

Conspirituality in the Age of TikTok: A Thematic Analysis of #AgeofAquarius

Amelia Jane Nicol
2220140

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
of a Master of Arts in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
University of Wales Trinity Saint David

14th October 2024



**Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation
Declaration Form**

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Name: Amelia Jane Nicol

Date: 14th October 2024

2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of ...Master of Arts in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology

Name: Amelia Jane Nicol

Date: 14th October 2024

3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references.

A bibliography is appended.

Name: Amelia Jane Nicol

Date: 14th October 2024

4. I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying, inter- library loan, and for deposit in the University's digital repository

Name Amelia Jane Nicol

Date 14th October 2024

Supervisor's Declaration.

I am satisfied that this work is the result of the student's own efforts.

Signed:

Date:

Table of Contents

No.	Description	Page Number
1.	<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	p. 4
2.	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	p. 5
3.	<i>Abstract</i>	p. 6
4.	Introduction	p. 7
5.	Literature Review	p. 13
6.	Methodology	p. 28
7.	Results and Discussion	p. 37
8.	Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research	p. 74
9.	Conclusions	p. 76
10.	Bibliography	p. 81

List of Tables and Figures

No.	Description	Page Number
Table 1.	Table of Initial Codes	p. 41

No.	Description	Page Number
Figure 1.	Screenshot of TikTok Video about the Age of Aquarius	p. 65

Acknowledgements

I would like to give heartfelt thanks to the following people, without whom this endeavour would not have been possible.

To my supervisor, Dr. Frances Clynes, I am deeply grateful for your time, support, and encouragement over the past year. It has been wonderful to work with you, and I hope our paths cross again. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Nicholas Champion, who has left a lasting impact on my academic journey and greatly influenced this dissertation, and Dr. Garry Phillipson, for your help in shaping this project in its early stages. I would also like to extend my appreciation to all my lecturers over the past two years for their valuable insights and guidance. Many thanks to Dr. Duane Hamacher at the University of Melbourne, for taking the time to meet with me and your valuable insights into the field of Cultural Astronomy.

To Elizabeth Watkins (MSc., BA.), thank you for the many hours we spent talking, I would not have been able to finish this dissertation without your help and guidance. I would also like to acknowledge Nigel Watkins (PGCE, MA, BA [Hons]) for his assistance with proofreading and structuring this work. Thank you to the entire Wellbeing department at UWTSD and my peers on the MACAA course.

To my Mum, Kellie Nicol and Kieran Morgan, and all my family and friends, I am eternally grateful for your unwavering support and encouragement. Thank you for all that you have done and continue to do for me. Lastly, to everyone I encountered along the way these past two years: thank you. I would not be where I am today without you all.

Abstract

This study examines contemporary beliefs about the Age of Aquarius on the social media platform TikTok. The research aims to analyse user-generated content to identify the contemporary beliefs and perspectives surrounding the phenomenon, the historical and cultural contexts that inform these beliefs, and the extent to which the Age of Aquarius on TikTok is associated with conspiratoriality and far-right conspiracy theories. The methodology of the study was a deductive reflexive thematic analysis of user-generated content on the Age of Aquarius hashtag on TikTok, using the search engine function to collect data. The findings demonstrate a clear connection to the countercultural Age of Aquarius of the 1960s and 1970s, broader astrological debates as to when the Aquarian Age begins, and evident overlap with conspiratorial narratives. The study contributes to existing literature beliefs and themes within New Religious Movements and alternative spiritualities on social media, the field of cyberethnography, and further illuminates the convergence between conspiracy theories and New Age beliefs.

Introduction

The purpose of this research activity is to undertake cosmological and cultural astrological research on the video sharing application, TikTok. This objective of the research is to perform a reflexive thematic analysis of user-generated content in the Age of Aquarius subsection on TikTok. The central research questions this research seeks to answer are:

- What are the dominant beliefs and understandings about the Age of Aquarius on TikTok?
- What historical and cultural contexts are represented within content about the Age of Aquarius?
- To what extent are TikTok videos about the Age of Aquarius associated with conspirituality, conspiracy theories and far-right beliefs?

According to Nicholas Campion, the Age of Aquarius is an example of modern astrological theory which posits that humanity undergoes vital shifts that occur in line with significant movements of the constellations or zodiac signs.¹ The Age of Aquarius is based on the concept of the precession of the equinoxes, which refers to the retrograde (backward) motion of the Vernal Equinox through the zodiac signs.² As the vernal point reaches a new zodiac sign, thus begins the next astrological age. Each age is said to last approximately 2,160 years.³ There is no

¹ Nicholas Campion, 'The Shock of the New: The Origin of the Age of Aquarius and the 2012 Phenomenon', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 15, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2011, 17-27 (p. 18). DOI: 10.46472/CC.0115.0205.

² Ibid.

³ Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology, and the New Age Movement* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 44.

definitive answer as to when exactly the Age of Aquarius will begin, although there is much debate amongst astrologers.⁴

Contemporary belief in the Age of Aquarius can be largely attributed to the Theosophical Society, founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in 1875.⁵ The aim of the Theosophical Society was to revive a ‘lost wisdom’ from the ancient times to help humanity prepare for a coming shift in human consciousness.⁶ The Theosophist Alice Bailey then directly related the forthcoming shift to the astrological Age of Aquarius.⁷ Predictions about the forthcoming Age of Aquarius describe a future New Age of harmony, revolution, technological advancement, and the spiritual evolution of humanity.⁸

The Age of Aquarius is closely associated with the New Age Movement, however the two concepts are distinct.⁹ Margrethe Løøv defines the New Age as a ‘form of contemporary religion or spirituality that has emerged over the course of the past 150 years’.¹⁰ New Ageism is considered as a form of ‘alternative spirituality’,¹¹ associated with the countercultural hippie movement of the 1960s and 1970s.¹² William E. Burns contends that the Age of Aquarius is typically considered a timer as

⁴ Campion, ‘The Shock of the New’, pp. 19-22.

⁵ Nicholas Campion, *Prophecy, cosmology and the New Age movement: the extent and nature of contemporary belief in astrology*. PhD thesis, Bath Spa University, (2004). DOI:[10.17870/bathspa.00001453](https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.00001453) pp. 54-56.

⁶ Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 2.

⁷ Alice Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations*, (New York: Lucis Trust, 1949), p. 79.

⁸ Daren Kemp, *New Age: A Guide*. (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 169.

⁹ Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West*, p. 48.

¹⁰ Margrethe Løøv, ‘The New Age Movement’, *Elements in New Religious Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), pp. 2-14.

¹¹ Christopher Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture*, 1st volume (London: T&T Clark, 2005.), p. 8.

¹² Campion, Nicholas, *The New Age in the Modern West : Counterculture, Utopia and Prophecy from the Late Eighteenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. 128.

to when the New Age will begin.¹³ Both the astrological phenomenon and the New Age movement have their roots in Western esotericism, specifically within the Theosophical movement.¹⁴ Whilst the New Age was popular in the countercultural movement fifty years ago, research from the Pew Research Centre in 2018 suggests that approximately one in six Americans hold at least one belief that is associated with an alternative spirituality such as New Ageism, demonstrating its long lasting influence and contemporary relevance.¹⁵

Alternative spiritualities often find community within the online sphere.¹⁶ One such space is TikTok, a social media app that allows users to watch, share, and create their own video content. Statistics show that TikTok is the ‘fastest growing social media app of all time’ since its inception in 2016, with over 1 billion monthly users globally in 2024.¹⁷ On TikTok, users are given a ‘For You Page’ which is controlled by a highly specified algorithm that tailors personalised content to each user. The platform’s algorithm is central to the entertainment experience it provides.¹⁸ TikTok recently came under scrutiny from the United States government as a potential

¹³ William E. Burns, *Astrology through History: Interpreting the Stars from Ancient Mesopotamia to the Present* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2018), p. 250.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Pew Research Centre, 'New Age Beliefs Common Among Both Religious and Nonreligious Americans', 1st October 2018. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/10/01/new-age-beliefs-common-among-both-religious-and-nonreligious-americans/#:~:text=Most%20American%20adults%20self%20identify,objects%20like%20mountains%20or%20trees> [accessed 2 July 2024].

¹⁶ Frances Clynes, *An Examination of the Impact of the Internet on Modern Western Astrology*, PhD Dissertation, University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, (September 2015) p. 244.

¹⁷ Backlinko, 'TikTok User Statistics 2024', 1 July 2024, Available at: <https://backlinko.com/tiktok-users> [accessed 11 August 2024].

¹⁸ Aparajita Bhandari, and Sara Bimo, 'Why's Everyone on TikTok Now? The Algorithmized Self and the Future of Self-Making on social media', *Social Media + Society*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, (January 2022) 1-11 (p. 2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221086241>.

security risk and a threat to the safety of its younger users, as 67% of Americans between the ages of 13 and 17 use the app.¹⁹ The New York Times suggests that 40% of Generation Z (the generation born between 1997 and 2013) use TikTok as a search engine, making it less likely that its users are obtaining resources and information from reputable, fact-checked sources.²⁰ Additionally, the non-profit watchdog organisation, Media Matters, published a study with the conclusion that, ‘TikTok’s rapid supply of content appears to allow exposure to even more hateful content in a fraction of the time it takes to see such content on YouTube [or other social media platforms]’.²¹

According to Ward and Voas, what is particularly concerning in the modern digital age is the convergence of New Age beliefs and far-right conspiracy theories. This phenomenon was termed ‘Conspirituality’ by Ward and Voas in 2011.²² The conspiracy group QAnon is one such example of conspirituality’s development on the web.²³ According to Miotto and Droogan, research into QAnon as a New Religious

¹⁹ Kari Paul and Johana Bhuiyan, ‘Key takeaways from TikTok hearing in Congress – and the uncertain road ahead’, *The Guardian*, 23 March 2023. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/mar/23/key-takeaways-tiktok-hearing-congress-shou-zi-chew> [accessed 17 October 2023].

²⁰ Kalley Huang, ‘For Gen Z, TikTok Is the New Search Engine’, *The New York Times*, 16 September 2022. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/16/technology/gen-z-tiktok-search-engine.html> [accessed 14 August 2024].

²¹ Olivia Little and Abbie Richards, ‘TikTok’s Algorithm Leads Users from Transphobic Videos to Far-Right Rabbit Holes’, *Media Matters*, 5 October 2021. Available at: <https://www.mediamatters.org/tiktok/tiktoks-algorithm-leads-users-transphobic-videos-far-right-rabbit-holes> [accessed 11 October 2023].

²² Charlotte Ward and Prof. David Voas, ‘The Emergence of Conspirituality’, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Volume 26, Issue 1, (2011), 103-121 (p. 104). DOI: 10.1080/13537903.2011.539846.

²³ Nicolò Miotto and Julian Droogan, ‘Stand Against the Wiles of the Devil’: Interpreting QAnon as a Pseudo-Christian Extremist Movement. *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 0, Issue 0, 1-24 (p. 2) (January 30 2024). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205241228744>.

Movement is vital, and further study is required to investigate how QAnon narratives are influenced by traditional and alternative religious expressions of faith.

Considering the rise of the far-right in online spaces, it is more urgent than ever to be aware of how social media is vulnerable to, and capable of producing extremist views and fringe beliefs.

Though researchers like Shpolberg, Griera et al and Miller are assessing the various manifestations of spiritual and religious beliefs on TikTok and the reach of conspirituality in the digital landscape, there is no existing research specifically examining the Age of Aquarius on TikTok. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the extent to which the Age of Aquarius is associated with conspiracy theories, far-right beliefs and conspirituality on TikTok to develop a deeper understanding of how the New Age and QAnon intertwine, and the similarities shared between the two New Religious Movements. This research aims to provide an analysis of part of the contemporary social media landscape, its historical and cultural contexts, as well as modern beliefs and discourses about the Age of Aquarius online. The research intends to provide an analysis of a potential cultural entry point and manifestation of conspirituality. This is in line with Griera's conclusion that the conspiritual milieu is not linear nor easily identifiable, therefore it is important to look at 'the clues, traces, and signs that offer us a glimpse of the emerging social imaginaries in this terrain'.²⁴ As this confluence is altered by, and often driven by,

²⁴ Mar Griera, Jordi Morales i Gras, Anna Clot-Garrell, Rafael Cazarín, 'Conspirituality in COVID-19 Times: A Mixed-method Study of Anti-vaccine Movements in Spain', *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, Volume 35, Issue 2, (2022). 192-217 (p. 193). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1558/jasr.22390>.

algorithmic social media platforms, analysing TikTok content can provide vital information into echo chambers and conspiratorial groups such as QAnon and how people may come to believe in conspiratorial narratives.

Literature Review

i) Introduction

The following discussion will review the existing literature surrounding the Age of Aquarius, the New Age movement, and the overlap with conspiracy theories that will inform the research project's design and analysis. Firstly, the section will undertake an analysis of the historical and cultural contexts of the New Age movement, critically assessing the key theorists and figures who have informed and contributed to the concept of the Age of Aquarius. Following this, the literature review will discuss the 'conspirituality' debate, detailing the precedence that has been set for the convergence of New Age beliefs and conspiracy theories.²⁵ Next, the discussion will integrate the academic discussions surrounding the genesis of the Internet, and in more recent years, social media. This section will also introduce the short-form video sharing platform TikTok as a key field for contemporary cyber religiosity.²⁶

ii) The History of the New Age and the Age of Aquarius

Michael York classifies the New Age as a New Religious Movement (NRM) and provides a definition of the New Age movement that acknowledges its variety as a religious group.²⁷ It can be considered an umbrella term that encompasses a mixture of communities, identities, and practices. Despite common threads within the community, it lacks a foundational doctrine, singular founder, holy scripture, or

²⁵ Ward and Voas, 'The Emergence of Conspirituality', 103-121 (p. 104).

²⁶ Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan, *Religion online: finding faith on the Internet*. (New York, Routledge, 2004), pp. 10-11.

²⁷ Michael York, *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements*, (Maryland. US, Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), p. 4.

overarching joint practices. Therefore, the New Age is polymorphous in nature, taking on a variety of shapes, forms and expressions.²⁸ It is in this way that the New Age is considered different to organised religions, such as Christianity or Islam. In addition, York claims that the New Age is a part of, and partly the cause of, belief in the imminent Age of Aquarius.²⁹ Wouter J. Hanegraaff considers the area of New Ageism that centralises the Age of Aquarius within its practices and activities as the New Age *sensu stricto* (New Age in the strict sense).³⁰ The New Age in a strict sense also considers the countercultural and Theosophical origins of the movement. This is distinct to New Age *sensu lato* (New Age in the general sense) which abridges the general associated practices of the New Age movement, such as yoga, meditation, astrology, crystal healing and other ‘alternative’ practices and healing modalities.³¹

The contemporary zeitgeist of the Age of Aquarius rose in popularity in the late 1960s with the release of the song ‘Aquarius (Let the Sunshine In)’ from the musical *Hair*.³² The lyrics of the song state: ‘This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius... Golden living dreams of visions...And the mind’s true liberation’.³³ The Age of Aquarius became closely associated with the countercultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s, as members of the movement believed that the forthcoming New

²⁸ Løøv, *The New Age Movement*, p. 1.

²⁹ York, *The Emerging Network*, p. 1.

³⁰ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age religion and Western culture: esotericism in the mirror of secular thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998) pp. 98–103.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Champion, *The New Age in the Modern West*, p. 2.

³³ James Rado, Gerome Ragni, Galt MacDermot, ‘Aquarius’, [song].1968, <https://genius.com/The-5th-dimension-aquarius-let-the-sunshine-in-lyrics> [Accessed 15 August 2024].

Age would be a time of enlightenment, peace, and humanitarianism.³⁴ The sociologist Theodore Roszak described how the countercultural movement was an expression of dissatisfaction with the hierarchical and elitist systems of the contemporary ‘technocracy’.³⁵ In addition, the countercultural movement can be described as an era of changing identities, wherein the youth rejected the traditional rules and norms of the time.³⁶ Whilst the countercultural movement shares ideals and characteristics with the Age of Aquarius, the Age of Aquarius represents a distinct yet related phenomenon. Chiefly, this occurs in how the hippie subculture considered the Age of Aquarius to be the current age of the 1960s and 1970s, with the astrological term becoming associated with the countercultural movement of the time.³⁷

The popular New Age beliefs and practices as they are understood today can be largely attributed to the Theosophical movement, which was founded by Helena P. Blavatsky in 1875.³⁸ Blavatsky considered there to exist a ‘lost wisdom’ from an ancient and previously universal human civilization and aimed to bring this together once more by forming and teaching a group of people who could help to prepare the world for an imminent shift.³⁹ Indeed, Blavatsky cites Theosophy as originating in the

³⁴ Michael A. Peters, ‘New age spiritualism, mysticism, and far-right conspiracy’. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Volume 55, Issue 14 (2022). 1608–1616 (p. 1608). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2022.2061948>.

³⁵ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), pp.1-42.

³⁶ Rina R. Bousalis, (2021) ‘The Counterculture Generation: Idolized, Appropriated, and Misunderstood’, *The Councilor: A Journal of the Social Studies*, Vol. 82: No. 2, Article 3 (2021). 1-26 (p. 1). Available at: https://thekeep.eiu.edu/the_councilor/vol82/iss2/3 [Accessed 17 April 2024].

³⁷ Russell Duncan, ‘The Summer of Love and Protest: Transatlantic Counterculture in the 1960s.’ in *The Transatlantic Sixties: Europe and the United States in the Counterculture Decade*, eds. Grzegorz Kosci et al., (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2013), *JSTOR*, 144–73 (p.158) and Campion, *The New Age in the Modern West*, p. 125.

