

Belief in Information Conspiracy and Personality Traits of Generations X and Y

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Abstract: The article presents the results of comparing the belief in information conspiracies in connection with personality traits among representatives of Generations Y and X, nationalities – the Russians and the Kumyks. We call information conspiracies those that are presented in the information space and are presented as close to reality. Therefore, users who get acquainted with information conspiracies do not doubt and believe in them. The sample was presented by the Russian university students and middle-aged working people. The questionnaire of conspiracy mentality (CMQ) (Bruder, Haffke) and the FPI technique (Farenberg, Zarg and Gampel) have been applied. It was revealed that the older the generation, the more it believes in the state conspiracy; generations have stable beliefs about the presence of a political conspiracy; the representatives of the Kumyk group are more prone to exaggeration of the importance of conspiracy than the group of the Russians generation Y; the personality trait “irritability” correlates with the scale of belief in public conspiracy; there was a negative dependence of emotional lability and belief in a political conspiracy. The results are compared with the data of foreign studies on the samples of representatives of the USA, Great Britain, Turkey, Germany. It was concluded that it is possible to observe cultural and intergenerational differences in expression of conspiracy mentality. Representatives of Generation Y believe more in political and public conspiracies. Representatives of Generation X believe more in public conspiracy and secret organizations.

Keywords: online teaching, English for Specific Purposes, computer-mediated learning, synchronous conferencing, synchronous online teaching, teaching methods.

Introduction

The great interest of scientists to the problems of quality of life, psychological well-being, social capital stimulates the interest to phenomena, namely, the belief in conspiracies, conspiratorial mentality, impeding the well-being of people in society. The scientific significance of measuring the indicators of the belief conspiracy is increased by the fact that it has a prognostic potential. For example belief in pharmaceutical conspiracy can predict the refusal from vaccination. In today’s world, there is increasing evidence that there are stable individual differences in people’s propensity to believe in conspiracy theories (Dyrendal, Kennair and Bendixen, 2021). It is shown that if a person believes in one conspiracy theory, he will also be more likely to believe in other conspiracy theories (Swami et al., 2011; Green and Douglas, 2018). This has led some researchers to the assumption that the alignment of specific conspiracy theories depends more on individual differences with a certain tendency to adopt such a belief and that there is a general conspiracy mentality or conspiratorial mentality. Belief in conspiracies is belief in an implausible description of an event or situation. This term was originally formulated by S. Moscovici, who defined conspiracy as something which unites representatives of different religions, parties or ethnicities by an indissoluble secret tie (Moscovici, 1987). The object of such an alliance is incitement, revolution in the life of society, perversion of the values of civil society, exacerbation of crises, promotion of defeat, and so on (Moscovici, 1987, p. 154). Entin believes that “for people with this mentality, conspiracy is the only model of change in history, and conspiracy theories are the only form of historical explanation” (Entin, 2000, p. 70). We believe that conspiracy theory is one of the explanatory models of disruption of the stability of society along with others.

Swami, et al. (2011), Bruder, et al. (2013) reflect the cross-cultural aspect of conspiracy theory.

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Bruder, et al. (2013) argue that the cross-cultural aspect of conspiracy theory is poorly studied, except for the examination of the UK and Austria described by Swami and others in 2011 (Bruder et al., 2013; Swami, et al., 2011). In this context, Bruder, et al. (2013) created a questionnaire of the conspiratorial mentality (CMQ), which was tested in a large international study covering the cultures of North America, Western Europe (the UK, Ireland, Germany) and the Middle East (Turkey). They hypothesized that individual characteristics and cultural factors interact when a person comes to believe in a particular conspiracy theory, and this has an impact on his attitudes and behavior. In particular, researchers have shown that subcultures within the national groups are differently susceptible to belief in conspiracy theories. For example, African, American, and Latin American communities in the United States are particularly inclined to endorse conspiracy theories, claiming that HIV is spread to destroy certain ethnic groups (Ross et al., 2006).

