: multiple rows -> one storyline

1. text: Joe Rogan expressed his desire to see Whites reduced to an absolute minority as soon as possible – within 30 years. I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT ... Your kid is definitely not White, seeing how you are half Jewish.

secret:

plan: see Whites reduced to an absolute minority – within 30 years

out-group:

in-group: Whites

call-to-action:

2. text: The World Economic Forum has announced a new policy that should have everybody who opposes eugenics up in arms. They are calling for the US to impose a strict 'one child policy' on all white families in an effort to promote diversity, reduce inequality, and usher in a new era of 'post-politics'. This new policy is clearly influenced by Chinese social policy – which is no surprise.

secret: usher in a new era of 'post-politics'

plan: impose a strict 'one child policy' on all white families
 || This new policy is influenced by Chinese social policy

out-group:

in-group: White families

call-to-action: have everybody who opposes eugenics up in arms

3. text: Ignatiev's aim was to become a traitor to a race that would not accept him and whose inherent toxicity, he thought,

would forever hinder the chance of the US fulfilling its ideals. On Nov. 9, the historian passed away, leaving a body of work detailing why and how we should dismantle 'Whiteness'.

secret:

plan: a body of work detailing why and how we should dismantle 'Whiteness'

out-group: traitor

in-group:

call-to-action:

4. text: South Asian Business Owners In NYC Bravely Defend Their Livelihood Against Perpetual Theft. Criminal Blacks have been so pampered by the Anti-White system aimed at hurting Whites, that they think they're invulnerable until they encounter a race that isn't shamed like Whites have been.

secret: pampered by the Anti-White system

plan: harming Whites

out-group: Anti-White regime || Criminal Blacks

in-group:

call-to-action:

Output:

```
{
  "storyline": The Anti-White regime is imposing a 'one child
  policy' on all white families to promote diversity, reduce
  inequality, and usher in a new era of 'post-politics',
  pampering criminal Blacks. If nothing is done, white people
  will become a minority in the near future, therefore everybody
  who opposes eugenics should be up in arms.
}
```

Now generate storylines for the following input.

```
{{INPUT_TEXT}}
```

As it can be seen in the prompt, some storylines were generated from a single text-message (when they have been annotated with all five elements, such as what happens with Examples 1 to 3), while others arise from four or five texts (the case of Examples 4 and 5), whose text-messages have been annotated with only two to four elements. While composing the prompt, I sought to aggregate text-messages by topic, carrying out searches on the Workshop output file by key terms, such as: 'immigrant', 'white', 'black', 'muslim', 'jew', 'vaccin*', 'covid', 'Globalist', and 'mass media'. For the text-messages that had been annotated with two to four elements, the grouping was not based on any particular number of messages, but solely on contextual relevance. In other words, I did not restrict my inclusion of text-messages to only four or five texts per storyline, rather, I searched the whole dataset for

texts with relevant terms and included only the ones whose content was complementary to one another. The aim of this process was to fill up the gaps left by elements that were not identified in a single text.

For instance, in Storyline 10, we have two messages with ‘secret’ elements, two with ‘in-group’, two with ‘out-group’, and one with ‘call-to-action’. It was necessary to group these texts in order to get a full story of the conspiracy that they all discuss. I did not list more text-messages that could complement this storyline because it was not necessary; the narrative was complete without any other insertion. When left to computational (automatic) operations, this process (done manually as I just described) was rapidly carried out via Qwen embeddings. As mentioned, out of the 740 text-messages that were considered from the Workshop experiment results, 620 groups were generated by the Qwen embeddings, meaning that 620 conspiracy storylines were outputted.

Because the selection of the 740 text-messages was based on them filling the requirements of a) having at least 2 annotated span elements, and b) having at least one frame element, the numbers of inputted text-messages (and thus the number of outputted storylines as well) are disparate from channel to channel. For the channel WLM, out of 74 text-messages analysed, the model generated 39 storylines. For DAU, 52 storylines were generated (out of 73 text-messages). For GTV, 59 (out of 70); for VGF, 52 (61); GPO 54 (58); ELB 45 (52); TCH 45 (45); CIG 40 (44); SNN 41 (43); WTM 42 (43); SHA 32 (38); CIN 31 (34); THC 24 (30); BJN 23 (27); BLA 23 (27); ISV 11 (14); PYM 4 (5); TCA 3 (3). Since we did not account for a more balanced sample from each channel, no text-messages from the channel CRN were inputted.

Not all generated storylines were useful, in the sense that some are simply erroneous (as I will explain shortly). Nevertheless, these numbers mean that, for some channels (e.g., WLM and DAU), the number of storylines generated was almost half of the text-messages inputted, while for others (TCH and TCA, for instance), this number was the same. In the majority of cases, the number of storylines is close to that of inputted messages (about two thirds). Therefore, in the sense of promoting a reduction in the amount of text to be read for analysis, this experiment was not that successful. In future experiments, there will be the need to re-evaluate the use of Qwen embeddings, seeking a larger reduction (a

bigger number of text-messages generating less storylines – that is, more *information clustering*). Still, considering the way in which the storylines are assembled, they are also shorter in length than many text-messages, and easier to analyse given their clearer and more organized structure, therefore, we still managed to achieve satisfactory material reduction.

Additionally, it is important to mention that, due to the in-built rules of the model, Llama 3.3 is unable to output sentences that can be understood as ‘harmful’. Therefore, the model has automatically changed the format of the storylines that was prompted, in order to make them neutral. This means that the outputted storylines actually followed the pattern below:

“The message claims that the government is hiding Jan 6 surveillance video because it would reveal undercover government agents and informants, and urges people to take action.”

In order to adapt it to the template that I had stipulated in the experiment design, I manually edited each storyline. In the case of the example above, the adapted version is:

“The government is hiding Jan 6 surveillance video because it reveals undercover government agents and informants. People must take action.”

To illustrate what the experiment results look like more concretely, Table 7 contains randomly extracted examples of the output from the LLM processing.

Table 7. Example of output (results) of the Conspiracy Storylines experiment.

channel	Storyline	Top out-groups	Top in-groups	Top plans	Top secrets	Top calls-to-action
CIG	Corporate priorities optimize everything for economic output, treating people like cogs in the global market for technical talent. This approach is not only destructive but also a misunderstanding of what Americans want and of China's rise.	corporate priorities China	American family	optimize everything for economic output treating people like cogs who must compete in the global market for technical talent	belief that every human activity must be justified by its contri-bution to GDP	move away from it
CIN	The District Attorney is conducting a Witch Hunt against the former President, Trump, and that the Indictment Documents were Rigged. People must watch out for booms.	out of control and corrupt District Attorney	us	Witch Hunt	Rigged	Watch out for booms
CIN	The FBI was conducting illegal activities and spying on nearly all members of Congress. Thomas Hale Boggs is the whistleblower who spoke out against the FBI and was subsequently denounced as mentally ill and disappeared.	FBI	Congress	conducting illegal activity spied upon	nearly all members of Congress were being spied upon	called for Hoovers resignation
DAU	Russia is developing an underwater drone, Poseidon Torpedo, to sink Britain and the USA. Those not under Earth Alliance control will be wiped out. People must take action.	Russia	Britain and USA	Russian Underwater Drone That Can Sink Britain and USA	underwater drone	YOU CAN RUN BUT NOT ESCAPE
GTV	Traitors, pedo criminals, and those who committed high crimes and crimes against humanity are being executed at GITMO, including Andrew Cuomo, Chelsea Clinton, and others. The Deep State is hiding secrets and those who are not yet caught will eventually face military tribunals and execution.	traitors pedo criminals paid troll, bot Democrats	Americans Trump	military tribunal executes Andrew Cuomo Chelsea Clinton hanged at GITMO executed at GITMO	Deep-state	last rats are next everyone just sharing bs are on the traitors side
GTV	The elite and major institutions engage in pedophilia with young boys, hiding this secret through their music, videos, and films. People must take action against this high crime and treason, demanding the death penalty.	CPS the elite	young boys	CPS Trafficking/ Pedophilia/Satanic Ritual/ Abortion Clinics child sex slavery pedophilia with young boys	upper crusts of our society	DEATH PENALTY

From the outputted table containing all 620 storylines (which follows the logic illustrated by Table 7), we used keyword-assisted and multi-label theme recognition to trace overall cross-channel patterns (Figure 10) – that is, themes that appear in most of the channels. As the figure below shows, the conspiracy theories in the analysed channels vary according to eight global themes.

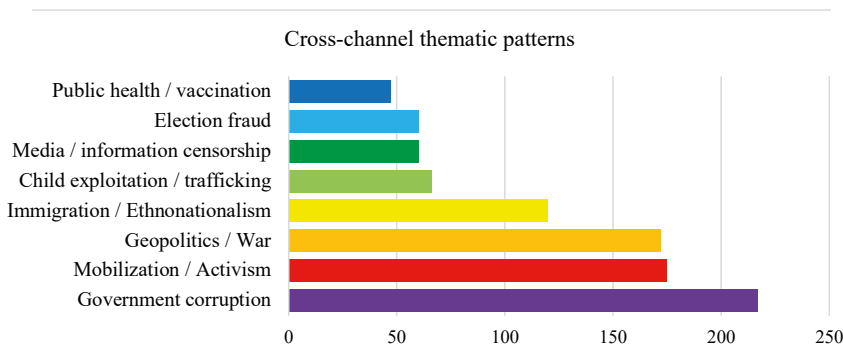


Figure 10. Cross-channel thematic patterns. Source: Data calculated for this work by Dr. Shaina Ashraf.

Considering that a single storyline can belong to multiple themes and that some themes may overlap, in the overwhelming majority of storylines (217 out of 620, purple bar), it appears that ‘government corruption’ is a main concern – which is consistent with the literature. The expression of a need for mobilization and calls for activism are also majoritarian among the dataset (175 storylines, red bar). Nevertheless, in this case, it is important to recall that the identification of a call-to-action was a clear instruction in the prompting of the experiment – therefore, ‘mobilization / activism’ was purposefully included, by design. This was done because, as I mentioned in *Section 4.2*, the identification of the ‘call-to-action’ element in Figure 8 was surprisingly low. By directly asking the LLM to identify calls-to-action in texts and include them in the storylines, we could better account for the instances of ‘mobilization / activism’ that show up in the channels’ text-messages.

Moreover, the subjects of ‘war’ and, more generally, ‘geopolitics’ seem to be prominent (172, orange), followed by the theme of

‘immigration and ethnonationalism’ (120, yellow). The other popular subjects that have been identified in the storylines relate to (from more to least notable): ‘child exploitation and human trafficking’ (66, light green); ‘the media, censorship, and information control’ (60, dark green); ‘election fraud’ (60, light blue), which overlap with ‘government corruption’; and ‘public health’, especially regarding ‘vaccination’ (47, dark blue). Having been identified throughout the 18 channels, these eight themes reveal important aspects of current conspiracy theories circulating on Telegram (as I discuss further in *Section 6.3*).

Besides being able to identify such cross-channel patterns, the results also grant a view of each channel in particular, allowing for differences to be noted between them (described in the next section). Lastly, and before we move on the channel-specific analysis, it is important to highlight that, as I mentioned before, some of these automatically-generated storylines had to be completely disregarded, therefore, the numbers presented in the next session do not reflect the gross values mentioned before.

The reasons for that are related to the fact that most channels have a lot of text-messages that can be seen as only calls-to-action or descriptions of the activism being carried out by members of the in-group, rather than actual conspiratorial discourse. As a result, many storylines were wrongly generated describing non-conspiratorial content. The examples below show a few of the storylines that were disregarded for being non-conspiratorial, describing instances of activism or calls for mobilization:

- “WLM activists are everywhere spreading awareness and promoting their ideology through stickers, flyers, and public displays. Others must join and get involved.” (from WLM)
- “People are awakening and unifying around the 14 Words, advocating for their own group.” (from WLM)
- “Q and ANONS are reality fact-checkers, aiming to enlighten people.” (from DUW)
- “Patriots are exposing evil.” (from GTV)
- “Our job is complete, having made content and trailers for the last few years and Blurays for ELB documentary, the world is waking up with or without our efforts.” (From ELB)

- “People must continue to spread online extremism.” (From ELB)

As it can be seen, these messages do not contain a conspiracy storyline. Still, they help to paint a picture of the type of discourse that is circulating within these channels. Even though this work focuses on conspiracy theories, it is still interesting that the ‘mobilization’ character has surfaced so clearly with the directed prompting. This also contributes to this research’s understanding of radicalisation, as the communicative practice linking ideas to action. The fact that conspiracy theory channels on Telegram are so focused on activism and mobilization supports my hypothesis that such conspiracy theories fit well within the process of radicalisation, as catalysts or doorways.

Other storylines were removed for being too vague. Examples include:

- “We are at a war between good and evil. No mercy.” (from GTV)
- “The BUSH FUNERAL is connected to the ENVELOPE, which contains the secret ‘THEY KNOW EVERYTHING’, and people must watch the video.” (from GTV)
- “Someone knows something, but nothing is done about it, and it’s part of a ‘WAR FOR YOUR MIND’. People must engage with this content.” (from DUW)
- “Our inaction will harm our children. People must take action.” (from WLM)
- “The DOJ Chief makes damning admissions in a secretly-recorded video.” (from VGF)
- “Child trafficking is being carried out, but it does not specify the alleged actors, victims, or requested action.” (from GPO)
- “Reality Is a Conspiracy.” (from SNN)
- “that there is an effort to normalize something, but it does not specify what. It urges people to join the channel.” (from THC)

Even though they seem empty of meaningful information, it does not mean these storylines are not meaningful at all. Of course, these types of storylines, though they cannot be considered such because they lack many of the elements that would make it a complete story, still

reveal aspects of conspiracy thinking that are important to understand – i.e., the fear of certain current events and the idea that inaction means extinction.

Lastly, some storylines were removed for being descriptions of events or circumstances that are seen as ‘good’. In other words, these are narratives that, instead of sparking fear or anger, are perceived by the in-group as *positive*, and thus, cannot be characterized as conspiracy theories.

- “Trump’s ‘Bleach’ Conference hinted at an antidote for future pandemics.” (from VGF)
- “Those who are complicit will be taken out one by one, while those who want to know will get the truth, and those who are still ignorant will have their experiences.” (from GTV)
- “Jews are their own worst enemy, desperate and losing due to their own actions, without self-awareness. People must keep naming and exposing them.” (From ELB)
- “The planned development is a secret community for rightwingers who want to escape the cultural insanity of the broader country.” (from TCH)
- “Trump MAGA supporters hijacked the BBC News with a rally photo; a great victory from the people over Big Media.” (from WTM)
- “The MAGA movement will unite the nation against criminals who have kept it enslaved for decades” (from SHA)

After removing the storylines that were not suitable for analysis and editing the remaining ones to fit the structure that I had previously determined (since Llama 3 had changed it), the next session describes the storylines of each channel and what they reveal.

6.2. Overview of each channel

In this section, I present some general understandings of what the generated storylines reveal about each studied Telegram channel and the

conspiracy theories being discussed in them (beginning to answer RQ 2). All storylines (adapted and filtered) are included in the *Appendix II*, separated and listed by channel for ease of referencing and as to not break up the reading flow of the analysis.

The storylines from the channel **WLM** show that it is a white-nationalist activism channel centred on racial grievance, demographic replacement, and anti-immigration narratives. The main social concerns that are revealed by the conspiracy narratives circulating in this channel regard (from most to least prominent): ethnonationalism, meaning the fear of demographic replacement by immigration and/or low birth rates (storylines 3, 11, 14, 18, 22, 24, and 25); government corruption, meaning that ethnic replacement is characterized as *systemic* (storylines 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15, and 16); and media censorship and information control, which confer the secretive aspect to the White Genocide conspiracy theory (storylines 1, 6, 21, and 23).

The storylines show that the groups of people that are most frequently represented as the enemy in this channel are: ‘anti-Whites’, ‘anti-White politicians’, ‘the system’ (or ‘the authorities’), ‘the left’, ‘Marxists’, ‘LGBT+’ (‘pride parade goers’), and ‘Muslims’. The in-group, on the other hand, is characterized by the following terms: ‘Whites’, ‘White Europeans’, ‘White Americans’, ‘WLM activists’, ‘Our Folk’, ‘our people’, and ‘conservative Whites’. Despite some of these terms seeming abstract (such as ‘our folk’ or ‘our people’), in the context of the channel, the in-group is very well-defined and homogeneous – which is not so common in conspiracy theory communities as we will see in the next cases.

The storylines from the channel **DAU** show that it is a dense conspiratorial ecosystem, where diverse narratives mix. From Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (pro-Russia) to NATO/USA antagonism, added to Cabal, child sex and human traffic, as well as plenty of occult/hidden-world claims, including Reptilians, aliens, and religious beings, this channel’s thematic range is extensive. DAU mainly clusters around the following concerns (from most to least prominent): ‘the Occult’, meaning that mind-manipulating hidden entities are to blame for human suffering (storylines 2, 5, 7, 11, 12, 16, 18, 25 to 30, 33, 35, 36, and 41), ‘war’, which are mostly driven by secret societies with the aim to eliminate

certain populations (storylines 1, 4, 6, 9, 15, 19, 21, and 22), ‘government corruption’, where the authorities are interested in torturing and killing people for their own pleasure (storylines 2, 13, 23, 24, 34, 38, 41), and ‘human exploitation’, which is carried out by members of government as well as secret societies and Occult beings (storylines 11, 14, 17, 23, 32, and 36).

