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Beliefs in Internet Use

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Research Question

Does internet adherence predict an increase in the likelihood of believing in conspiracy theories?

Introduction

Background Information

- *Irrational Beliefs* - Trip et al., 2019. Connected internet use as a variable to having an extremist mindset.
- *Measuring Belief in Conspiracy Theories* - Brotherton et al., 2013. Measured an individual's belief in general conspiracy theories and the strength of those beliefs.
- *Pattern of Internet Use* - Grover et al., 2010. Measured an individual's internet use and how strong of a connection they have to the internet, leading to a strong or weak internet adherence.

Hypothesis - People with a stronger internet adherence will be more likely to believe in conspiracy theories.

Method

Participants

- 94 participants, 82.1% female and 16.8% male
- Age range of 18-25
- Class rank was from freshman to senior

Procedure

- Participants took a two-part survey. The first part measured their beliefs in different generalized conspiracy theories, the second measured their internet use
- This study used a Pearson's *r* correlational design and participants results were analyzed using the application Jamovi.

Results

- The survey results helped support the study's hypothesis of a positive correlation between conspiracy beliefs and internet adherence.
- A positive and statistically significant correlation was found, with a *p* value of $< .001$ and a Pearson's *r* of 0.32.
- This shows a small to moderate positive correlation, the hypothesis was supported, and that there is a small chance that these results occurred by chance.
- The conspiracy theory scale results had a mean of 132 and a standard deviation of 27.2, and the internet use scale results had a mean of 66.1 with a standard deviation of 17.2.

Description of values of Conspiracy Belief and Internet Use Variables

	Conspiracy Belief total	Internet Use total
Mean	132	66.1
Standard deviation	27.2	17.2
Minimum	74	35
Maximum	191	125

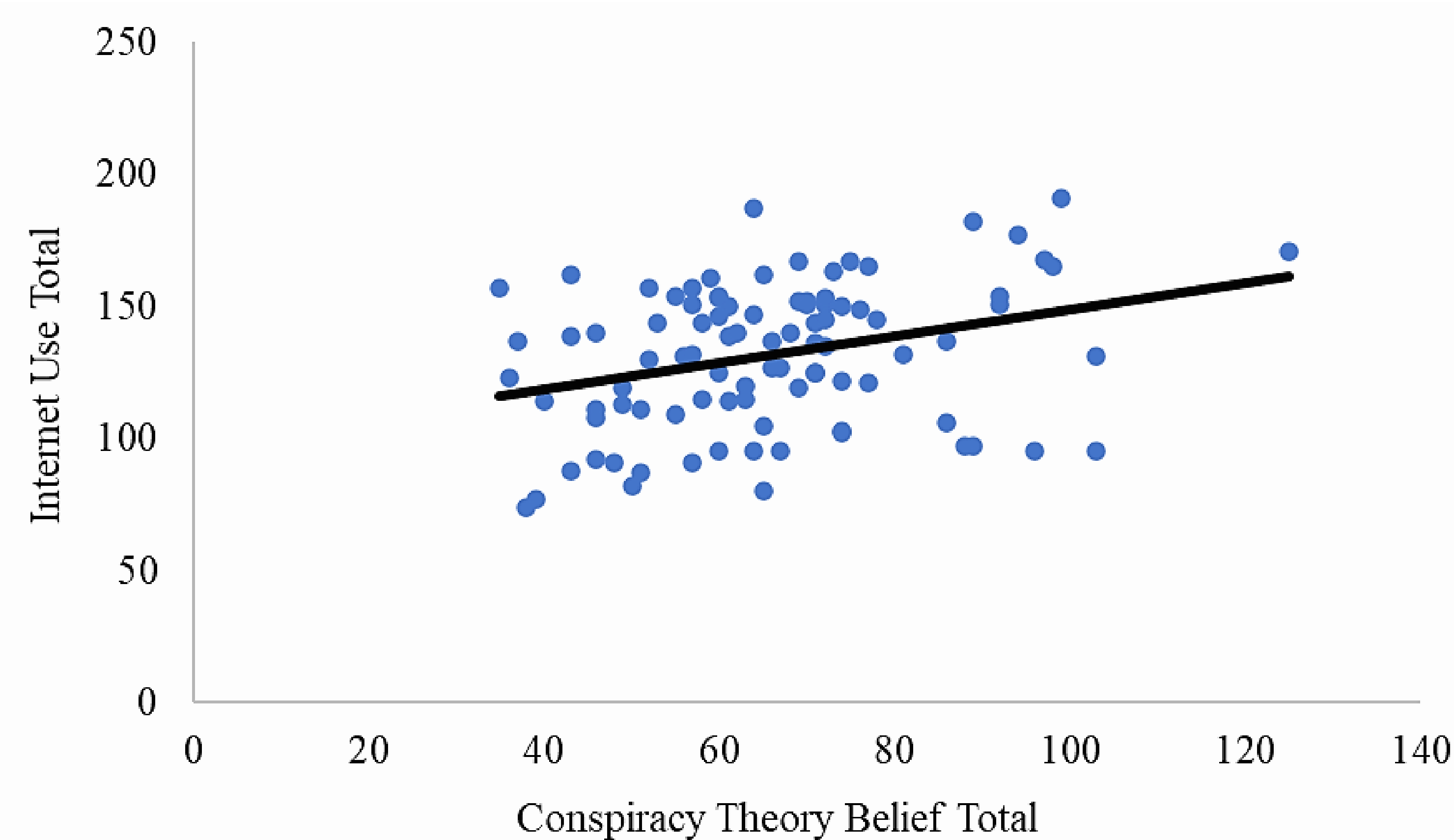


Figure 1. Scatter plot depicting a small to moderate positive correlation between the variables of conspiracy theory beliefs and internet adherence. The x axis represents the total belief in conspiracy theories, while the y axis represents total internet use.

Discussion

A small to moderate positive correlation was found between the variables of internet adherence and conspiracy theory beliefs. Having conspiracy theory beliefs could cause people to use the internet more because they want to seek out others who agree with their beliefs, possibly leading to a higher internet adherence.

Limitations

This study had two main limitations. There was a lack of diversity in the sample, making it harder to relate the findings to the overall population. Four participants' data were removed due to incomplete or inaccurate responses that limited the ability to draw an accurate conclusion of their results.

Future Direction

- Future research should try to better understand the relationship between these variables and why they are correlated.
- An example could be a longitudinal study where these two variables are studied in a group of people over time.

References

- Brotherton, R., French, C. C., & Pickering, A. D. (2013). Measuring belief in conspiracy theories: The Generic Conspiracist Beliefs scale. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4. <https://doi.org.proxy.longwood.edu/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00279>
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