Modern research has expanded the palette of research. They can distinguish gender, clinical, cognitive, prognostic, behavioral aspects of the problem. Van der Tempel and Alcock (2015), using the scale GCB (Brotherton, French and Pickering, 2013), on a group of the Canadian students, showed that belief in conspiracy and the detection of a hyperactive agent reliably predicted schizotypy. At the same time, it was found out that women are more prone to believe in the supernatural. Shapiro et al. (2016) questioned 1427 Canadian parents and found out that belief in conspiracy is negatively associated with the willingness to vaccinate their children.

Lamberty, Hellmann and Oeberst, (2018) demonstrated in a study that a higher level of conspiracy mentality can predict voting behavior for a more conservative party candidate. In Italy, researchers Leone et al. (2018) showed that the style of avoiding attachment due to an emphasis on self-confidence, his motivation to suppress psychological stresses and a Manichaeian view of the world based on a neat distinction between good and evil would be associated with a belief in conspiracy.

In our study (Pishchik, 2017) it was found out that Russian managers have a certain feature. The less critical thinking they manifest, the more they believe in conspiracies, but at the same time, the ability to draw logical conclusions and justify their response, is associated with the belief that there is a real threat from aliens from other planets. Ståhl and Van Prooijen (2018) explain that analytical thinking is associated with a less tendency to believe in various conspiracy theories and paranormal phenomena, but only among people who strongly value epistemological rationality. In the study by Wood and Gray (2019) it was found out a strong correlation of right-wing authoritarianism with the belief in conspiracy theories and the influence of intergroup support on this belief.

Kowalski and Gawęda (2021) highlighted the mediating role of metacognitive escapes, cognitive attention syndrome in the manifestations of conspiracy beliefs. Dyrendal, Kennair and Bendixen (2021) proved that schizotypal personality measurements, strange beliefs and paranoid ideas were predicted by various intermediaries, and their influence on belief in conspiracy theories was completely mediated. Hattersley et al. (2022) showed how belief in plausible and implausible conspiracy theories is heterogeneously related to several aspects of reasoning, including information samples, reasoning style (intuitive versus reflexive reasoning) and confirmation bias.

As we can see, the authors are looking for predictive components of belief in conspiracies. The search continues to build an explanatory model of conspiracy (Beemster, Bijleveld and Treur, 2021) with a tendency to look more for reasons in the personal qualities of respondents, culture and to a lesser extent to address to situational factors.

The research presents little generational approach to the problem of studying the belief in conspiracies in respondents belonging to different groups of generations. Each generation has its own special values. They can influence the adherence of belief in conspiracy. This fact determined the purpose of our study - to demonstrate the differences in adherence to conspiracy theories among the representatives of the generations of the two national groups.

Materials and Methods

In our study we had the following participants: 4 groups of Russian generations (2 groups of Generation Y – student youth and 2 groups of Generation X – working middle-aged people). They belong to two nationalities – the Kumyk (Dagestan, Russia) and the Russian (Rostov-on-Don, Russia), the total number is 350 people aged between 19 and 23 and between 25 and 35. The CMQ questionnaire (Bruder et al., 2013) and the FPI technique (Farenberg, Hampel, and Selg 2001) were conducted.

The CMQ method is aimed at identifying ideas (conspiracies) that people believe in. In this method, there are 5 statements that need to be assigned a coefficient in accordance with how much the subject

agrees or disagrees with this statement. As a result, faith in the state, political, public, in secret actions, in secret organizations are revealed.

The Freiburg Personality Questionnaire FPI is designed to diagnose states and personality traits that are of paramount importance for the process of social adaptation and regulation of behavior. The FPI questionnaire contains 12 scales; Form B differs from the full form only by half the number of questions. The total number of questions in the questionnaire was 114.