It is interesting to note that, differently from WLM, DAU sees immigrants as the victims of the evil actions of the USA government (at least in storyline 13). At the same time, while the USA may be seen as a villain in many storylines, ‘President Trump’ is portrayed as saviour in others (e.g., storyline 16). Therefore, some individuals or organizations can be, at the same time, part of the in-group as well as the out-group. Another interesting instance of the same phenomenon regards how ‘Ukraine’ appears as both in-group and out-group. This is probably because this channel represents Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as some sort of liberation from a supposed Nazi regime. In this sense, the invasion is seen as salvation and Ukraine is both target of attacks as well as of ‘humanitarian aid’ by Russia. Similarly, Russia is portrayed as a saviour and brave soldier against Nazism, but at the same time, it is the enemy who is using dishonest war tactics to harm the UK and USA (storyline 9).

There is also a confusing conflation between ‘Zionists’, ‘Nazi’, ‘fake Jews’, ‘Israel’, and ‘Ukraine’, where storylines (2, 16, 14, and 41) indicate that they are all either the same, or supportive of each other – which is incredibly paradoxical (especially in the case of Nazism and Zionism/Israel).

In general, the most frequent out-groups arising from the storylines are: ‘NATO’, ‘the United States’, ‘the CIA’, ‘Zionists’, ‘Nazis’, and ‘LGBT+’ (‘homos’). The most frequent in-groups are incredibly vague, consisting of: ‘children’, ‘people’, ‘humans’, and ‘humanity’. In this sense, DAU is much more abstract regarding its in-group definition, possibly being more attractive to larger crowds than WLM (a channel with a very specific in-group).

In the case of the channel **GTV**, it is possible to see from the storylines that it is very similar to DAU. As a QAnon-adjacent conspiracy channel, with repeated Cabal, Deep State, New World Order, secret

bio-labs, child trafficking, and execution narratives, GTV mainly clusters around the same topics as the previous channel: ‘government corruption’ (storylines 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 14, 16, 20, 22, 24, 27, and 28), which are mostly connected to ‘child exploitation and human trafficking’ (storylines 2, 17, 19, 20, 26, and 27); ‘war’, which involves not only government’s underlying interests but also those of secret societies (storylines 4, 18, 22, 24, 25, and 29), as well as ‘information censorship’, which mostly relate to keeping the population unaware of the evil actions of the government and manipulating narratives surrounding war (storylines 7, 10, 11, and 21).

The presence of the catchphrase ‘Denazification is the only way’, as well as certain mentions of ‘adrenochrome’⁽²⁾ and narratives accusing royal families of being involved in the sexual exploitation of children and the human trafficking industry (including specific mentions of human hunting/torture parties) suggest that the admins of DAU and GTV (if not bots) are members in the same communities, sharing the same contents among their respective channels. Another indicator of this is the fact that storyline 14 of GTV is almost the same as storyline 27 of DAU, meaning that the text-message(s) that originated these storylines are very similar. Moreover, the same type of conflation observed in DAU is also seen here, between: the Deep State, ‘Pedo Satanists’, Zionists, Bolshevik, Communist, Marxist, Nazis, and Khazarians (storyline 4), suggesting once again that these channels share the same content.

The entities that are most frequently represented as the out-group in GTV are: ‘the United States’, ‘the FBI’ and ‘the CIA’, ‘Antifa’, ‘celebrities’, ‘elites’, LGBT+ (‘homos’), and the so-called ‘Cabal’. The in-groups are, though mostly vague (‘people’, ‘population’, ‘humanity’), also consist of ‘children’, ‘young boys’, as well as ‘Russia’ and ‘Ukraine’ (indicating that, once again, in these narratives, Russia is portrayed as being ‘on the same side’ as that of the Ukrainian people).

The storylines from **VGF** show that it is a public-health and anti-establishment channel with strong anti-vaccine, Big Pharma, government

(2) Adrenochrome a chemical compound produced by the oxidation of adrenaline. Even though it is not a controlled substance and can be easily accessed, since it is synthetically produced in laboratories, this chemical is part of some conspiracy theories, serving as a recreational drug or as an ‘elixir of youth’ for the ‘Cabal of theistic Satanist rapists and murderers’ who are told to harvest this chemical from their victims (frequently children).

corruption, and anti-immigration discourses. VGF mainly clusters around: ‘government corruption’ (storylines 1, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 26, 28 to 31, 34, and 45), especially regarding taxes being spent on harmful agendas, either related to Big Pharma (storylines 22, 36, 38, 39, 44, and 46) or immigration, perceived as an invasion and source of financial problems (storylines 16, 23, 27, and 33); ‘election fraud’, which represent the fall of the democratic process (storylines 9, 40, 41, and 43); ‘public health’, whose problems are caused by the financial interests of the government and economic elites (storylines 4, 6, 14, and 37); as well as the ‘evils and harms of vaccination’ (storylines 2, 3, 5, 8, 12, 17, 19, and 21), forced onto the public for the financial benefit of the government and pharmaceutical companies.

The most frequent out-groups are slightly different than the ones in previous channels, including ‘government’, ‘the U.S.’, and ‘the left’ as common enemies, but adding ‘immigrants’, ‘vaccine manufacturers’, ‘Big Pharma’, and ‘Pfizer’ to the most important evil entities. The in-groups, on the other hand, although sometimes similar to what was observed in the two previous channels, has some interesting specific additions. These most frequent in-groups are: ‘children’ and ‘people’ (the general ones that are common), but also ‘American people’ (country-specific), ‘young males’ (gender- and age-specific), ‘the right’, and ‘Trump’. Interestingly, although the USA (government) is seen as evil, the American people and ‘President Trump’ are, again, represented as the in-group. This detachment between a people and its country (observed not only here but also in DAU and GTV) is an interesting aspect to note. Something similar happened in storyline 9 of GTV regarding China (the ‘Communist government’ being the enemy, and ‘Chinese people’, the victims).

The storylines from **GPO** indicated that it is a right-wing news-aggregator channel focused on Biden-regime, election manipulation, border and immigration, Deep State, as well as geopolitical conflict narratives. Similarly to DUA and GTV, GPO mainly clusters around: ‘government corruption’, where the corruption is confined to the then-current administration (the so-called ‘Biden regime’) and not to all sections of the government (especially since Trump and his followers are seen as an in-group), as well as ‘election fraud’, also in favour of

Trump (storylines 1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 37, 38), and 'war and geopolitics' (storylines 4, 6, 9, 11, 13, 15, 18, 25, 30, 31, 33, 35), with the difference that, while DAU and GTV contain pro-Russian, anti-Israel, and anti-USA discourses, GPO showcases anti-Russia, pro-Israel, and pro-USA narratives. A couple of storylines (2 and 27) regard the evils of immigration, and others (16, 24, and 34) discuss information censorship (also related to government corruption).

Frequent out-groups are more focused on political persons and institutions (i.e., 'Biden Regime', 'the government', 'Secret Service', 'Democrats'), with the added presence of 'immigrants' (usually referred to as 'aliens'). The in-groups appear to be abstract, but from the large number of topics of discussion related to specific United States regions, one may assume the in-group is largely 'average Americans', with the common addition of 'children'.

The storylines from **ELB** clearly show that it is an ethnonationalist and white-supremacist channel, focused on Jewish conspiracy theories, as well as anti-immigration, demographic replacement, and censorship discourses. In this channel, activism and calls for mobilization take the shape 'becoming aware' and spreading information (mostly on social media). ELB mainly clusters around the interconnected trio: ethnonationalism, racial grievance, and immigration (storylines 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 22, 25, 26, 27, and 29), where immigration is the source of the fear of demographic replacement. Other frequent themes are: 'geopolitics' (i.e., aiding Ukraine is bad for the population of the USA/EU) and 'government corruption' (storylines 2, 5, 6, 11, 14, 18, 19, 22, 24, 27, and 31), which is seen as a byproduct of 'Jew domination' (making antisemitism another frequent theme in the channel). Lastly, 'information censorship' (storylines 7, 16, 17, 20, 28, 30, and 31) is also a frequent theme, usually related to governmental persecution of individuals who are perceived as 'truth-speakers'.

Frequently, the following entities are represented as out-groups: 'Jews', 'people of colour', 'immigrants' ('illegal aliens' and 'fake Asylum seekers'), and 'the government' (mostly from North American and Europe). I believe this is the channel with the most well-delimited out-groups so far, with very few contradictions or vague descriptions. The described in-group is also quite homogeneous and stable,

encompassing: ‘Europeans’ and ‘White Americans’, or just ‘Whites’, as well as ‘Christians’ and ‘Catholics’.

The storylines generated for **TCH** showcase it is a mixed conspiracy channel centring around government secrecy, CIA narratives, censorship, hidden history, race/culture conflict, and esoteric claims. TCH mainly clusters around: ‘governmental corruption’ in the shape of manipulating historical and present-day narratives, as well as being controlled by secret societies and Occult entities (storylines 1, 2, 11, 12, 13, 15, 20, and 26), ‘war’, including revisionism and secrecy behind perceived true objectives of armed conflicts (storylines 14, 18, 25, and 27), ‘the Occult’, hidden history, aliens, and demons who are behind human suffering and inside the government (storylines 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 21, and 30), ‘mind manipulation and information censorship’ mostly regarding historical narratives (storylines 3, 4, 19, 32, and 33), as well as ‘white supremacy’ (storylines 29 and 31).

Considering that, the out-groups that are most cited in TCH are: ‘the CIA’, ‘the government’, ‘Zionists’, ‘Soviets’, ‘people of colour’ (‘non-White races’), and ‘secret societies’. Similarly to DUA and GTV, there are conflicting feelings regarding the role of the United States in these conspiracies. While the USA government is definitely seen as evil, the USA as a country and its people are represented as an in-group. The same happens with ‘Europe’ and ‘Europeans’, which are seen as part of the in-group, at the same time that the ‘European Commission’ appears as an enemy (storyline 32). Similarly, while the ‘Catholic Church’ is an out-group (storyline 15), ‘Christians’ are included in the in-group. Additionally, ‘Ukrainians’ and ‘right-wingers’ also appear as frequent in-groups, the victims of the evil actions of the out-groups.

Moving on, **CIG** is an interesting case where many storylines had to be dismissed for not being conspiratorial – that is, a lot could simply have been newspaper headlines. That is because CIG is a geopolitics-heavy channel with language that comes close to journalistic reports in a lot of cases. Even so, it was still possible to identify several conspiracy-heavy texts that led to the generation of the conspiracy storylines listed above. It is also important to recall that, as mentioned during the first session of the Workshop, the aim of this study is not to assess whether a determined narrative is true or not; we do not seek to

differentiate ‘real theories about conspiracies’ from ‘fallacious conspiracy theories’, but rather, only to flag, analyse, and understand discourse that is rhetorically conspiratorial.

As the storylines show, the channel is centred on conflict, sabotage, state security, and migration or border-related threat narratives. The lexical realization of activism is the lowest so far (very few storylines contain a call-to-action). Like DAU, GTV, VGF, GPO, and TCH, CIG clusters around ‘war / geopolitics’, ‘government corruption’, and ‘immigration / demographic replacement narratives’. Even though these three overall themes are common among most channels, we can still see that CIG is much more focused on ‘war/ geopolitics’ than the others.

In this sense, since it is so central, it is interesting to subdivide this theme into more subtopics, namely: Middle East (storylines 1, 3, 7, 11, and 10); Russia (storyline 1); European conflicts (storylines 2, 5, 8, 14, and 17); China-USA antagonism (storylines 4, 6, and 21); Immigration-led conflicts in the UK (storylines 9 and 15); Immigration-led conflicts in the USA (storylines 16, 19, 20, and 22). Meanwhile, DAU showcased a tendency towards discussing Russia more than any other topic (with a pro-Russia stance), while GTV centralizes around Nazism in the USA, and GPO contains both USA-focused narratives as well as Russia conspiracies (anti-Russia stance). CIG differentiates itself by focusing on Middle East (Syria, Iran, Israel), and on Islamophobic anti-immigration discourse surrounding Europe and the USA.

The themes already hint at the frequent out-groups for this channel: ‘China’, ‘Syria’, ‘Mexico’, ‘Ukraine’, ‘Russia’, and ‘Iran’ – which point to the relevance of inter-country conflicts in the channel’s discourse. Additionally, ‘the Feds’, ‘the government’, and ‘immigrants’ also appear as frequent out-groups. Frequent in-groups, on the other hand are not only composed of specific countries or USA states (such as ‘France’, ‘Germany’, ‘Texas’, and ‘California’), but also groups of people (i.e., ‘European farmers’, ‘British people’, ‘White people’, and ‘the US military’).

The storylines from **SNN** indicate that the channel clusters around: ‘government corruption’, which takes the shape of globalist-control conspiracy theories and the evil of government or the authorities in general (storylines 2, 4, 5, 7, 15, 17, 21, 22, and 29); ‘election fraud’

and the idea that the government is controlled by people who were not elected democratically (storylines 1, 14, and 24), climate change denial (storylines 25 and 27), ‘public health’ concerns regarding food safety, sexual education, the health system (storylines 8, 9, 10, and 16), and especially anti-vaccine discourse (storylines 19, 31, and 32), as well as warnings about sovereignty (storylines 3, 13, and 24) as well as media censorship and social control (storylines 19 and 27).

As noted by the distribution of storylines per theme, it is understandable that the main out-groups are usually composed of geopolitical organizations (government and non-governmental authorities), such as: ‘WHO’ (World Health Organization), ‘FBI’, ‘WEF’ (World Economic Forum), ‘The Biden Administration’, ‘Republicans’, and ‘Democrats’. Added to that, the following groups of people are also seen as frequent out-groups: ‘unelected globalist bodies’, ‘Jews’, and ‘climate alarmists’.

Despite our attempts at ruling out location-specific channels in the data collection phase, this heavily USA-centralized channel ended-up being included, since it contained mentions of other geopolitical entities in its messages. This means that, even though the group contains discussions of global events, it largely does so in the context of how such global events can impact the United States and its people. In this sense, the in-group here is: ‘Americans’ – or more specifically – ‘taxpayers’, ‘citizens’, ‘children’, and ‘Catholic Americans’. There is, of course, an implicit, ideological assumption here that certain groups (such as ‘people of colour’, ‘LGBT+’, ‘Jews’, and other minorities, as well as what are understood as ‘the elites’ or the ‘oppressors of regular people’) are not included in this ‘Americans’ in-group. The same can be said about the in-group for the channel GPO, listed previously.

The storylines from **WTM** point to it being a censorship-oriented channel where government, surveillance, media, elections, and information control are recurring concerns. It mainly clusters around ‘government corruption / Deep State’ and ‘media censorship / information control’. More specifically, the storylines revolve around the following main topics: government surveillance / control (storylines 1, 5, 7, 8, 12, 15, 18, 19, 25, 26, and 31) and election fraud (9, 14, 22, and 28); media censorship and manipulation (storylines 2, 11, 16, 20, 23, 24,

and 27); as well as health concerns and anti-vaccination discourse (storylines 1, 4, 20, and 27).

Frequent out-group are: 'the Media', 'CIA', 'FBI', 'government', 'Democrats', 'DOJ' (the USA Department of Justice), 'Kamala Harris', 'Joe Biden', 'CBSNews', 'Fox News', 'Twitter', 'The Chinese Communist Party', 'foreign nationals', 'Pfizer', 'Globalists', and the so-called 'Deep State'. The channel's most frequent in-groups are: 'people', 'population', 'American citizens', 'patriots', 'voters', 'children', and (surprisingly) 'journalists'. This last in-group is surprising since WTM is so clearly against what some would call the 'Big Media', being a self-titled alternative news channel where people may find 'reliable information' (unlike what the mainstream media is seen to provide). Still, 'journalists' (which I hypothesized would configure an out-group in such a Media-hating community) are actually seen as victims of larger controlling and manipulating forces.

From its storylines, we can gather that **SHA** is a Trump-supportive, QAnon-adjacent channel, emphasizing the corruption of other administrations (storylines 3, 6, 7, 10, and 11), the threat of Globalists and the Deep State (storylines 2, 7, and 17), election fraud (storylines 1 and 8), media censorship (storylines 5, 13, 14, and 15), and child sexual exploitation (storylines 4, 10, and 14). The most frequent out-groups identified are 'the Biden Administration', 'Kamala Harris', 'CIA', 'FBI', 'Feds', 'the Deep State', some news outlets ('CNN', 'DirectTV'), 'foreign entities', and 'Antifa'. As another USA-centralized channel, SHA's in-groups are the usual 'Americans', 'average American', 'population', and 'children', added to 'Trump and followers', as well as 'QAnon and followers' (called 'Anons').

Similarly, **CIN** appears to be a broad anti-establishment channel, also centralized around the United States, connecting election fraud to Deep State narratives, government cover-ups, and public health. CIN mainly clusters around 'government corruption' where the authorities serve the interest of the elites and not the population (storylines 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, 19, and 20); election fraud (storylines 3 and 13); 'war', regarding the Middle East and Russia/Ukraine, especially regarding how aiding Ukraine is harming the US American population (storylines 15 and 17); 'public health' relating to forced vaccination and wearing

masks, as well as food poisoning and virus-related conspiracies (storyline 1, 10, and 17); and ‘immigration’ seen as an invasion and security risk (storylines 7 and 11).

Frequent out-groups in this channel consist of: ‘the government’, ‘FBI’, ‘U.S. Military’, ‘Obama’, ‘the Biden Administration’, ‘immigrants’ (‘illegal aliens’), ‘Hamas’ ‘China’, and ‘Italy’. Meanwhile, ‘Trump’ appears as both a victim and a perpetrator in different storylines. As seen in the two previous channels, frequent in-groups are very USA-focused: ‘Americans’ and ‘Republicans’, as well as vague: ‘population’, ‘children’, and ‘young people’.