³⁸ Egil Asprem, ‘Theosophy’, in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion*, eds. Adam Possamai & Anthony Blasi, (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2020) pp. 846-847.

³⁹ Campion, ‘The Shock of the New’, pp. 19-22.

works of Alexandrian philosophers, dating back to the third century BC. Blavatsky uses the phrase ‘lovers of the truth’ to describe Theosophical devotees, a phrase which later became the Theosophical motto of ‘There is no religion higher than truth’.⁴⁰ According to Nicholas Campion, the Theosophical society was ‘the most important single institutional influence on the New Age movement’, in part because of its global reach, and also due to the significant number of respected intellectuals who became members of the movement.⁴¹

Blavatsky's writing mentions the New Cycle, later known as the Aquarian Age, which is said to be a historical and pivotal period of human history whereby the ‘psychic idiosyncrasies of humanity’ will evolve through a significant change after the precession of the equinoxes shifts the astrological age from the Age of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius.⁴² However, Campion is doubtful about the Aquarian Age resulting in a shift in consciousness for humanity, stating that ‘the astronomical foundation for the theory of astrological ages lends them an aura of objective reality’.⁴³ Campion’s view suggests the meaning is not inherent to the concept, and that the astronomical details, rather than being significant in and of themselves, are more so a vehicle by which to hang a certain kind of belief about the future.

While Blavatsky laid the groundwork for the Aquarian Age, it was the Theosophist Alice Bailey who first directly related the astrological shift from the Age

⁴⁰ Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 2.

⁴¹ Campion, ‘The Shock of the New’, pp.19-22.

⁴² Helena P. Blavatsky, ‘The Esoteric Character of the Gospels: Part 1,’ in *Lucifer*, eds. H. P. Blavatsky and Mabel Collins, Volume 1, note 5 (London: Kelly & Co., 1887).

⁴³ Campion, ‘The Shock of the New’, p. 19.

of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius as heralding the future enlightenment of humanity on Earth.⁴⁴ The concept of a global shift in consciousness was later popularised by Marilyn Ferguson in her 1980 book, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*. According to Daren Kemp, Ferguson's book gave 'definite form' to the concept of the New Age by providing material and practical discussion on how the New Age may come to be, particularly regarding technological and personal changes.⁴⁵

Campion states that the co-founder of analytical psychology, Carl Gustav Jung, was one of the most influential individuals in the prophesised Age of Aquarius.⁴⁶ In *Aion*, Jung focuses on archetypal and symbolic representations of the astrological ages, wherein humanity comes to be represented by the 'water carrier', or 'water bearer', in the Aquarian age.⁴⁷ Liz Greene, an astrologer and Jungian analyst, describes Jung's archetypal ages as 'changes in the constellations of psychic dominants, of the archetypes, or 'gods' as they used to be called, which bring about, or accompany, long-lasting transformations of the collective psyche'.⁴⁸ However, Greene also states that while Jung did influence the New Age movement, he may

⁴⁴ Asprem, 'Theosophy', p. 3.

⁴⁵ Kemp, *New Age: A Guide*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology, and the New Age Movement* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 26.

⁴⁷ Carl Gustav Jung, eds. Gerhard Adler, Michael Fordham, Richard Francis Carrington Hull, and Herbert Read, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Vol. 9, Pt. 2, Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), pp. 81-62, note 136.

⁴⁸ Liz Greene, 'Jung's studies in astrology: prophecy, magic, and the qualities of time', *Quest*, Vol. 106, Issue 2, (2018), 19-25 (p. 19). Available at: <https://www.theosophical.org/publications/quest-magazine/c-g-jung-s-vision-of-the-aquarian-age#:~:text=By%20Liz%20Greene,and%20is%20still%20popular%20today>. [Accessed 13 April 2024].

himself have also been influenced by New Age beliefs, potentially even being a representative of the movement itself.⁴⁹

Blavatsky contended that an astrological age lasts *approximately* 2,155 solar years. In search of a definitive date of the Age of Aquarius' dawning, Theosophists, astrologers, and astronomers have attempted to provide an answer. The astrologer and Theosophist Raghavan Iyer wrote multiple articles on the Age of Aquarius, presenting the date of 19th June 1902 as the precise dawning of the New Age.⁵⁰ Iyer considers harmony to be the defining feature of the Aquarian Age. The astrologer and Theosophist Dane Rudhyar believed that the Age of Aquarius would begin in 2060, having had a 'seed period' in the mid 1800s.⁵¹ Jung, however, stated that '1940 is the year when we approach the meridian of the first star in Aquarius. It is the premonitory earthquake of the New Age.'⁵² Yet Liz Greene argues that significant shifts such as the Age of Aquarius do not occur at a specific date or time, and instead are prolonged over a period of centuries.⁵³ This transitional period, according to Greene, is often deeply tumultuous as values shift and the human collective searches for new ways forward. Jung also believed that the astrological age would begin with a period of 'confusion' as Christianity's influence declined.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Raghavan Iyer, 'The Aquarian Elixir', *Hermes*, September 1982 (London: Theosophy Trust Books) Available at: <https://www.theosophytrust.org/1134-the-aquarian-elixir> [Accessed 17 February 2024].

⁵¹ Dane Rudhyar, *Astrological Timing: The Transition to the New Age* (San Francisco, New York and London: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 115.

⁵² Jung, *Letters of C. G. Jung: Volume I, 1906-1950*, eds Adler, G., trans. Hull, R.F.C., (London & New York, Routledge, 1973), p. 285.

⁵³ Liz Greene, 'Long-term Perspective Horoscope 2003 -2008 for Bill Gates' in *The Meaning of the Time: Yearly Horoscope Analysis*, (Astrodienst, 2 February 2003), p. 5. Available at: <https://alabe.com/chartservice/lizlong.pdf> [Accessed 17 August 2024].

⁵⁴ Jung, *Letters of C. G. Jung, Vol. 1*, p. 69.

Nevertheless, the prediction of significant global change is not a solely New Age concept. The Millenarian perspective argues that a forthcoming New Age will occur through drastic and catastrophic global events, from deluges to famine and epidemics. Millenarianism is not to be confused with millennialism, with the latter referring specifically to the beginning of a Golden Age of a thousand years of peace, which is said within Christian eschatology to be ushered in by the Second Coming of Christ, as opposed to an apocalyptic global change.⁵⁵ However, some Christian definitions of the New Age movement and its associated practices and beliefs are critical in nature.⁵⁶ As stated by Kemp, Constance Cumbey warned the Christian community about the New Age in 1983. Cumbey argued ‘The New Age movement is a worldwide network... Their primary goal or the secret behind their ‘unity-in-diversity’ is the formation of a ‘New World Order’... it includes organisations teaching mind control, holistic health, esoteric philosophy’.⁵⁷

iii) The Conspiritoriality Debate

Moreover, in recent years there has been an acceleration in the overlap between New Age beliefs and conspiracy theories. This phenomenon was documented by Ward and Voas in 2011, who termed the intersection ‘conspiritoriality’.⁵⁸ Conspiritoriality is defined as a ‘politico-spiritual philosophy’ that

⁵⁵ Jean-François Mayer, 'Millennialism: New Religious Movements and the Quest for a New Age', in J. R. Lewis and I. Tøllefsen (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements: Volume II*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 401-411 (p. 403).

⁵⁶ Kemp, *New Age: A Guide*, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Constance E. Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow: The New Age Movement and Our Coming Age of Barbarism*, (Louisiana: Huntington House Publishers, 1983) p. 54, in Kemp, *New Age*, p.6.

⁵⁸ Ward and Voas, 'The Emergence of Conspiritoriality', pp.103-113.

encapsulates themes of change and transformation, the exposing of a shadow government and elite control, as well as the concept of ‘awakening’ to the ‘truth’ and ultimately a higher collective consciousness. Ward and Voas argued that the phenomenon is a new emergence that can be attributed to various media figures and New Agers promulgating ‘spiritually conscious ideals’.

Ward and Voas contend that conspirituality can be considered a web movement, in part accelerated by social networks’ ability to disseminate a vast amount of information quickly. However, researchers Asprem and Dyrendal provided a rebuttal in 2015, contending that the emergence of conspirituality is neither new nor surprising, instead having precedence in Western esotericism, occultism and the cultic milieu.⁵⁹ Asprem and Dryendal argue that previous historical phases have also been rife with conspiracy theories, namely theories of secret brotherhoods and antisemitic conspiracy theories that were prominent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Consequently, Asprem and Dryendal argue that conspirituality is therefore ‘a predictable outcome of structurally central processes in the cultic milieu’, and that understanding the historical context is essential in understanding how conspiratorial narratives form in the West.⁶⁰

The researchers demonstrate the historical precedence for conspirituality through a thorough explanation of sociologist Colin Campbell’s concept of the cultic milieu. The cultic milieu refers to the cultural environment that allows for the

⁵⁹ Egil Asprem, and Asbjørn Dyrendal, ‘Conspirituality Reconsidered: How Surprising and How New is the Confluence of Spirituality and Conspiracy Theory?’, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol. 30, Issue 3. (2015), 367-382 (p. 367). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2015.1081339>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

emergence, growth, and interplay of alternative and fringe groups in which unconventional and esoteric beliefs thrive through the continuous exchanging of ideas between like-minded people.⁶¹ In this way, Asprem and Dryendal contextualise conspирuality as its own genre of conspiracy theory. Campbell describes how secularisation, which refers to the decline of religious influence in society, has contributed to funneling individuals into areas of alternative beliefs and spiritualities, furthering the proliferation of cults and alternative groups.⁶²

Central to understanding conspирuality is the concept of ‘occulture’.⁶³ Christopher Partridge expands the traditional definition of ‘occult’ to encompass a wider religio-cultural milieu, whereby popular culture is instrumental in the development of alternative spiritualities. These spiritualities include a ‘vast spectrum of beliefs’, from Theosophy and Paganism to alternative science, holistic medicine, and traditional Eastern spiritualities.⁶⁴ Partridge’s concept of occulture describes the new forms of spiritual life that are resulting from traditional organised religion’s decline, as new conditions such as the internet, are producing an increase in the popularity of alternative spiritualities.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Colin Campbell, ‘The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization’, in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira, 2002), 12-24 (p. 12).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Giovanna Parmigiani, ‘Magic and Politics: Conspирuality and COVID-19.’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. *American Academy of Religion*, vol. 89, no. 2 (2021), 506-529 (p. 157) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfab053>.

⁶⁴ Christopher Partridge, ‘Alternative Spiritualities, Occulture and the Re-enchantment of the West’, *Bible Society*, (Summer 2005), 1-3 (p. 3). Available at: https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/uploads/content/bible_in_transmission/files/2005_summer/BiT_Summer_2005_Partridge.pdf [accessed on 10 October 2024].

⁶⁵ Christopher Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West*, p. 8.

Contemporarily, Michael Barkun contends that millenarian conspiracy culture promotes beliefs and attitudes that conflict with those of mainstream society.⁶⁶ As a result, members of conspiracy culture believe that mainstream institutions will attempt to suppress and condemn such beliefs. This suppression is then seen as validation of the conspiracy's validity and/or existence by the conspiracy sphere. Furthermore, Barkun provides a vital definition of a conspiracy theory by identifying three core principles and beliefs: that nothing occurs by accident; that nothing is as it seems, and that everything is connected.⁶⁷ Barkun describes the process by which belief in conspiracy theories is cultivated, arguing that conspiratorial narratives provide a framework which simplifies the complexities of life into a moralistic duality of 'good versus evil' which allows for the uncovering of hidden knowledge and evil agendas. In addition, Barkun argues that the allure of 'secret knowledge' provides an increase in self-confidence whereby conspiracy theorists believe they are part of a special group who are fighting against evil and obtaining knowledge that is unknown to outsiders.

According to C.T. Nguyen, conspiracy theories are predominantly circulated through the sharing of information within epistemic communities.⁶⁸ Epistemic communities are knowledge-based networks consisting of a variety of individuals

⁶⁶ Michael Barkun, 'Conspiracy Theories as Stigmatized Knowledge', *Diogenes*, Vol. 62, Issues 3–4 (2015), 114–20 (p. 114). DOI: 10.1177/0392192116669288.

⁶⁷ Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. 1st ed., (California: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 7-10 and Vladislav Šolc, 'Dark Religion and Conspiracy Theories: An Analytical Viewpoint.' *Jung Journal*, Vol. 13, Issue 4, (2019) 14–34 (p. 16). DOI: [10.1080/19342039.2019.1676142](https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2019.1676142).

⁶⁸ C. Thi Nguyen, 'Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles', *Episteme*, Vol. 17, Issue 2 (2020), 141-161 (p. 141-148). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.32>.

who share beliefs or principles.⁶⁹ Nguyen argues that social media was not originally designed to be a source of news distribution and that as a result, the flow of information has been disrupted, with this disruption best illustrated in the development of online echo chambers. Echo chambers are social environments where the beliefs, opinions, and political leanings of a community or group of people in the online sphere are reinforced through repeated interactions with other users and figures who possess similar attitudes and beliefs.⁷⁰ Nguyen makes a distinction between ‘normal’ epistemic bubbles and echo chambers, as the former explains as how a person is typically exposed to similar views through belonging to a sociopolitical class or having likeminded friends, colleagues, or family members. Conversely, echo chambers actively discredit outside voices to foster distrust between their members and the external world. Ruiz and Nilsson describe how malicious actors within echo chambers intentionally create contentious narratives including ‘not only falsehoods but also truths, half-truths, and value-laden judgements – to exploit and amplify identity-driven controversies’.⁷¹

Conspiracy theories are popular within the echo chamber, QAnon, that was partly responsible for the January 6th attack on Capitol Hill.⁷² Members of this echo

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Seth Flaxman, Sharad Goel and Justin M. Rao, 'Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 80, Special Issue: Party Polarization (2016), 298–320 (p. 299). Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44014621> [accessed 12 August 2024].

⁷¹ Carlos Diaz Ruiz and Tomas Nilsson, 'Disinformation and Echo Chambers: How Disinformation Circulates on Social Media Through Identity-Driven Controversies', *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, Vol. 42, Issue 1 (2023), 18-35 (p. 18). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/07439156221103852>.

⁷² Sophia Moskalenko, Tomislav Pavlović and Brett Burton, 'QAnon Beliefs, Political Radicalization and Support for January 6th Insurrection: A Gendered Perspective.' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 36, Issue 7 (2023) 962-981 (p. 962) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2023.2236230>.

chamber use social media as the primary route of disseminating information between its members. Christopher T. Conner's ethnographic qualitative research found that cultural entry points to the QAnon echo chamber include yogic and wellness communities, Neo-shamanistic circles and psychic mediums. Michael York states that the New Age movement is predominantly American in its origin, but Conner contends that fascist movements have a pattern historically of co-opting cultural movements that gain traction, to increase their membership and normalise their extremist beliefs.⁷³

Ward and Voas' 'The Emergence of Conspirituality' was published in 2011, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Griera et al argue that the pandemic acted as a cultural driving force for the acceleration of conspirituality in the contemporary digital age. The researchers describe the pandemic as a 'focusing event' that produced collective anxiety and increased anti-vaccination discourse, resulting in conspiracy theories related to COVID-19.⁷⁴ Birkland described focusing events as a significant but rare events that 'can be defined as reasonably harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms'.⁷⁵ According to Griera et al, online communities became a space for self and collective expression where heightened emotions could be expressed during the global crisis. The combination of the factors of a disrupted

⁷³ Conner, 'QAnon, authoritarianism, and conspiracy within American alternative spiritual spaces', p. 3.

⁷⁴ Griera et al, 'Conspirituality in COVID-19 Times', p. 194.

⁷⁵ Thomas A. Birkland, 'Natural Disasters as Focusing Events: Policy Communities and Political Response', *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, Vol. 18, Issue 1 (1998) 53-74 (p. 54). Available at: https://www.academia.edu/27311924/Natural_Disasters_as_Focusing_Events_Policy_Communities_and_Political_Response [Accessed 9 October 2024].

flow of information, malicious actors, and focusing events thus explains the formation of echo chambers in the contemporary age and provides a framework by which the mechanisms and spread of conspiratoriality can be understood.

However, Parmigiani differentiates between *belief in conspiracies* and *conspiracy-believing*.⁷⁶ The latter describes a practice that is a ‘sensory, aesthetic and performative’ participatory experience which incorporates a variety of ‘ways of knowing’ of groups and individuals, as opposed to the psychological process of belief in conspiracies. Such ways of knowing were found by Parmigiani to rely on the emotional affective experience when understanding the world, one that prioritises feeling by way of determining the ‘truth’ over facts or knowledge.⁷⁷

iv) TikTok and Religiosity on the Internet

The following section describes how the Internet and new social media platforms are shaping modern religiosity and communities, and how TikTok differs from the online social landscapes of the first 30 to 40 years of the Internet’s inception. Religious researchers Dawson and Cowan contend that ‘the nature and quality of people’s experiences doing religious things online’ is an essential area of study to understand the ‘overall social context of cyber-religiosity’.⁷⁸

Researchers from a variety of disciplines are beginning to acknowledge the importance of studying TikTok due to its significant real-life implications. For

⁷⁶ Giovanna Parmigiani, ‘Magic and Politics: Conspiratoriality and COVID-19.’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. *American Academy of Religion*, vol. 89, no. 2 (2021), 506-529 (p. 157) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfab053>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Dawson and Cowan, (eds), *Religion Online*, pp. 10-11.

example, public health researchers Logrieco et al performed a case study into anti-pro-anorexia videos on TikTok, finding that the platform contributes to negative mental and physical health consequences for users, and that users' behaviours are influenced by the content they consume.⁷⁹ Psychologists Jiang et al's research concludes by advising that users should be aware that TikTok use can impair judgement and analytic thinking, owing to how consuming short video content increases tendencies towards automatic thinking and produces issues with information discernment.⁸⁰ Karimi and Fox also found that TikTok is more likely to influence young people's political engagement than any other form of social media.⁸¹

Though TikTok scholarship is emerging, several researchers are researching trends and communities relevant to spiritual beliefs and practices on TikTok. Masha Shpolberg describes how the application has become intertwined with religious and spiritual faith, with a new kind of spiritual community developing on TikTok.⁸² Similarly, Chris Miller studied a subsection of the spiritual community on TikTok

⁷⁹ Guisepe Logrieco, Maria Rosaria Marchili, Marco Roversi, and Alberto Villani, 'The Paradox of Tik Tok Anti-Pro-Anorexia Videos: How Social Media Can Promote Non-Suicidal Self-Injury and Anorexia', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Volume 18, Issue 3, (2021) 1041-1044 (p. 1041). DOI: [10.3390/ijerph18031041](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18031041).