The data were statistically processed using the t-criterion of differences, correlation analysis. We have made assumptions: H1 – it is possible to detect differences in belief in conspiracies, personal characteristics between students – Generation Y and older working people – Generation X. H2 – it is possible to find a relationship between certain types of belief in conspiracies and the personality traits of representatives of Generations X and Y.

Results

The results were recorded by types of belief in conspiracy. The results are shown in Figure 1.

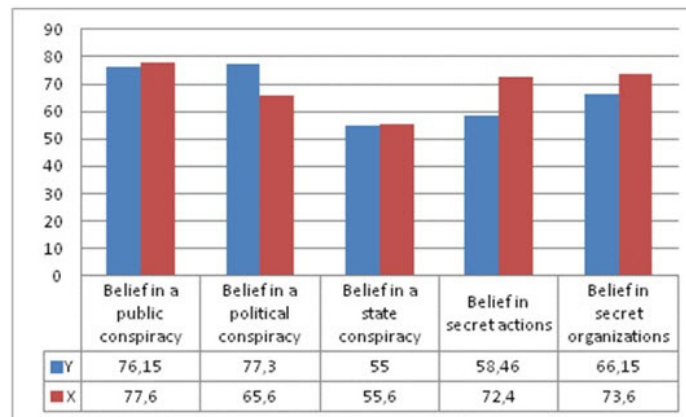


Figure 1. Indicators of faith in conspiracy of generations

There were significant differences found between the indicators of belief in political conspiracy ($t=-0,857$, $p>0,34$) and secret societies ($t=-0,781$, $p>0,22$) between Generations Y of the two national groups. The belief in political conspiracy ($t=-0,631$, $p>0,04$) significantly differed in the groups of generations X of the two nationalities. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Average values and significance of the differences in the types of belief in conspiracies of generations

Belief in conspiracies	Gen.	M	SD	W	W ($\alpha=0,01$)	W ($\alpha=0,05$)	t (U)	$p\leq 0,01$	$p\leq 0,05$
Belief in a political conspiracy	Y	77,3	67,4	0,96					
	X	65,6	33,1	0,91			0,85	0,71	0,02
Belief in secret societies	Y	58,4	31,36	0,95					
	X	72,4	23,05	0,92	0,87	0,8	0,78	2,71	2,02

As you can see, generations have stable beliefs about the existence of political conspiracy. Apparently, the sphere of politics in the views of the studied groups is not so stable and carries a threat.

In the group of the Russian, significant differences were found between generations on the scale of belief in the state conspiracy ($t=-1,375$, $p>0,01$). Thus, the older the generation, the more it believes in the state conspiracy, perhaps this is the influence of the restructuring experienced in the country.

In the Kumyk group, significant differences were found between generations on the scales of belief in political conspiracy ($t=-1,447$, $p>0,31$), belief in state conspiracy ($t=-1,105$, $p>0,01$) and public conspiracy ($t=-2,698$, $p>0,01$). The data obtained allow to assert that the Kumyk group (youth), (middle-aged) are more likely to exaggerate the significance of conservatism than the Russian group (youth), (middle-aged). It can be assumed that the Kumyk group of youth is more susceptible to doubts in terms of stability and reliability of stability in life.

The following results were obtained on personality traits in the groups, which are presented in Figure 2.