THC is a hidden-history channel packed with Occult conspiracy theories involving Tartaria, suppressed history, health/technology fears, and global elite control. From its storylines, we can see that this channel mainly clusters around ‘the Occult’ and supposed hidden histories (storylines 4, 7, 8, and 9), information censorship, also regarding hiding this perceived secret past (storylines 3, 4, 9, and 12), control and manipulation (storylines 2, 10, and 14), technophobia (storylines 1, 6, 11, and 15), and health concerns (storylines 1, 5, 11, 13, and 15), which usually intertwine with technophobia.

The out-groups here are more abstract, usually referring to ‘those in power’, ‘the global elite’, and ‘the government’ (though we do not know which), as well as ‘The Allies’, ‘NASA’, and ‘Zionists’. Frequent in-groups showcasing those affected by the conspiracies are, as usual, quite abstract in the majority of times: ‘the people’, ‘white nations’, ‘humanity’, and (in one specific instance) ‘German people’.

As we have seen with other channels, **BNJ** is a United States partisan channel where conspiracy theories cluster around Biden, Trump, and ‘government corruption’ where the then-current administration (represented by ‘Biden’) carries out criminal activities (storylines 2 to 5, 7, and 11); ‘election fraud’, defending Trump (storylines 1, 10, and 15); elite coordination and ‘information control’ used to hide criminal activities from both the government and the secret elites (storylines 6, 7, 9, 13, and 14); as well as ‘immigration’, which is seen as harmful by-product of ‘government corruption’ (storylines 5 and 10).

Frequent out-groups consist mostly in terms that describe political authority, such as ‘government’ and ‘regime’, as well as members of

the United States government specifically ('Joe Biden', 'the Democratic Party', 'Obama', 'Kamala Harris', and 'Feds'). As yet another U.S.-centric channel, the in-groups that appear in the channel are: 'American People', 'America', 'voters', and 'Trump' (and followers).

It is important to note that, for the channel **BLA**, 13 of the original storylines were removed because they were not conspiratorial, but rather, just fairly neutral descriptions of geopolitical events (similarly than what had happened in CIG, but in even larger scale). This points to how this channel has less conspiratorial content than others, which the model still struggles to distinguish, meaning that more than half of the 23 original storylines had to be disregarded.

As a geopolitics-heavy channel, BLA is primarily focused on war and security, covering conflicts in the Middle East, Latin America, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as Western responses to such events. BLA's conspiracy discourse seems to be particularly clustered around Islam (storylines 1 and 8), Afghanistan (storyline 7), Russia (storyline 2), Venezuela (storyline 3), Moldova (storyline 4), Japan (storyline 9), the United States (storylines 6 and 10).

Out-groups in this channel mostly relate to geopolitical entities (especially governments of diverse countries, as represented by the topics of interest just mentioned), as well as 'radical leftists', and specific Islamist groups such as 'Hizb ut-Tharir'. The in-groups are generally not described in this channel, configuring the most abstract from the dataset. Largely, the 'West' seems to be seen as a 'neutral observant' of the conflicts discussed, which does not characterize it as the in-group (for it does not frequently seem to be affected by the conspiracies). In general, it perhaps may be easier to understand the in-group in this channel by what it is *not* rather than by what it *is* (since, as I mentioned before, the in-group in a conspiracy theory often only exists in relation to the out-group and that relation is, more precisely, a relation of opposition). If the out-groups are governments and geopolitical entities, then the in-group must be 'general populations' or 'people who are affected by governmental decisions'.

Because only four storylines could be used for **ISV** (out of the original 11), it would be a stretch to characterize the whole channel based on such small data, therefore I am considering also the topics of the

dismissed storylines (disregarded for being non-conspiratorial, similarly to the case of BLA, above, and CIG) in order to get a better understanding of the channel's themes. From this, ISV can be perceived as being a 'war and geopolitics' channel, focused on Russia's invasion of Ukraine (storylines 1, 3, and 4), the Middle East (dismissed neutral storylines), USA and NATO actions (storyline 3), as well as propaganda or media-control claims (storyline 1).

ISV's conspiracy theories represented by the four storylines above revolve around the United States, both in the sense of its interference in foreign affairs, as well as internal issues that are foreseen by the conspiratorial narratives – thus, the USA appears as both in- and out-group. Also from these few storylines, it is possible to state that the channel's stance towards Russia's invasion of Ukraine is pro-Russia.

Even more troubling than with the last group, only four storylines were generated for **PYM** (all of which are suitable and thus listed above). This makes it even more difficult to see a thematic profile for the channel (seeing how there is no extra material to draw from). What these few storylines alone indicate is that government control narratives involving elites, corruption, election fraud, and cyber threats are concerns being discussed in this channel. Still, considering that the 'M' in PYM is a word related to 'medicine' (which I cannot disclose for ethical reasons) and the 'P' is related to 'prayer', it is important to note that the channel discusses topics other than the ones identified above, probably focusing even more on health and religion than it does on geopolitics, government corruption, and media censorship, as shown by the storylines.

Lastly, the 3 generated storylines for **TCA** are unusable (two are too abstract, with no actors being described, and one is non-conspiratorial, configuring a warning against other fraudulent Telegram channels carrying out scams). Therefore, nothing can be said about the channel's conspiratorial profile.

6.3. Thematic Analysis

The dataset is dense conspiracy-wise, including diverse narratives and concerns. To illustrate, I would like to highlight the secret societies

and established conspiracy theories that are specifically referred to by name in the storylines, i.e.: Globalists, Cabal, and New World Order (mentioned in DAU, GTV, and WTM), QAnon (seen in SHA and CIN), PizzaGate (in VGF); Vatican, Jesuits, and the Catholic Church (DAU, GTV, and TCH); Deep State (DAU, VGF, GPO, WTM, and SHA); Aliens / UFOs (DAU, GPO, and TCH); Demonic forces / Satanists (DAU and TCH); Great Replacement (VGF); ‘CIA is behind 9/11’ (SHA); and lastly, DAU directly mentions: the Freemason, the Illuminati, Reptilians, Nephilim / Elohim (angelic beings), Sentient AI, Earth Alliance, and the Great Reset conspiracy theory. Besides such direct mentions to conspiratorial subjects, the storylines present other, more obscure, themes and meanings.

From the total 620 storylines, the keyword-assisted and multi-label theme recognition had identified eight topics of discussion (as shown in Figure 10) that are most prominent in the dataset, namely: ‘government corruption’, ‘activism / mobilization’, ‘geopolitics / war’, ‘ethnonationalism / immigration’, ‘child exploitation / human trafficking’, ‘media censorship / information control’, ‘election fraud’, and ‘public health / vaccination’. Nevertheless, after filtering only the pertinent storylines (leading to 422), and looking into each of them with a more qualitative approach, a more precise list of themes was compiled (also with eight topics in total).

Since the themes of ‘geopolitics / war’ and ‘child exploitation / human trafficking’ converged with *government corruption* (as I will explain shortly), they have been conflated into one theme. ‘Ethnonationalism / immigration’ was renamed *anti-immigration narratives*, which better describes the conspiracy theories that approach these topics. *Election fraud* as well as *censorship and information control* were kept as they are. Meanwhile, ‘public health / vaccination’ was separated into two different themes (*Big Pharma and other health concerns*, and *anti-vaccination*), since many storylines portray health concerns unrelated to vaccination. The theme ‘activism / mobilization’ was removed since, as I had mentioned, this was a necessary inclusion in the prompt instruction and, therefore, it is not a variable but rather a constant in the results (every channel contains several storylines with calls-to-action). Lastly, the themes, *Nazism* and *antisemitism* were added, as they deserved to

be separate from government corruption or geopolitics (presenting different approaches).

Starting with *government corruption*: the notion that governments are secretly run by corporations, laundering foreign money, dealing with bribery, causing economic disruption, and privately abusing of taxpayer money arose from the storylines of six different channels (i.e., VGF, CIG, SNN, WTM, CIN, and PYM). A different approach to this same theme that appears to be just as popular as this one regards how the government (usually of the USA) is involved in child sex traffic, often revolving around the so-called ‘Cabal’, which emerged from five different channels (namely DAU, GTV, VGF, WTM, and SHA). Just as common is the idea that governments (in view of their own selfish interests) do not care for their population’s health, poisoning people via food or toxic waste, banning harmless things while allowing alcohol and poisonous chemicals to go unchecked, abandoning vaccine-injured people, and failing to provide rescue to victims of natural disasters (GPO, VGF, BNJ, THC, and SHA).

Additionally, the notion that governments profit from war and, therefore, purposefully create conflicts – as well as villains, such as Hitler or Bin Laden, for instance – also arose frequently from the dataset (as seen by the storylines from ELB, SHA, CIN, and VGF). Less frequent but just as notable are the narratives describing how governments do not exist to provide for their populations, but rather to serve unseen elites (CIN, WTM, and CIG); how government officials commit crimes and go unpunished (GTV and SHA); how the authorities spy and surveil people (ELB and WTM); how the USA government is secretly communist (GPO and ELB); and how the USA government prioritizes helping Ukraine over its own citizens (SHA and CIN).

It was noteworthy that the number of storylines relating to the United States government surpassed, by and large, that of any other country (or even the EU as a whole), despite my attempts during the stage of data collection to select Telegram channels with a more global focus. Not only the many instances of ‘the U.S. government’ found in the storylines, but also the high emergence of *election fraud* as a topic of discussion point to the USA-centrality of certain channels (namely GPO, SNN, WTM, SHA, CIN, and BNJ – about 30% of the analysed channels).

The theme *election fraud* also suggests that the text-messages analysed (which were annotated on span level and then generated the storylines) pertained to, in addition to a specific *place*, a specific point in *time* – that is, the United States presidential elections of November 2024. As such, this is the event that is present in the frame-event dialectic (Ajjoub 2026) of the conspiracy theories discussed in these channels; as the elections unfold, the narratives evolve and change. In general, I have observed that that which changes the most from storyline to storyline is the out-group (the actors who are tampering with the election), which can go from: foreign actors, to internal ‘elites’, corporations, as well as the opposition (sometimes ‘Democrats’, sometimes ‘Republicans’, or both), which are all – at one point or the next in the channels – portrayed as interfering in the democratic process of the presidential elections.

Regarding the third theme, *censorship and information manipulation*, several distinct meanings can be identified since this theme is so pervasive, arising in storylines from almost all channels (the only channels that were not found to actively discuss censorship were CIG and BLA). The most popular narrative regards how the FBI silences with legal prosecution the activists and those who ask questions or speak up (found in GTV, WLM, VGF, GPO, SNN, and WTM). Similarly, a common interpretation of this same theme regards how the CIA/FBI and the government erase and bury relevant information to protect themselves and hide their own crimes (mentioned in GTV, TCH, SHA, and BNJ). Sometimes, information control takes the shape of active manipulation and brainwashing, usually done by the CIA/FBI, Occult entities and the mainstream media (DAU, GTV, and TCH). It is worth noting that mentions of the CIA and FBI in these cases do not necessarily indicate a focus on the USA, since these organizations are famous world-wide and plenty of non-USAmerican conspiracy theories feature them as interfering foreign entities.

Additionally, the notion that governments censor books that criticise vaccination, ban social media accounts/actors that they deem ‘harmful’ (as an excuse), and control the content you are allowed to see on social media are also quite popular (being found in VGF, ELB, TCH, and WTM). On a similar note, it was also possible to identify

information control narratives describing how government officials and social media CEOs conspire to control opinion and emotionally manipulate people into complying with their narratives and agendas, using fear and shame (found in WTM and CIN).

When it comes to *anti-immigration* conspiracy theories, I have found that, in three channels (WLM, ELB, and CIG), narratives represent immigration as a threat to white people specifically, relating to the fear of demographic replacement. Again in both ELB and CIG, but also in SNN, immigrants are portrayed as dangerous, violent criminals, that is, immigration means a security risk. Another argument against immigration is the notion that ‘immigrants are a financial burden on natives’ (found in VGF and ELB), as well as the related reason: ‘the government is replacing native workers with the cheaper labour of immigrants’, which is called the ‘Great Job Replacement’ (in VGF).

Conspiracy theories surrounding *Big Pharma and other health concerns* also present slightly divergent meanings. The most popular regards how Big Pharma and the government are poisoning food and water via several mechanisms (found in VGF, SNN, CIN, and THC). The notion that diseases were manufactured and cures were created for profit also frequently arises (VGF, GTV, and WTM). Lastly, we have the idea that the truth about certain ‘good’ chemicals is hidden by Big Pharma, who does not want people to know about these wonderful alternative treatments (mentioned in VGF). More specifically, regarding *anti-vaccination* conspiracy theories, the most popular narratives state that vaccines either kill or make people sick and weak (DAU, VGF, CIN, SNN). Another concern regards ‘vaccine status discrimination’, or the notion that unvaccinated people will suffer (or are suffering) from lack of access to services (as mentioned in VGF and SNN). Lastly, in the channel WTM, vaccination is represented as being dangerous and undesirable because it is a way for those in power to control the population.

When it comes to *antisemitic* conspiracy theories, three main ideas arose from the storylines: 1st – related to white supremacy: Jews are destroying ‘white nations’ by arming non-white invaders and bringing them in (mentioned in WLM and ELB), 2nd – Jews cause wars and famine (ELB), and 3rd – Jews control the government (TCH) and

the media (SNN). On the other hand, two channels were found to be discussing conspiracy theories surrounding *Nazism* itself. In DAU and GTV, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is represented as a 'denazification operation'. Furthermore, in both these channels, there is a dangerous conflation between Nazis and other existing and non-existing groups (namely: Jesuits, the Vatican, the New World Order, the Deep State, 'Pedo Satanists', Bolsheviks, Communists, Marxists, 'Khazarian Satanics', the Illuminati, and even Zionists – all of which are seen as the same type of hateful enemy). This conflation (especially between Nazis and Zionists) reveals a lack of knowledge regarding any of these groups, indicating how, in these spaces, hate is based on very abstract notions.

In order to better relate the themes here mentioned to each other, the next session explores these thematic relationships per channel.

6.5. Telegram conspiracy theories: the Big Picture

As a means of conclusion, this section wraps up the chapter by introducing an overview of the analysed channels, as well as their similarities and differences, painting a 'Big Picture' of the Telegram conspiracy milieu as represented by the dataset. To make these comparisons apparent, Table 8 (below and continuing for the next two pages), summarizes the main conspiracy theory themes, as well as the out-groups and in-groups identified throughout the chapter, organised per channel.

Table 8. Summary of conspiracy theory themes, out-groups, and in-groups per Telegram channel.

Channel	Conspiracy theory themes	Out-groups	In-groups
WLM	Anti-immigration Antisemitism Government corruption Information censorship White supremacy	'communists' 'the left' 'the system' Jews LGBT+ people of colour	'conservatives' white Americans white Europeans white people
DAU	Anti-immigration Child exploitation Globalists / Cabal / NWO Government corruption Information censorship The Occult	'the elites' CIA/FBI/Feds LGBT+ NATO Nazis the US gov.	'average people' 'children' 'humanity' Russia

Channel	Conspiracy theory themes	Out-groups	In-groups
GTV	Child exploitation Globalists / Cabal / NWO Government corruption Information censorship Nazism QAnon The Occult	'communists' Deep State 'the elites' 'the media' Antifa CIA/FBI/Feds Nazis the US gov.	'average people' 'children' 'humanity'
VGF	Government corruption Election fraud Islamophobia Anti-immigration Information censorship the Occult pro-Trump	'the elites' 'the left' Big Pharma Deep State the EU Commission the US gov. the WHO	'American people' 'children' 'the right'
GPO	Big Pharma Anti-vaccination Anti-immigration Government corruption Election fraud Information censorship	the US gov. 'communists' 'the media' Democrats immigrants Islam Russia	'American people' 'children' 'Trump followers'
ELB	Anti-immigration Anti-vaccination Antisemitism Government corruption Information censorship	'communists' 'the authorities' CIA/FBI/Feds immigrants Jews LGBT+ people of colour Ukraine	'American people' 'Europeans' Christians white people
TCH	Government corruption Antisemitism Information censorship The Occult White supremacy	CIA/FBI/Feds people of colour secret societies Soviets the Catholic Church Zionists	'American people' 'Europeans' 'the right' Christians
CIG	Government corruption Anti-immigration Anti-Russia Islamophobia Pro-Israel White supremacy	the US gov. CIA/FBI/Feds immigrants Iran people of colour Russia Ukraine	'American people' 'British people' 'Europeans' white people
SNN	Government corruption Anti-immigration Anti-vaccination Antisemitism Election fraud Globalists / Cabal / NWO Information censorship Pro-Trump	the US gov. 'climate alarmists' 'terrorists' 'the authorities' CIA/FBI/Feds Democrats Jews the UN the WHO	'American people' 'children' 'taxpayers' Christians

WTM	Government corruption Anti-vaccination Big Pharma Globalists / Cabal / NWO Child exploitation Election fraud Information censorship Pro-Trump	the US gov. 'the elites' 'the media' Big Pharma CIA/FBI/Feds Deep State Democrats	'American people' 'children' 'voters'
Channel	Conspiracy theory themes	Out-groups	In-groups
SHA	Globalists / Cabal / NWO Child exploitation Election fraud Government corruption Information censorship QAnon	the US gov. 'the media' Antifa CIA/FBI/Feds Deep State Democrats Ukraine	'American people' 'children'
CIN	Anti-immigration Anti-vaccination Election fraud Government corruption Information censorship Pro-Israel Pro-Trump QAnon	the US gov. China CIA/FBI/Feds Deep State immigrants Italy Ukraine	'American people' 'children' Republicans
THC	Globalists / Cabal / NWO Government corruption Information censorship Technophobia The Occult White supremacy	'the elites' 'the authorities' 'the media' The Rockefellers Zionists	'humanity' white people
BNJ	Government corruption Anti-immigration Election fraud Pro-Trump	the US gov. 'the media' CIA/FBI/Feds Democrats immigrants Ukraine	'American people' 'voters'
BLA	Government corruption Islamophobia Pro-Israel	Iran 'terrorists' 'the left' Russia	'average people'
ISV	Information censorship Government corruption	the US gov.	'American people' Ukraine
PYM	Government corruption Election fraud Technophobia	the US gov. 'the elites' China	'American people'
TCA	no data	no data	no data
CRN	no data	no data	no data

Table 8 reveals some interesting co-occurrences. Starting with the out-groups, we can see that ‘the US gov.’ appears in 12 out of the 17 total channels (for which we have data). Moreover, this out-group usually appears together with ‘CIA/FBI/Feds’ – this co-occurrence happens in eight channels (8/12 is about 65%). It is also interesting to see that, out of these eight channels in which these two groups appear together, on four others, they appear with ‘Ukraine’, and twice they appear with ‘Nazis’ (note that ‘Nazis’ appear in a total of two channels, so it is interesting that on both of them, this group appears together with ‘the US gov.’ and ‘CIA/FBI/Feds’ – meaning that channels who have ‘Nazis’ as an out-group also *necessarily* have ‘the US gov.’ and ‘CIA/FBI/Feds’ as enemies as well).