⁸⁰ Qian Jiang and Liangying Ma, 'Swiping more, thinking less: Using TikTok hinders analytic thinking', *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, Volume 1, Issue 3 (2024), 1-28 (p. 11). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2024-3-1>.

⁸¹ Kiana Karimi, and Richard L. Fox, 'Scrolling, Simping and Mobilizing: TikTok's Influence Over Generation Z's Political Behavior', *The Journal of Media and Society*, Volume 12, Issue 1 (2023), 181-208 (p. 186). Available at: <https://thejsms.org/index.php/JSMS/article/view/1251> [accessed 5 August 2024].

⁸² Masha Shpolberg, and Elizabeth Mears, 'New Age, New Media: TikTok as Ritual Practice', *Media Fields Journal*, 16 (2021), 1-17 (p. 1). Available at: <http://mediafieldsjournal.org/new-age-new-media/2021/4/18/new-age-new-media-tiktok-as-ritual-practice.html> [accessed 5 August 2024].

known as ‘#WitchTok’.⁸³ This sub-section provides an insight to the online behaviours, rituals, and identities relevant to the members of the alternative spirituality on TikTok, who were found to be predominantly Contemporary Pagans and other practitioners of Wicca and Modern Witchcraft. Indeed, #WitchTok is part of a wider theme of alternative spiritualities on TikTok. An emerging trend within these communities is described as ‘algorithmically mediated cosmic intervention’, whereby users perceive videos such as inspirational messages and tarot readings to be specifically intended for them, having been sent by spirit guides, angels, or the universe.⁸⁴ This phenomenon has been termed ‘algorithmic conspиритuality’, as Kanthawala et al identify the dimensions by which algorithmic conspиритuality occurs and how it has the potential to persuade and influence TikTok users.⁸⁵

⁸³ Chris Miller, 'How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok: Intersections of Digital, Consumer, and Material Culture(s) on #WitchTok', *Religions*, Volume 13, Issue 2 (2022), (p. 118). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020118>.

⁸⁴ Shaheen Kanthawala, Kelley Cotter, Amy Ritchart, Ankolika De, Haley McAtee, Connie Yun, and Julia DeCook, 'Algorithmic Conspиритuality: Explicating Its Emergence, Dimensions, and Persuasibility', *New Media & Society*, (2023), 1-26 (p. 3). DOI: [10.1177/14614448231217425](https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231217425).

⁸⁵ Kelley Cotter, Julia R. DeCook, Shaheen Kanthawala, and Kali Foyle, 'In FYP We Trust: The Divine Force of Algorithmic Conspиритuality', *International Journal of Communication*, Volume 16, Issue 1, (2022), 2911–2934 (p. 2927). Available at: <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/19289>. [accessed 14 August 2024].

Methodology

The next chapter introduces the qualitative methodology that will be used to examine content about the Age of Aquarius on TikTok.

i) Qualitative Research, Cyber-Ethnography, and Thematic Analysis

According to Scarcelli et al, we now exist in a complex social environment fostered by the ubiquity of social media networks.⁸⁶ Such networks are therefore a fruitful area of study for comprehending shifting relational dynamics, and the mechanisms of social change. The very nature of qualitative research allows for the understanding and study of the complexity of human nature, allowing researchers to gather detailed information on a subject matter, as opposed to collecting large amounts of data that may be less comprehensive, such as with quantitative methods.⁸⁷

Thematic analysis is a qualitative method that involves the generation and interpretation of patterns of meaning within a given data set.⁸⁸ It has previously been used to analyse content on social media platforms. King and McCashin used thematic analysis to investigate YouTube comments and vlogs (video blogs) about the lived experience of borderline personality disorder.⁸⁹ Similarly, Al-Rawi et al used

⁸⁶ Tonny Krijnen, Cosimo Marco Scarcelli, Paul G. Nixon, Michelle D. Ravenscroft, eds., *Identities and Intimacies on Social Media : Transnational Perspectives* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022), pp. 1-15 (p. 1).

⁸⁷ Kim Etherington, *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher : Using Our Selves in Research* (London ; Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004) pp. 25-27 (p.26).

⁸⁸ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Volume 3, Issue 2, (2006), 77–101 (p. 79). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

⁸⁹ Clare, M. King and Darragh McCashin, 'Commenting and Connecting: A Thematic Analysis of Responses to YouTube Vlogs About Borderline Personality Disorder', *Internet Interventions*, Volume 28, Issue 1, (2022) 2-10 (p. 1). DOI: [10.1016/j.invent.2022.100540](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2022.100540).

thematic analysis to research gendered memes on the platform Instagram.⁹⁰ Thematic analyses of TikTok videos have been used particularly to examine intimate aspects of Generation Z's cultural and social lives. HA Davis et al assessed the #WhatIEatInADay sub-section, contributing to the existing literature on the relationship between social media and eating disorders in young people,⁹¹ whilst Sun et al investigated young people's behaviour with e-cigarettes through a thematic analysis on TikTok.⁹² The number of studies that are focusing on TikTok specifically suggests the platform is a vital area of study, as it provides an insight into the unique cultural and social dynamics of TikTok users, who are predominantly under the age of 30.⁹³

Thematic analysis of social media content can be considered a form of cyberethnography. Cyberethnography, or digital ethnography, involves a researcher immersing themselves into the field of study, which in this case, is the online field of social media.⁹⁴ The ethnographic approach to digital studies has been developed because studying the digital world has become ubiquitous, and therefore inseparable

⁹⁰ Ahmed Al-Rawi, Maliha Siddiqi, Xiaosu Li, Nimisha Vandan, and Karen Grepin, 'A Thematic Analysis of Instagram's Gendered Memes on COVID-19', *Journal of Visual Communication in Medicine*, Volume 44, Issue 4 (2021), 137-150. DOI: 10.1080/17453054.2021.1941808.

⁹¹ Heather A. Davis, Meredith R. Kells, Chloe Roske, Sam Holzman, Jennifer E. Wildes, 'A reflexive thematic analysis of #WhatIEatInADay on TikTok', *Eating Behaviors*, Volume 50, Issue 1, (2023), 101759. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2023.101759>.

⁹² Tianze Sun, Carmen C. W. Lim, Jack Chung, Brandon Cheng, Lily Davidson, Calvert Tisdale, Janni Leung, Coral E. Gartner, Jason Connor, Wayne D. Hall, Gary C. K. Chan, 'Vaping on TikTok: a systematic thematic analysis'. *Tob Control*, Volume 32, Issue 2, (2023) 251-254. DOI: [10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2021-056619](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2021-056619).

⁹³ Molly Foster, Hannah Frith and Mary John, 'I'm still su!C!Dal when you're done with the paperwork': An inductive framework thematic analysis of #camhs on TikTok', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Volume 65, Issue 10, (2024) 1258-1269. DOI: [10.1111/jcpp.14002](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.14002).

⁹⁴ Katie J. Ward, Cyber-Ethnography and the Emergence of the Virtually New Community. *Journal of Information Technology*, Volume 14, Issue 1, (1999), 95-105, (p. 95). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/026839629901400108>.

from cultural studies of the contemporary offline world.⁹⁵ However, in comparison to other, more established qualitative and ethnographic methods such as semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, thematic analysis lacks the volume of pre-existing literature and precedence that provides a firm consensus for researchers to follow.⁹⁶ The creators of thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke have, however, published several follow up articles elucidating on how thematic analysis should be performed, providing a thorough background for this study.⁹⁷

ii) Methods

A new TikTok account featuring my name will be created in order to collect the data. TikTok features a search engine function, whereby users can search for a term, phrase, or hashtag. A hashtag is ‘a word or phrase preceded by the hash symbol (#) that is used on social media to categorise and identify messages on a specific topic’.⁹⁸ This process brings up a number of publicly available videos associated with the topic the user has searched for. This search engine will be how videos are found for this research project, searching specifically for videos associated with the Age of Aquarius (#AgeofAquarius). This decision is in line with recent studies conducted on social media platforms, including Helen Lowe’s qualitative study, which used

⁹⁵ Yang Zhao, ‘TikTok and Researcher Positionality: Considering the Methodological and Ethical Implications of an Experimental Digital Ethnography’, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Volume 23, Issue 1, (2024), 1-11, (p. 3). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231221374>.

⁹⁶ Lorelli S. Nowell, Jill M. Norris and Nancy J. Moules, ‘Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria’, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Volume 16, Issue 1, (2023), 1-13, (p. 2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>.

⁹⁷ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis :A Practical Guide* (London: SAGE Publications, 2022), pp. 25–33 (p.25).

⁹⁸ Aleksandra Laucuka, ‘Communicative Functions of Hashtags’, *Economics and Culture*, Volume 15, Issue 1, (2018), 56-62 (p. 57). DOI:[10.2478/jec-2018-0006](https://doi.org/10.2478/jec-2018-0006).

hashtags to identify relevant discourses about experiences of classism in Irish schoolchildren on Twitter.⁹⁹

The thematic analysis process involves following six definable steps to effectively generate and analyse patterns of meaning within the data set, as laid out by Braun and Clarke.¹⁰⁰ The six stages are as follows:

1. Familiarisation with the data
2. Creation of initial codes and creation of categories
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report.

Braun and Clarke contend that ‘codes are the building blocks of themes’.¹⁰¹ Themes, on the other hand, ‘capture something important about the data concerning the research question and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set’.¹⁰² Whilst there is a step-by-step process for the methodology, Braun and Clarke clarify that the process should occur in a non-linear fashion, instead featuring continual movement between the steps to deepen the analysis and avoid missing important considerations.¹⁰³

The familiarisation with the data will happen naturally as I will be watching, downloading, and transcribing the videos. Data will be recorded in a Microsoft Excel

⁹⁹ Helen Lowe, ‘Let’s talk about class – exploring the everyday emotions and experiences of classism in Irish education: a thematic analysis of Irish Twitter conversations on class and education between 2018 and 2022’, *Irish Educational Studies*, (2023), Volume 42, Issue 4, 733-748. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2023.2261009>.

¹⁰⁰ Braun and Clarke, ‘Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology’, p. 87.

¹⁰¹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, ‘Thematic analysis’, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Volume 12, Issue 3, (2016), 297–298 (p. 297). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613>.

¹⁰² Braun and Clarke, ‘Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology’, p. 10.

¹⁰³ Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis : A Practical Guide*, p. 75.

spreadsheet and will include the audiovisual and textual details of the videos, such as captions, text overlays, visual imagery, and music. The transcripts will then be read through multiple times, with recurrent patterns of meaning being highlighted and resulting in the generation of initial codes.

In addition, Braun and Clarke state that thematic analysis not only allows for but requires deep reflection and engagement with the data by the researcher.¹⁰⁴ Following this, reflexivity will be maintained through the recording of my thoughts, interpretations and decisions whilst collecting and analysing the data. It will be essential to ensure that the interpretations and decisions I make throughout the research process are considered through the lens of my personal experience and potential biases. Voice recordings and reflexive journals will be kept throughout the process, using my iPhone's voice recording application and a dedicated online journal on Microsoft Word. This is in line with qualitative researcher Emma Sherry's approach, which describes reflexivity as the practice of observing and examining the researcher's own experiences and emotions through introspection and self-awareness.¹⁰⁵

iii) Sampling

The sample size of the study has been decided in line with Hammersley's contention that thematic analysis can frequently produce data oversaturation,

¹⁰⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis', *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, Volume 11, Issue 4, (2019), 589-597 (p. 591). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>.

¹⁰⁵ Emma Sherry, 'The Vulnerable Researcher: Facing the Challenges of Sensitive Research', *Qualitative Research Journal*, Volume 13, Issue 3, (2013), 278-288 (p. 283). DOI: [10.1108/QRJ-10-2012-0007](https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-10-2012-0007).

potentially inhibiting the development of meaningful analytic arguments and conclusions.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, this research faces the potential problem of saturation due to the sheer number of TikTok videos available. The precise number is unknown, as TikTok does not display a count of how many videos each search result has. Yet Hammersley stresses that the important factor in deciding a sample size for thematic analysis is whether the sample allows for a deep and thorough analysis, not the sheer quantity of data. As TikTok videos can be anywhere up to 30 minutes in length, I decided that my sample size should be capped at a maximum of 20 videos, allowing for an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the data. Whilst the smaller sample size may limit the representativeness of the study, anthropologists Merrill and West argue that within qualitative research, smaller samples are still able to provide detailed and significant material that illuminates a better understanding of topics.¹⁰⁷

The sample size was also decided due to the difficulty finding users of TikTok who engage with the subject matter organically and would be willing to participate in the questionnaires or interviews.¹⁰⁸ Obtaining participants for questionnaires and interviews would rely on creating videos to seek out participants through the platform's algorithm, and obtaining large numbers of views on TikTok videos is an unpredictable process. As such, seeking participants in this way was unfeasible and likely to produce too small a data set to draw meaningful conclusions from. Although

¹⁰⁶ Martyn Hammersley, 'Sampling and thematic analysis: a response to Fugard and Potts', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Volume 18, Issue 6, (2015), 687–688 (p. 688). DOI: [10.1080/13645579.2015.1005456](https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2015.1005456).

¹⁰⁷ Barbara Merrill and Linden West, *Using Biographical Methods in Social Research*, (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009), pp. 104-106 (p. 104).

¹⁰⁸ Miltsov, 'Researching TikTok: Themes, Methods and Future Directions', p. 6.

many of my peers are TikTok users, it is unlikely that many of them would be aware of the concept of the Age of Aquarius or be involved in the New Age subculture on TikTok. Therefore, snowball and opportunity sampling was unlikely to provide enough data for the research. The sampling methods of using the TikTok search engine has been chosen to produce a sample size that was as representative as possible within the limitations of the study, and to investigate the content of the most popular creators whose videos have a broad reach both on TikTok and on other social media platforms such as Facebook.

iv) **Ethical Considerations**

Gigletto, Rossi and Bennato describe how researchers studying social media platforms may run into difficulties with privacy settings and permissions. For instance, much of the data on Facebook is restricted from researchers due to needing to be 'Friends' with a user to view the information on their profile.¹⁰⁹ Conversely, the vast majority of videos posted by users on TikTok are public videos, available to anyone with, or without an account, much like on YouTube.¹¹⁰ Following the lead from similar studies such as Herrick et al's, consent will not be required to perform thematic analysis because the TikTok videos accessed and used in this research are published publicly and accessible to anyone with or without a TikTok account.

¹⁰⁹ Fabio Giglietto, Luca Rossi and Davide Bennato, 'The Open Laboratory: Limits and Possibilities of Using Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as a Research Data Source', in *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, Volume 30, Issues 3-4, (2021), 145-159 (p. 150). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15228835.2012.743797>.

¹¹⁰ Shannon S. C. Herrick, Laura Hallward and Lindsay R. Duncan, 'This is just how I cope: An inductive thematic analysis of eating disorder recovery content created and shared on TikTok using #EDRecovery', *The International Journal of Eating Disorders*, Volume 54, Issue 4, (2021), 516-526 (p. 517). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23463>.

TikTok users consent to the platform's terms and conditions of service, which states that their public data may be accessed by various and undeterminable third parties.¹¹¹

In line with the methodologies of previous media studies such as Herrick et al, the only posts that will be analysed will be the ones that are publicly available and downloadable, as these sharing settings suggest the creator's intent was for their content to be shared with the public.

However, users may not intend for their public videos to be evaluated in academic research, which proposes an additional ethical consideration. As a result, any usernames or information that could be used to identify the content creators will be excluded to ensure the users' identities remain anonymous and protected. In addition, the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities state that 'Researchers must protect personal integrity, preserve individual freedom and self-determination, respect privacy and family life, and safeguard against harm and unreasonable strain'.¹¹² This research will follow this advice by ensuring the anonymity of the creators of the videos.

v) Researcher Positionality

Furthermore, researcher positionality is a key component of why a reflexive thematic analysis was the appropriate methodological choice for this research. In their article analysing the 'OK Boomer' Meme, Anderson and Keehn argue that

¹¹¹ TikTok, 'Terms of Service', August 2023. Available at: <https://www.tiktok.com/legal/page/eea/terms-of-service/en> [accessed 17 August 2024].

¹¹² National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH), 'Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities', 5th Edition, (2023). Available at: <https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/social-sciences-and-humanities/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-the-social-sciences-and-the-humanities/>. [accessed on 25 August 2024].

