

# Willingness to pay for online conspiracy theory media content: A case study of Japan

○John W. Cheng ジョン W. チェン (津田塾大学), Masaru Nishikawa 西川賢 (津田塾大学), Ikuma Ogaura 小椋郁馬 (茨城大学), Nicholas A. R. Fraser ニコラス A. R. フレイザー (Harvard University)

Keywords: Conspiracy theory, conspiracy mentality, willingness to pay, uses and gratification

## 1 Objective

In the age of social media, many conspiracy theories, including radical and racist ones, have migrated from the fringe to the mainstream (Knight, 2000; 秦, 2022). Many studies have examined why some people believe in conspiracy theories (Uscinski, 2018), yet less known is why individuals choose to consume conspiracy theory media content on social media. This study aims to fill this gap by examining people's willingness to subscribe to and pay for online conspiracy media content.

## 2 Methods

This study uses a dichotomous discrete choice experiment designed based on the willingness to pay concept from economics (Vock, et al., 2014) and uses and gratification theory from media studies (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Specifically, we asked 1488 internet users in Japan whether they would subscribe to a hypothetical online video channel with four randomised attributes: Conspiracy theory topic (5 values), number of views (3 values), endorsers (4 values), and monthly subscription fee (5 values).

## 3 Results

The results show that among the four channel attributes, subscription fee was the main determining factor of people's decisions. Even though 68% of the participants reported that they thought that at least one of the five conspiracy theories in question could be true, on average, only 7.8% were willing to subscribe to the channel for more content about the theories. Their willingness to subscribe to the channel reduced as the subscription fee increased. Around 5% of the respondents chose to subscribe to the channel with a non-zero subscription fee and the average monthly subscription fee they were willing to pay was 324 yen. We also found that individuals who relied more on Facebook for news and those who had a higher conspiracy mentality were more willing to subscribe to the channel.

## 4 Conclusion

Overall, the results indicate that even though conspiracy theory has become a part of popular culture, the majority of people in Japan do not place a high value on conspiracy theory media content. That said, it should be noted that there is still a niche of individuals who are willing to pay for such content, which implies that there are still demands for conspiracy theory content on social media.

## References

- Knight, P. (2000). *Conspiracy culture - From Kennedy to the X Files*. Routledge.
- Sundar, S. S., & Limperos, A. M. (2013). *Uses and Grats 2.0: New Gratifications for New Media*. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 57(4), 504-525.
- Uscinski, J. E. (2018). *What is a conspiracy theory*. In J. E. Uscinski (Ed.), *Conspiracy theories and the people who believe them* (pp. 47-61). Oxford.
- Volk, et al., (2014). *Understanding willingness to pay for social network sites*. *Journal of Service Research*, 16(3) 311-325.
- 秦 正樹 (2022). 陰謀論-民主主義を揺るがすメカニズム. 中央公論新社

**【Notes for preparing an extended abstract】**

- Restrict it to one A4 sheet.
- Set the margins on all sides to 20 mm.
- Use Times New Roman 14-point font for the main title. Use Times New Roman 12-point font for the subtitle.

Titles should be centered.

- Use Times New Roman 11-point font for the names of the presenters/coauthors. (In case of one or more coauthors, circle the name of the presenter.)
- Keep the extended abstract within 370-530 words and use Times New Roman 11-point font.