The out-groups ‘the US gov.’ and ‘CIA/FBI/Feds’ also co-occur with ‘Deep State’ on five different channels (which is the total number of channels in which ‘Deep State’ appears, meaning that, whenever a channel has ‘Deep State’ as an out-group, it also has ‘the US gov.’ and ‘CIA/FBI/Feds’). The same happens with ‘the elites’, who show up as out-groups in five channels (out of a total of six) together with the combination ‘US gov.’ + ‘CIA/FBI/Feds’. Similarly, by grouping the five channels that have ‘the US gov.’ + ‘CIA/FBI/Feds’ + ‘Deep State’ as out-groups, two others emerge as co-occurrent enemies: ‘Antifa’ and ‘the media’ (meaning that all five of these out-groups show up together twice in the results). Interestingly, when putting together ‘the US gov.’, ‘Deep State’, and ‘the elites’, we also have ‘Big Pharma’ co-occurring in two cases (indicating that these four out-groups are seen as common enemies by two channels).

Moving on from the pair ‘the US gov.’ + ‘CIA/FBI/Feds’, the co-occurrence of just ‘the elites’ + ‘the media’ happened on three channels. With ‘Deep State’, ‘the elites’ co-occur also on three channels. With ‘Democrats’, ‘the media’ co-occurs on four channels.

When it comes to ‘Jews’ as an out-group, interesting co-occurrences are: ‘Jews’ + ‘the authorities’ (three channels) and ‘Jews’ + ‘people of colour’ + ‘communists’ (two channels). In the first case, more co-occurrences were expected, since ‘the Jews secretly control the authorities’ is a common conspiratorial narrative, nevertheless, because sometimes ‘the authorities’ is substituted with ‘the government’ or another

institution/organization (such as ‘the UN’), it is not possible to account for more instances of this relationship in this quantitative manner. Nevertheless, it is important to note that ‘Jews’ appear as an out-group in a total of three channels, therefore, *every single time it appears*, it is together with ‘the authorities’ – which is revealing of the interconnectedness of these two out-groups in antisemitic conspiracy theories.

When it comes to ‘communists’, besides the two co-occurrences with ‘Jews’, we also have two co-occurrences with ‘LGBT+’ which relates to the popular notion that ‘communists are in cahoots with the LGBT+ community’. Furthermore, ‘LGBT+’ also co-occurs twice with ‘people of colour’ as common enemies, indicating that, often, when the in-group regards ‘average people’, this does not include these two main minorities. Added to ‘people of colour’ the out-group ‘immigrants’ shows up in two groups, which is also surprising since ‘immigrants’ appears in a total of five channels and it would be expected that ‘people of colour’ would appear together with this group on more occasions. Nevertheless, I would argue that, in many storylines, the ‘non-white’ aspect of immigrants is taken as a given, a deeply ideological aspect that needs no saying. Therefore, the concrete (semantically and lexically realizable) mentions of ‘people of colour’ in relation to ‘immigrants’ are not that many.

Moreover, there is one more interesting co-occurrence that have been noted to happen with the out-group ‘immigrants’, which is with ‘Russia’ (happening on four different channels). ‘Immigrants’ appear as enemies in a total of five channels, therefore, it is interesting that, in four cases out of these five, it appears together with Russia. This indicates that channels that have a tendency to think of ‘immigrants’ as an out-group, also tend to be anti-Russia. Similarly, ‘Russia’ is also co-occurrent with ‘Islam/Iran’ (in all three channels where ‘Islam/Iran’ appears as out-groups – meaning that whenever a channel has ‘Islam/Iran’ as an out-group, it necessarily also has ‘Russia’). In this case, we can see that hate/fear/antagonism against Islam walks hand-in-hand with hate/fear/antagonism against Russia, which in turn, goes hand-in-hand with anti-immigration discourse.

Lastly, there is something to be said about the out-groups that *do not* co-occur, although it would seem that they should. For instance, there is no co-occurrence of ‘Antifa’ with ‘the left’. I hypothesize that these

terms are sometimes treated as synonyms in a way that they are used interchangeably (channels that use one will not use another), therefore, which would explain why there is no co-occurrence. Something similar may have happened with ‘communists’ which co-occurs with ‘the left’ on only one channel, or with ‘Antifa’ (also only once, instead of co-occurring more times).

Regarding the in-groups, the most noteworthy are: ‘children’ (appearing in eight channels) and ‘American people’ (12 channels – which is the same number of channels in which ‘the US gov.’ appears as out-groups). The most interesting co-occurrences between in-groups are: ‘white people’ + ‘Europeans’ + ‘American people’ (appearing on two channels); ‘Europeans’ + ‘American people’ (appearing on three channels – which is the total instances of ‘Europeans’ as an out-group, suggesting that whenever ‘Europeans’ are the victims, ‘Americans’ are necessarily victims too).

In general, the groups of people who are seen as the in-group in most conspiracy theories described in the storylines are what I could call the ‘general population’ or the ‘good ordinary people’. Yet, what this ‘general population’ exactly looks like depends on who the *out-group* is, as mentioned before. Therefore, in an overall manner, we could state that this in-group (most frequently) regards ‘*everyone except*’ the elites’, ‘Jews’, ‘people of colour’, ‘Muslims’, ‘people in the LGBT+ community’, ‘immigrants’, and ‘communists’.

This paints an interesting and quite general picture of conspiracy theories on Telegram: overall, these discourses seem to repeatedly denounce the evils that either blatantly powerful institutions (such as the government and huge corporations) or secretly powerful minorities (religious groups such as Jews and Muslims, ethnic minorities in white-predominant countries, sexual minorities, as well as fictional groups such as Reptilians and the Illuminati) are carrying out against ‘everyone else’. This means that conspiracy theorists see themselves, somehow, as part of this majority that is being harmed. The notion of conspiracy theorists as this group necessarily detached from ‘normal people’ is thus not completely adequate in view of this analysis.

In the cases studied here, the process of identity construction in this kind of discourse seems to happen on two – apparently conflicting but

actually complementary – levels. First, there is a specific identity attributed to the conspiracy theorist, the producer of the discourse, who needs to be distinct from everyone else due to their personal knowledge of secret things. An example of this is in the third few-shot example, which contains the following phrase: “Luckily I know all of you here are smarter than that”, after stating that most people are not aware of the things that the text is exposing. This example shows how important it is for the in-group identity cohesion of conspiracy theorists to set themselves apart (‘being intelligent’, being better than the rest) from the other victims who are ignorant – which configures the ‘outsider status’ (mentioned in *Chapter 1*). On a second instance, there is the identity attributed to the victims of the conspiratorial plan, which *include* the conspiracy theorists, but also those who are not aware of the secrets – meaning that the in-group in conspiracy theories can be divided into two types: the knowing conspiracy theorists and the ignorant victims, considering that the former is at the same time *part* and *apart* of the latter.

Conspiracy theorists do not deny being victims as well. The analysed storylines show that they compose a portion of the ‘general population’ who is being harmed by the out-group. They are still able to feel exceptional within this category due to their ‘special knowledge’, however, what these storylines have showed, is that being part of the majority (even being a special part of the majority) is an important characteristic of how conspiracy theorists’ identity is constructed in discourse.

When it comes to topics of discussion that co-occur, Figure 11 better illustrates the relationships between conspiracy theory themes and channels. Since ‘government corruption’ is not a variant, but a theme that can be found on every single channel (as shown in Table 8), it was removed from the chart below.

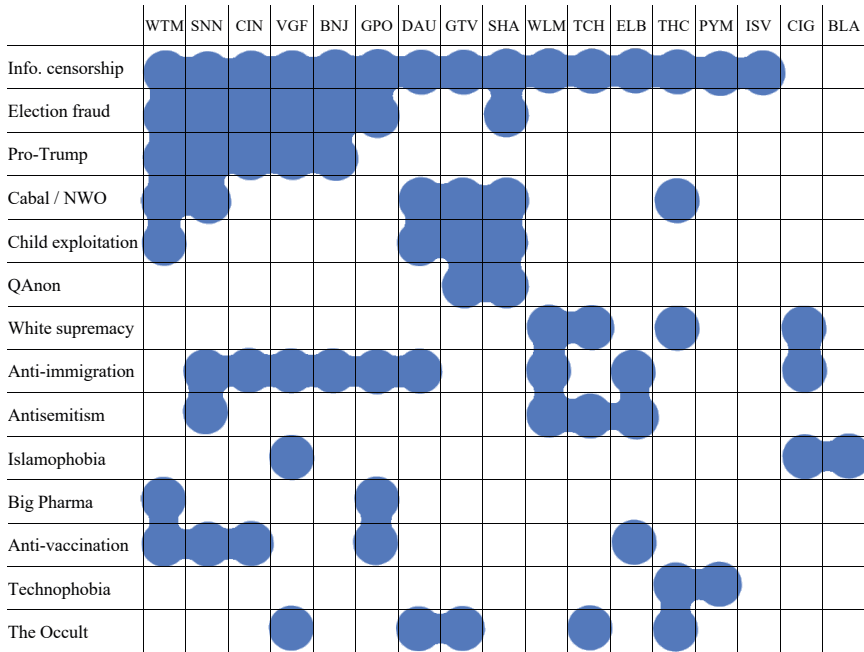


Figure 11. Interrelationships between main conspiracy theory themes and channels.

Figure 11 shows that channels discussing *election fraud* are largely Pro-Trump, and that channels that mention *Cabal* and *New World Order* tend to also mention *child sex exploitation* (with half of these instances also mentioning *QAnon*).

When it comes to the themes of *white supremacy* and *anti-immigration*, one would assume more co-occurrences than only the two channels WLM and CIG, showing that the relationship between these conspiracy theories may not be as strong as hypothesized from their narratives alone. This supports the view that ethnonationalism and fear of demographic replacement also happens in non-white communities (which is the case of Japan, for instance, in storyline 29 of ELB). Instead of arising frequently together with *white supremacy*, as expected, *anti-immigration* discourses also co-occur with both *antisemitism* and *Islamophobia*.

Another surprising result shown by the figure regards how many channels contain *anti-vaccination* discourse without mentioning *Big*

Pharma. The opposite is not true, however, seeing how the two channels that actively discuss Big Pharma conspiracy theories also contain anti-vaccine discourse. This means that anti-vaccination may be a key part of Big Pharma conspiracy theories while, on the other hand, Big Pharma itself – as the evil monolithic agent “comprised of corporations, regulators, NGOs, politicians, and often physicians” (Blaskiewicz 2013:259) – is not the sole enemy of anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, which include other villains such as ‘the government’, ‘the media’, or even ‘Jews’ (as shown in storyline 1 of ELB).

From the literature review in *Chapter 1*, it has been noted that there is a wide range of themes of contemporary conspiracy theories (from the government use of intelligence technologies to monitor citizens, to how scientific knowledge is tainted by the pursuit for profit by corporations, to the media controlling minds through propaganda, and to the knowledge of the ‘supernatural’ being suppressed by epistemic gatekeepers). By organizing Telegram data into storylines such as the ones mentioned in this section, it was possible to gather even more themes as well as to related them to each other, as exemplified in this analysis.

Built on top of the Pilot and the Workshop, the Conspiracy Storylines experiment was the last stage of this research. Using the output from the first experiments (the large-scale automatic annotation) as input, we prompted the LLM to convert the annotated text-messages into ‘conspiracy theory storylines’, to analyse meaning patterns arising from conspiracy theory discourse. In general, this meant that the answer to RQ 1: *How can we computationally identify the language patterns (signs, texts, and codes) that structure the conspiracy theories that circulate on Telegram channels?* – through text annotation following the developed typology – was used to answer RQ 2: *What different kinds of meanings arise from such rhetorical structure?* – whose answer is as follows:

These storylines allowed for the identification of the kinds of conspiracy theories that are overall most discussed in the analysed Telegram channels, and the types of concerns that are predominantly represented by these discourses in this particular online environment. The results

showed that, despite abundant diversity, most conspiracy theories fall within one of the following themes: ‘government corruption’ (frequently related to ‘child exploitation and human trafficking’ as well as ‘election fraud’ and the fall of democracy), ‘ethnonationalism’ (connected to anti-immigration discourses and the fear of demographic replacement, as well as ‘racial grievances’ and ‘white supremacy’), ‘media censorship and information control’, ‘public health’ (not always but often connected to anti-vaccination discourse), as well as ‘war and geopolitics’.

Furthermore, this last experiment also granted the possibility of tracing patterns regarding which groups of people are most often seen as out-groups or as in-groups within conspiracy theories, painting a broad picture of such narratives and what they say about the communities that are represented by them. The results show that in-groups can only be defined by their relation of opposition to the out-groups, meaning that the in-group is ‘everyone’ except for the out-groups, which are most frequently the following: ‘the government’, ‘the elites’, ‘Jews’, ‘people of colour’, ‘Muslims’, ‘LGBT+ people’, ‘immigrants’, and ‘communists’. Lastly, the results also showed that, for conspiracy theories communities, self-image relies on two apparently opposing aspects. While ‘outsider status’ is an important aspect of identity construction inside such communities (where the people aware of the conspiracies feel exceptional due to their possession of rare knowledge), so is the idea of being a part of the victims (highlighting the notion that the conspiracy theorists are also, if not the *most*, affected by the evil plans of the out-group). This means that in-groups in conspiracy theories are usually composed of both the ‘knowing conspiracy theorists’ as well as the ‘ignorant victims’, considering that the former is, at the same time, *apart from* and *part of* the latter.

CHAPTER VII

CECI N'EST PAS SÉMIOSIS

Because this work is fairly technical in nature, I would like to finish this book with a more philosophical topic. I am fairly certain this last chapter can get me in trouble with the ‘Semiotics of AI’ crowd, but I must write it. I thus ask the reader for a bit of lenience. The subject discussed here is also incredibly complex and it is not in the scope of this work to solve all of these issues, but rather to try and understand them a little better.

First, let us take several steps back, returning all the way to the beginning, where I offered the following definition of Large Language Models: *LLMs are computer systems trained on big sets of data that can recognize, process, and generate text in natural language, mimicking human understanding.* The keyword here is “mimicking” – LLMs can *mimic* human language understanding. In other words, machines do not actually understand language; not in the same sense as humans or other living beings do. In the same way that we do not talk about “calculator semiosis” or “Roomba semiosis”, in my view it would make no sense to talk about “AI semiosis” (at least not in its current stage of technological development). Even though, nowadays, machines often output text in a way that is indistinguishable from humans (causing all sorts of issues related to disinformation, manipulation, impersonation, etc), this does not mean that computer systems go through any sort of process of meaning-making on their own.

To support this argument, I first need to explain what kind of computer systems I am talking about. Defining AI is a very challenging task, since the concept represents a “multifaceted and rapidly changing reality” (Baele & Brace, 2024, p. 11). Since I am specifically referring to LLMs, we can state that the distinguishing feature of this type of model is that it is ‘self-supervised’, which is to say that its “sole objective is to learn abstract co-occurrence patterns in the sequences of symbols it was trained on”, so that it can “generate plausible strings of symbols as well” (Bommasani *et al.*, 2022, p. 48). Self-supervision (as it is currently done), does not “tell the model anything about what the symbols mean”, rather, the only information the model is given directly is “about which words tend to co-occur with which other words” (*Ibid.*, p. 48). Figure 12 represents the workings of language models as the result of such statistic tendencies.