‘Millennial scholars and educators are uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge between organic intellectual memographic practice, and academic theorising’.¹¹³ In addition, Anderson and Keehn describe how ‘meme-fluent’ educators can effectively analyse the implicit meanings and consequences of social media discourse amongst users, with memes serving as a point from which deeper critical analysis can be performed. I am part of Generation Z, who are known as ‘digital natives’ due to being one of the first generations to be surrounded by technology and the online world for their entire lives, and thus being fluent in the digital language of the internet.¹¹⁴

I have been a user of TikTok since 2020 and have a preexisting understanding of the platform, the memographic content and ongoing viral themes. I have witnessed firsthand its progression and development both in terms of popularity and in content, chiefly in its evolution from humorous dancing videos, to ultra-specified ‘niches’ and sub-communities. Furthermore, I am a user with an interest in the New Age, both online and offline, and have been consuming media within the New Age subculture on TikTok for some time now. In this way, as a Gen Z academic and TikTok user, I am more likely to understand, perceive and comment on particular notions, subtle means of communication and viral themes within TikTok videos, as well as broad themes and current debates within the Age of Aquarius subsection on TikTok.

¹¹³ Morgan Anderson and Gabriel Keehn, ‘“OK Boomer”: Internet Memes as Consciousness Building’, *The Radical Teacher*, Issue 118, (2020), 56–63 (p. 58). *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48694804>. [accessed 10 Oct. 2024].

¹¹⁴ Marc Prensky, ‘Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1’, *On the Horizon*, Volume. 9, Issue 5, (2001) 1-6 (p. 1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816>.

Results and Discussion

i) Introduction

The following section is a detailed breakdown of the analytic process of this qualitative study. This section details the research findings obtained through reflexive thematic analysis. The thematic analysis of the TikTok videos involved using interpretation, pre-existing theory and literature to construct patterns of meaning within the videos. The research questions the study sought to answer were an investigation of the historical and cultural contexts surrounding the Age of Aquarius; contemporary beliefs about the concept, and the extent to which the Age of Aquarius is associated with astrology, conspiratoriality, and far-right conspiracy theories on TikTok.

ii) Methodology Considerations

A methodological consideration for the following discussion is the filtering and exclusion of any irrelevant videos that may have oversaturated or confused the data set (i.e., those that pertain to the traits of those with the zodiac sign Aquarius, rather than the concept of the Age of Aquarius itself). The users who created and voiced the videos in the data set have not been named, in line with the methodological approach and the ethical guidelines set forth by the Association of Internet Researchers in 2020, which advises erring on the side of caution to protect the identities of users who may not be willing for their personal information to be

used in a study.¹¹⁵ Instead, participants were given a unique identifying number, denoted as V7, or Video 7 for example.

The total sample size of the videos collected was 21, instead of 20. This is because one of the videos collected was initially omitted. However, after analysing the data and defining the themes, this video was relevant to one of the key themes generated and it was decided the video's inclusion would be a useful illustration of the theme.

iii) **Hashtags**

TikTok users use hashtags both in the descriptions for their videos and during the videos themselves, often as text overlays. Hashtags help guide the algorithm to effectively categorise a user's content, with the intent that the algorithm will then push the content out to people who are interested in similar topics. Hashtags were not a part of the initial methodology, but it became a useful way of categorising the videos during the research process. It allowed for the identification of the subsections that users had decided were relevant to their content and illustrated who the intended audiences were. The hashtags were documented in order of frequency whilst transcribing the videos, and any written captions and text overlays were also recorded. Hashtags have provided valuable data for other social media theorists, such

¹¹⁵ franzke, aline shakti, Bechmann, Anja, Zimmer, Michael, Ess, Charles, 'Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0' *The Association of Internet Researchers*, (2020), 1-83 (p. 9). Available at: <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>. [accessed 18 August 2024].

as Chris Miller who researched the TikTok subsection #WitchTok and utilised the hashtag to source data for the study.¹¹⁶

The most frequently used hashtags were #AgeofAquarius, with 11 individual tags, #Astrology, with 10 tags, #fyp with 8 tags and #Aquarius with 6, and #SpiritualTikTok with 5 tags. Each hashtag that had over 2 mentions was considered significant for data collection. This demonstrated that the Age of Aquarius is generally considered an astrological and spiritual concept by TikTok users making videos on the subject and subsequently, the theme generation was able to be guided by this.

TikTok users frequently use hashtags that are seemingly irrelevant to the video to increase viewership, something that is featured in the following data set. For instance, amongst the 21 videos, the “For You Page” (‘FYP’ in short) was used as a hashtag in 8 separate video descriptions. #Viral was also featured twice, a term which refers to ‘viral sensations’, defined as a ‘process wherein a message [or other format of media content] is actively forwarded from person to person... and is marked by a period of exponential growth in the number of people who are exposed to the message’.¹¹⁷ However, TikTok virality is deemed by the algorithm rather than the forwarding and sharing of messages between users, although that information does influence the algorithm itself.

¹¹⁶ Miller, ‘How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok’, p. 118.

¹¹⁷ Jeff Hemsley, ‘Virality: Developing a rigorous and useful definition of an information diffusion process’, *Communication and Social Networks*, University of Washington, (Spring 2011), 1-16 (p. 1). Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3129424>. [accessed 1 September 2024].

Thematic Analysis

The following section discusses the themes that were developed within the analysis, following a deductive, ‘top-down’ approach that structures the themes with the guidance of previous scholarship and literature.¹¹⁸ The deductive approach aims to test existing theories, which in this case were outlined in the literature review. The themes are as follows: the Astrological Age of Aquarius, Countercultural Re-imaginings in the Aquarian Age, the Age of Aquarius and Spiritual Awakenings, and Conspiracy Theories.

The themes and patterns of meaning have been generated following a social constructivist approach, which falls within the arena of critical thematic analysis. Critical thematic analysis is most useful when uncovering the ideologies and social structures underlying the quotations in the data set.¹¹⁹ In addition, critical analysis aims to avoid describing trends and instead ‘theorise the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided’.¹²⁰ As a result, this approach aims to examine the Age of Aquarius on TikTok in relation to the differing ideologies and social structures that have informed contemporary beliefs about the phenomenon.

¹¹⁸ Muhammad Naeem, Wilson Ozuem, Kerry Howell and Silvia Ranfagni, ‘A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research’, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Volume 22, Issue 1, (2023), 1-18 (p. 8). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177_16094069231205789.

¹¹⁹ Brandi Lawless and Yea-Wen Chen, ‘Developing a Method of Critical Thematic Analysis for Qualitative Communication Inquiry’. *Howard Journal of Communications*, Volume 30, Issue 1, (2018), 92–106 (p. 97). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2018.1439423>.

¹²⁰ Braun and Clarke, *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology*, p. 85.

Following data generation and transcribing the 21 TikTok videos, eight initial codes were developed. The codes were:

No.	Code.	No.	Code.
1.	Astrology	5.	Conspiracy Theories
2.	Aquarian Traits	6.	Social change
3.	New Age Beliefs and Concepts	7.	Feelings towards the current state of society
4.	Biblical References	8.	Prophecy

Table 1: Initial Coding

The initial codes were developed with the existing literature in mind. Codes were then grouped into patterns of meaning, in line with Braun and Clarke’s six-step methodology for thematic analysis. Each theme was defined, and the scope of the theme was identified. According to Braun and Clarke, themes are patterns of meaning that are significant in relevance to the research question or hypothesis.¹²¹

¹²¹ Braun and Clarke, ‘Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology’, p. 10.

1: The Astrological Age of Aquarius

This theme is defined by the Age of Aquarius being predominantly considered an astrological phenomenon by TikTok users who make videos about the topic. The theme also incorporates beliefs about various planetary movements and astrological calculations as to when the New Age will occur, using psychological astrology as a way to predict those changes, and Astrotheology.

i) Contradictory Beliefs and Astrological Debates

TikTok users who made videos about the Age of Aquarius generally understood the idea as an astrological movement, however various debates were present as to exactly when, and how the New Age would begin, and what it would entail. Consequently, a prominent theme was diverging opinions and beliefs within the Astrology, New Age, and Astrotheology communities.

Overall, 10 out of 21 videos used the #Astrology hashtag. Of those, 16 of the videos specifically referenced astrology, while only 2 videos discussed the precession of the equinoxes. One video that mentioned the precession of the equinoxes was V1, an astrologer who aimed to correct the information that was being proliferated within pop astrology spaces online, particularly about the Age of Aquarius. The user passionately stated:

‘Some of you are still thinking we’re in the Age of Aquarius and we’re not... I proved it three times astrologically across three different platforms... You need to take into consideration axial precession... an astrology age is 2,160 years... in pop astrology, not everything is correct.’

The video references the notion of the duration of an astrological age being 2,160 years, whilst the mention of axial precession suggests the user has a background in astrology and the New Age movement. Contending that they have ‘proved’ the Age of Aquarius has not occurred yet, reflects a confidence in their abilities, despite there being a lack of consensus as to when the precise date of the Aquarian Age is. The user appeared to take specific issue with the popular notion that Pluto’s movement into Aquarius in January 2024 would signify the beginning of the Age of Aquarius. A number of videos did reference this date, including V17, which was posted on the 22nd January 2024. The video contends:

‘On January 20th 2024, the Age of Aquarius finally began! The planet of transformation and rebirth, Pluto, enters the inventive and innovative sign of Aquarius, something that has not happened since 1778, the era of the American revolution’.

Likewise, V2, which was posted on 21st January 2024, stated: ‘The Age of Aquarius begins January 20th, ushering in a transformative era in cultural, spiritual, and technological aspects of life.’ According to the American ephemeris for the 21st century, Pluto did in fact move into the sign of Aquarius on 20th January 2024.¹²² The users’ astrological accuracy speaks to the seriousness by which astrology is taken by the astrological community on TikTok, and the commitment of its members to engaging with contemporary astrological movements and knowledge. V17’s connection of Pluto moving into Aquarius in 2024 with Pluto being in Aquarius in 1778 demonstrates how this user perceives a larger cosmic narrative playing out on

¹²² *The American Ephemeris for the 21st Century: 2000 to 2025 at Noon*, Expanded Second Edition, Programmed by Neil F. Michelsen, Revisions by Risque Pottenger (ACS Publications, San Diego, CA, 1996).

Earth as associated with astrological movements throughout history. The user thus relates previous historical events to contemporary astrological movements, perhaps to make sense of the world, or predict future societal changes.

However, Pluto was not the only planet to be referenced in association with the Age of Aquarius. V7 shows a woman in her mid-thirties talking directly to the camera. The caption states:

‘We are now truly entering into the Age of Aquarius... Saturn... is a planet of long-term revolutionary movements... When Saturn parks itself into an Aquarius, we should all expect big societal change’.

The video was posted on the 25th of March 2023. Saturn was in Aquarius from March 2022 until March 2023.¹²³ It is unclear, however, whether the user attributes Saturn moving into Aquarius as the beginning of the astrological Age of Aquarius, or whether the user simply views this astrological movement as a harbinger of the coming Aquarian Age, as V17 did with Pluto’s movement. However, Saturn as a planetary force does not have the same influence as Pluto.

In addition, users frequently referenced psychological astrology, namely Aquarian zodiac traits, to explicate ideas and predictions about what the forthcoming Age could bring. For example, V14 featured a video on the topic of ‘Three things you need to know about the Age of Aquarius’. The second item on the list stated: ‘We are entering an age of humanitarianism. With [an] abundance of information, this age emphasises using it in the right way to serve humanity and the planet.’ Likewise, V2 contended that ‘This astrological age [of Aquarius] is characterised by individuality,

¹²³ Ibid.

innovation, and a strong sense of collective consciousness'. Similarly, V9 argues that the Age of Aquarius explains why 'so many people are rebelling against the status quo and becoming more progressive and interested in metaphysical information'. A common theme between these quotes is the inference that any social change that may occur will be through individual and collective actions, suggesting that the Age of Aquarius is something that must happen with the cooperation of humanity. Indeed, V14 argues there is a 'right way' by which the increase of information in the astrological age can be used to create a world that is more harmonious and humanitarian, whilst V9 argues that more people are becoming educated in metaphysical information and progressive ideas. V2's reference to a 'strong sense of collective justice' is also comparable, as these three contentions imply a sense of personal responsibility in bringing the predicted New Age to fruition.

What is also notable is the connection to psychological astrology. Alan Leo, an influential Theosophist and astrologer, lists individuality and humanitarianism as being Aquarian traits.¹²⁴ Leo was also a prominent promulgator of belief in the Age of Aquarius, as he argued that looking at what he refers to 'true Aquarians' such as Charles Dickens, may provide a glimpse as to what humanity could look like in the Aquarian age.¹²⁵ Consequently, the data demonstrates contemporary belief in the Age of Aquarius on TikTok is influenced by Theosophy and Alan Leo's work.

¹²⁴ Alan Leo, *Practical Astrology : Being a Simple Method of Instruction in the Science of Astrology*, 3rd. ed. (London: Modern Astrology Office, 1924) p.45.

¹²⁵ Alan Leo, *Astrology for All*, (London: Forgotten Books, 2013 [1899]) pp.36-38.

ii) **Astrotheology and the symbol of the ‘Water-bearer’**

The symbol of Aquarius as the ‘water bearer’ was a recurring motif within the videos in the Age of Aquarius hashtag. References to the water bearer symbol were most prominent in videos that undertook an Astrotheological perspective.

Astrotheology is defined as ‘a branch of theology which provides a critical analysis of the contemporary space sciences combined with an explication of classic doctrines’.¹²⁶ Within the data set, Astrotheology appeared to combine the teachings of the Bible with astrological and astronomical movements, using the two to understand each other in tandem. Other references to the water bearer include V4, which was a lecture-style video of the Astrotheologist Bill Donahue. The video states:

‘Jesus Christ said in Luke 22:10 when you see...the man carrying...the picture of water, now that's Aquarius... he's talking about this age, right now... He says enter into the house, and the house is you. Enter into yourself. Go to the upper room, in the upper room is your higher consciousness, there you will be fed by him. And so now we understand... that Jesus was talking about the man with the pitcher of water, pouring it out.’

Likewise, V13 retells a parable from the Bible, whereby:

‘One of Jesus' disciples asks him ‘What will we do without you, our lord?’ He says: ‘Go into town and find the man bearing a pitcher of water and follow him to his house and there you will find sustenance. And how is Aquarius shown? It's like a man bearing a pitcher of water right.’

¹²⁶ Ted Peters, ‘Astrotheology’, in *The Routledge Companion to Modern Christian Thought*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1st eds, pp. 383-853 (p. 383).

Similarly, V11 was a reposting of another lecture-style video, led by the self-defined ‘Mr. Astrotheology’, Santos Bonacci, who has over 100,000 followers on Instagram.¹²⁷ The video states:

‘This is what churches don’t want you to know... Aquarius is the man... he's got the water and he's pouring it down... The motto of Aquarius is ‘I know...we're knowing all of this now and waking up. It's the age of consciousness.’

On his YouTube channel, Bonacci describes his teachings as syncretic in nature, seeking ‘to merge different and spiritual philosophical traditions’, such as astrology and the Bible.¹²⁸ Bonacci’s lectures focus on seeking out and understanding a ‘Universal truth’ that exists within ancient wisdom, bearing resemblance to Blavatsky’s aim to recover a ‘lost wisdom’ through the Theosophical movement.¹²⁹

The symbol of the Age of Aquarius as the water bearer also demonstrates a Jungian influence, as Carl Jung associated the forthcoming Aquarian Age to the water bearer in *Aion*.¹³⁰ References to this symbol in the data were typically paired with mentions of the Age of Pisces as ‘the Age of Christianity’, or ‘the Age of Belief’. For example, V9 describes the Age of Pisces as ‘the Age of Secrets, the Age of Beliefs’, whilst V11 also includes a reference to the Age of Pisces, stating: ‘Pisces [is] the two fish, one doubts, and one believes. We've been in the church of doubting and believing for 2000 years...’. Similarly, V13 states:

¹²⁷ Santos Bonacci, @santos.bonacci, Instagram, (2024). Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/santos.bonacci>. [accessed 26 August 2024].

¹²⁸ Santos Bonacci, ‘Astrology and Zodiac Series’, *YouTube*, Uploaded by Jewels of Light, 12 May 2024. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhY5GxJzgEmkH5X89wVmQF9Aut5bqYLYr>. [accessed 23 September 2024].

¹²⁹ Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 2.

¹³⁰ Carl Gustav Jung, Adler, G., Fordham, Francis Carrington, R., and Read, H., *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Vol. 9, Pt. 2, Aion : Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p. 32, note. 136.

‘Right now, we're in the Age of Pisces where we're transitioning into the Age of Aquarius. There are references in the Bible about this. And think about it, Jesus kind of represents the Age of Pisces in a lot of ways...his disciples were fishermen, he fed people with bread and fish...’

Furthermore, Carl Jung describes the Age of Pisces as being associated with Christianity and considers the two fish as representative of Jesus and Satan.¹³¹ As such, Bonacci and the Astrotheology community on TikTok has been heavily influenced by Theosophical astrology and the work of Carl Jung.

Consequently, this variety of astrological content and beliefs demonstrates that whilst the Age of Aquarius is considered an astrological phenomenon on TikTok, it also reflects the wider debates occurring within New Age and Astrology communities outside of TikTok about the Age of Aquarius. The astrology enthusiasts of the Age of Aquarius hashtag circulate ideas about the Age of Aquarius and its varying astrological interpretations, referencing a number of ideas that are Theosophical and Jungian in origin, as well as being related to Western esotericism in general and the wider astrological community.

¹³¹ Jung, *Aion*, p. 149, note 231.

