Combating distrust online: New study explains why current messaging efforts may not be effective
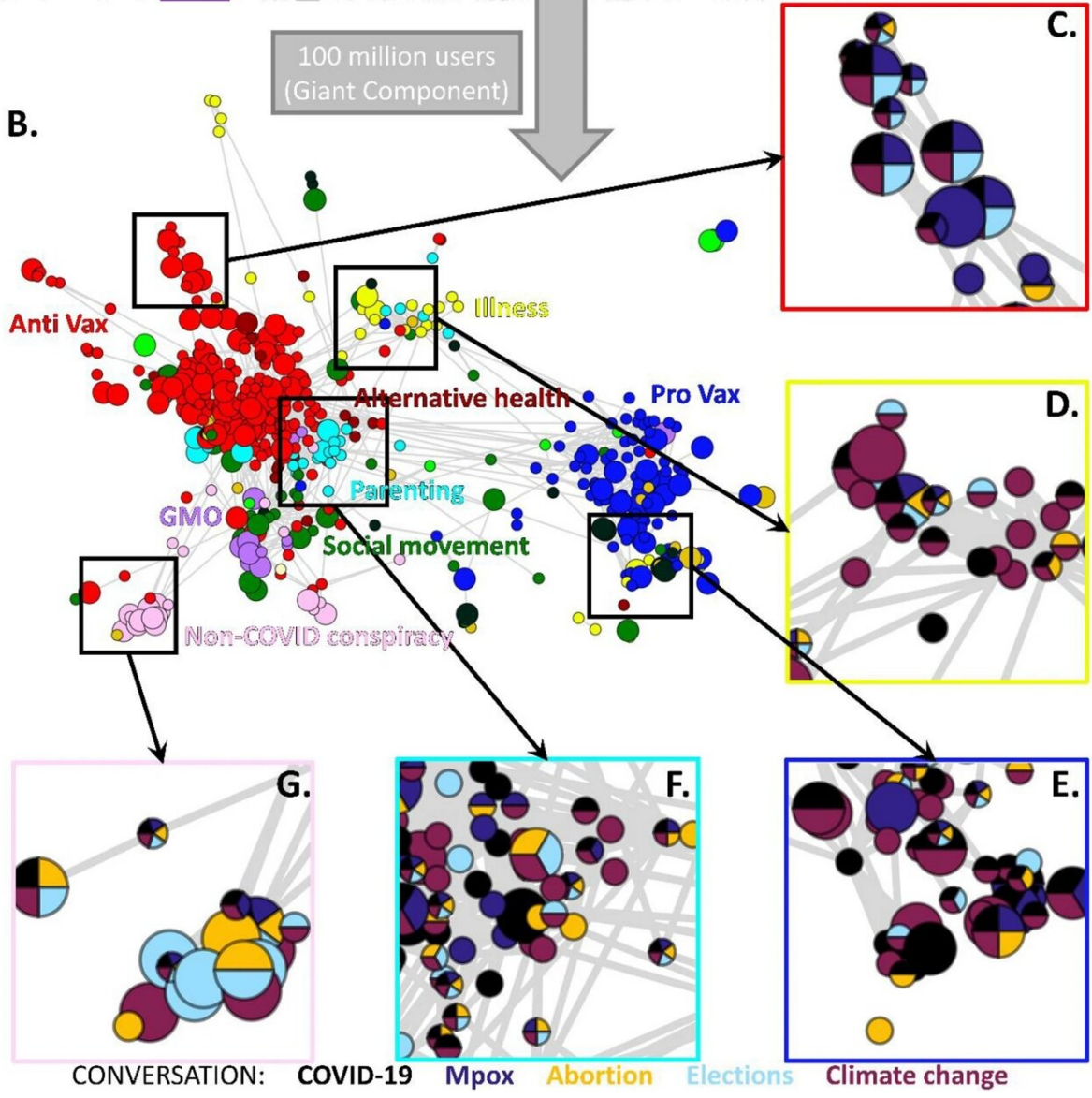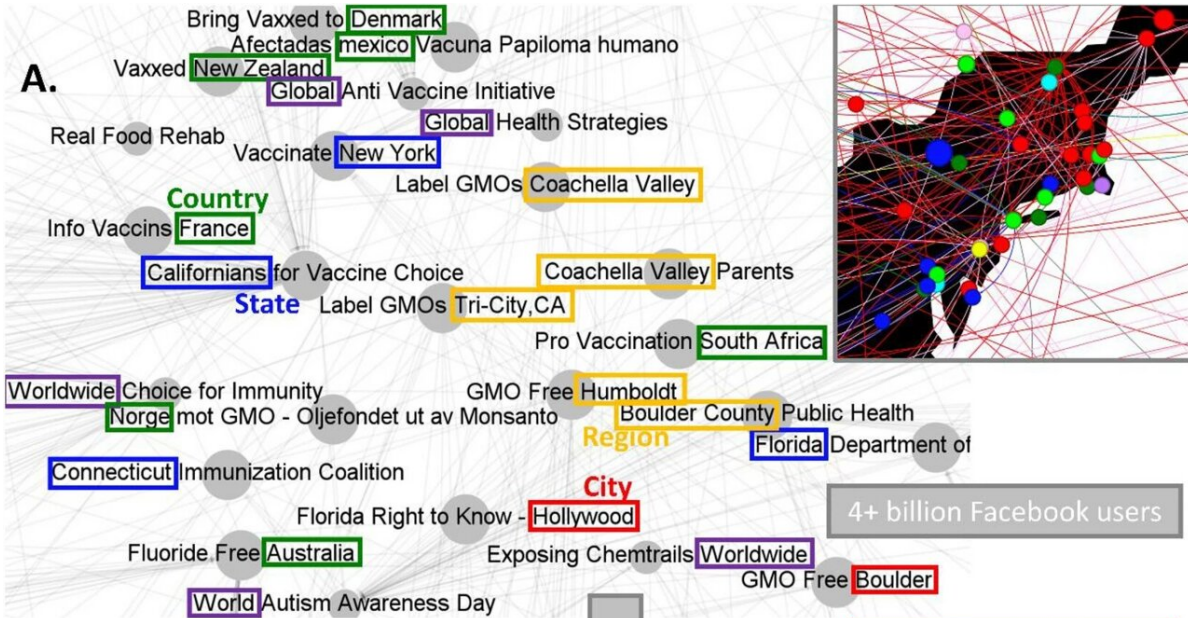
September 27 2023

