

Conspiracy Theories Find New, Younger Fans on TikTok | Rolling Stone

By Andrea Marks

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On TikTok, the user @tythecrazyguy has amassed 3.7 million followers talking about one of the internet's most popular topics: conspiracy theories. But Ty is not a typical conspiracy theorist. He's a high school senior who posts rainbow flags during Pride Month, supports Black Lives Matter, and condemns Trump. In videos that often garner millions of views, he dishes to followers about what he calls the "ConspiracTEA" of the day. Many of his videos may be tongue-in-cheek, but the trouble with explaining the world's craziest theories — from Birds Aren't Real and Flat Earthers to Hollywood coverups and Wayfair-based child sex-trafficking rings — in a compelling and shareable format is it's also a great way to spread them.

Ty is a bit of an anomaly, since research has repeatedly shown baby boomers are seven to eight times more likely to spread misinformation than college-aged kids, according to Darren Linvill, an associate professor with Clemson University's Media Forensics Hub who studies disinformation on social media. But times could be changing. "Those numbers are based off of research on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube; they're based off of perhaps an old paradigm and [the fact] that content is often packaged for older audiences," Linvill says.

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