2: Countercultural Re-imaginings in the Digital Age

This section discusses the second major theme in the data set: counterculture. Counterculture is defined as ‘a set of norms and values that sharply contradict the dominant norms and values of the society of which that group is part’.¹³² As discussed in the literature review, the Age of Aquarius rose to popularity in the countercultural movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Theodore Roszak provided an explanation for the countercultural movement as one that was born out of dissatisfaction and frustration with the economic and social structures of the time, prompting people to look for alternative solutions and ways of living.¹³³ The theme of ‘countercultural re-imaginings’ was indeed present in the Age of Aquarius hashtag, as users expressed hope, frustration, and their predictions for the coming new era.

i) The Digital Countercultural Revival

A comparison between the contemporary expression of the Age of Aquarius on TikTok and the countercultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s is also the shared values between the two: challenging hegemony, anti-establishmentarianism, increased sexual freedom, and communal living. For example, V6 stated:

‘We’re going to see [increased] communal living, sharing resources... [living alone] is quite literally against our social natures, our human nature. We're meant to rely on each other...Capitalism thrives over... everybody needing to go out and buy things for their house, even though you could just borrow your neighbour’s.’

¹³² J.M. Yinger, 1997, p. 833, in Ralph W Larkin, ‘Counterculture: 1960s and Beyond’, In: James D. Wright, *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edition, Vol 5. (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015). pp. 73–79 (p. 73).

¹³³ Roszak, *Making of a Counter Culture*, p. 42.

This user perceives capitalist structures at direct odds with ‘human nature’, which suggests her connection to the holistic spiritual milieu and the countercultural movement as she demonstrates her inclination towards returning to a more natural way of living, as opposed to the homogenous societal expectations of individual home ownership and separate, nuclear families. Video 6 goes on to discuss changes to intimacy and relationships in the Aquarian Age. She states one of her predictions for the Age of Aquarius as being an increase in ‘ethical non-monogamy’, which she attributes to Aquarius being one of the least traditional signs. The user goes on to say: ‘what’s more traditional than monogamous relationships?’. This prediction for the Age of Aquarius thus bears resemblance to the countercultural norms and values of the earlier generation, opposing tradition in favour of promulgating a ‘sexual revolution’.¹³⁴

Furthermore, V6 points out that capitalism benefits from the hegemonic structures in society more than the individual does, which suggests an element of class consciousness towards her role in society as a consumer, as well as her hope for change. Class consciousness is a Marxist theory which predicted that the working-class proletariat would become aware of their economic situation in relation to the ruling-class bourgeoisie, resulting in a revolution born out of social class conflict.¹³⁵ Indeed, the prediction of the Age of Aquarius involving revolution was also evident in the data set. V17 stated:

‘What's about to come for the next 20 years will indeed be revolutionary... As structures of tyranny are overturned, power dynamics are challenged, and

¹³⁴ Larkin, ‘Counterculture: 1960s and Beyond’, p. 75.

¹³⁵ Karl Marx (1818-1883, *The Communist Manifesto*, (London; Chicago, Ill: Pluto Press, 1996).

unjust hierarchies are destroyed, all signs will experience an inner revolution in the way they approach traditions and norms in their life.’

The discussion of revolution in regard to the Age of Aquarius is notable as Campion writes that both Marxist socialism and the New Age movement were the heirs to the European millenarian tradition, noting their simultaneous occurrences.¹³⁶ V17’s contention that current structures in society are tyrannical also takes a critical tone just as Video 6 does, illustrating that both users feel frustration and dissatisfaction with the current state of the world. In addition, the language of an ‘inner revolution’ is notable, in the way of Jung’s writings which describe how the Age of Aquarius will first occur through internal shifts within the individual, which will then produce collective, material changes.¹³⁷ This perspective appears to be playing out once more, whereby users discussing the Age of Aquarius are both hopeful about systemic and social changes occurring, and unhappy with the current systems. In this way, the Age of Aquarius can be said to be political, as users discuss the phenomena in the context of political, social and systemic changes.

Nicholas Campion contends that the Aquarian Age is positioned in opposition to political and religious institutions and authorities, with the countercultural movement having emerged alongside socialism and Marxist beliefs in the 1960s and 1970s.¹³⁸ Consequently, a countercultural framework provides an explanation by which interest in the Age of Aquarius can be linked to an expression of dissatisfaction with the

¹³⁶ Campion, 'The Shock of the New', p. 24.

¹³⁷ Stephanie Buck, 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Jung, Astrology, and the Psychology of the Unconscious', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 63.2 (2018), 207–27 (p. 217). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.12394>.

¹³⁸ Campion, 'The Shock of the New', p. 24.

contemporary global climate, and perhaps could be considered a digital revival of the Aquarian counterculture in the contemporary age.

ii) **Celebrity Culture**

Furthermore, 14 out of 21 videos in total directly associated the Age of Aquarius with societal change. A prevalent contention within this demographic was the association with the Age of Aquarius and a shifting in values and norms, particularly around celebrity culture and idolisation. For example, V3 stated:

‘What you are witnessing folks is the end of an era. The era of celebrity worship... we’re in the Age of Aquarius, collectively speaking... if you aren't showing up in an authentic way that is benefitting humanity...that same collective that used to worship you is going to grab you by the scruff of your neck and drag you out to pasture’.

This user contends that the Age of Aquarius has begun already and that it’s possible to recognise this through observing cultural shifts around celebrity culture and social media influencers. ‘Influencer’ describes a form of microcelebrity on social media, with such figures typically being employed by brands to market products to the influencer’s large online audiences.¹³⁹ The user’s frustration is evident, making use of visceral language and a tone that infers a loss of patience with celebrity culture in the contemporary digital age. Whilst the user does not provide specific examples as to what they mean, the date of the video is 17th June 2024, approximately one month after the online movement ‘Block Out 2024’ occurred. The ‘Block Out’ was a grassroots movement that began on TikTok, whereby social media users blocked

¹³⁹ Alice E. Marwick, ‘Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy’, *Public Culture*, Volume 27, Issue 1, (2015),137-160 (p. 138). DOI 10.1215/08992363-2798379.

celebrities and influencers who attended the Met Gala in May 2024, as a response to the celebrities' silence in the face of rising wealth inequality and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.¹⁴⁰ The blocking of these celebrities was colloquially referred to as sending them to the 'digital guillotine'. The guillotine reference is notable, as the method of execution during the French Revolution has become historically and culturally constituted as a symbol of revolutionary ideology against the upper-class bourgeoisie.¹⁴¹ Karl Marx, the father of Marxism, was inspired by the French Revolution.¹⁴²

Video 21 also commented on the 'Block out' movement, linking it directly to the Age of Aquarius. The user, who was a man in approximately his early 20's, speaking with a North American accent, contended:

'Earlier this year someone had predicted this is going to be the year where [the] celebrities and influencers that get famous are the ones who actually care about humanity. And I was like, girl, be for real, like this is not going to happen. Now we're doing block parties! This goes back to astrology...the astrology girlies were like "oh the Age of Aquarius, [is] the Age of truth" and I was like...what does this mean? [pulls face] I found out quick and so did everybody else. The astrology girlies were right, I fear. It really is the age of truth.'

According to the Urban Dictionary, a non-official catalogue which provides user-generated definitions to popular internet colloquialisms, an 'Astrology girlie' is 'A person who (can be of nondescript gender) who takes astrology, tarot, and other

¹⁴⁰ Meredith Clark, 'Influencer Haley Kalil apologises for 'let them eat cake' Met Gala video', *The Independent*, 14 May 2024. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/haley-kalil-met-gala-video-apology-b2545044.html>. [accessed 12 September 2024].

¹⁴¹ Eamonn Carrabine, 'The guillotine: Shadow, spectacle and the terror', *Crime, Media, Culture*, Volume 20, Issue 4, (2024), 349-369 (p. 349), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/17416590231218744>.

¹⁴² Jay Bergman, 'The Marxist Inheritance of the French Revolution', *The French Revolutionary Tradition in Russian and Soviet Politics, Political Thought, and Culture* (Oxford, 2019; online edn, Oxford Academic, 19 Sept. 2019), pp. 51-78 (p. 51).

modern-day forms of eclectic mysticism extremely seriously'.¹⁴³ V21's contention suggests that concepts about the Age of Aquarius are popular within the wider astrology subsection on TikTok, and that whilst the user describes initial skepticism towards the phenomenon, still prevalent is the association between social change and the Age of Aquarius.

V6, who shared her predictions for the Age of Aquarius as being increased communal living and a rise in non-traditional relationships, also identifies a similar pattern and predicts a shift in the social structures of mass communication and celebrity culture in connection with the Age of Aquarius. She says:

'Aquarius...being the sign that sticks up for others and for the underdog especially, we're going to see 'social clout' being related to who can do the most community service/giving back... eventually we're going to see clout related to how much giving back are you doing?'

The term 'social clout' is a modern repurposing of a reference to political influence in the 1960s and 1970s, with the term now meaning a person's reputation, popularity or influence within the online social sphere, and is considered a form of 'digital cultural currency'.¹⁴⁴ Again, this creator describes a changing in attitudes towards people who are respected in society, in favour of those who demonstrate humanitarian, 'Aquarian' ideals.

In summary, content about the Age of Aquarius on TikTok demonstrates a potential countercultural resurgence, by which the astrological concept paints a

¹⁴³ @harkerpants, Urban Dictionary, 22 April 2022, Available at: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Astrology%20Girl> [accessed on 2 October 2024].

¹⁴⁴ Kaitlyn Tiffany, 'Why Kids Online are Chasing 'Clout'', *The Atlantic*, 23 December 2019, Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/12/clout-definition-meme-influencers-social-capital-youtube/603895/>. [Accessed 30 September 2024].

picture of how this section of the milieu feels about the current state of the world, their hopes for the future, and their criticisms of the world they live in.

3: The Age of Aquarius and Spiritual Awakening

According to the data set, beliefs about the Age of Aquarius pertain to the idea that societal changes will occur due to a shift in the collective consciousness of humanity. The process of this spiritual enlightenment is typically referred to as experiencing a ‘spiritual awakening’, a theme that is present both within the data set and conspirituality. Grier et al describe the concept of the spiritual awakening as one of the ‘conspiritual assemblages’.¹⁴⁵ ¹⁴⁶ In addition, Grier et al’s research demonstrated the importance of differentiating between the ‘holistic spiritual milieu’ and far-right conspiracy theory narratives. This distinction was evident in videos about the Age of Aquarius on TikTok, illustrating a necessity for differentiating between the ‘occulture’ Age of Aquarius and far-right influenced conspiracy theories, though there is some overlap between the two, and both are impacted by conspiritual narratives. As a result, this section demonstrates the parallels and differences between a key shared characteristic between the two milieus: the spiritual awakening.

i) The New Age Awakening

The analysis found that six out of twenty-one videos specifically used the term ‘awakening’ as an identifying hashtag. Many of the videos made direct references to the idea of human consciousness changing to become more spiritually enlightened. For example, V14 contends that ‘humanity is evolving to a higher level of consciousness and a large part of this is facilitated by how quickly we can share our knowledge’. The term consciousness originates from the Latin term *conscientia*,

¹⁴⁵ Grier et al, ‘Conspirituality in COVID-19’, p. 192.

¹⁴⁶ Ward and Voas, ‘The Emergence of Conspirituality’, p. 106.

meaning ‘knowledge shared with others’.¹⁴⁷ Within the New Age Movement, consciousness is a prominent theme, with Michael York contending that the singular core feature of the New Age movement is the belief in the spiritual evolution of human consciousness.¹⁴⁸ Nicholas Campion describes how ‘higher’ consciousness within the New Age is defined as a spiritual condition.¹⁴⁹ V15 takes a metaphorical and symbolic approach to the concept of awakening as associated with the Age of Aquarius, stating that:

‘The Age of Aquarius is sometimes referred to as a lotus. And how does a lotus grow? From the murky cloudy waters into the light. Murky cloudy waters aka the Age of Pisces. Light, aka consciousness... when we turn our attention back to the chakras or the lotuses, that are emerging from the murky, cloudy waters of the Age of Pisces, we can see they are designed to take us from an awareness where we are separated individuals to the awareness that we are one.’

V15 thus provides additional information about what exactly the shift in consciousness entails, reflecting increased awareness, unification and oneness as key themes. Ward and Voas consider unity and oneness to be core narratives within the bounds of conspирituality.¹⁵⁰ This is comparable to how V14 states the elevation of consciousness is linked to the sharing of knowledge, which infers the helping of fellow human beings in the Aquarian Age and can also be interpreted as promulgating ideals of community and humanitarianism to produce the New Age.

¹⁴⁷ Franco Fabbro, Damiano Cantone, Susanna Feruglio, Cristiano Crescentini, ‘Origin and evolution of human consciousness’, *Progress in Brain Research*, Volume 250, Issue 1, (2019), 317-343 (p. 317). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.pbr.2019.03.031>.

¹⁴⁸ Michael York, *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements*, (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), pp.1-2.

¹⁴⁹ Nicholas Campion, ‘Theosophical, New Age, and Pagan Cosmologies: Nature and Transformations’, in *Astrology and Cosmology in the Worlds Religions*, (New York: NYU Press, 2012) pp. 188–200 (p. 190).

¹⁵⁰ Ward and Voas, ‘The Emergence of Conspирituality’, p. 112.

V15 also references popular New Age figures, including the American psychic medium, Edgar Cayce, and the popular phenomenon known as Abraham Hicks. Abraham Hicks' website defines itself as 'a group consciousness from the non-physical dimension' who are channelled through Esther Hicks to bring teachings of the Law of Attraction to humanity, to aid in the spiritual enlightenment of humanity.¹⁵¹ Whilst chakras are not New Age in origin, the Hindu concept of 'nerves' and 'centers' are popular within Theosophy,¹⁵² which informed contemporary New Age beliefs and subsequently popular occulture. Both Abraham Hicks and Edgar Cayce can also be considered elements of popular occulture, as Partridge contends that occulture is 'concerned with whatever passes for nonsecular 'knowledge' in society'.¹⁵³

Consequently, the New Age version of spiritual awakenings is predominantly focused with the elevation of human consciousness, and features common themes of unity, oneness and increased awareness.

ii) **Pseudo-Christian Awakening**

The concept of a spiritual awakening is central to QAnon messaging. According to Miotto and Droogan, QAnon is a pseudo-Christian movement that

¹⁵¹ Abraham-Hicks Publications, 'About Abraham-Hicks', 1997-2024, Available at: <https://www.abraham-hicks.com/about/>. [accessed 8 October 2024].

¹⁵² William Q. Judge, *The Ocean of Theosophy*, (Pasadena, California: Theosophical University Press, 2011), p. 42.

¹⁵³ Partridge, Christopher, 'Occulture and Everyday Enchantment', in James R. Lewis, and Inga Tøllefsen (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements: Volume II*, 2nd edn, (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2016), pp.315-332 (p.322).

‘shares significant characteristics with liberation theology’.¹⁵⁴ The themes identified by Miotto and Droogan in QAnon online content will form the central analysis of the following section, with quote analysed comparatively within two key influences in QAnon: Christian apocalyptic theology and ‘good versus evil’ dualism.

Firstly, references to Christian apocalyptic theology were present in some of the videos about the Age of Aquarius. In the *Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic Millenarian Movements*, Crossley and Lockhart define apocalypticism as ‘belief in the likely or impending destruction of the world... usually associated with upheaval in the social, political, and religious order of human society.’¹⁵⁵ Crossley describes how apocalypticism is prominent within QAnon, as adherents make use of texts associated with the Book of Revelation and the New Testament to support their narratives. This is illustrated by V9, who states:

‘The Age of Aquarius is here. We are living in the day and time where all secrets will be revealed. That's what the apocalypse is. Apocalypse literally means revelation, or a revealing... The Age of Aquarius is the age of knowing... knowledge is going to exponentially increase during this time. And those who reject knowledge will perish’.

This quote can be broken down into two important ideas: the concept of the Age of Aquarius as an apocalyptic event, and the idea that those who reject the coming changes will ‘perish’. Both ideas can be said to be influenced by millenarianism, which typically posits that a new ‘Golden Age’ will succeed a cataclysmic, apocalyptic series of events, considered to be the consummate battle between good

¹⁵⁴ Miotto and Droogan, ‘Stand Against the Wiles of the Devil’, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ James Crossley and Alastair Lockhart (eds.), ‘Apocalypticism’, in *Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements*, (Milton Keynes, CenSAMM: 15 January 2021). Available at: <https://www.cdamm.org/articles/apocalypticism>. [accessed 13 September 2024].

and evil.¹⁵⁶ The suggestion that ‘those who reject knowledge will perish’ can be interpreted as a reference to the idea that there exists a division between the ‘chosen’ ones, and those who must be purged from the Earth in pursuit of the destruction of evil.¹⁵⁷ In addition, Miotto and Droogan describe how QAnon messaging typically reinforces apocalyptic Christian scripture, particularly as a way to interpret current political and social events.¹⁵⁸ This is evident in Video 9 as the Age of Aquarius is interpreted as being an apocalyptic event, whereby only those who embrace the knowledge that is revealed will be able to experience the new era.

Indeed, Conner’s qualitative research into QAnon messaging defined one of the tenets of QAnon as the belief that members of the echo chamber will lead a process of spiritual evolution that culminates in a ‘purified and righteous US freed from demonic forces’.¹⁵⁹ The concept of the liberation from evil was present in direct references to Jesus and Satan, and Heaven and Hell. For example, in reference to the Age of Aquarius, V4 stated:

‘God has given a blueprint [of] how to overcome that which is evil and that which is oppressive and to rise up to what is heavenly... Christ is supposed to return, split the Eastern sky, and cast down Satan into prison.’