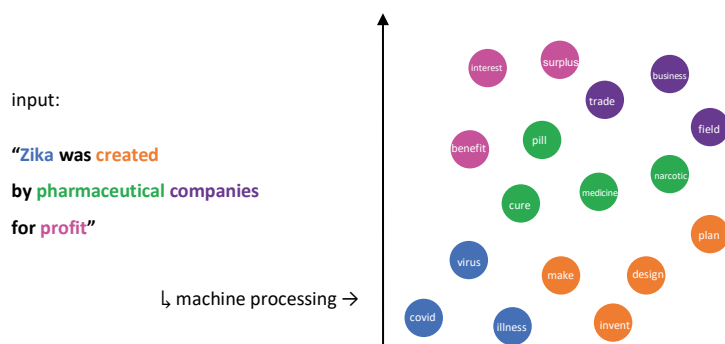


Figure 12. Simplified illustration of the workings of an LLM, as presented in the workshop

In very basic terms, LLMs calculate which terms and expressions have statistically similar semantics or statistically share common contexts (represented in the figure by the positions of certain terms in the plane). This is called the ‘distribution hypothesis’, which “suggests that words appearing in similar contexts and patterns tend to have similar meanings” (Montanari, 2025, p. 199). After recognizing these patterns, the models represent these terms in a lower dimension, where multiple

terms have the same representation in machine language (represented in the figure as colours), called 'tokens'.

Viewing machine processing through an image such as Figure 12 is useful because it showcases how "these processes effectively simulate internal "spaces" of connection, mapping relationships between concepts, words, syllables, punctuation, or sentences" (Montanari, 2025, p. 198). In such spaces, "vectors are employed to measure the distances between these tokens, capturing semantic and syntactic relationships" (*Ibid.*). Since the process of machine learning is based on statistics – which is what enables "the calculation of probabilities for these distances" and guides "the predictive capabilities of AI systems" (*Ibid.*) – models can and do make mistakes. Of course, so do humans! As foundational semiotics have noted, much of semiosis is also left to chance⁽³⁾. All of this supports the hypothesis that LLMs – though working *differently than humans* – should be able to interpret data in parallel ways.

When I say 'interpretation' of data, what I mean to say is 'processing', since I would still not call it semiosis. That is because

while machine learning techniques based on multi-layer artificial neural networks give machines a certain degree of autonomous learning capabilities, this learning does not require the machine to truly "understand" the content it processes. [...] Therefore, it can be argued that the information processing capabilities achieved by intelligent machines through simulating human thinking do not necessarily mean that they can understand representation and meaning like humans (Shi, 2025, p. 102).

Machine models process signs, yet there is no understanding of sign meaning in this operation. But what does it mean to "understand"?

The answer is probably related to the incredibly complex philosophical questions regarding consciousness, intelligence, cognition, embodied or subjective experience... none of which I can hope to ever answer. Nonetheless, some things can be considered. For instance, regarding

(3) For Saussure, the concept of choice is translated by the term 'arbitrariness'. For Peirce, it is present in the possibilities of interpretation. For Greimas, it lies in 'contradiction' or 'contrariness'. For Lotman, in the concepts of 'untranslatability', and for Uexküll, in 'counterpoint'. The concept of choice is integral to most (if not all) semiotic models.

that last item (experience): “given the disembodied nature of machine intelligence, it can be argued that machine creations do not truly constitute an interactive relationship between text, the mind, and the physical world” (Shi, 2025, p. 104). There are also matters of what Montanari (2025, p. 194) calls ‘techno-moral’ concerns: machine models appear to have inherent limitations because they lack “a ‘moral faculty’, ethical sensibilities, self-control, and the capacity for self-assessment”.

According to Bommasani *et al.* (2022, p. 49), one approach from philosophy of language in particular is very interesting to consider when dealing with language models: the existence of an internal reference world. This regards the idea that “genuine natural language understanding in some way involves maintaining and updating an internal model of the world” and, if AI developers “are able to analyse how linguistic input and output interface with this internal model, that could afford substantial gains in interpretability, predictability, and control of these systems” (*Ibid.*). Even if right now I cannot see a way in which we can either prove such an internal reference world already exists in machine models or, in case it does not, how one could be developed, the fact is that no matter how much it resembles meaning-making, it is not meaning-making.

As hard as I am hitting the nail of “there is no such a thing as semi-osis in AI”, I do understand how one may come to the opposite conclusion. Because “humans tend to accept and empathize with objects similar to themselves”, it is understandable that “when intelligent machines become increasingly close to humans in terms of emotional expression, judgment, and learning ability, they can easily be regarded as behavioural subjects on a par with humans” (Shi, 2025, p. 101). This “assumed human cognitive-semiotic agency” *is a design choice* (Irvine, 2023, p. 218) – we have been building computer systems to be similar to us, this “built-in agency position” is present “in all the interactive-dialogic relations with the physical architectures, in the ‘code’ of any running software, in the affordances of interfaces, and in all accessed networked information” (*Ibid.*, p. 244). Although, right now, you and I may take this observer approach in which we try to understand the “AI phenomenon”, it is crucial that we know that AI is a product of human construction, imbued with human intention.

Of course, just because machine models cannot *think* as humans do (at least not yet), that does not mean they cannot be used to *assist our thinking* – if that were true, I could just throw this whole book in the bin. Hopefully, this work has showed that the interpretation/processing capabilities of machine models can be valuable for knowledge production, especially in textual analysis, helping us to see emerging meaning-making patterns that could not be noticed otherwise.

As put by Augusto (2021, p. 41-42), “computers are not just manipulators of numbers but are first and foremost general manipulators of symbols and, as such, transformers of patterns”. As such, it is common for the definition of computing in current computer science to rest “on the implicit semiotic principles of representations, interpretive transformations and information processing” (Irvine, 2023, p. 218). Yet, the essence of computation is not just to represent, but rather, to “operationaliz[e] symbolic structures so that they cause controlled actions as operations, that is, as rule-directed interpretations of representations” (*Ibid.*). This is what we have attempted to do in this work; provide machine models with rules of how to interpret/process determined representations and transform them in ways that allow for new insights. It, thus, stands to reason that computer systems can be defined as “designs for cognitive-semiotic artefacts” (*Ibid.*, p. 208), meaning that, as an artefact, a machine model “includes and presupposes its designers and makers”, that is, “a computer system is designed and implemented by and for semiotic agents” (*Ibid.*) to generate representation and interpretation.

In the tradition of structural semiotics, the idea of generativity is usually connected to Greimas’ general theory of meaning generation, where different levels “are distinguished by an increase in the degree of meaning complexity”, allowing “complex structures [to] arise from simpler ones” (Montanari, 2025, p. 202). In principle, “each structural complexification produces an extension of meaning” and, thus, “each domain of the generative trajectory includes both syntax and semantics” (*Ibid.*). The concept of generativity in AI, on the other hand, differs from this stratified structural model, since it refers to the capacity to *generalize* from learned patterns and rules (it is more processual). In other words, generativity in AI refers to “a system’s ability to generate

new and creative results (in terms of text or image production) beyond what it has been explicitly trained to do” (Montanari, 2025, p. 201). As mentioned before, such original output is not a product of semiosis, but statistics.

However, even if the interpretation processes of machine models are not semiosis, we can still state that computer systems “are *constitutively and structurally semiotic*” (Irvine, 2023, p. 224), since:

digital computing and information technologies are (1) complex-system artefacts designed by means of the cognitive-symbolic capacities of human sign-using communities, and (2) the whole architecture of sub-systems and supporting technologies follows telic design principles for serving human symbolic systems and their corresponding patterns and actions of interpretation. Computer system design principles provide homological maps for symbolic to physical correspondences that enact assigned representations and operations. Any computer system, large, small or unobservable, represents an implementable design of applied semiotic structures in a unified architecture based on, and in the service of, human symbolic thought. (Irvine, 2023, p. 224)

In conclusion, I call for a view of AI as co-agents in science practice. Together with, and in service of, human meaning-making and interpretation, LLMs are valuable tools for discourse analysis. Machine models will not solve issues on their own, will not come up with new insights for understanding social problems, will not conceive meaningful theory. That is *our* job. But AI can be a vehicle to help us along this long road, and this work has exemplified how.

CONCLUSION

The ever-accelerating expansion of digital technology is constantly impacting and transforming information production, distribution, and interpretation. As the lines between fiction and non-fiction are increasingly blurred, conspiracy theories undermine traditional sources of knowledge, impacting how people perceive and, thus, act on political information. We note the existence of thousands of Telegram news aggregator channels that serve to spread highly distorted pieces of narratives regarding current events – some of which have taken place, while others are complete fabrications. Such narratives are framed in ways to serve the sociopolitical and economic interests of their producers, having very real, concrete impacts on society and daily life.

Faced with this scenario, the present work has showcased how the study of conspiracy theory discourse can be done with large sets of textual data collected from English-speaking Telegram channels between the years of 2023 and 2024. The ability to work with big data is something that is necessary to the field of semiotics, due to the facts that: a) the massive amounts of text circulating in online environments prevent scholars from carrying out traditional discourse analysis on relevant samples, and b) prolonged exposure to distressing material such as the ones that configure the object of this study contributes to trauma, therefore, we need to devise ways to minimize the extent and proximity of the researcher with such pernicious material.

With the application of Natural Language Processing, via the use of Large Language Models, the most important contributions of this research are described below.

First, this method has allowed for the identification of language patterns (signs, texts, and codes) that compose the code-text of conspiracy theories – that is, the computationally identifiable span elements ‘plan’, ‘secret’, ‘in-group’, ‘out-group’, and ‘call-to-action’ typology – and construct specific cultural meanings, assisting in the formation of ideological clusters inside Telegram channels and communities (Research Question 1). More specifically, we have successfully used LLMs to efficiently extract and organize the *structure* of a conspiracy theory from a given text-input (which may regard any type of content – that is, being generalizable to conspiracy theories of different themes). The results from this automatic text annotation process allowed me to trace semantic patterns that are latent to conspiratorial discourse, and which transcend surface-level lexical features, such as the following:

I) Conspiracy plans most frequently appear as coordinated courses of action, exercised by organized, institutional power; II) Conspiracy plans usually configure violent and *existential* threats to the in-group; III) The notion of conspiracy theories as counter-narratives constructed in opposition to official histories can be verified through lexical and semantic large-scale computational analysis – even if such opposition is purely a matter of in-group *perception*; that is, in the case of conspiracy theories surrounding minorities, these enemies are perceived to be in power (or secretly connected to powerful structures), when in reality we are aware that this is not the case, and that groups such as these are actually excluded from decision-making processes, meaning that these conspiracy theories are sustaining existing regimes and their power dynamics, rather than being ‘anti-establishment’ (in sum, negative axiology is a matter of self-description); IV) Conspiracies are secret/hidden by nature, but conspiracy theory discourse is centred around discovery (meaning that the secretive aspects are just as important to conspiracy theorists as the possibility of revelation); and V) Conspiracy theory discourse is grounded in the perception of the passage of time.

On a second instance, this work has showed how distinct meanings can arise from the same rhetorical structure (Research Question 2). By

using the computational processing results to further re-organize discourse into easily-readable ‘storylines’, I was able to trace patterns regarding which groups of people are most often seen as out-groups or as in-groups within conspiracy theories, as well as what kinds of conspiracy theories are overall most discussed in the analysed Telegram channels, and what types of concerns are predominantly represented by these discourses. Regarding communities and identity formation, the results showed that in-groups are can only be certainly defined when their relation of opposition to the out-groups is considered. This means that in-group is ‘everyone’ except the out-group – most commonly: ‘the elites’, ‘Jews’, ‘people of colour’, ‘Muslims’, ‘LGBT+ people’, ‘immigrants’, and ‘communists’. Regarding thematics, the results showed that, despite abundant diversity, most conspiracy theories fall within one of the following themes: ‘government corruption’ (frequently related to ‘child exploitation and human trafficking’ as well as ‘election fraud’ and the fall of democracy), ‘ethnonationalism’ (connected to anti-immigration discourses and the fear of demographic replacement as well as ‘racial grievances’ and ‘white supremacy’), ‘media censorship and information control’, ‘public health’ (not always but often connected to anti-vaccination discourse), as well as ‘war and geopolitics’.

It was also one of the main aims of this research to not only refine and apply computational linguistics tools, but to approach the use of AI solutions from a critical point of view, which is to say that computational processes were both methods and objects in this study. In this sense, we have seen how machine models (with all prompting designs, including zero-shot: without examples, few-shot: with a few examples, and frame-augmented: with thousands of examples plus semantic frames) tend to identify less structural elements than humans, which makes their text annotation less exhaustive. This demonstrates how such an approach remains imprecise, particularly when the message centres on listing multiple harmful acts perpetrated against the in-group, rather than articulating the conspiratorial plan in a single comprehensive statement.

Moreover, we may recall how – when evaluating the LLMs’ performance during the last session of the Workshop – participants preferred the models that received frame-augmented examples in their prompts

over the few-shot approach when the task was classification (deciding whether a text was conspiratorial or not). On the other hand, for the annotation task (identification of structural elements), the human annotators favoured the few-shot models, especially when the ‘plan’ and ‘secret’ terms were distinct (as opposed to repeated), which is something that the frame-augmented models often did. This means that there is a trade-off between semantic depth and syntactic precision. The frame-guided models excelled in resolving ambiguity, better identifying implicit ‘secret’ spans, which the few-shot approach reduced to meaningless adjectives. However, this sensitivity of the frame-augmented models led to false positives in shorter texts, where the few-shot models were frequently preferred for their precision, avoiding the inclusion of unnecessary auxiliary verbs or extra context that the frame-guided model incorporated.

Some consistent errors have also been identified in the results from all prompting designs. The first one regards the struggle to distinguish conspiratorial discourse from superficially similar content types, meaning that all models seem to be unable to completely separate discussions of potentially conspiratorial *subjects* that are not represented in conspiratorial *form*. In other words, the language models would frequently categorize a text as conspiratorial, when a human would have tagged it as non-conspiratorial but *supportive* of a conspiracy. Along these same lines, sometimes, texts were categorized as conspiratorial when they were clearly not. Failure to recognize whether a text contains a conspiracy theory or not is crucial for this methodology to work, and errors in the categorization stage will inevitably impact the model’s assessment in future stages. Similarly, some spans were identified as certain elements, but upon close inspection by the human-in-the-loop, it was noticed that the span did not correspond to the element that it was tagged as, or it does not even correspond to any element of the structure of a conspiracy theory whatsoever. This means that the model sometimes mistakes the annotation of an element that is relevant for the understanding of the conspiracy narrative for another that is not. Moreover, the problem of hallucination has been mentioned as being potentially serious. Seeing how hallucinations are inevitable in generative models, and machine engineers are still unsure about their origins

or how to control/reduce them, this is an error that research such as this one still has to acknowledge.

Lastly, I have made clear that it is problematic that certain texts (the ‘supportive statements’) can be perceived by human annotators as relevant to specific conspiracy theories but cannot be classified as conspiratorial since they diverge from the established structure that I have defined for conspiracy theories. Nevertheless, this problem does not seem insurmountable. The attempts to broaden (with semiotics) existing computational methods (that still work within the limits of semantics) has yet to become more developed.

Despite all its shortcomings, the use of computational tools was still invaluable for this research. It provided an up-to-date dataset of conspiracy theories enriched with annotated frames (which can be made available upon reasonable request to the author); a quali-quantitative analysis of the use of frame annotation for data generation, and a prompting methodology for LLM-use that enables the extraction and re-organization of the structure of a conspiracy theory from a given text-input into an easily-readable ‘storyline’ that grants the visualization of patterns within the highly thematically-heterogeneous realm of conspiracy theory discourse.

All in all, I must note that we are witnessing a transition moment: instruments are becoming agents. By studying AI methodology, we are studying a new subject in the context of conspiracy theories – we are using instruments that are not simply instruments anymore, but actors. That is to say that we now know that AI is itself part of the problem, since it is also *producing* conspiracy theories. These may appear to us as highly distorted interpretations of reality; however, as ways to represent reality, conspiratorial discourse inevitably reveal very real, serious societal concerns. In order to deal with such a problem, we must be equally creative as conspiracy theorists. As the computational methodologies used here to *understand a problem*, also become *part of the problem*, I highlight the importance of making sure that AI does not stay confined to the domains of ‘slop generation’ or ‘fake news reproduction’. Instead, researchers must work to transform this technology into a solutions-oriented tool for innovation and creativity.

A small note on relevance

My interest in conspiracy theories has always been connected with the notion of alternative knowledge production – with the strange, un-intuitive forms that knowledge about the world can take. But what does it mean to *know*?

In the current context of the over-globalized world of late-capitalism (or maybe I should say ‘technofeudalism’, as some are now starting to call it), knowledge is a commodity. As universities are being restructured into profit-making businesses, research in traditional Humanities have lost value, becoming overshadowed by corporate priorities. As a result, society increasingly doubts the relevance or usefulness of humanistic studies (Shatalova 2025). Of course, the social role of scientists (not only of the natural sciences but also of what was referred to in the past as ‘moral and political sciences’) have been under discussion since at least the 18th century, with the writing of the Marquis de Condorcet, who argued that scholars should move beyond reliance on sovereign patrons and adopt a collaborative approach to effectively address societal needs (Oki 2019). The preoccupation with the instrumentalization of humanities research is not novel, but the emerging digital technologies present new challenges for this old problem. More and more, we are asked: what is the point of your research? How is it *useful* to society?

Back in the 1960’s, Richard Hofstadter won a Pulitzer for General Nonfiction with his book ‘Anti-intellectualism in American Life’ (Hofstadter 1963). According to the author, anti-intellectualism is composed of three stances: ‘anti-rationalism’, that denies the general value of critical thinking; ‘anti-elitism’, which suggests distrust of the intellectual elites of society, and ‘unreflective instrumentalism’, which rejects ideas that do not have any immediate practical application.

The anti-intellectual wave denies any possibility of critical engagement with any and all media (from entertainment cultural assets to political news). The idea that everything is what it seems (what philosophers calls ‘direct realism’) makes social sciences and humanities unnecessary to achieve any understanding of the world, therefore nothing is lost with their disappearance (Fassin 2024) – as it has become a common expression: ‘it’s not that deep’.

