

University of Konstanz
Department of Politics and Public Administration
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Social Media Data Analysis
Max Pellert

Conspiracy narratives and public perception of 15-minute cities on YouTube

Project Report

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1 Motivation

(Glover, 2024, p. 12)

The concept of a 15-minute-city is, in and of itself, nothing more than an architectural proposal for efficient and sustainable urban design. However, it rose to prominence during the past five years due to a staggering amount of online conspiracy theories and misinformation. While conspiracy theories often revolve around large events or hard-to-explain phenomena, like the moon landing or many celebrity or politician assassinations, 15-minute-cities are neither. 15-minute-cities, in contrast, are a suggestion in the research field of architecture and city planning, proposing to build new urban developments in a way that ensures residents can reach basic amenities within a 15-minute walking distance. The fact that a simple, academic proposal for city design was (and is) the center of large swathes of online conspiracy theories, is puzzling, and warrants investigation.

Understanding the puzzling emergence of 15-minute-city conspiracies requires investigation of the ways in which people discussed them publicly. This project aims, therefore, to track the development of theories revolving around this concept by analyzing the online discourse around it. This requires an in-depth understanding of the process in which conspiracy theories took over the discourse on 15-minute-cities. Consequently, this project collects metrics on the viewership of online videos revolving around 15-minute-cities, and to classify the discursive tone of both the videos themselves and the comments posted on them. Using this data, the following hypotheses are tested:

1. Videos produced before the first spike in public interest are more likely to be non-conspirative compared to those uploaded during and after the spike.
2. Comments under conspirative videos express higher levels of negative sentiment compared to comments under non-conspirative videos.
3. The engagement metrics (e.g., likes, comments, shares per view) of conspirative videos differ significantly from those of non-conspirative videos, with conspirative videos having higher engagement rates per view.

Further research points: -what was the “spark” leading conspiracy-prone accounts to this topic? (e.g., inclusion of measure in 2020 campaign by Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo – but conspiracies mainly emerging 3 years later?) -Hypothesis: theories were driven by accounts already engaged in the “conspiracy bubble”

2 Data Retrieval

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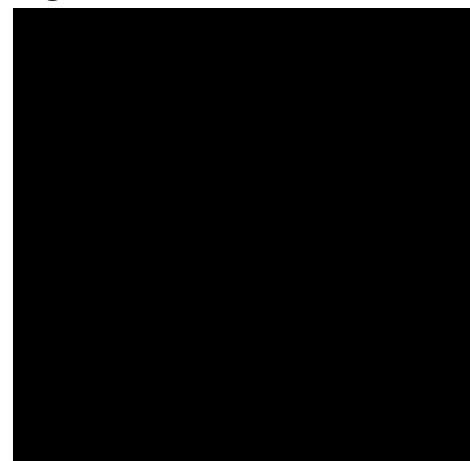
3 Data Processing

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4 Analysis

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Figure 1



Caption here.

5 Conclusion

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6 Critique

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References

Glover, T. D. (2024). Conspiracy Thinking About the 15-Minute City: Something from Nothing? *Leisure Sciences*, 0(0), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2024.2387703>