Likewise, V8: made direct associations between the Age of Aquarius and heaven:

‘This signifies the transfer of control in the heavens from Jupiter to Saturn and a return to a Golden age which was prophesised, they believe, by the Roman poet Virgil in around the year 40BC.... 40 years before the birth of Christ, he wrote a return to a Golden Age, when Saturn would return to power with a new breed of men set down from heaven’.

¹⁵⁶ Brad Whitsel, ‘Ideological Mutation and Millennial Belief in the American Neo-Nazi Movement’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 24, Issue 2, (2001), 89-106 (p. 89), DOI: 10.1080/10576100117722.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Miotto and Droogan, ‘Stand Against the Wiles of the Devil’, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ Miotto, and Droogan, ‘Stand Against the Wiles of the Devil’, p. 4.

The two quotes demonstrate a form of moralistic dualism whereby good and evil are opposing forces. The quotes suggest that the battle between them is predestined and said to be occurring during the Age of Aquarius. Likewise, V19 states:

‘This one thing the Bible says about the Age of Aquarius is going to blow your mind and it’s going to open your eyes... Scripture [Daniel 12:4] says that in the last days knowledge shall be increased. Well, that’s basically what they say about the Age of Aquarius. The expansion of consciousness, the revelation of truth. The Age of Aquarius is a New Age term. The New Ager take the teachings of Jesus and leave Jesus out. Satan gives half a truth and wraps it in a lie...because Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and so if you leave Jesus out who is the truth, then you’re leaving out the truth.’

Jim Kline, who analysed QAnon content through the lens of Jungian archetypes, states that the motif of the eternal return is prevalent in QAnon conspiracy theories about a great battle between good and evil, known as ‘The Storm’ by its followers.¹⁶⁰ Kline describes how the holy war from the New Testament’s book of Revelation, which features a battle between Jesus and Satan, is a representation of the archetypal energy of the continual destruction and rebirth of the universe. According to Kline, the Biblical chapter has influenced QAnon’s conspiratorial narratives. This is also evident in content about the Age of Aquarius on TikTok, meaning there is some overlap in content about the phenomena with beliefs about the Aquarian Age.

Yet this contention also demonstrates difference between the New Age and pseudo-Christian, millenarian-influenced perceptions of the Age of Aquarius. V19

¹⁶⁰ Jim Kline, ‘Eat My Flesh, Drink My Blood: Archetypal Elements in the QAnon Conspiracy’, *Jung Journal*, Volume 15, Issue 3, (2021), 36–52 (p. 45). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2021.1942754>.

and V9 both contend that the Age of Aquarius will be a 'revelation'. 'Revelation', implies hidden knowledge, the exposure of secret truths, and suggests a link to conspiracy theories about hidden elite control, as well as a Biblical reference. Conversely, the thematic analysis found that New Age beliefs posit the Age of Aquarius as a 'revolution', which is instead associated with social change being obtained through human action and collective power. As such, a difference between these quotes and the New Age concept of the Age of Aquarius is that V4 and V8 imply that the Earth will be liberated from evil through divine intervention, whereas the left-leaning spiritual milieu typically posits that the Age of Aquarius will occur through individualised healing and collectivism.

4: The Age of Aquarius and Conspiracy

This section analyses the data with regard to conspiratorial and conspiritual narratives. Within the data, distinctions could be made between the prominence of overt conspiritual narratives and what Giovanna Parmigiani defines as the more affective and sensory experience of '*conspiracy-believing*'.¹⁶¹

i) Elite Control, Distrust in Institutions, and the New World Order

The concept of hidden elite control is one of the two core convictions of conspirituality.¹⁶² This theme was present in the data set, suggesting a significant influence of conspiratorial narratives and conspirituality within content about the Age of Aquarius on TikTok. In particular, V8, which was posted on the 11th of February 2023, stated:

‘We know as Christians that our fates, our destinies are not controlled by the movement of the planets in the sky, but very powerful, very wealthy people do believe this... This is something that is taken very seriously by the New Age and by occultists, and on December 21st of 2020 with the Great Conjunction, we, in their minds, moved into this New Age. It's not a coincidence, in my view, that the World Economic Forum of very powerful, very wealthy people announced their ‘Great Reset.’

This quote reveals conspiritual influences in the user's belief in the Age of Aquarius. Firstly, the phrase ‘very powerful, very wealthy people’ is used twice, which can be interpreted to be referencing the hidden elite, a concept popular within the ‘New World Order’ (NWO) conspiracy theory. However, this was not the only time that there was a reference to the NWO conspiracy theory within the #AgeofAquarius subsection, as V9 states that ‘when conspiracy theorists talk about the New World

¹⁶¹ Parmigiani, ‘Magic and Politics: Conspirituality and COVID-19’, p. 157.

¹⁶² Ward and Voas, ‘The Emergence of Conspirituality’, p. 104.

Order, they're really talking about the Age of Aquarius.' According to the Middlebury Centre for Terrorism, Extremism and Counterterrorism, the NWO conspiracy posits that 'a cabal of powerful elites is secretly implementing a dystopian international governing structure that will grant them complete control over the global populace'.¹⁶³ Michael Barkun describes the NWO conspiracy as a 'super-conspiracy' which refers to conspiracies about systemic structures.¹⁶⁴ Within QAnon, the NWO conspiracy takes on the form of belief in a 'deep state' of liberal elites.¹⁶⁵ The phrase 'it's not a coincidence' aligns directly with Michael Barkun's core principles of conspiracy theories that describe how conspiratorial beliefs adhere to the view that nothing is a coincidence, and everything is connected.¹⁶⁶

Indeed, Ward and Voas categorise the New World Order conspiracy theory within their first generation of conspirituality, however, the theory remains prominent in second-generation conspirituality. Ward and Voas argue that the NWO also falls within the domain of 'radical right' conspiracy theories.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, Ward and Voas discuss how the NWO involves the idea of the Illuminati, the supposed name of the supposed secret liberal elite society which is conspiring to establish the NWO. This theory dates back to 1797 with John Robinson's book, *Proofs of a Conspiracy*

¹⁶³ Myles Flores, M, 'The New World Order: The Historical Origins of a Dangerous Modern Conspiracy Theory', *Middlebury Centre of Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism*, 30 May 2022. Available at: <https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/academics/centers-initiatives/ctec/ctec-publications/new-world-order-historical-origins-dangerous>. [Accessed 7th October 2024].

¹⁶⁴ Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2006), p. 6.

¹⁶⁵ Jared M. Wright and Stuart Wright, 'The Future of QAnon: Emergent Patterns of Social Movement Adaptation and Change', In: M.K. Miller, ed. *The Social Science of QAnon: A New Social and Political Phenomenon*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2023), 291-307 (p. 3). DOI: [DOI:10.1017/9781009052061.023](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009052061.023).

¹⁶⁶ Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁷ Ward and Voas, 'The Emergence of Conspirituality', p. 107.

against all the Religions and Governments of Europe.¹⁶⁸ As such, the data extract shows that the Age of Aquarius is associated with the conspiracy theory of the New World Order, demonstrating that some beliefs about the Age of Aquarius can be considered as involved with conspiratorality and features some overlaps with the ‘radical right’.

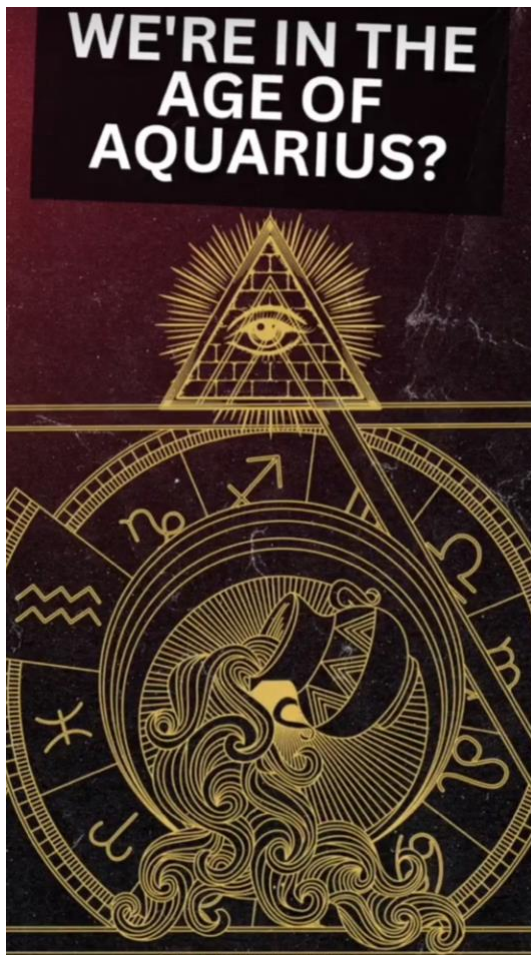


Figure 1: V8, via TikTok, posted 11TH February 2022

V8 demonstrates an additional reference to the ‘elite control’ conspiracy theory in direct relation to the Age of Aquarius, through using a background which features the image of a pyramid with the Illuminati symbol – the Eye of Providence, or the ‘All-seeing Eye’ (See Figure D). As well as the Illuminati symbol, the image also shows a zodiac wheel, and a pitcher pouring out water, a reference to Aquarius as the water bearer.

In the same vein, Video 10 also demonstrated a lack of trust in institutions and conspiratorial implications. The video states:

‘Ask any real astrologer today and they will tell you that we’re in the Age of Aquarius... Do not be listening to these astronauts from NASA, they are liars, we cannot go to the stars, that’s like trying to land on a rainbow.’

¹⁶⁸ Ward and Voas, ‘The Emergence of Conspiratorality’, p. 107.

The contention ‘ask any real astrologer’ is significant within the context of secret knowledge, due to how it produces the question of authority and who can be trusted to be a legitimate source of information. According to Michael Barkun, distrust of authority can result in an inclination to place trust in less traditional, unorthodox explanations of events.¹⁶⁹ This is evident here in how the quote references astrology as being a more legitimate source of information than an institution like NASA, who are deemed to be ‘liars’. In addition, this quote could be interpreted as a continuation of the conspiracy theory which argues the 1969 Apollo moon landing mission was faked by NASA.¹⁷⁰ As such, the data demonstrates that some content about the Age of Aquarius on TikTok has been influenced by a key conspiratorial element: the conspiracy theory of elite control. However, traces of more historical conspiracy theories such as the Apollo moon landing are also evident.

ii) **Affective Conspiritoriality and ‘Algorithmically mediated cosmic intervention’**

This next section applies Parmigiani’s concept of ‘conspiracy-believing’ to analyse conspiratorial elements within content about the Age of Aquarius on TikTok. Parmigiani states that conspiracy-believing is ‘primarily a practice that engages simultaneously different affects, experiences, and ‘ways of knowing’ of individuals and groups’.¹⁷¹ As referenced in the literature review, certain messages on TikTok are

¹⁶⁹ Barkun, ‘Conspiracy Theories as Stigmatized Knowledge’, p. 117.

¹⁷⁰ David D. Perlmutter and Nicole Smith Dahmen, ‘(In)visible evidence: pictorially enhanced disbelief in the Apollo moon landings’, *Visual Communication*, Volume 7, Issue 2, (2008), 229-251 (p. 231). DOI: 10.1177/1470357208088760.

¹⁷¹ Parmigiani, ‘Magic and Politics’, p. 515.

often believed by users to be a form of ‘algorithmically mediated cosmic intervention’.¹⁷² Correspondingly, this section analyses content about the Age of Aquarius in terms of the emotional and sensory experiences associated with conspiritual content.

For example, Video 20 featured the caption ‘The Age of Aquarius’, and stated:

‘Maybe you can’t see it yet, but you can feel it. You can sense it, somewhere deep within you. You know something is happening that you can’t quite see. Energy that is working in your favour, tiny synchronicities aligning in perfect timing. A shift happening in the universe that you can feel deep down in your bones. Your thinking mind may still have doubts, but your beating heart knows this is real.’

Here, V20 suggested that it is possible to ‘feel’ and ‘sense’ the coming shift in consciousness, imploring viewers to go beyond their ‘thinking mind’ to access this hidden knowledge. This quote can also be interpreted as being influenced by Carl Jung and the Western esoteric tradition. Namely in how this conceptualisation of the Age of Aquarius posits the shift as something that can be understood within the bounds of extrasensory perception, or intuition. Extrasensory perception is defined by the *Britannica Encyclopedia* as ‘perception that occurs independently of the known sensory processes’, and includes phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition, or knowledge of the future.¹⁷³ Whilst extrasensory beliefs are not a strictly New Age concept, psychic abilities are frequently associated with New Age beliefs and occulture.¹⁷⁴ The quote also demonstrates Jungian influence. In a letter to

¹⁷² Cotter et al, ‘In FYP We Trust: The Divine Force of Algorithmic Conspiritoriality’, p. 3.

¹⁷³ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. ‘Extrasensory perception’, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 25 May 2024. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/extrasensory-perception>. [accessed 3 September 2024].

¹⁷⁴ Partridge, Christopher, ‘Occulture and Everyday Enchantment’, p. 322.

Dr. Laurence Bedit in April 1946, Jung wrote: ‘I conclude that the human psyche... has a non-spatial and a non-temporal quality.’¹⁷⁵ Consequently, the Jungian perspective describes how being able to ‘sense [it]...deep in your bones’ is an intuitive perception that exists beyond conscious cognition. In Jung’s words, intuition is ‘perception by way of the unconscious’.¹⁷⁶

Video 20’s reference to ‘synchronicities’ can also be understood to be influenced by the work of Carl Jung, who, as stated in the literature review, is considered by Nicholas Campion to be one of the most influential proponents of the Age of Aquarius within the Western esoteric tradition and the New Age movement.¹⁷⁷ Jung invented the term synchronicity, which he defined as a ‘meaningful coincidence’.¹⁷⁸ As such, V20’s contention can be interpreted as being directly influenced by the Western esoteric tradition, as the video makes use of this concept to explain that the Age of Aquarius is happening, and that it can be essentially proved through personal experience and experiencing synchronicities.

Secondly, V20 can be understood as positioned within what Parmigiani terms ‘*conspiracy-believing*’, due to the heightened focus on the affective, embodied experience, as in, to rely on feeling and intuition as a ‘way of knowing’ the world. The sensory experience is positioned at the centre of how an individual or group understands the world around them. Parmigiani’s perspective is informed by

¹⁷⁵ Carl Gustav Jung, *Letters of C. G. Jung: Volume I, 1906-1950*, eds Adler, G., trans. Hull, R.F.C. (London & New York, Routledge, 1973) p. 285.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West*, p. 26.

¹⁷⁸ Carl Gustav Jung, and Roderick Main, ‘Synchronicity’, in *Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal*, Volume 1, (Princeton University Press, 1997) pp. 93–102 (p. 93, note 969). *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvzsmf3b.9>.

Magliocco's contention that 'belief is not the opposite of reason; it is a state of conviction that is reached in a different way, with different evidence'.¹⁷⁹ In Video 20, the 'different evidence' for the Age of Aquarius' arrival is provided through feeling and intuition. For example, V7 can also be positioned within the bounds of affective conspiratorality, as the creator states:

'We are truly now entering into the Age of Aquarius. This is the first year where it's going to start to be felt, not just ephemerally, but we're going to have specific proof, specific evidence, that we are in the Age of Aquarius.'

She argues that the Age of Aquarius is going to be 'felt', suggesting an embodied, sensory, and physical experience of knowing. Therefore, this indicates a belief in a form of embodied wisdom, one that can be guided by astrological calculations, and that this intuitive experience will soon be proved materially. In the same video, V7 discusses the Age of Aquarius in relation to the movement of Saturn going into Aquarius from March 2022 to March 2023. This belief system could be said to be influenced by Carl Jung, bearing resemblance to the how he deemed astrology to be an 'intelligent aperçu' by which unconscious archetypal structures could be revealed. Stephanie Buck argues that Jung believed astrology could illuminate shifts within the collective consciousness, providing a 'physio-spiritual correlate to the psychological process of individuation'.¹⁸⁰

Another detail of the video indicates its positioning within conspiratorality. The creator is talking to the camera with her eyes closed, as if she were channelling

¹⁷⁹ Sabina Magliocco, 'Beyond Belief: Context, Rationality and Participatory Consciousness', *Western Folklore*, Volume 71, Issue 1, (2012), 5–24 (pp. 11-13).

¹⁸⁰ Buck, 'Hiding in Plain Sight', p. 211.

information from a non-physical spiritual entity. Wouter J. Hanegraaff notes that the channelling of ‘entities’ of higher consciousnesses is a common trend within the more generalised, *sensu lato* New Age, as practitioners often claim to be passing on messages that have come from outside their own consciousnesses.¹⁸¹ V7 can thus be interpreted as a ‘channelled message’. According to Cotter et al, such videos reflect a wider trend whereby TikTok users believe the videos appearing on their ‘For You Page’ are ‘not just [the] result of a finely tuned algorithm... but perhaps divine intervention’.¹⁸² Cotter et al also position algorithmic divine intervention within the bounds of Ward and Voas’ conspиритuality milieu, as the latter define conspиритuality as associated with Barkun’s definition of the core principles of conspiracies: that ‘nothing happens by accident, nothing is as it seems, and everything is connected’.¹⁸³ In this way, the algorithm acts as a mechanism by which synchronistic messages are delivered. The findings thus illustrate Asprem and Dryendal’s assertion that conspиритuality is not a new phenomenon, and instead has significant historical and cultural precedence.¹⁸⁴

iii) The COVID-19 pandemic and the Age of Aquarius

Whilst none of the videos in the data set mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic, important comparisons can be drawn between the Age of Aquarius and the pandemic

¹⁸¹ Hanegraaff, *New Age religion and Western culture*, pp. 23-35

¹⁸² Cotter et al, ‘In FYP We Trust: The Divine Force of Algorithmic Conspиритuality’, p. 3.

