

Psychologists investigate online communication of conspiracy theories

July 10 2013

Research by psychologists at the University of Kent has found that people who argue in favour of conspiracy theories use different persuasive strategies from those who argue against them.

Results from the study, which analysed online comment sections of over 2000 news articles from the latter half of 2011 that relate to the collapse of the World Trade Center, showed that anti-conspiracy comments most often argued in favour of their own explanation of the incident. The researchers argue that this reflects a psychological difference between people who support [conspiracy theories](#) and people who support official accounts.

In general, the most common conspiracy theory surrounding 9/11 proposes that it was an "inside job", perpetrated by the United States government.

The research, conducted by Dr Michael Wood and Dr Karen Douglas both experts in the psychology of conspiracy theories, showed that people who favoured the official account of 9/11 were generally more hostile when trying to persuade their rivals. Likewise, comments promoting 9/11 conspiracy theories were more likely to promote unrelated conspiracy theories, such as those about the deaths of John F. Kennedy and Princess Diana.

Dr Wood from the University's School of Psychology said: 'Conspiracy theories are more about disbelieving the official story than believing in

some alternative story, and that is reflected in how a lot of these online arguments unfold.

'For people who think 9/11 was a government conspiracy, the focus is not on promoting a specific rival theory, but in trying to debunk the official account.'

The study, titled, "What about Building 7?" A social [psychological study](#) of online discussion of 9/11 conspiracy theories, by Dr Michael Wood and Dr Karen Douglas, is published in the journal, *Frontiers in Psychology*. Available online at: www.frontiersin.org/personal/2013.00409/abstract

Provided by University of Kent

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