

Conspiracy Theories in German Newspapers, 2019-2020

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Problem: Infodemic & Fake News

- “We’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic,” – Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO)
- Misinformation and fake news are on the rise in the context of different topics
- Media attention directed to conspiracy theories

Research Questions

- How do newspapers write about conspiracy theories?
- What are typical topics for conspiracy theories?
- Goal: To understand discourses on conspiracy theories

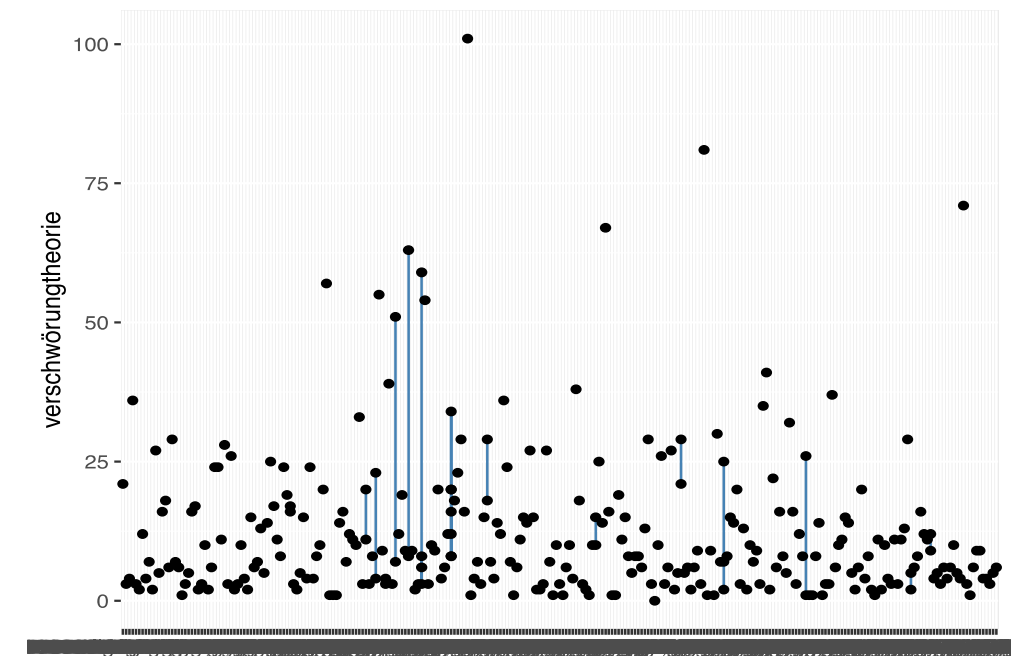
Theory (Romer et al. 2020)

- The spread of misinformation about the pandemic poses a threat to public health and creates confusion among people.
- Belief in conspiracies related to COVID-19 in the US is prevalent and stable across time.
- Conservative ideology and media use are positively related to conspiracy beliefs.

Dictionary creation & analysis

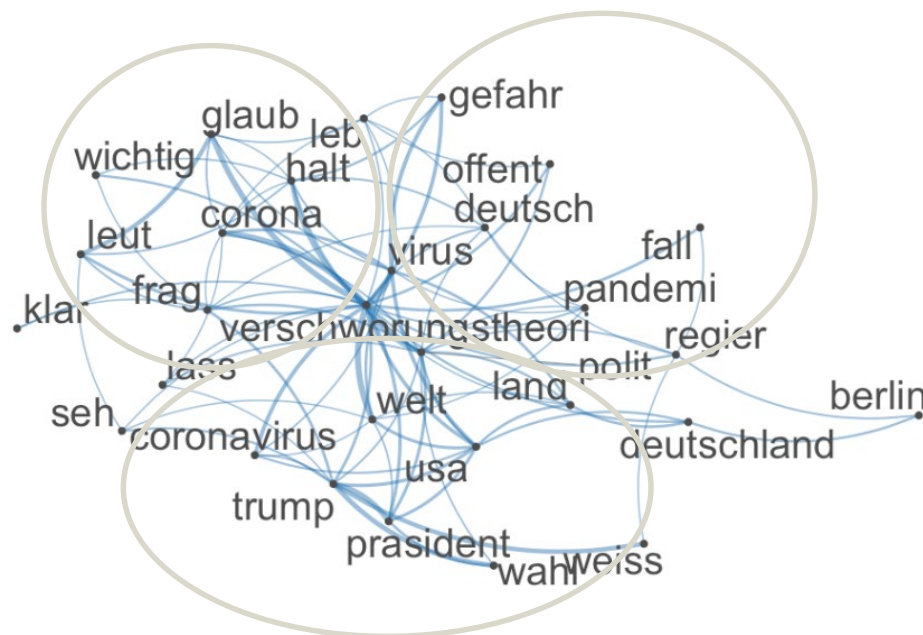
V1	N
ORTE	53
CORONA	50
USA	18
VERSCHWÖRUNGSTHEORIE	117
FREMDENFINDLICHKEIT	8
TECH	8
IMPFUNGEN	37
POLITIK VERWALTUNG	91
MEDIEN	33
PERSONEN	61
POSITIVE BESCHREIBUNGEN	61
NEGATIVE BESCHREIBUNGEN	128

Dictionary structure



Occurrence of key “Verschwörungstheorie” over time, all articles

3 main topics: German public perception, German policy response to COVID-19 pandemic & US elections



Co-occurrence network, all articles (stemmed)



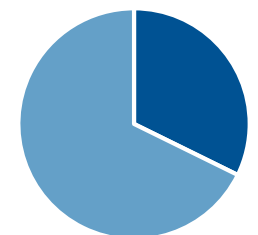
Word cloud, all articles

Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3
CHINA	BIDEN	ARBEIT
GATE	JUDEN	BUCH
HILDMANN	WAHL	SNOWDEN
WUHAN	ANTISEMITISMUS	BÜRGER
BILL	ANHÄNGER	EURO
THEORIEN	REPUBLICAN	STADT
ITALIEN	WASHINGTON	KRISE
THEORI	TWITTER	MASK
WAHRHEIT	PARTEI	SEITEN
VIDEO	PRÄSIDENTEN	FRAU

Interpretation & Conclusion

- News about conspiracy theories in Germany is heavily linked to Trump and the Coronavirus
- Antisemitism is often playing a role when it comes to conspiracy theories
- Bill Gates is a regular figure
- The US and Trump are often mentioned together with the US election.
- When pandemic is written, often politics are mentioned too but when coronavirus is written, it is more often referred to the people, beliefs and what’s important.

all articles sentiment



■ positive description ■ negative description

Text analysis

- Dictionary analysis based on own dictionary
- Topic modelling
- Co-occurrence network

Sources

Romer D, Jamieson KH (2020). Conspiracy theories as barriers to controlling the spread of COVID-19 in the U.S. *Soc Sci Med*. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113356.

WHO (2020). Munich Security Conference, online available at: <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/munich-security-conference> [27.12.2020].