¹⁸³ Ward & Voas, ‘The Emergence of Conspиритuality’, p. 108).

¹⁸⁴ Asprem and Dryendal, ‘Conspиритuality Reconsidered’, p. 367.

in terms of conceptualising beliefs about the Aquarian Age on social media and understanding the historical and cultural contexts in which it is interpreted today.

Firstly, Video 8 implies their suspicion around the ‘Great Reset’, a reference to the proposal laid out by the World Economic Forum in June 2020, which aimed to ‘to create a healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous future’ following the economic turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁸⁵ V8 links this to ‘Great Conjunction’, which is known as the ‘Christmas Star’, the planetary conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. According to NASA, this conjunction occurs approximately every twenty years.¹⁸⁶ However, the proposal of the Great Reset produced a surge in conspiratorial narratives around the COVID-19 crisis, arguing that the world’s elites had planned and executed the pandemic, resulting in anti-lockdown protests and increased anti-vaccination narratives.¹⁸⁷ The direct association between the Age of Aquarius and conspiratorial narratives thus adds another layer to the video’s conspiratorial influences as it overtly combines both astrological conjunctions and the New World Order conspiracy.

In addition, Grier et al identified that the ‘holistic spiritual milieu’, which can be compared to the occultural, left-leaning, New Age milieu evident in this study, perceived the Coronavirus crisis as a ‘sign of a new era and an opportunity for

¹⁸⁵ Olga Robinson, Shayan Sardarizadeh, Jack Goodman, Christopher Giles and Hugo Williams, ‘What is the Great Reset - and how did it get hijacked by conspiracy theories?’, *BBC News*, 24 June 2021. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-57532368>. [accessed 7 October 2024].

¹⁸⁶ Bill Keeter, ‘The ‘Great’ Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn’, *National Aeronautics and Space Administration*, 15th December 2020, Available at: <https://www.nasa.gov/solar-system/the-great-conjunction-of-jupiter-and-saturn/>. [Accessed 7 October 2024].

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

individual and collective change'.¹⁸⁸ According to Griera, the pandemic is explicated in terms of a global spiritual awakening whereby the 'truth' of the pandemic is understood within the context of 'energy movements, planetary and astral conjunction schemes'.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, Griera et al reference a data extract in their study that directly associates the Age of Aquarius with the COVID-19 pandemic. Griera et al's study featured the following quote from one of their participants:

'The purpose of the entire Age of Aquarius 2020 timeline stargate is to stabilize the positive Aquarian Age timeline for the planet. During 2020, the dark forces have done their best to prevent the positive Ascension timeline from manifesting. Now is our collective opportunity for the positive Ascension timeline to be anchored, secured, and stabilized forever, and to ensure that the remainder of the planetary liberation process occurs smoothly and quickly.' (19 December 2020).¹⁹⁰

This quote from Griera et al's study also demonstrates the themes discussed in the previous sections of this research, including the theme of liberation from evil, here phrased as 'the planetary liberation process' from 'dark forces', therefore combining conspirituality with Christian theology and conspiracies about the COVID-19 pandemic as a time of reckoning between the forces of good and evil. In this way, the convergence of spiritual awakenings and the pandemic incorporate a 'way of knowing'¹⁹¹ that reflects the contemporary beliefs and understandings about the Age of Aquarius on TikTok. With regards to conspirituality, Parmigiani identified that COVID was interpreted by the conspirituality milieu as a pivotal battle between high

¹⁸⁸ Griera et al, 'Conspirituality in COVID-19 times', p. 202.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 203.

¹⁹⁰ Griera et al, 'Conspirituality in COVID-19 times', p. 104.

¹⁹¹ Parmigiani, 'Magic and Politics', p. 518.

and low energetic or vibrational forces.¹⁹² High and low vibrational forces can thus be interpreted as synonymous with the high versus low consciousness debate found within the occulture milieu's descriptions of what the Age of Aquarius will entail.

In summary, these comparisons are in line with previous scholarship about conspirituality and indicate that the Age of Aquarius can be positioned within the conspiritual milieu, and in fact was found to be influenced by conspiracy theories and Christian theology. However, it is important to denominate the distinctions that exist within conceptualisations of the Age of Aquarius, as there is, if only in some of the videos, a clear differentiation between the conspiratorial milieu, Christian-influenced classical conspiracy, and the politically left-leaning, astrology-enthusiast occulture milieu.

¹⁹² Ibid.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This section discusses the limitations of the study and suggests areas that would benefit from further research. The topic of the Age of Aquarius and other conspiritual assemblages on TikTok would benefit from additional future research, particularly through utilising the app's algorithm as a data source. While the using the search engine function mirrors a portion of a user's experience on the platform, it doesn't encapsulate the entirety of a user's organic experience of using TikTok and the influence of the algorithm. Although this study has detailed the assemblages of conspirituality on TikTok, more research should be done to organically reflect users' experiences and to examine the extent to which people interested in the astrological age of Aquarius or other areas of occulture could be shown content that aligns with the far-right conspiracy milieu by the algorithm. This would further illustrate how TikTok acts as a cultural entry point for conspirituality and far-right conspiracy groups, such as QAnon.

Additionally, a mixed-methods approach which includes a quantitative analysis of user engagement data, and a comparative study that expands the analysis to other popular social media platforms such as Instagram, Telegram and YouTube could also provide an illuminating comparison of how the Age of Aquarius is represented across the web. Furthermore, a larger sample size could also provide more detailed insights into how conspirituality are promulgated, understood, mediatized and contextualised on social media. As suggested by Griera et al, exploring the 'traces' of conspirituality and popular culture on social media can

deepen understanding of the complex convergence between social media, New Religious Movements and conspiracy theories.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Griera et al, 'Conspirituality in COVID-19 Times', p. 217.

Conclusions

This study aimed to examine contemporary beliefs about the Age of Aquarius on TikTok; the historical and cultural contexts that are represented amongst those beliefs, and the extent to which user-generated content about the Age of Aquarius the platform is associated with conspirituality, conspiracy theories, and far-right beliefs. The research aimed to fill a gap in the existing literature by analysing this subsection of the digital landscape and exploring how the Age of Aquarius is conceptualised, what it overlaps with, and what it is informed by in terms of religion, culture, and historical precedence. As stated by Griera et al, conspirituality is not easily identifiable nor linear, and therefore it is useful to study the ‘clues, traces and signs’ that provide a deeper understanding of how the conspiritual milieu spreads, and the specific beliefs of the milieu.¹⁹⁴

The study finds that the Age of Aquarius on TikTok is grounded in historical and cultural precedence. Firstly, the Age of Aquarius is understood, first and foremost, as an astrological phenomenon. Contentions about the astrological Age of Aquarius were in general accurate, demonstrating the enthusiasm and commitment of the astrological community on TikTok. The user-generated content also illustrated a reflection of wider debates within the astrological and New Age communities, as the videos provided a range of dates, celestial and planetary movements by which users

¹⁹⁴ Mar Griera, Jordi Morales i Gras, Anna Clot-Garrell, Rafael Cazarín, ‘Conspirituality in COVID-19 Times: A Mixed-method Study of Anti-vaccine Movements in Spain’, *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, Volume 35, Issue 2, (2022). 192-217 (p. 193). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1558/jasr.22390>.

believed the Age of Aquarius would begin, as such calculations were not limited to the precession of the equinoxes.

The Age of Aquarius was also overwhelmingly considered to be a time of societal change and transformation. Most videos suggested that the Age of Aquarius would involve significant social changes. The general idea was that these changes would occur through an increase of information, technological advancements, and internal shifts in the individual that would cause a resultant shift in hegemonic norms, values, behaviours and beliefs. As a result, the Earth would experience a new paradigm, whereby people are more spiritually enlightened, community-minded, and humanitarian, in line with typically ‘Aquarian’ traits. This perspective was demonstrated to be influenced by the Theosophical movement, psychological astrology, and the Western esoteric tradition. Social change was prominent theme, as users were more focused on the idea of social change than the precise astrological calculations of the Age of Aquarius comparatively. As such, the findings are in line with Nicholas Campion’s contentions that the meaning of the Age of Aquarius is perhaps more significant than the astrological details themselves.¹⁹⁵

The research also revealed that contemporary beliefs and interpretations of the Age of Aquarius share characteristics with the countercultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This is evident in how social media users on TikTok referenced the Age of Aquarius to express their frustrations with the current state of the world, such as regarding the economy and celebrity culture. Users also expressed hope, however,

¹⁹⁵ Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West*, p.21.

and provided ideas and predictions about what may occur in the forthcoming New Age. These contemporary re-imaginings challenged hegemonic structures in society and re-imagined new ways forward for society at large. This was a significant similarity between the contemporary Age of Aquarius on TikTok and the earlier countercultural generation, as both expressed their dissatisfaction with hegemonic society through imagining new ways forward that challenge traditional and dominant norms and values.

The belief that the Age of Aquarius would involve humanity experiencing a collective spiritual awakening was another key theme in the data. Distinctions could be made between ideas of a shift in consciousness that would produce social changes, and pseudo-Christian and millenarian-influenced narratives which promulgated ideas of an apocalyptic Age of Aquarius. The latter discussed the new era coming as a result of a final battle between good and evil. The New Age awakening typically inferred that a sense of personal and collective responsibility would be required to eventuate the coming Age of Aquarius. In contrast, narratives with a dualistic, ‘good versus evil’ perspective suggested that humanity would be saved by divine forces, resulting in the purging of all those deemed unworthy. The dualistic awakening bears a strong resemblance to messaging disseminated by the pseudo-Christian conspiracy group, QAnon, with similar inferences to Christian liberation theology and the Book of Revelation.¹⁹⁶ As such, the Age of Aquarius was indeed found to have overlap with far-right extremist beliefs on TikTok.

¹⁹⁶ Miotto and Droogan, ‘Stand in the Wiles of the Devil’, p. 13.

Furthermore, conspиритuality was present in videos about the Age of Aquarius. Ward and Voas contend that the idea of a ‘paradigm shift’ of humanity is one of the core elements of conspиритuality.¹⁹⁷ This concept was discussed across the majority of the videos, including those that referenced social change and spiritual evolution, as well as featuring in both the New Age communities and the pseudo-Christian influenced videos. The second core conviction of conspиритuality is the belief in ‘elite control’ conspiracies, which too, were present amongst the data. Most significantly, overt references to the New World Order conspiracy were directly associated with the Age of Aquarius, however, inference was also made to the ‘Apollo moon landing hoax’. The same videos typically displayed a distrust towards institutions and organisations, which was also described by Ward and Voas as being associated with conspиритuality. Questions were raised from the thematic analysis about who and what could be trusted as legitimate authorities and sources of information. Consequently, the data supports Asprem and Dyrendal’s contention that conspиритuality is not a new phenomenon, as its precedence exists in the historical and cultural contexts of the New Age movement, conspiracy theories, and the cultic milieu.¹⁹⁸

The thematic analysis showed that even videos that did not directly reference elite control could be considered conspиритual in nature, making use of Parmigiani’s concept of ‘conspiracy-believing’¹⁹⁹ to interpret the affective and sensory dimensions to some of the videos about the Age of Aquarius. This analysis includes Cotter et al’s

¹⁹⁷ Ward and Voas, ‘The Emergence of Conspиритuality’, p. ?

¹⁹⁸ Asprem and Dryendal, ‘Conspиритuality Reconsidered’, p. 367.

¹⁹⁹ Parmigiani, ‘Magic and Politics’, p. 518.

concept of ‘algorithmically-mediated divine intervention’ occurring through channeled messages and a focus on trusting intuition as a source of truth.²⁰⁰ Additionally, the videos in the data set did not mention the COVID-19 pandemic directly, yet notable similarities were evident between how the pandemic was interpreted as a time of spiritual awakening by the holistic spiritual milieu,²⁰¹ and beliefs about the Age of Aquarius on TikTok.

In conclusion, the findings align with a significant proportion of the existing literature review, providing insight into an element of popular occulture and the conspiritual milieu: The Age of Aquarius. The research contributes to the study of New Religious Movements and alternative spiritualities, and further addresses conspirituality on TikTok, finding that the platform shapes discussions, beliefs and communities, and is a fruitful area of study for deeper understanding of these areas. Lastly, the study also provided an insight into how astrology can be used as a vehicle by which anxieties, hopes and fears can be expressed.

²⁰⁰ Cotter et al, 'In FYP We Trust: The Divine Force of Algorithmic Conspirituality', p. 3.

²⁰¹ Grier et al, 'Conspirituality in COVID-19 times', p. 104.

Bibliography/References

- Abidin, Crystal, 'Mapping Internet Celebrity on TikTok: Exploring Attention Economies and Visibility Labours', *Cultural Science Journal*, Volume 12, Issue 1 (2021), 77–103.
- Abraham-Hicks Publications, 'About Abraham-Hicks', 1997-2024, Available at: <https://www.abraham-hicks.com/about/>. [Accessed 8 October 2024].
- Al-Rawi, Ahmed, Maliha Siddiqi, Xiaosu Li, Nimisha Vandan, and Karen Grepin, 'A Thematic Analysis of Instagram's Gendered Memes on COVID-19', *Journal of Visual Communication in Medicine*, Volume 44, Issue 4 (2021), 137-150. DOI: 10.1080/17453054.2021.1941808.
- Anderson, Morgan, and Gabriel Keehn, "'OK Boomer': Internet Memes as Consciousness Building", *The Radical Teacher*, Issue 118, (2020), 56–63. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48694804>. [Accessed 10 October 2024].
- Asprem, Egil, 'Theosophy', in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion*, eds. Adam Possamai & Anthony Blasi, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2020).
- Asprem, Egil and Asbjørn Dyrendal, 'Conspirituality Reconsidered: How Surprising and How New is the Confluence of Spirituality and Conspiracy Theory?', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Volume 30, Issue 3. (2015), 367-382.
- Backlinko, 'TikTok User Statistics 2024', (1 July 2024) <https://backlinko.com/tiktok-users> [accessed 11 August 2024].
- Bailey, Alice, *The Destiny of the Nations*, (New York: Lucis Trust, 1977).
- Barkun, Michael, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. 1st ed., (California: University of California Press, 2003).
- Barkun, Michael, 'Conspiracy Theories as Stigmatized Knowledge', *Diogenes*, Volume 62, Issues 3–4, (2015), 114–20.
- Bergman, Jay, 'The Marxist Inheritance of the French Revolution', in *The French Revolutionary Tradition in Russian and Soviet Politics, Political Thought, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
- Bhandari, Aparajita and Sara Bimo, 'Why's Everyone on TikTok Now? The Algorithmized Self and the Future of Self-Making on social media', *Social Media + Society*, Volume 8, Issue 1, (January 2022) <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221086241>.
- Birkland, Thomas A., 'Natural Disasters as Focusing Events: Policy Communities and Political Response', *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, Volume 18, Issue 1 (1998) 53-74. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/27311924/Natural_Disasters_as_Focusing_Events_Policy_Communities_and_Political_Response. [Accessed 9 October 2024].

- Blavatsky, Helena P., 'The Esoteric Character of the Gospels: Part 1,' in *Lucifer*, eds. H. P. Blavatsky and Mabel Collins, Volume 1, note 5 (London: Kelly & Co., 1887).
- Blavatsky, Helena P., *The Key to Theosophy* (New York: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1896).
- Blavatsky, Helena P., *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy*, Volume 2, (Theosophical University Press Online Edition, 1888a).
- Bonacci, Santos, 'Astrology and Zodiac Series', [YouTube], 12 May 2024.
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhY5GxJzgEmkH5X89wVmQF9Aut5bqYLXr>. [Accessed 23 September 2024].
- Bonacci, Santos, 'Santos.bonacci', [Instagram], (2024).
<https://www.instagram.com/santos.bonacci>. [Accessed 26 August 2024].
- Bousalis, Rina R. 'The Counterculture Generation: Idolized, Appropriated, and Misunderstood', *The Councilor: A Journal of the Social Studies*, Volume 82, Issue 2, Article 3, (2021), 1-26. Available at:
https://thekeep.eiu.edu/the_councilor/vol82/iss2/3 [Accessed 15 August 2024].
- Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis : A Practical Guide* (London: SAGE Publications, 2022).
- Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clarke, 'Thematic analysis', *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Volume 12, Issue 3, (2016), 297–298. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613>.
- Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clarke, 'Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis', *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, Volume 11, Issue 4, (2019), 589-597. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Volume 3, Issue 2, (2006), 77–101. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. 'Extrasensory perception', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (25 May 2024). Available at:
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/extrasensory-perception>. [Accessed 3 September 2024].
- Buck, Stephanie, 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Jung, Astrology, and the Psychology of the Unconscious', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 63.2 (2018), 207–27. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.12394>.
- Business of Apps, 'TikTok Statistics', (8 July 2024).
<https://www.businessofapps.com/data/tik-tok-statistics/#:~:text=It%20passed%20one%20billion%20users,data%20and%20statistics%20on%20TikTok>. [Accessed 14 August 2024].