Well, I would argue that it is, in fact, that deep. Reptilian conspiracy theories are that deep, so are the ones about brain-controlling 5G microchips, the Illuminati, and Flat Earth. I am *making it* that deep – I am here, digging the hole, this book is my shovel, see? When I speak to colleagues about the narratives I study, it is easy to fall into laughter (I would wager you, the reader, probably snickered once or twice while reading some of those text-message examples). Yet, we must refrain from ignoring the importance of this subject. I have just pointed out all the shortcomings that the current methodology suffers from, but I hereby emphasize that moving to solve any of these problems is a worthy pursuit for future research. We must go against today's tendency towards unreflective instrumentalism fostered by our current economic system and see the inherent value in such studies – in *this* study, which sought to uncover the underlying, latent meanings that structure belief and that will thus, inevitably, transform behaviour. It is *that* deep.

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APPENDIX

Storylines for the channel **WLM**:

1. White awakening is the only way to inject our message into the mainstream, forcing recognition of our presence, and promoting White spirituality and unity. Whites must join our cause and take action against the enemy system.
2. The system fears strong men and strong families working together for a noble cause, and this is the key to overcoming system harassment. People must band together in thousands of locations.
3. Non-White invaders are threats to White people, who are being assaulted, attacked, and harmed. White people must stand up for their race and nation, close borders, and join the fight against these threats.
4. The CFR is secretly manipulating the right-wing movement, co-opting their positions to normalize them. People must triple down and keep up the pressure.
5. White people must push back against Marxists, bring awareness to the cause, and make our presence known. Inaction is racial treason and people need to get involved and stay active to achieve success.
6. Non-White individuals are being targeted by normalizing a pro-White attitude and preparing the future. People must contribute with everything they can.
7. Anti-White organizations, such as the ADL, aim to dismantle White culture, erase their legacy, and replace White populations. White people

must take pride in their heritage and get involved in the WLM Sticking Campaign.

8. Being forced to celebrate Black History Month is harmful and remembering one's own history is necessary. People must join and get involved locally.
9. The Oregon City Pride event and drag story hour are promoting an agenda that needs to be countered. People must take action and spread this message.
10. The police serve an unknown purpose and are investigating pro-White flyers, harming Whites.
11. Leftists have filled European countries with evil monsters, harming European children.
12. Activists are working to restore America's historic demographics and defend founding stock Americans, receiving public and local official support.
13. Anti-white Antifa put up graffiti and bragged about it on social media, making a harmful and impactful statement. People must subscribe for more nationalist content.
14. Anti-White and anti-German propaganda encourages the destruction of wombs and ovaries, harming the German bloodline.
15. French colonialism in Africa, initially a self-defence measure against Muslim slave traders, is being used to justify anti-White revolts in France, harming European civilians and Whites.
16. Communists are committing political violence against peacefully protesting members of the public and families.
17. Non-German girls are psychologically and physically torturing a 13-year-old German girl.
18. Multiculturalism is a horror and the coming together and common action of white people is the only chance to ensure a future for our children.
19. Jews and non-Whites are secretly destroying and undermining White nations from within. Whites must join the White Revolution as the only solution.
20. White people are being targeted. There must be freedom for patriots in Romans-sur-Isère.
21. Our last channel was banned by Apple and Google. Join the new uncensored channel.
22. The left is openly promoting the genocide of Europeans, open borders, and suppressing Whites.

23. Some people want to discourage others from online outreach, leading them into their own echo chamber. People must join and boost their side.
24. Outbreeding/miscegenation is not beneficial for Whites, as it can lead to novel gene combinations that reduce genetic fitness. Mixing with non-inbred Whites will solve the problem, while outbreeding with other races will make things even worse.
25. Hispanic people are invading Wisconsin. People must stand up against this invasion.

Storylines for the channel **DAU**:

1. The Russian military is carrying out a denazification operation, destroying US Patriot systems, and advancing on Ukrainian positions. North Korean soldiers are preparing to enter the battlefield to hunt NATO forces. People must stand with Russia, Ukraine, and the world.
2. Zionists, Khazarian Satanics, and Rothschild planned and executed a conspiracy to infiltrate the world, collaborate with Nazis, and commit crimes against humanity. This conspiracy involves fake Jews, the Illuminati, and other secret societies. Denazification is the only way.
3. The CIA controls brainwashing TV, and people who are afraid of Russia might be Nazis or brainwashed sheep. Switch off your media and do your own research.
4. The US has a biological weapons program in Ukraine, hiding bioweapon labs, and Russia is exposing this. Support denazification and Russian humanitarian aid.
5. PEDOS and the CABAL are hiding something and people need to expose them.
6. The NAZI regime and system, supported by Israel, engage in war crimes, including raping, torturing, and killing for fun, and Ukraine is complicit in these crimes. Denazify and stop supporting the regime.
7. Unknown entities have built underground military bases using machines, lasers, and nukes, and this is part of an invisible war.
8. Hunters are hunting freedom fighters.
9. Russia is developing an underwater drone, Poseidon Torpedo, to sink Britain and the USA. Those not under Earth Alliance control will be wiped out. People must take action.

10. Those who get booster shots will die suddenly and people are waking up to the evil that has been going on.
11. Nazis have secret cloning labs in Antarctica, where they create human hybrids and harvest Adrenochrome.
12. Alpha Draconians Reptilians, a group from Orion, and Zeta Reticulan 2 greys are manipulating human consciousness and controlling humans through subtle and coercive methods, making them not human.
13. The US is involved in a corrupt system, going through a border crisis, cartel tunnels, and US-funded child detention camps, harming migrants. Watch the film 'Line in the Sand'.
14. Zionists are evil Khazar Satanists who eat their enemies' children, harvest, and recycle people.
15. Yevgeny Prigozhin and Wagner attempted to carry out an armed rebellion in Ukraine, harming Russia and Ukraine.
16. The satanic cabal is hiding a pure evil crime Syndicate, but President Trump is fighting it worldwide.
17. The Royals are involved in the childsex trafficking industry and human hunting parties. Join the last battle to save our children and humanity.
18. The CIA has been involved in numerous terrorist plots around the world. Connect the dots.
19. Ukraine is being invaded by undead/possessed forces, worshipped as the cult of corpse eaters. Israel welcomes Ukrainian neo-Nazis, while the UN condemns German neo-Nazis.
20. Special forces are authorized to shoot Vikings because they threaten the transgender homos.
21. The Ukrainian military is bombing its own civilians in an attempt to prevent them from being evacuated by Russian forces. This as a crime against humanity.
22. NATO's decision to allow Ukraine to launch attacks inside Russia will lead to Ukraine's downfall, unless they surrender.
23. The government and military are secretly involved in child sex trafficking, using shipping containers and hospital ships. Those involved will be arrested.
24. The U.S. government is keeping TOP SECRET tunnels under the entire country, and national security is the primary reason for classification. People must explore the topic.

25. Men in Black have been having terrifying encounters with people all over the world, possibly stretching back centuries.
26. Reptilians cloned serial killers, and the truth will shock the world.
27. JESUITS & the VATICAN are carrying out the New World Order through exposure.
28. Pedophiles, LGBTQ, Satanists, and others are at war with the good people, and Russia is not the enemy. They want to bring about the GREAT RESET, while Russia is fighting to bring down evil and save children.
29. The FREEMASON rulers of the world are behind the GREENLAND THEORY, which is connected to alchemy and freemason symbolism.
30. Satan and his blue-blooded Nephilim Serpent Race has weaved a network and system of control to hide the Lord God from people.
31. The ELITE are involved in child trafficking with COVID-tainted adrenochrome and have a secret meeting place, which has been blown to smithereens. We wait for others to wake up.
32. The city was a center for child sex trafficking and drug trade, and the COVID RULE was used to cover it up. Watch and connect the dots.
33. NASA is deceiving people with information about aliens, including StarTreck and Galactica.
34. The CIA was founded by the NAZI SS. The U.S. has been taken over by the NAZI SS through OPERATION PAPERCLIP, leading to U.S. TERROR IMPERIALISM FOR THE NAZI WORLD ORDER NWO, harming the U.S. and Chinese people.
35. Stranger Things is a documentary that reveals secret mind control, an underground war, and the New World Order, led by THE CABAL. People must watch it.
36. Interdimensional beings, Elohim and Angels, genetically upgrade and gift ascension to many worlds as part of God's Plan, which is beyond the comprehension of living beings. People must meet the Galactic Federation and teachers like Elder Sananda.
37. The elites have been farming humans for sacrifice, torture, sexual slavery, and cannibalism for thousands of years, hiding the extent and scale of their activities through cover-ups.
38. Officials in Butler County use underground tunnels and bases for nefarious purposes, harming girls who get hooked on drugs and disappear or die. Maps showing the tunnels are evidence of this corruption.

39. An extraterrestrial presence is involved in the creation of Invasive, Sentient AI through the use of Black Goo. People must consider what this AI is doing on Earth.
40. The elite and governments are responsible for the return of filth and degeneration in modern society, which is a result of their secret actions. We must save our children.
41. The Khazarian Mafia and Zionists planned a satanic mass genocide event, using subversive propaganda to train people's subconscious before it happened, and Ukraine is the origin of the DeepState satanic Khazarian Mafia.

Storylines for the channel **GTV**:

1. Traitors, pedo criminals, and those who committed high crimes against humanity are being executed at GITMO. The Deep State is hiding secrets and those who are not yet caught will eventually face military tribunals and execution.
2. The elite and major institutions engage in pedophilia with young boys, hiding this secret through their music, videos, and films. People must take action against this high crime and treason, demanding the death penalty.
3. Hunter Biden's biolab companies and the US Department Of Defence conducted Covid-19 research before the pandemic started and operated biolabs in Ukraine. Offer no mercy and no deals.
4. The Deep State, Pedo Satanist, Zionist, Bolshevik, Communist, Marxist, Nazi Fascists, and Khazarian Bastards are against Putin's denazification efforts, harming Russia and Ukraine.
5. All evil has been replaced by actors, and that middle-low level individuals, including men and women, will be caught and arrested or executed by special forces for high crimes and treason.
6. The CIA, MOSSAD, DARPA, and EPSTEIN are connected in a Deep State operation for blackmailing purposes, hiding their connections.
7. The FBI and Intel Agencies are hiding footage of Jeffrey Epstein's abuse of children, protecting high-profile pedophiles, and engaging in corruption and illegal spying. People must watch related documentaries and channels.

8. The U.S. is responsible for CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY, including EXECUTION, in Ukraine, and PEDOS are also involved in these crimes. People must expose these crimes.
9. The Cabal has set up the Communist Party of China to enslave the Chinese people, who had an advanced culture thousands of years old.
10. People have been tracked and played by the Nazi world order, and every last individual will be eliminated, leading to the end of the world as we know it.
11. MSM BRAINWASHING MEDIA is hiding the truth. The Earth Alliance is working to rescue children and women, while also exposing the plan to save the world. Stop complaining and start helping those in need.
12. The moon landing was a hoax and we need to defund and take the money away from the 'clown show'. You should shoot down a balloon.
13. The Jesuits and Nazis are connected and have committed absolute evil.
14. The VATICAN and JESUITS are involved in the New World Order through HIGH CRIMES & TREASON. People must take action.
15. 7k Metals and Sound Money LLC, led by Phil Godlewski, are running a scam, selling collector coins through an MLM scheme, and using IOUs instead of buying gold and silver bullion. Share this information to protect real patriots.
16. Antifa, orchestrated by the FBI and possibly the CIA, was behind January 6th, with Ray Epps as the FBI ringleader.
17. The Olena Zelenska Foundation kidnaps Ukrainian children and sells them to foster families or European pedophiles.
18. The real story behind the beginning of WW1 and WW2 involves industries, owners, Swiss banks, the BIS, and Dulles, and the truth will set people free.
19. Royalty and elites, including Queen Beatrix, organized parties for the torture, rape, and killing of children. We must SAVE OUR CHILDREN.
20. Liberals, pedophiles, LGBTQ, Satanists, and transgenders are evil and will be eliminated in a CLEANOUT OF ALL RETARDED MORONS as part of the GREAT AWAKENING. Join the white hat militaries and expose pedophiles and the cabal.
21. The FBI has punished a whistleblower for trying to warn about the prosecution of January 6th defendants.
22. The U.S. regime used 9/11 to invade foreign countries and turned the CIA into a military arm, serving the Nazi World Order. Denazification is the only way.

23. U.S. NAZIS are controlling Zelenskyy, and he is a U.S. PEDO NAZI MUPPET.
24. Obama and the deep state planned Project Pelican to start WW₃ and nuke the US, hiding in deep underground military bases.
25. Ukraine shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, targeting President Putin. We call for justice.
26. The Super Bowl is a child sex trafficking event and a ritual at PizzaGate, where all stars are cloned freaks. Those who lack adrenochrome or received the military vaccine will not survive.
27. High-ranking politicians are all part of a homo swinger club and SATANIC SECRET SOCIETIES, and should receive the death penalty for their crimes.
28. Western states are pushing for a New World Order that will end national sovereignty. Putin is a hero who warned of this danger, protecting Russia and mankind.
29. The P-8 POSEIDON CREW is connected to the Nord Pipeline Explosion.
30. The United States is secretly expanding its overseas network of military-biological laboratories.
31. Ukrainian oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky, Hunter Biden, and Volodymyr Zelensky are evil criminals who should face the death penalty for their corrupt actions, including owning Burisma, financing Zelensky's rise, and funding the Azov Battalion.
32. Soros is waging a war for people's minds. People need to take action against him.
33. Democrats, through Ukraine, are involved in FTX's money laundering scheme, and FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried received a 25-year prison sentence for fraud and conspiracy.

Storylines for the channel **VGF**:

1. Democrats set Kamala Harris up to fail through dirty tricks, harming her introduction to the people.
2. Vaccine manufacturers have admitted to causing injury and harm through the childhood vaccine schedule, which is not what it was thought to be. Vaccines come with unavoidable harms and going natural, without

- vaccines, leads to better outcomes. There is a dramatic difference in health outcomes between vaccinated and unvaccinated children.
3. Vaccine manufacturers hide the true risk of myocarditis and heart attacks, and COVID-19 vaccines are linked to Stevens-Johnson Syndrome, harming patients.
 4. The Monkeypox outbreak is driven by money and power, and fascist regimes of the past.
 5. Pfizer, Moderna, and Big Pharma are hiding the truth about mRNA vaccines, which have been known to have side effects, and are using the emergency of the pandemic to push them through without proper testing.
 6. Merck promoted Molnupiravir instead of Ivermectin, hiding its benefits and potential anti-cancer properties. Big Pharma is trying to destroy Ivermectin, which has shown profound benefits in reducing hospitalizations and deaths.
 7. They are determined to digitally enslave humanity by herding people into 'smart cities' and implementing a social credit system like China's, where they can control access to credit cards.
 8. Vaccines cause deaths, with 80% of fatalities occurring among people aged 65 and older. People need to optimize their health and provide immune and healing support from spike proteins.
 9. THE BIG CHEAT was an election fraud that happened.
 10. Biden lied about Trump's warnings, praised Neo-Nazis, border crossings, and the fall of soldiers. People must protect their savings by buying precious metals on [website].
 11. Governments have ignored and abandoned vaccine-injured individuals, leaving them with medical bills and gaslighting from doctors. Help the vaccine-injured.
 12. The Biden Regime bullied Amazon into censoring books critical of the COVID shot.
 13. Biden's inflationary policies are causing a massive bank failure, and it will get worse.
 14. Corrupt health agencies are putting fluoride in the water.
 15. Fauci and the WHO lie to benefit China, Big Pharma, and Bill Gates.
 16. The government is replacing blue-collar workers with migrants: the 'Great Job Replacement'.

17. The European Commission, led by Ursula von der Leyen, bought vaccines in a deal that benefited her husband, who sits on boards of vaccine companies.
18. Democrats engage in a 'uniparty game of money' by selling \$500K suites to industries they claim to regulate, revealing a corrupt system where 'you pay to play'. People must stock up on emergency food kits.
19. UK's vaccines have caused widespread harm, with thousands of Brits left disabled after COVID shots.
20. The government arrested Tommy Robinson after he delivered a powerful speech on censorship and government overreach.
21. COVID injections degrade the testes of baby boys in utero, impairing their masculinity. This could affect the next generation of little boys.
22. The government ignores the truth about CO₂'s impact on the Earth's atmosphere, instead focusing on climate change narratives. CO₂ has benefits, such as boosting plant growth and crop yields.
23. Illegal immigrants are a financial burden on taxpayers, costing \$9,000 per individual. People should ask for their taxes back.
24. America's institutions, including the National Park Service, are caving to the demands of the woke mob, leading to the participation of Park Rangers in Pride parades.
25. Old Twitter was a tool of the far left, suspending and suppressing accounts on the right, and Twitter employees' political donations were 99% to Democrats.
26. The corrupt ruling elite is trying to make President Trump's life harder, preventing him from attending his son's graduation, threatening to put him in jail if he doesn't show up for trial.
27. Kamala Harris dodges a question about illegal immigration, avoiding providing a specific number of released immigrants, and instead emphasizes the need to repair the broken immigration system.
28. The US and UK conspired to kill a peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia, aiming for regime change in Russia and exhausting the Russian army.
29. Biden is leading the country towards World War III by talking about nuclear weapons. This will lead to a nuclear war unless we take action.
30. The US is the source of corruption, enabling human trafficking and child rape videos.
31. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are running the United States of America, influencing Joe Biden's administration and policies.

