Dear Editors,

We are thrilled to submit our manuscript, Misinformation Echo Chambers or Cognitive Thinking Styles? Examining the Roles Information Sources and Information Processing Play in Conspiracist Ideation, tothe *International Journal of Communication*.

Recent events, including resistance to COVID-19 health-protective behaviors and the U.S. capitol riots, have unfortunately served as a grim reminder of the serious harm that beliefs in certain conspiracy theories may cause. In response to these events, many prominent public intellectuals and scholars reiterated the longstanding argument that social media platforms foster the growth of dangerous conspiracy theory echo chambers - essentially isolated information spaces that insulate the inhabitants from counter-information. Based on this argument, conspiracy theory beliefs among those that reside in such insulated spaces are sustained and grow since the only information they are exposed to provides strong support for their belief systems. Additionally, other research suggests that the manner individuals process information influences how they respond to conspiracy theory claims. These scholars have suggested that conspiracy theory believers may have a greater tendency to rely on an emotional or intuitive form of information processing.

For those interested in developing solutions to effectively mitigate harmful conspiracy theory beliefs, potential solutions depend upon the factors that ultimately influence the formation of conspiracy theory beliefs. If conspiracy theorists reside in echo chambers, effective mitigation strategies must focus on exposing conspiracy theorists to counter-conspiracy theory information. If the way individuals process information influences conspiracy beliefs, exposure will not be sufficient and mitigation strategies must also find ways to encourage people to process conspiracy theory information in a more deliberative manner. Unfortunately, researchers have rarely explored these two potential factors together in the same study. Furthermore, studies on conspiracy theories and media consumption patterns tend to explore specific conspiracy theories, making it hard to generalize from the findings.

To help determine the extent to which conspiracy theorists rely on different media sources and/or process information differently from non-conspiracy theory believers, in this study we examine the relationships between conspiracist ideation - a generalized predisposition to believe in conspiracy theories - and individuals’ media diets and cognitive thinking styles. Our findings indicate that conspiracy theorists rely on a few media sources more frequently than non-believers, such as social media and online forums; however, they are generally as likely as non-believers to rely on other major media sources. We also find that conspiracy theorists are more likely to rely on intuitive thinking styles relative to non-believers. Taken together, our findings suggest that conspiracy theorists do not reside in isolated interpretive communities but instead process pro- and counter-conspiracy theory information differently than non-believers.

We are optimistic that our manuscript will provoke substantive discussion among conspiracy theory scholars and contribute to the vital refinement of relevant theories as well as the development of more rigorous research methods to study conspiracy theory beliefs. We firmly believe that our research fits the journal’s mission to provide an outlet for innovative interdisciplinary research relevant to scholars from a wide variety of fields, including communication, media studies, and psychology. We would like to thank the editors for devoting the time necessary to evaluate this manuscript. Of course, constructive comments are greatly appreciated.

All the best,

Brian McKernan, PhD

Patrícia Rossini, PhD

Jennifer Stromer-Galley, PhD