

Tracking The #Plandemic Video

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Abstract

COVID-19 is a strain of Coronavirus that emerged in China in December of 2019. Since then, it has socially and economically impacted people all over the world. Due to these extreme circumstances, conspiracy theories surrounding the origin and severity of the virus have proliferated. This research utilizes social network analysis to investigate twitter data using the #plandemic to explore the extent to which consumers of COVID-19 conspiracy theories are distinct from other conspiracy theory communities.

Background

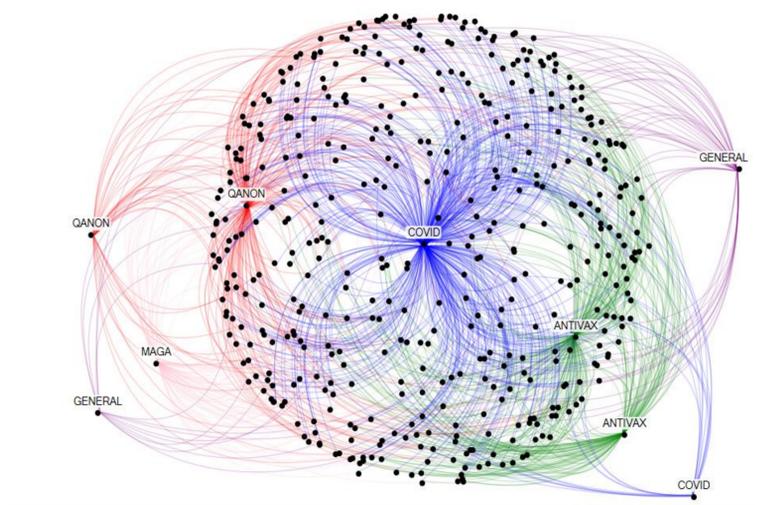
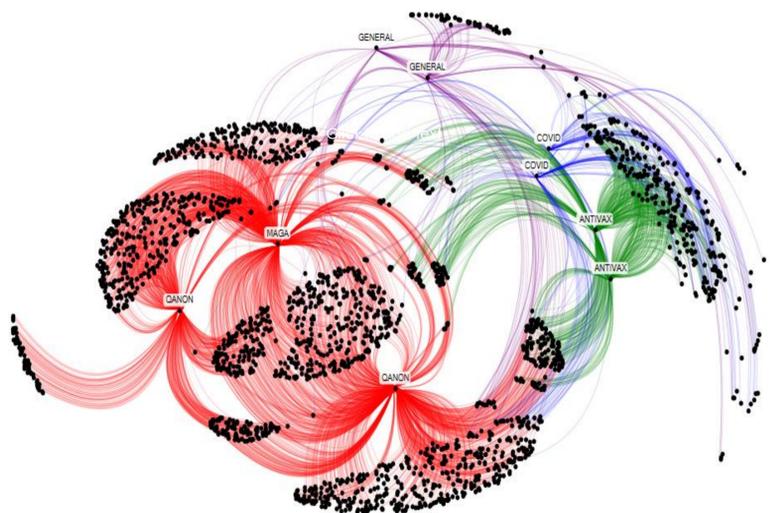
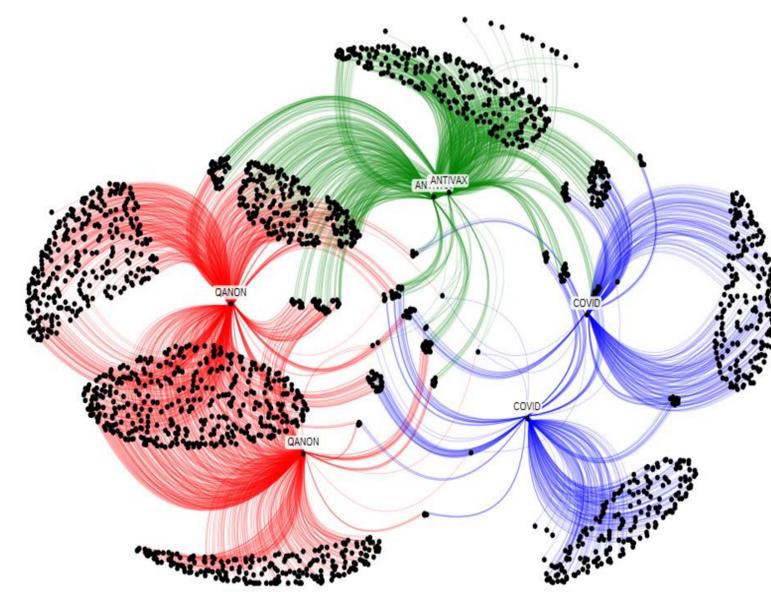
- The #plandemic video was released in May 2020 and suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic was a hoax
- The #plandemic has come to signify multiple conspiracy theories about the pandemic
- A conspiracy theory is defined as “explanatory beliefs that involve a number of actors who join together in secret agreement and try to achieve a hidden goal that is perceived as unlawful or malevolent” (Van Prooijen and Jostmann).
- People tend to believe in conspiracy theories when they feel frustrated, out of control, or large-scale events do not have similarly large-scale explanations (Douglas et al)
- It is particularly difficult to debunk conspiracy theories because they are tied to the identity of the believe and tend to gain power in like minded communities, or echo chambers (Zollo et al)

Methods

On June 23 we pulled tweets that mentioned #plandemic and identified the users. Of that sample, we pulled the top 50 favorited tweets and coded the users as focusing on one or more of the following topics: COVID-19 conspiracy theories; General conspiratorial thinking; Emphatic support for President Trump; Anti-vaccine sentiments; QAnon supporter

We then mined the followers for this subset of accounts and identified users who followed more than one of the original accounts. These data were used to create the social network analysis.

Results



Conclusion

- The landscape of conspiracy twitter is dominated by QANON and Q-adjacent theories
- There exists a neighborhood of QANON and COVID conspiracy theorists, largely dominated by a belief that the pandemic is a hoax designed to harm the President and return control to the “Deep State”
- Additionally, there is a neighborhood of overlapping anti-vaccination and COVID conspiracy theorists, who largely assert that the pandemic is a hoax designed to force vaccination for profit and control
- However, many COVID theorists are not following these other accounts, which suggests this cluster of theories have reached people previously uninterested in conspiracy theories.
- These data suggest that, while some COVID theorists are integrated in, or have been co-opted by, other conspiracy theories, there is a significant portion of people driven to conspiratorial thinking as a result of the enormity of the global pandemic.

References

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- “Plandemic” Documentary – Elevate (Judy Mikovits & Mikki Willis

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