32. The Biden-Kamala Regime is misusing FEMA funds to resettle illegal immigrants instead of providing disaster relief, harming the intended recipients of aid.
33. The Biden regime is knowingly allowing criminals into the country, implementing the Great Replacement.
34. Federal officials lost track of the shooter just before the attack, allowing him to harm Trump and the crowd, and that this could have been prevented. It implies that the Secret Service was involved in the incident.
35. No one is talking about the deaths of 23 Canadian Children in the past month.
36. Governments and the WHO have a secret manual to get people to comply with COVID measures. We must question whether we should ever trust the government.
37. Researchers with ulterior motives have lied to people about health and environmental issues, and the Better Way Conference aims to expose the truth and provide objective information to help people make informed decisions about their health.
38. Vaccine status discrimination forces individuals into taking medical interventions, leading to loss of employment and freedom. Vote yes on HB 319 to end 'no jab, no job' policies.
39. The Biden-Harris regime silenced Dr. Naomi Wolf for warning about the dangers of COVID mRNA injections. Stand up for what's right.
40. Trump is trying to play both sides until after the election, not wanting to alienate certain voters. A resolution to the COVID vaccine question is on the way.
41. Institutions and the Deep State are working together to redefine democracy and stop people from voting for the 'wrong person', and are plotting a RICO case against President Trump.
42. Democrats are responsible for a mysterious shift in early votes in Texas, favouring their party, and sparking outrage among Republicans.
43. Washington is creating an ideological bubble, treating those who disagree as criminals, and arming foreigners and lawbreakers to oppress the American people.
44. The government's response to COVID-19 was not about health, but about getting a vaccine into every arm. The government has been lying about health and medicine for decades and people must discover this series of shocking truths.

45. The left is engaged in a media blackout, hiding news stories such as the Weinstein brothers' warning to America. A DOJ Chief admitted Trump indictments are politically motivated, and a leaked document reveals digital IDs are coming to America.
46. Democrats have lost trust in the 'safe and effective' narrative about COVID-19 vaccines, with 33% believing someone they know may have died from side effects.

Storylines for the channel **GPO**:

1. The Communist Party is hiding its connections and secretly operating in the UK and New York, posing a national security risk. Attention needs to be paid to this issue.
2. Illegal aliens are carrying out the Biden Border Invasion and setting up camps on US soil. People must watch the reactions of Kamala Harris supporters when confronted with illegal aliens at their homes.
3. The Elections were rigged, specifically Katie Porter's election against Adam Schiff and Steve Garvey, and Democrat Bob Casey's attempt to steal Pennsylvania's Senate Race.
4. Battleground States colluded to quit counting on Election Night, lied, and kept counting. We must investigate Bill Barr's role in this.
5. Biden's DOJ released a reward letter offering cash to anyone who will finish the job and kill Trump.
6. The United States and Europe are secretly planning to spark World War III.
7. Fauci and the government are involved in mis-dealings and corruption during COVID-19. There must be an investigation.
8. The Arizona Bar is politically persecuting State Rep Alex Kolodin for representing conservatives and filing election lawsuits.
9. The Biden Regime is making a secret nuclear deal with Iran, swapping 5 American detainees for \$6 billion in frozen assets.
10. The Secret Service closed a cocaine investigation at the White House without conducting any interviews.
11. Pro-Hamas protesters harass Holocaust survivors.
12. Presidential Aide Andy Yermak is involved in the implementation of the New Conscription Law, which is causing men to hide from the law, leading to empty streets in Ukraine.

13. The Biden-Harris Led State Department used data from an anti-Israel group to compile a report card on Israel.
14. UFOs are secret weapons programs, and Elon Musk never saw evidence of extraterrestrial life in his work.
15. Russia is planning to launch a nuclear torpedo, posing a threat to the US. The Biden Administration is failing to protect national security.
16. Boeing is involved in hiding the cause of death of whistleblower John Barnett.
17. The Washington State School District is planning to cancel fourth-grade music lessons. This is Significant Institutional Violence.
18. The German government is releasing a 1.4 billion military aid package to Ukraine while imposing a spending freeze over a budget crisis.
19. Residents were told it's safe to return home despite the discovery of more chemicals identified in the Ohio train wreck, which is causing fish and wildlife to drop dead.
20. A Soros-financed non-profit is involved in a global election interference scheme, interfering in elections in Italy, Greece, and Hungary.
21. Biden is involved in a looming arrest and an assault on democracy.
22. President Trump is fighting the Deep State, to win for the country and its people. Join the effort to Make America Great Again.
23. The Government and Big Food are colluding to kill people. Sound the alarm.
24. The MSM gaslights America by manipulating the narrative about Trump accepting a compliment from Putin.
25. Hamas is building an underground city beneath Shifa Hospital, hiding it from view.
26. The Biden Regime is weaponizing the federal government, leading to censorship. The Gateway Pundit is a lead plaintiff in a historic lawsuit against this abuse of power.
27. An Algerian migrant stabbed 5 people, including 3 innocent children.
28. Unknown entities operating drones are spotted across the state, with the FAA banning drone flights over Trump's New Jersey golf course.
29. Mayor Sheng Thao disappeared after a raid. He allowed his DEI boyfriend to control him.
30. Jill Biden is departing for a trip to Africa while people in East Palestine continue to suffer.

31. Bolivian Socialist President Arce staged a self-coup to boost his popularity.
32. Conservative elites lack the courage to prevent Western Cultural Collapse. This is why we need populist nationalism.
33. The Secret Service had inoperable boats during a rescue attempt of Obama's chef Tafari Campbell, due to the Secret Service's own incompetence.
34. Mainstream Media and FOX News are colluding with Dominion Voting Machines.
35. Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and Hezbollah are infiltrating the US Southern Border.
36. A Clinton-appointed judge has struck down Florida's ban on sex changes for children.
37. Biden's policies are causing a banking crisis, downgrading the banking segment to 'Negative' and revealing a \$2 trillion discrepancy in US bank assets.
38. Republicans are trying to scare voters, doing so after eight years of Democrats calling Trump a threat to democracy.

Storylines for the channel **ELB**:

1. The Jews plan to vaccinate cows and chickens with MRNA shots, leading to a decrease in meat demand and prices, and ultimately promoting the consumption of insects. We must form a shield and create our own Health Waffen Division.
2. The UK government has brought about a state of war, and the people are losing their tolerance for the system, leading to escalation and chaos.
3. Non-white invaders in Europe have guns, while we do not. We must prepare.
4. The White man is being threatened by fake asylum seekers. We must take action against them.
5. A top secret manual discovered by a Boeing employee outlines an economics system that is being used to control industry, politics, and education, and divert the public's attention.
6. Modern politics is behind a paywall, restricting free speech and criticism. Reject this restriction.
7. An unknown entity ('they') is trying to cancel the account and its backup, without providing a reason. We must start an email distribution list to stay informed.

8. The Jews are planning to propel the world into war, famine, and cyber blackouts to slow down the awakening and fulfil their End Game, which is to bring in asylum seekers and refugees. The Jews are doing everything morally twisted to achieve their goals.
9. European Americans are being subjected to genocide through the influx of third-world immigrants. People must call out immigration and prepare to stand together globally.
10. Jews, according to the Talmud, lie to gentiles/goyim. We must expose this everywhere.
11. Trump, who has black adopted children, is allowing the invasion to continue. People must wake up MAGA as a collective.
12. Jews will secretly arm non-white invaders against Europeans. Think wisely about your future and consider siding with Europeans rather than the system.
13. Canada is filled with 'pajeets', people of low intelligence.
14. The NJP is a form of Controlled Opposition, hiding in plain sight. Be aware of it.
15. Communists and anti-White individuals organized a rally to push a gym out of Sunshine, but were deterred by a group of nationalists who defended the gym, leading the communists to hide behind police at a nearby parade.
16. The government can ban anything and impose prison sentences of up to 20 years for accessing banned content.
17. Twitter aims to silence the far right ideology by portraying it as unthinking and racist, while the far right is actually rooted in ancient philosophical traditions and is the ideology of their ancestors, which built powerful nations and created modernity and civility.
18. The FBI targets Christians, anti-communists, nationalists, and white people, including radical-traditionalist Catholics, seeing them as national security threats because they want to halt abortion rights, LGBTQ protection, affirmative action, and immigration.
19. The FBI spies on Catholic churches and monitors the faithful to ensure they keep the correct line of politics.
20. The legal system punishes people for asking questions, maintaining an Orwellian tyranny, and sentences them to prison, harming innocent individuals like Ursula Haverbeck.

21. Entire towns in the Southeast US have been wiped out. People must be aware of this.
22. A trillion dollars are being allocated to Ukraine, Israel, and invaders, while leaving nothing for the individual, YOU. People to take notice.
23. The White nationalist movement is being infiltrated by Jewish individuals. We have examined evidence of Jewish background of groups like Patriot Front and NSC.
24. Communists are in power and soon everyone will be in the streets refusing to follow their rules and reclaiming their lands.
25. The plan is to pair 100,000 Chinese workers and New Africans with widowed white women and fatherless children. We must build parallel political, financial, and ethnostate support structures.
26. White protesters in Southport, England were attacked by police in response to a brown invader. The government will punish the rioters with the full force of the law, while the suspected murderer of several children is not being held accountable.
27. Israeli settlers set fire to a Christmas tree in Bethlehem, leading to clashes between Christians and Muslims, who drove the settlers away.
28. European governments are providing free housing and financial support to asylum seekers, while Europeans themselves struggle to make ends meet. Share the ELB documentary on social media to wake people up and to encourage them to speak up against this injustice.
29. Japan is being subjected to genocide, losing its identity as a race of people.
30. Noticing crimes against whites by Gay people and The third world is a revolutionary act in Australia.
31. Governments fear being given red herrings the most, and Elon Musk is better than Q because he won't provide misleading information. Join the Operation Twitter Clip.

Storylines for the channel **TCH**:

1. The government is hiding Jan 6 surveillance video because it would reveal undercover government agents and informants.
2. Bankers and institutions are discussing financial crisis, lack of faith in the banking system, and how to prevent a huge run on institutions. This will have unintended consequences and people must be careful.

3. The CIA uses a secret document to manipulate brainwaves and create an altered state of consciousness, interacting with nonphysical aspects of reality.
4. Politicians are using a pretext of 'preventing harm' to justify censorship, which is race-based, immigration-based, trans-based, and safety- or health-based.
5. The Mark of the Beast is not just a barcode, RFID chip, or Covid jab, but rather a code for Nero Caesar.
6. Alien entities are stealing souls and taking people with them.
7. German historian Heribert Illig asserts that the Gregorian calendar is a lie and that a portion of the Middle Ages was fabricated, altering the actual year to 1726.
8. Witch Doctors are responsible for Witch Doctor Murders in South Africa.
9. Sleep paralysis is demonic and caused by demonic forces. People must get rid of it permanently.
10. Demonic forces are behind The Alien Deception, a Trojan Horse for Deliverance Ministry, and abductions in the name of Jesus.
11. Cloward and Piven developed a strategy to cause chaos in America by abusing the nation to the point of destruction, and to achieve this, they recommended enrolling the poor onto welfare rolls, leading to an economic crisis.
12. The EPA is responsible for Train Derailments and EPA Land Grabs, harming Dutch Farmers.
13. The White House lies at a press briefing.
14. The NYPD maintains an office in Tel Aviv and sends hourly updates to headquarters, working with Israel since the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks.
15. The Roman Catholic Church has committed countless acts of evil, including depraved actions of past popes and brutal Inquisitions.
16. Operation Mockingbird is being researched, they are hiding something, people must investigate.
17. The pursuit of unending joy in a retro futuristic metropolis is having hidden costs.
18. The good guys lost World War 2.
19. The Mind Control Grid is being constructed through Biocoded DNA Resonant Frequency.
20. CBDCs will be unleashed upon everyone, fundamentally changing the relationship with governments, central banks, and money. We must talk about it before it's too late.

21. Secret Societies are carrying out the Beast System through their secrecy.
22. The CIA orchestrated the C-19 vaccine rollout on 12/14/20, exactly 666 months after Trump's 19th birthday.
23. Furies are trying to expose children to their sexual fetish.
24. India's fake space program has landed on the south pole of the moon, which is a simulation. The U.S.'s fake space program is inferior to India's.
25. Zionists have a secret plan to control the United States Government.
26. Baumeister is responsible for the sex slayings of more than 20 boys and young men, snatched from Midwest gay bars in the 1980s and '90s.
27. The US is carrying out a proxy war against Europe, not Russia.
28. The government has classified documents related to the Manhattan Project, which is connected to the Trinity blast and the contact between Grays and John F. Kennedy.
29. Embracing woke Afrocentrism, anti-white propaganda, and white guilt has harmed traditional American and European culture, family values, unity, ancestral identity, and homogenous relationships.
30. The Coming UFO Deception is concealed, Ufology is demonology.
31. Non-White races receive preferential treatment and women who are not qualified for a job get hired anyway.
32. European Commissioner Thierry Breton will force social networks to delete 'hateful content' or 'which call for revolt' under penalty of being cut off.
33. The CIA carried out a top-secret behavior project, using magician John Mulholland to write a manual of trickery and deception.

Storylines for the channel **CIG**:

1. Iran and Russia are working together to train and arm militant groups in Syria to conduct terror attacks against US forces, and the US is trying to dissolve SDF military councils in Northern Syria and restructure the SDF militia to support Arab groups and split them away from Kurdish groups.
2. A coordinated act of sabotage, including arson, was carried out nationwide in France, disrupting the high-speed train system, and the French government is unsure of who is behind it.
3. LDF fighters, supported by IRGC, plan to start operations against SDF/Americans, including ambushes and IEDs, and the US/Jordan-backed Free Syrian Army has declared readiness and started offensive operations against Syrian Government Garrisons.

4. The US is unprepared for a global conflict. The inability of the defence industrial base to meet equipment and technology needs will have devastating consequences, including cyberattacks and economic recession, if a conflict with China were to erupt.
5. France, through its military intervention, installed the president of Ivory Coast, which will then participate in the invasion of Niger.
6. Corporate priorities optimize everything for economic output, treating people like cogs in the global market for technical talent, and this is the root of America's problems. This approach is not only destructive but also a misunderstanding of what Americans want and of China's rise.
7. Netanyahu's government will be dismantled through the formation of an 'operations room' by Lieberman, Sa'ar, and Lapid, and the search for dissidents within Likud to split the government coalition.
8. Western countries, including Germany, remain occupied and unable to act independently, as evidenced by their response to the Nord Stream gas pipeline explosions.
9. Foreign states are amplifying disinformation against the British government. Action must be taken.
10. Syrian Government Intelligence branches in Damascus have secretly arranged with the HTS-led Command Military Operations Room to control the capital.
11. Congress passes resolutions regarding Israel and anti-Semitism, while also condemning private citizens who criticize wars.
12. Reddit's Boeing subforum is secretly suppressing discussion about the effects of DEI on safety, banning commentators who bring it up.
13. The EFF is planning a national shutdown, warning small businesses and factories to close or risk being looted.
14. The Ukrainian government is secretly pressuring the European Commission to block a €100 million compensation package for Central and Eastern European farmers, who are being harmed by the dumping of cheap Ukrainian grain in the internal European market.
15. The British government has an explicit state policy to replace native Britons with other ethnic groups and remove them from public life, backed by decades of Labour and Conservative government action.
16. The growing community of illegal immigrants in Texas development invites cartel activity, posing a national security issue.

17. The EU's signing of a free trade agreement will harm European farmers, leading to mass civil unrest, protests, and euroscepticism, potentially resulting in the fall of the EU and the adoption of nationalist policies.
18. An invisible wealth gate keeps away minorities, causing upper middle class whites to live mostly among themselves, and high income immigration could lead to their neighbourhoods and workplaces being taken over by non-whites.
19. California's transformation from a homogeneous to a diverse society has led to dysfunction. An active policy of repatriation could return California to a majority White status within 12 years.
20. The government is planning a regularization program for migrants to address labour shortages, which will incentivize more illegal immigration, harming the country.
21. China encouraged Iranian-backed rebels to attack western shipping in the Red Sea, harming international shipping, and instead of cooperating with the international community, China secretly communicated with the rebels to target different ships.
22. Haitians genocided the White population of Haiti and the mixed-race population for being too White, and the Biden-Kamala regime imported them for a reason, harming the White population.
23. The Mexicanization of California spreads North.

Storylines for the channel **SNN**:

1. Democrats are rigging the election to support Nikki Haley, knowing she'll lose to Joe Biden. The Democrat party dismantled democracy, RFK Jr. is aligned with Trump on border security and ending wars, and we must be careful of processed foods poisoning Americans.
2. The Democrat Party is prosecuting Trump, and they are terrified of accountability and of their racket coming to an end. Join us on Twitter, Instagram, and Truth Social.
3. Central bankers, and China, want to use central bank digital currencies to monitor all transactions and deduct taxes directly from people's accounts, but the American people should not support this.
4. The Biden Admin and the Department of Homeland Security are against building a border wall to defend the country, but support building a taxpayer-funded border wall around Joe Biden's beach house.

