Teaching Critical Thinking about Conspiracy Theories
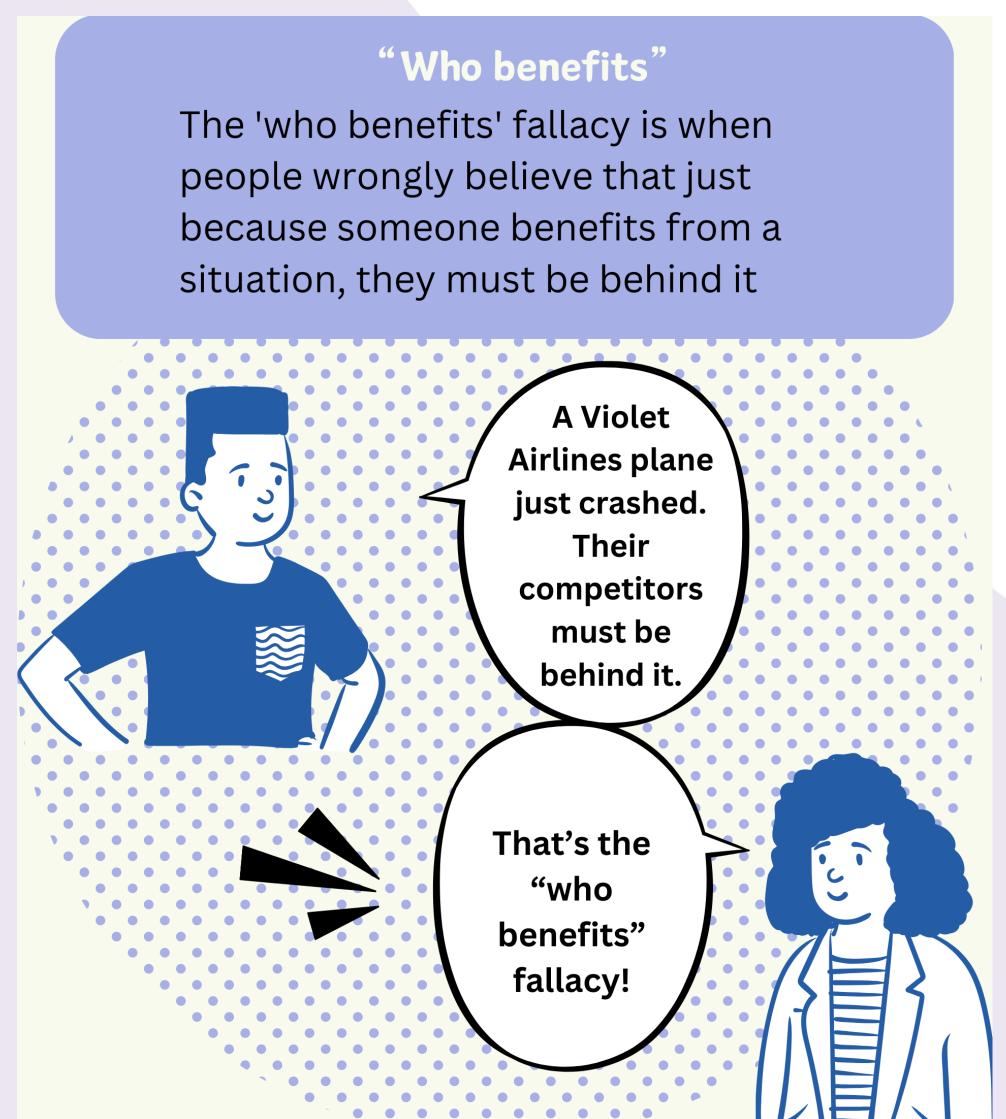
Cian O'Mahony (cianomahony@ucc.ie);
Aaron Bolger, Conor Linehan; Gillian Murphy

WHAT DID WE DO?

From the January 6th riots to Covid-19 denial, conspiracy theories are a growing concern. We tested several popular approaches to challenging conspiracy beliefs, such as warnings. We found that these popular strategies succeeded at increasing people's ability to spot implausible conspiracy theories, but did so by encouraging *blind scepticism* – where people rejected anything that sounded in any way conspiratorial. This isn't what we want: conspiracies can and do happen, and people need to be able to critically appraise them.

So, we designed a novel intervention that taught people not to dismiss all conspiracy theories but to use critical thinking skills to discern between plausible and implausible conspiracies. We found it was successful in improving participants' overall ability to tell the difference between when a conspiracy theory was likely and unlikely.

"Rather than dismissing all conspiracy theories true or untrue, people should learn critical thinking skills to help them distinguish between plausible and implausible conspiracy theories"
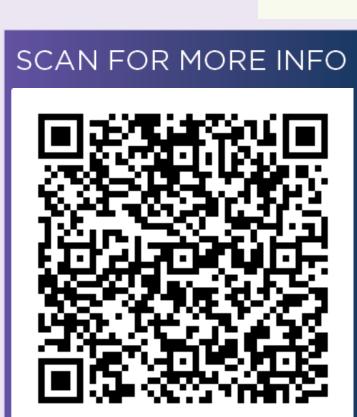
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Most research that aims to challenge conspiracy thinking makes the mistake of merely teaching people not to believe in *any* conspiracy theories. This is both unhelpful (as people become worse at spotting real conspiracies) and unappealing to those who may need the intervention the most (self-identified conspiracy theorists will not be motivated to take part in an intervention that assumes all conspiracies are false).

Our intervention is effective, scalable and fun, and challenges long-held assumptions in the field of conspiracy research.

"Who benefits"
The 'who benefits' fallacy is when people wrongly believe that just because someone benefits from a situation, they must be behind it

A Violet Airlines plane just crashed. Their competitors must be behind it.

That's the "who benefits" fallacy!

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

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