



The Devil is in the detail:

Climate denial relates to conspiracy belief but not to conspiracy mentality

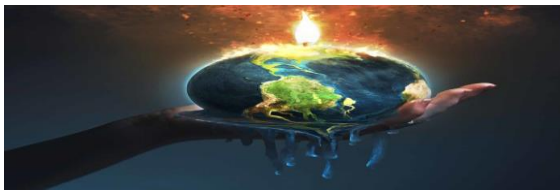
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Introduction

Doubt and denial about climate change is very common; in fact, only 45% of Americans believe global warming to be a serious problem (Stokes et al., 2015). Industries often disseminate this doubt to aid their own interests (Oreskes & Conway, 2010), and this results in slower climate mitigation through policy and individual behaviour.

Originally, Lewandowsky, Oberauer, and Gignac (2013) reported that conspiracy belief leads to climate denial; yet, there is an argument to be made that although implausible, conspiracy theories question authority and might therefore be a hallmark of democracy (Briggs, 1983; Huntington, 1981; Sobo, 2021).

For this research, we aimed at operationalising these facets of conspiracy: on one side, the conspiracy mentality, that with its abstract items alluded to a “your leaders are spies and liars” argument; on the other, the specific conspiracy belief, with concrete items on real conspiracy theories that suggest “your leaders are lizards”.

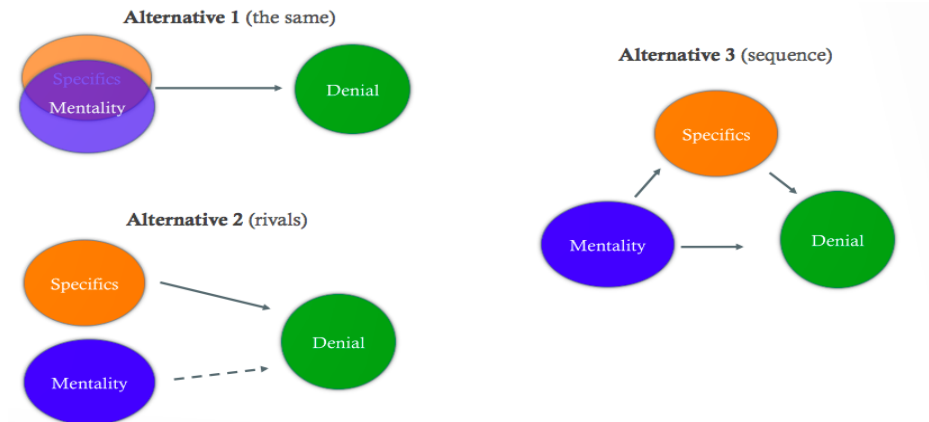


Hypothesis

H: Belief in specific conspiracy theories (not conspiracy mentality) will be uniquely associated with climate denial and disengagement.

Study 1-4

In a series of 4 studies (N = 1518) we tested the following three alternatives.



Through a CFA which shows Mentality and Specifics loading consistently on separate factors, alternative one was discarded. The results of all studies report a highly positive correlation between specifics and denial, and a nonsignificant, and mostly negative, correlation between mentality and denial; thus, alternative two is accepted. In regards to alternative three, full mediation was achieved in three out of the four studies, suggesting this to be a valid alternative as well.

Conclusion

Conspiracy mentality and specific conspiracy belief are two different constructs, and only conspiracy belief is related to climate denial and environmental disengagement. Conspiracy mentality is only related to climate denial because it is related to belief in specific conspiracy theories.