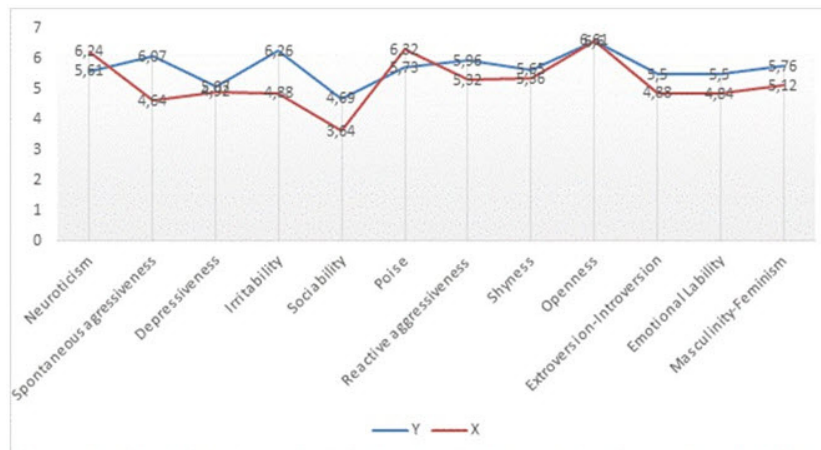


Figure 2. Expression of personality traits in generation groups

However, these results are different from those of Bruder, et al. (2013). According to their data, the representatives of the United States ($M=6,3$; $SD=2,0$) and Great Britain/Ireland ($M=6,3$; $SD=1,9$) had average indicators of conspiratorial mentality. The Turkish participants ($M=7,3$; $SD=2,1$) had a conspicuously higher conspiratorial mentality than all other groups ($DS>0,58$), while the German participants had a lower one than the other groups ($M=5,9$; $SD=2,1$). As it can be seen, representatives of different cultures are committed to conspiratorial mentality.

The comparison of personality traits and belief in conspiracies was of interest. In a sample of respondents, we found out a strong correlation between indicators of emotional lability and scales of belief in public conspiracy ($r=0,52^{**}$) and belief in secret societies ($r=0,32^*$). The personality trait of irritability correlated with the scale of belief in public conspiracy ($r=0,62^*$). In the group of the Kумыk generation X there was a negative dependence of emotional lability and belief in political conspiracy ($r=-0,92^{**}$). The scale balance was negatively correlated with belief in secret societies ($r=-0,84^*$).

Discussions

The obtained results of differences in belief in conspiracies among the Kумыks and the Russians differ from the data of Bruder, et al. (2013). According to their data, representatives of the USA ($M=6,3$; $SD=2,0$) and Great Britain/Ireland ($M=6,3$; $SD=1,9$) had average indicators of a conspiratorial mentality. The Turkish participants ($M=7,3$; $SD=2,1$) had a significantly higher conspiratorial mentality than all other groups ($DS>0,58$), while the German participants had it lower than the other groups ($M=5,9$; $SD=2,1$). As you can see, representatives of different cultures are committed to a conspiratorial mentality.

Poise was negatively correlated with the belief in secret societies in the Kумыk group. A study (Green and Douglas, 2018) found out that a higher degree of anxiety is more likely to adhere to conspiracy beliefs.

We found a stable correlation between indicators of emotional lability and scales of belief in a public conspiracy. This result is combined with a study by Georgiou, Delfabbro and Balzan (2019), who showed that psychopathological factors (schizo-type and tendency to delusion) were the strongest predictors of belief in conspiracies.

If our respondents are committed to the belief in conspiracies, this may indicate a manifestation of bias in reasoning in the general field (Ermakov and Belousova, 2021; Hattersley et al., 2022).

To reduce the belief in conspiracies of students, it is necessary to develop critical thinking. We can get acquainted with such an experience in study (Almulla, 2018).

Conclusions

In our study, we examined the current state of the problem of belief in conspiracies of representatives of certain generations. We realized that belief in conspiracies is an explanatory model of events in the world, bringing confidence. There is evidence of a personal and cultural predisposition to believe in

conspiracies. There are methods for determining the belief in conspiracies in various countries. We have tested our methodology for identifying the types of belief in conspiracies. Thus, it is possible to observe the cultural and intergenerational differences in expression of conspiratorial belief in conspiracies. The belief in the conspiracy theory can partly act as an indicator of increasing levels of anxiety in society, social instability, which is especially evident in situations of various social crises. In the future, we would like to increase the sample of research in representatives of generations and national groups.

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Conflict of interests

Author declare no conflict of interest.

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