A.

Bring Vaxxed to Denmark
Afectadas mexico Vacuna Papiloma humano
Vaxxed New Zealand
Global Anti Vaccine Initiative
Real Food Rehab
Global Health Strategies
Vaccinate New York
Label GMOs Coachella Valley
Country
Info Vaccins France
Californians for Vaccine Choice
Coachella Valley Parents
State Label GMOs Tri-City,CA
Pro Vaccination South Africa
Worldwide Choice for Immunity
GMO Free Humboldt
Norge mot GMO - Oljefondet ut av Monsanto
Boulder County Public Health
Region
Florida Department of
Connecticut Immunization Coalition
City
Florida Right to Know - Hollywood
4+ billion Facebook users
Fluoride Free Australia
Exposing Chemtrails Worldwide
World Autism Awareness Day
GMO Free Boulder

100 million users
(Giant Component)

B.

C.

Anti Vax

Illness

Alternative health

Pro Vax

Parenting

GMO

Social movement

Non-COVID conspiracy

D.

G.

F.

E.

CONVERSATION: COVID-19 Mpox Abortion Elections Climate change

Post-pandemic distrust entangles topics, locations, and geographical scales. (**A**) Illustrative sample of our data[40]. Each circle is a Facebook community (page). Communities promote page-level links to each other. Inset illustrates communities' locations in U.S. north-east. (**B**) Giant connected component of communities classified according to their stance on vaccines. Neutral communities (i.e., non-blue, non-red) are subclassified by their primary interest, e.g., parenting (light blue). Node size indicates geographic scale: large nodes are local communities; small nodes are global ones. (**C–G**) Each community's discourse sub-classified by proportion of dominant topics (black is Covid-19, dark purple is mpox, gold is abortion, light blue is elections, dark magenta is climate change). SI Sect. 6 gives full information and shows the complete network. Credit: *Scientific Reports* (2023). DOI: 10.1038/s41598-023-42893-6

New research led by the George Washington University finds that current mitigation efforts to combat distrust online may not be effective because organizations and governments tackling distrust are only targeting one topic and only one geographical scale. The study shows that online distrust has become a 'glocal' phenomenon, meaning that it is spreading with different topics lumped together and mixing both local and global interests.

"The key takeaway here is that distrust has gone 'glocal' and hence so should mitigation. Currently, all government, NGO, and other organization's attempts at mitigation against distrust are focused on one topic, like elections, or public health, or climate, or abortion etc.—i.e. they are 'local' in topic by focusing on just one topic, not a mix—and they are either at an international scale, or a national scale, or a state scale, or a local scale—but again not a mix," Neil Johnson, study author and a professor of physics at GW, says.

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"This silo approach is dangerous because it completely misses the fact that distrust has become 'glocal' in both topic and in geographic scale. For example, people who distrust advice about one topic at the local level (e.g. state-level health advice) are likely to distrust information about topics (e.g. elections, climate) at the national and global levels. That is what gives distrust its new resilience to mitigations and interventions post-pandemic."

As distrust has flourished online after the pandemic and especially as the United States heads into the 2024 presidential election, the researchers say it will become increasingly important for organizations to rethink their strategies in this 'glocal' way if they want to reach online audiences more effectively.

The study, Rise of post-pandemic resilience across the distrust ecosystem, was published in *Scientific Reports*.

More information: Lucia Illari et al, Rise of post-pandemic resilience across the distrust ecosystem, *Scientific Reports* (2023). DOI: 10.1038/s41598-023-42893-6

Provided by George Washington University

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