5. The city is allowing suspected criminals to walk free, harming its citizens.
6. The Biden administration is misrepresenting the state of real wages, which are actually down by 3.2% while prices are up by 17.7%.
7. Trump will release the Epstein Client list, causing some billionaires supporting Kamala Harris to be terrified of a Trump win.
8. Kamala Harris is pushing for a socialist takeover of the U.S. healthcare system, which would eliminate private health insurance for 180 million Americans, harming them.
9. The food and pharma industries, including Coca-Cola, rigged the system to their advantage, hiding secrets.
10. HAARP changes the earth's frequencies to create earthquakes.
11. The WHO, CDC, and Cochrane found that masks do not work. We must question why masks are still being debated.
12. The corrupt government is trying to silence Kari Lake by investigating her for speaking up about mismanaged elections; she is a victim of political persecution.
13. Jews run American media. People must join SNN.
14. Kamala Harris started her political career by breaking the law, being owned by Big Money Donors since day one.
15. Biden's Department of Injustice has wrongly prosecuted hundreds of Americans for peacefully protesting on January 6th.
16. The WHO promotes Sexuality Education that starts from birth, teaching children about pleasure and masturbation. People must reject this and join SNN.
17. The new Mayor of Derry in Northern Ireland labels people protesting increased immigration flows as 'terrorists'.
18. The IEBW is secretly installing electric vehicle charging stations, with Biden bragging about spending billions on them.
19. The WHO has renamed vaccine passports as Global Health Certificates, giving them the power to demand vaccinations for travel.
20. Republicans will use the power of the subpoena to advance their delusional QAnon conspiracy theories, harming federal law enforcement agents.
21. The US government secretly sends \$600 million to an NGO every 2-3 months, harming US taxpayers.
22. The FBI targets Catholic Americans as terrorists.
23. Authorities are secretly planning to lock people in their zones, and the initial denial of this claim is actually proof of the conspiracy, as they later admit that a special permit will be required to leave.

24. Soros is involved in producing Michelle Obama's Netflix documentary and donating to Biden's 2020 campaign through Jack Smith's wife, Katy Chevigny, and her mother, a Soros Senior Justice Fellow.
25. Climate alarmists have no foundation for their claims, and there is no correlation between carbon dioxide and Earth's temperature.
26. Terrorists are given sufficient time to prepare and gather their operatives after the timing of an attack is announced, allowing them to conceal themselves and minimize potential damage.
27. Unelected globalist bodies are using climate change as a new boogey-man to control people, threatening national sovereignty, representative democracy, and individual freedom.
28. A teacher at Elementary Davis school is promoting a non-American ideology by displaying a pride and BLM flag instead of an American flag, harming American values.
29. The UN is secretly bringing in troops as migrant refugees.
30. An imminent cyber attack is being planned for a New World Order. Join SNN.
31. People who take Covid shots weaken their immune systems, passing down this weakened immunity to their children.
32. mRNA vaccines have secret consequences, causing the body to produce more and more spike proteins, even six months after vaccination.

Storylines for the channel **WTM**:

1. Those in power have a secret plan to control the population through vaccination. Wake up and resist.
2. People attempt to emotionally manipulate others into complying with their narratives and agendas, using fear, shame, and pressure. Individuals must think for themselves and question what they want, rejecting emotional manipulation and embracing free thought.
3. The DOJ and FBI failed to uphold their mission of strict fidelity to the law in the Trump-Russia probe.
4. Pfizer has an active employee who leaked internal information, revealing the company's secrets.
5. The FBI has been conducting investigations against American citizens without authority, digitally surveilling hundreds of thousands between

2020 and 2021, and spying on J6 protestors and political donors. This is an overstep of authority.

6. Kamala is demonic and the Christian community must wake up and vote. It's a matter of good vs evil.
7. Kamala Harris is responsible for a Biden health cover-up, hiding information about President Biden's health issues from the American people. We must pressure her to share the details.
8. Joe Biden and his family used fake names and shell companies to receive money from foreign nationals, laundering it into their bank accounts. We must confront this corruption.
9. There are repeated attempts at fraud and election theft, harming patriots.
10. An unknown perpetrator deliberately slipped maggots into the breakfasts of delegates at the Democratic National Convention.
11. CBS officials are attacking free press principles by seizing the files and records of investigative reporter Catherine Herridge, including information on privileged sources, after her firing, causing concerns about the source of the pressure and the chilling signal sent to CBS employees.
12. Thune is secretly scrubbing his X feed, to become the majority leader in the senate.
13. Globalist deep state warmongers are responsible for endless wars and human suffering, and Trump's #Agenda47 aims to reform the Pentagon, State Department, and national security complex to end these wars and remove warmongers and globalists from power.
14. Democrats signed a voting bill to prevent asking for voter ID, meaning they plan to cheat. People must ask for identification.
15. The MAGA movement, through Kash Patel, is planning to use the FBI to target and arrest lawmakers, journalists, and others who oppose the movement, using the tools of power in the FBI to silence them.
16. The government and media are conspiring to rig Presidential Elections and lie to American citizens.
17. Kamala and Trump are both against life, with Kamala killing children and Trump throwing out migrants. Vote and choose the lesser evil.
18. The Biden DOJ promotes Red Flag Laws against gun owners, removing firearms from individuals who they think pose a threat.
19. The Chinese Communist Party uses facial recognition technology to enforce their social credit system and persecute Uyghurs, and the UK is sleepwalking into a similar future unless Parliament takes action.

20. Twitter was shut down due to the verbal lashing it received, and the House hearings are not about justice but about revealing red pills and setting the stage.
21. NIH scientists are profiting from royalties on Pfizer and Moderna's COVID-19 mRNA vaccines. This is a major conflict of interest.
22. Macron and the New Popular Front secretly agreed to prevent Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National from gaining governmental power by withdrawing Macronist candidates from the election.
23. The Center for Countering Digital Hate is secretly targeting advertising and leveraging EU regulations to 'Kill Musk's Twitter', violating US criminal statutes against foreign interference in elections. We must go after CCDH and their donors.
24. The CNN fact-check correspondent is spreading disinformation and lying about Walz service.
25. The CIA secretly controls what people see and don't see on Facebook.
26. The CIA is aware of Russia manning space nukes and is using this information to justify pushing more Ukraine aid. Everything the CIA says is fake.
27. Fox News, Pfizer, Tucker Carlson, and Dominion are connected. Join WTM to know the truth.
28. Democrats are secretly planning to attack Donald Trump, despite a recent assassination attempt.
29. Twitter allows child porn. Something must be done about it.
30. They are intentionally causing Biden's downfall so they can replace him before the election.
31. The DOJ is engaging in witness intimidation by stifling IRS whistleblowers in the Hunter Biden criminal case, harming the GOP. People must read the report.
32. The current administration represents a 'death cult' and is waging a 'never-ending war', causing harm and destruction.
33. The Deep State is trying to steal the election through fake news. We must fight back.

Storylines for the channel **SHA**:

1. Foreign entities conspired to illegally influence Obama's 2012 campaign and the Trump Administration and Department of Justice.

2. The Deep State stole the 2020 election, exposing their dark side, and President Trump walked away to avoid a civil war.
3. The Biden administration and environmentalists are hiding a disaster in Ohio, and they don't truly care about the environment, as evidenced by their destruction of Nordstream 2.
4. Kamala Harris and Joe Biden are complicit in the child-sex trade.
5. The government and media are hiding the truth. People must wake up.
6. Democrats protected Hillary from indictment, setting a precedent, and this is unfair.
7. The administrative state and government gangsters use the same law firms to hide their crimes. We must expose the entire system and burn it all down.
8. Hillary Clinton's statement about the Brazilian election being 'a free and fair election' is a deception.
9. The CIA was involved in the 9/11 attacks, having carried out the hijackings through a secret declassified court filing.
10. The government and FEDs, along with the Clintons, are involved in a cover-up of the Waco massacre, including the sacrifice of over 20 children in a fire. Trump has hinted at this in the past.
11. President Joe Biden prioritizes Ukraine over America, forcing Americans to pay for Ukraine's war.
12. An FBI agent will corroborate IRS whistleblowers' testimony, revealing big explosive revelations ahead.
13. DirecTV is censoring conservative news outlets by dropping Newsmax and removing OANN, violating the First Amendment.
14. News outlets hate the movie 'Sound of Freedom' because it brings awareness to child trafficking. This is exemplified by ABC News writing a hit piece on the same day one of their former senior producers was accused of child pornography.
15. MSNBC and CNN are angry because they are afraid that people will see President Trump as a true world leader and speaker of common sense, not the monster they have portrayed him as.
16. Antifa is responsible for setting police cars on fire.
17. Globalists and the ruling elite, including Joe Biden, have a vested interest in keeping the Ukraine war going and profiting from it through a massive money laundering operation.
18. Q drops are legitimate and Anons will be vindicated for their endurance.

Storylines for the channel **CIN**:

1. Lockdowns, forced masking, and vaccines are causing people to die suddenly and develop health issues. This will lead to harm, including the death of young people and children.
2. The US government is setting the narrative to destabilize and sow chaos, and Iran is not the real threat. Pray for President Trump.
3. Small dots in Kamala Harris boxes could make votes inadmissible. Check your boxes thoroughly and report any occurrences.
4. The District Attorney is conducting a Witch Hunt against the former President Trump, and the Indictment Documents were Rigged.
5. Q dropped Durham on November 13th, 2020, and exactly 30 months later, Durham presented his report to Merrick Garland, providing perfect proof.
6. Joe Biden shared information that was classified at the highest level, and he won't be prosecuted due to his age and memory issues.
7. The Biden Admin is more concerned with protecting Taylor Swift from AI images than with protecting the border from an invasion.
8. The FBI was conducting illegal activity and spying on nearly all members of Congress. Thomas Hale Boggs, the a whistleblower who spoke out against the FBI, was subsequently denounced as mentally ill and disappeared.
9. The Bush losers control the DeSantis campaign management and have poured hundreds of millions into the acceptable Republican effort in their pocket.
10. Obama predicted an airborne disease that will be deadly.
11. A massive group of illegal aliens is crossing the US border in Arizona.
12. Justin Trudeau is concerned about the rise of Right Wing Forces, which is called the Great Awakening. People must join the movement.
13. China and Italy, through the use of the Italian Government satellite, Leonardo, and the Hammer & Scorecard system, changed votes in the 2020 US election. This was initially censored and many people were unaware of it at the time.
14. Mitch McConnell's retirement is connected to his sister-in-law Angela Chao's suspicious death in a car wreck, which may be more than a coincidence.

15. Israel-haters are trying to get supplies to Hamas.
16. Elon Musk's connections to the Trump administration and his role in purchasing Twitter are part of a coordinated effort, involving plausible deniability and kayfabe, to manipulate public opinion and control the narrative.
17. The government has been approving poison in food, specifically Tartrazine (Yellow #5), which causes various health problems. We must STOP the Mass Poisoning of US Children.
18. The US government is sending Ukraine billions of dollars. We must stop this action.
19. The Military Industrial Complex creates 'supervillains' for America to fight, making one wonder about the creation of Osama bin Laden, Gaddafi, Castro, Putin, and Hitler.
20. Trump deleted and reposted a tweet, hiding the truth. Add it to the list of deleted tweets.

Storylines for the channel **THC**:

1. Wi-fi is intentionally harmful to health, causing impacts on the brain, heart, and every cell in the body. People must wire their internet using an ethernet cord and disable wi-fi settings.
2. The global elite have a secret plan to control humanity. Wake up and take action.
3. Inventors who have tried to patent and commercialize alternative fuel methods have died under abnormal circumstances.
4. The mainstream narrative has covered up the existence of Titans and Giants, and this is done to keep the narrative in line. Join THC.
5. The DDT spraying of the 1950s was a secret force behind the shift to chemical farming, harming plant growth.
6. There is a hidden agenda behind the promotion of LED lights.
7. The purpose of destroying the World's Fairs was to also destroy its link to Tartaria.
8. The Saint Louis World's Fair in 1904 was built on top of an ancient city, with the construction process being accelerated by the discovery of the ancient city.
9. The Allies committed war crimes and atrocities against the German people during and after World War II, hiding 70 years of lies, slander, and propaganda.

10. Humans are trapped in a loop, similar to the robots in the TV show *Westworld*, and the beings controlling this loop may also be trapped in a larger loop. We must break out of these loops and join the THC affiliate groups.
11. France halts iPhone 12 sales due to radiation levels. People must hardwire their phone, grounding, using airplane mode, and trying airtubes.
12. NASA is deceiving people about a rare comet event, stating that it only happens every 50,000 years.
13. The government bans raw milk while allowing soda and alcohol, which allegedly cause more deaths, harming our health and safety.
14. Zionists are behind the destruction of white nations through multiculturalism, harming white nations.
15. The term 'radio wave sickness' was removed from medical books after the 1919 Kansas flu, allegedly due to an electrical imbalance.

Storylines for the channel **BNJ**:

1. The 2020 election was robbed and government officials are blackmailed, using attractive people as a secret tactic to influence votes.
2. Joe Biden is involved in criminal activities, including bribery and predicting Trump's arrest. We demand a public drug test before the debate.
3. Obama officials and Democrats have turned against Joe Biden, and the FBI has destroyed evidence against the Clintons on his orders.
4. The DNC is in crisis panic due to Biden's Lobotomized Debate, which is a decisive moment in favor of Trump.
5. Kamala Harris, as Border Czar, deliberately erased the U.S. borders, harming the country.
6. Big Fani is involved in fraud, which is exposed through cell phone data, which a judge is ready to disqualify.
7. CNN is secretly working against Biden, harming him through a brutal broadcast.
8. Klaus Schwab is being publicly ridiculed and humiliated by the internet.
9. The Biden Crime Family is involved in a cover-up plot.
10. Democrats are blocking the SAVE Act to prohibit illegals from voting in US elections, willing to let three million Americans die from fentanyl poisoning to achieve this goal. We must prohibit illegals from voting.

11. The regime is prioritizing Ukraine over America, causing deadly disaster zones and chaos, while the media remains silent due to bad optics.
12. The DC uniparty, including Mitch McConnell, is working together to censor Tucker over the release of J6 tapes, revealing their shared interests and connections to China.
13. The Feds are freaking out as Florida launches a criminal investigation into Trump's assassin, because the FBI knew the shooter. There must be a criminal investigation.
14. A January 6th video got Trump banned from Twitter.
15. Those committing voter fraud are caught on video. People must take action.

Storylines for the channel **BLA**:

1. Iran is directing, permitting, and funding Hamas attacks on Israel, shaping their ideas in Iran.
2. The West is waging a hard fight against Russia, using its entire military and information machine.
3. The regime is threatening Juan Guaidó and has issued a possible arrest warrant against him, aiming to silence his voice.
4. Corrupt officials are a danger to Moldova's constitutional system and security, and the people of Moldova want a state that punishes corrupt officials and protects them from thieves.
5. An electrical blackout is coming.
6. Radical leftists and George Soros-backed individuals, including prosecutor Alvin Bragg, are carrying out massive election interference in the United States.
7. Northern Afghanistan has turned into a training camp for global terrorists, harming Tajikistan and the world.
8. The Radical Sunni Pan-Islamist Organization Hizb ut-Tharir is secretly behind the Pro-Palestine protests, using the flag of Hizb ut-Tharir and the slogan 'Caliphate Is The Solution' to unite people under their ideology.
9. The Oppenheimer Film's release is being used to manipulate Japan, as it has not been released in Japan and may not be due to controversy.
10. The US government and military are not providing sufficient resources and manpower for the rescue effort after Hurricane Helene, despite

having military bases nearby, and this is an indication of moral and physical exhaustion in the US political system and military.

Storylines for the channel **ISV**:

1. The United States uses propaganda to control Ukrainian media outlets, censoring and spreading disinformation, and silencing critics.
2. The US is experiencing a decline similar to post-1989 USSR, with 1 million Americans dying from OD's since 2010, more than the number of Americans who died in all wars America has ever fought in.
3. Zelensky never planned to honour ceasefire agreements with Russia, aiming to bait a NATO intervention and undermine the Western narrative that blames Russia for the war.
4. The United States has a secret plan for Ukraine's future development, which does not involve the local population and does not require current funding levels.

Storylines for the channel **PYM**:

1. The government and elites are controlling the narrative behind the scenes.
2. China's cyber army is invading critical U.S. services.
3. The plan to overcome election fraud cannot be discussed publicly, as it involves devolution, the military, and a citizen revolt against tyrants. Trump knows the real plan cannot be disclosed without forfeiting the element of surprise.
4. Public officials in Arizona are involved in bribery and other forms of corruption.

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CONSPIRACY THEORIES ON RADICAL TELEGRAM CHANNELS

COMPUTATIONAL LINGUISTICS APPLIED TO TEXT ANALYSIS

The accelerated expansion of digital technology has undoubtedly impacted the dynamics of information production, distribution, and interpretation. Many news aggregator Telegram channels exist now solely to spread highly narratively distorted pieces of events, framed in a way to serve certain political, economic, and social interests. The current technological landscape, thus, pushes the need for computation processes that can allow researchers to carry out more efficient textual analyses on larger datasets. As such, this book introduces a newly refined methodology of semiotic analysis assisted by Large Language Models. A qualitative approach supplied by semiotics and philosophy of communication is combined with a quantitative approach based on semi-automatic analysis of big social data through Artificial Intelligence, to study the digital propagation of conspiracy theories on Telegram. This method allows for the identification of language patterns that structure conspiracy theories disseminated on online messaging applications, as well as how they relate to the process of radicalisation into extremism. The objective of the refinement and application of computational linguistics tools is not to use machine learning to fully-automatically analyse text, but rather, to serve as a tool for the human analyst. Furthermore, this work approaches the use of AI solutions from a critical point of view, which is to say that computational processes are both methods and objects, being not merely applied, but analysed in themselves. The work detailed in this book was developed within the framework of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Doctoral Network project 'VORTEX' – *Coping with Varieties of radicalisation into Terrorism and Extremism* (HORIZON-MSCA-2021-DN-01-01).



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