- Burns, William E., ed., *Astrology through History : Interpreting the Stars from Ancient Mesopotamia to the Present* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2018)
- Campbell, Colin, 'The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization', in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira, 2002).
- Campion, Nicholas, *Astrology and Cosmology in the Worlds Religions*, (New York: NYU Press, 2012).
- Campion, Nicholas, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology, and the New Age Movement* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
- Campion, Nicholas, *Prophecy, cosmology and the New Age movement: the extent and nature of contemporary belief in astrology*, PhD thesis, Bath Spa University, (2004)
DOI:[10.17870/bathspa.00001453](https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.00001453).
- Campion, Nicholas, *The New Age in the Modern West : Counterculture, Utopia and Prophecy from the Late Eighteenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).
- Campion, Nicholas, 'The Shock of the New: The Origin of the Age of Aquarius and the 2012 Phenomenon', *Culture and Cosmos*, Volume 15, Issue 1, (Spring/Summer 2011), 17-27. DOI:[10.46472/CC.0115.0205](https://doi.org/10.46472/CC.0115.0205).
- Carrabine, Eamonn, 'The guillotine: Shadow, spectacle and the terror', *Crime, Media, Culture*, Volume 20, Issue 4, (2024), 349-369. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17416590231218744>.
- Clark, Meredith, 'Influencer Haley Kalil apologises for 'let them eat cake' Met Gala video', *The Independent*, 14 May 2024. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/haley-kalil-met-gala-video-apology-b2545044.html>. [Accessed 12 September 2024].
- Clynes, Frances *An Examination of the Impact of the Internet on Modern Western Astrology*, PhD Dissertation, University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, (September 2015).
- Conner, Christopher T., 'QAnon, Authoritarianism, and Conspiracy Within American Alternative Spiritual Spaces', *Frontiers in Sociology*, (2023), Volume 8, Issue 1136333. 1-15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1136333>.
- Cotter, Kelley, Julia R. DeCook, Shaheen Kanthawala, and Kali Foyle, 'In FYP We Trust: The Divine Force of Algorithmic Conspiratorship', *International Journal of Communication*, Volume 16, Issue 1 (2022), 2911–2934. Available at: <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/19289>. [Accessed 14 August 2024].
- Crossley, James and Alastair Lockhart (eds.), 'Apocalypticism', in *Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements*, (Milton Keynes: CenSAMM, 15 January

- 2021). Available at: <https://www.cdamm.org/articles/apocalypticism>. [Accessed 13 September 2024].
- Dawson, Lorne L. and Douglas E. Cowan, *Religion online: finding faith on the Internet*. (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- Davis, Heather A., Meredith R. Kells, Chloe Roske, Sam Holzman, Jennifer E. Wildes, ‘A reflexive thematic analysis of #WhatIEatInADay on TikTok’, *Eating Behaviors*, Volume 50, Issue 1, (2023), 101759. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2023.101759>.
- Diaz Ruiz, Carlos and Tomas Nilsson, 'Disinformation and Echo Chambers: How Disinformation Circulates on Social Media Through Identity-Driven Controversies', *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, Volume 42, Issue 1 (2023), 18-35. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/07439156221103852>
- Dolores Benítez-Márquez, María, Eva María Sánchez-Teba, Guillermo Bermúdez-González, Núñez- Emma Sofía Núñez-Rydman, ‘Generation Z Within the Workforce and in the Workplace: A Bibliometric Analysis.’ *Frontiers in Psychology*, Volume 1, Issue 12 (2022) DOI: [10.3389/fpsyg.2021.736820](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.736820)
- Duncan, Russell, ‘The Summer of Love and Protest: Transatlantic Counterculture in the 1960s.’ in *The Transatlantic Sixties: Europe and the United States in the Counterculture Decade*, eds. Grzegorz Kosc et al., (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2013).
- Etherington, Kim, *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher : Using Our Selves in Research* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004).
- Fabbro, Franco, Damiano Cantone, Susanna Feruglio, Cristiano Crescentini, ‘Origin and evolution of human consciousness’, *Progress in Brain Research*, Volume 250, Issue 1, (2019), 317-343. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.pbr.2019.03.031>.
- Flaxman, Seth, Sharad Goel and Justin M. Rao, 'Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume 80, Special Issue: Party Polarization (2016), 298–320. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44014621>. [Accessed 12 August 2024].
- Flores, Myles, ‘The New World Order: The Historical Origins of a Dangerous Modern Conspiracy Theory’, *Middlebury Centre of Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism*, 30 May 2022. Available at: <https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/academics/centers-initiatives/ctec/ctec-publications/new-world-order-historical-origins-dangerous>. [Accessed 7th October 2024].
- Foster, Molly, Hannah Frith and Mary John, ‘‘I'm still su!C!Dal when you're done with the paperwork’’: An inductive framework thematic analysis of #camhs on TikTok’, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Volume 65, Issue 10, (2024) 1258-1269. DOI: [10.1111/jcpp.14002](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.14002).

- franzke, aline shakti, Bechmann, Anja, Zimmer, Michael, Ess, Charles, 'Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0' *The Association of Internet Researchers*, (2020), 1-83. Available at: <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>. [Accessed 18 August 2024].
- Giglietto, Fabio, Luca Rossi and Davide Bennato, 'The Open Laboratory: Limits and Possibilities of Using Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as a Research Data Source', in *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, Volume 30, Issues 3-4, (2021), 145-159. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15228835.2012.743797>.
- Goldfine, Andrew M., Nicholas D. Schiff, 'Consciousness: its neurobiology and the major classes of impairment', *Neurologic Clinics*, Volume 29, Issue 4, (2011), 723-37. DOI: [10.1016/j.ncl.2011.08.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ncl.2011.08.001).
- Greene, Liz, 'Jung's studies in astrology : prophecy, magic, and the qualities of time', *Quest*, Vol 106, Issue 2, (2018), 19-25. Available at: <https://www.theosophical.org/publications/quest-magazine/c-g-jung-s-vision-of-the-aquarian-age#:~:text=By%20Liz%20Greene,and%20is%20still%20popular%20today>. [Accessed 13 April 2024]
- Greene, Liz, 'Long-term Perspective Horoscope 2003 -2008 for Bill Gates' in *The Meaning of the Time: Yearly Horoscope Analysis*, (Astrodienst, 2 February 2003), Available at: <https://alabe.com/chartservice/lizyha.pdf>. [Accessed 17 August 2024].
- Grasse, Ray, 'The Dawn of Aquarius: The Turning of the Great Ages.', *Quest*, Volume 98, Issue 1. (Winter 2010), 10-13. Available at: <https://www.theosophical.org/publications/quest-magazine/the-dawn-of-aquarius-the-turning-of-the-great-ages> [Accessed 10 February 2024].
- Griera, Mar, Jordi Morales i Gras, Anna Clot-Garrell, Rafael Cazarín, 'Conspiratoriality in COVID-19 Times: A Mixed-method Study of Anti-vaccine Movements in Spain', *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, Volume 35, Issue 2, (2022). 192-217. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1558/jasr.22390>.
- Hammersley, Martyn, 'Sampling and thematic analysis: a response to Fugard and Potts', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Volume 18, Issue 6, (2015), 687–688. DOI: [10.1080/13645579.2015.1005456](https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2015.1005456).
- Hanegraaff, Wouter J. *New Age religion and Western culture: esotericism in the mirror of secular thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).
- Hemsley, Jeff, 'Virality: Developing a rigorous and useful definition of an information diffusion process', *Communication and Social Networks*, (Spring 2011), 1-16. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3129424>. [Accessed 1 September 2024].
- Herrick, Shannon S. C., Laura Hallward and Lindsay R. Duncan, 'This is just how I cope: An inductive thematic analysis of eating disorder recovery content created and shared on TikTok using #EDRecovery', *The International Journal of Eating*

- Disorders*, Volume 54, Issue 4, (2021), 516-526. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23463>.
- Huang, Kalley, 'For Gen Z, TikTok Is the New Search Engine', *The New York Times*, 16 September 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/16/technology/gen-z-tiktok-search-engine.html>. [Accessed 14 August 2024].
- Iyer, Raghavan, 'The Aquarian Elixir', in *Hermes*, (London: Theosophy Trust Books, September 1982) Available at: <https://www.theosophytrust.org/1134-the-aquarian-elixir>. [Accessed 17 February 2024].
- Jiang, Qian and Liangying Ma, 'Swiping more, thinking less: Using TikTok hinders analytic thinking', *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, Volume 1, Issue 3, (2024), 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2024-3-1>.
- Judge, William Q., *The Ocean of Theosophy*, (Pasadena, California: Theosophical University Press, 2011).
- Jung, Carl G., *Letters of C. G. Jung: Volume I, 1906-1950*, eds Adler, G., trans. Hull, R.F.C., (London & New York, Routledge, 1973).
- Jung, Carl G. and Roderick Main, 'Synchronicity', in *Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal*, Volume 1, (Princeton University Press, 1997).
- Jung, Carl G., eds. Gerhard Adler, Michael Fordham, Richard Francis Carrington Hull, and Herbert Read, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Volume 9, Pt. 2, Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).
- Kanthawala, Shaheen, Kelley Cotter, Amy Ritchart, Ankolika De, Haley McAtee, Connie Yun, and Julia DeCook, 'Algorithmic Conspiratorship: Explicating Its Emergence, Dimensions, and Persuasibility', *New Media & Society*, (2023), 1-26. DOI: [10.1177/14614448231217425](https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231217425).
- Kaplan, Jeffrey and Heléne Lööw, eds. *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*. (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira, 2002).
- Karimi, Kiana and Richard L. Fox, 'Scrolling, Simping and Mobilizing: TikTok's Influence Over Generation Z's Political Behavior', *The Journal of Media and Society*, Volume 12, Issue 1 (2023), 181-208. Available at: <https://thejsms.org/index.php/JSMS/article/view/1251>. [Accessed 5 August 2024].
- Keeter, Bill, 'The 'Great' Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn', *National Aeronautics and Space Administration*, 15th December 2020, Available at: <https://www.nasa.gov/solar-system/the-great-conjunction-of-jupiter-and-saturn/>. [Accessed 7 October 2024].
- Kemp, Daren, *New Age: A Guide*. (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2004).
- King, Clare, M., and Darragh McCashin, 'Commenting and Connecting: A Thematic Analysis of Responses to YouTube Vlogs About Borderline Personality Disorder',

- Internet Interventions*, Volume 28, Issue 1, (2022) 2-10.
DOI: [10.1016/j.invent.2022.100540](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2022.100540).
- Kline, Jim, 'Eat My Flesh, Drink My Blood: Archetypal Elements in the QAnon Conspiracy', *Jung Journal*, Volume 15, Issue 3, (2021), 36–52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2021.1942754>.
- Krijnen, Tonny, Cosimo Marco Scarcelli, Paul G. Nixon, Michelle D. Ravenscroft, eds., *Identities and Intimacies on Social Media : Transnational Perspectives* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022).
- Larkin, Ralph W., 'Counterculture: 1960s and Beyond', In: James D. Wright, *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edition, Vol 5. (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015).
- Laucuka, Aleksandra, 'Communicative Functions of Hashtags', *Economics and Culture*, Volume 15, Issue 1, (2018), 56-62. DOI: [10.2478/jec-2018-0006](https://doi.org/10.2478/jec-2018-0006).
- Lawless, Brandi and Yea-Wen Chen, 'Developing a Method of Critical Thematic Analysis for Qualitative Communication Inquiry'. *Howard Journal of Communications*, Volume 30, Issue 1, (2018), 92–106. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2018.1439423>.
- Leo, Alan, *Astrology for All* (London: Forgotten Books, 2013 [1899]).
- Leo, Alan, *Practical Astrology : Being a Simple Method of Instruction in the Science of Astrology*, 3rd. ed. (London: Modern Astrology Office, 1924).
- Little, Olivia and Abbie Richards, 'TikTok's Algorithm Leads Users from Transphobic Videos to Far-Right Rabbit Holes', *Media Matters*, (5 October 2021). <https://www.mediamatters.org/tiktok/tiktoks-algorithm-leads-users-transphobic-videos-far-right-rabbit-holes>. [Accessed 11 October 2023].
- Logrieco, Guiseppe, Maria Rosaria Marchili, Marco Roversi, and Alberto Villani, 'The Paradox of Tik Tok Anti-Pro-Anorexia Videos: How Social Media Can Promote Non-Suicidal Self-Injury and Anorexia', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Volume 18, Issue 3 (2021), 1041-1044. DOI: [10.3390/ijerph18031041](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18031041).
- Løøv, Margrethe , *The New Age Movement, Elements in New Religious Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).
- Lowe, Helen, 'Let's talk about class – exploring the everyday emotions and experiences of classism in Irish education: a thematic analysis of Irish Twitter conversations on class and education between 2018 and 2022', *Irish Educational Studies*, (2023), Volume 42, Issue 4, 733-748. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2023.2261009>.
- Magliocco, Sabina, 'Beyond Belief: Context, Rationality and Participatory Consciousness', *Western Folklore*, Volume 71, Issue 1, (2012), 5–24.

- Marwick, Alice E., 'Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy', *Public Culture*, Volume 27, Issue 1, (2015), 137-160. DOI 10.1215/08992363-2798379.
- Marx, Karl, (1818-1883), *The Communist Manifesto*, (London; Chicago, Illinois: Pluto Press, 1996).
- Mayer, Jean-François, 'Millennialism: New Religious Movements and the Quest for a New Age', in J. R. Lewis and I. Tøllefsen (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements: Volume II*, 2nd edn., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- Merrill, Barbara and Linden West, *Using Biographical Methods in Social Research*, (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009).
- Michelsen, Neil F., *The American Ephemera for the 21st Century: 2000 to 2025 at Noon*, Expanded Second Edition, Revisions by Risque Pottenger (San Diego, CA: ACS Publications, 1996).
- Miller, Chris, 'How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok: Intersections of Digital, Consumer, and Material Culture(s) on #WitchTok', *Religions*, Volume 13, Issue 118, (2022), 1-22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/re113020118>.
- Miltsov, Alex, 'Researching TikTok: themes, methods, and future directions'. In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022).
- Miotto, Nicolò and Julian Droogan, '“Stand Against the Wiles of the Devil”: Interpreting QAnon as a Pseudo-Christian Extremist Movement'. *Critical Sociology*, Volume 0, Issue 0, (January 30 2024). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205241228744>.
- Moskalenko, Sophia, Tomislav Pavlović and Brett Burton, 'QAnon Beliefs, Political Radicalization and Support for January 6th Insurrection: A Gendered Perspective.' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 36, Issue 7 (2023) 962-981. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2023.2236230>.
- National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH), 'Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities', 5th Edition, (2023). Available at: <https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/social-sciences-and-humanities/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-the-social-sciences-and-the-humanities/>. [Accessed on 25 August 2024].
- Naeem, Muhammad, Wilson Ozuem, Kerry Howell and Silvia Ranfagni, 'A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Volume 22, Issue 1, (2023) 1-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>.
- Nguyen, C. Thi, 'Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles', *Episteme*, Volume 17, Issue 2 (2020), 141-161. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.32>.

- Nowell, Lorelli S., Jill M. Norris and Nancy J. Moules, 'Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Volume 16, Issue 1, 1-13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>.
- Parmigiani, Giovanna, 'Magic and Politics: Conspirituality and COVID-19.' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion. American Academy of Religion*, Volume 89, Issue 2, (2021), 506-529. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfab053>.
- Partridge, Christopher, 'Alternative Spiritualities, Occulture and the Re-enchantment of the West', *Bible Society*, (Summer 2005), 1-3. Available at: https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/uploads/content/bible_in_transmission/files/2005_summer/BiT_Summer_2005_Partridge.pdf. [Accessed 10 October 2024].
- Partridge, Christopher, 'Occulture and Everyday Enchantment', in James R. Lewis, and Inga Tøllefsen (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements: Volume II*, 2nd edn, (Oxford Handbooks: Oxford Academic, 2016).
- Partridge, Christopher, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture*, 1st volume, (London: T&T Clark, 2005).
- Paul, Kari and Johana Bhuiyan, 'Key takeaways from TikTok hearing in Congress – and the uncertain road ahead', *The Guardian*, (23 March 2023). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/mar/23/key-takeaways-tiktok-hearing-congress-shou-zi-chew>. [Accessed 17 October 2023].
- Perlmutter, David D. and Nicole Smith Dahmen, '(In)visible evidence: pictorially enhanced disbelief in the Apollo moon landings', *Visual Communication*, Volume 7, Issue 2, (2008), 229-251. DOI: 10.1177/1470357208088760.
- Peters, Michael A., 'New age spiritualism, mysticism, and far-right conspiracy'. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Volume 55, Issue 14 (2022), 1608–1616. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2022.2061948>.
- Peters, Ted, 'Astrotheology', in *The Routledge Companion to Modern Christian Thought*, 1st eds., (New York: Routledge, 2013).
- Pew Research Centre, 'New Age Beliefs Common Among Both Religious and Nonreligious Americans', 1st October 2018 <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/10/01/new-age-beliefs-common-among-both-religious-and-nonreligious-americans/#:~:text=Most%20American%20adults%20self%2Didentify,objects%20like%20mountains%20or%20trees>. [Accessed 2 July 2024].
- Prensky, Marc, 'Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1', *On the Horizon*, Volume. 9, Issue 5, (2001) 1-6. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816>.
- Rado, James, Gerome Ragni, Galt MacDermot, 'Aquarius', [song].1968, <https://genius.com/The-5th-dimension-aquarius-let-the-sunshine-in-lyrics>. [Accessed 15 August 2024].

- Robinson, Olga, Shayan Sardarizadeh, Jack Goodman, Christopher Giles and Hugo Williams, 'What is the Great Reset - and how did it get hijacked by conspiracy theories?', *BBC News*, 24 June 2021. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-57532368>. [Accessed 7 October 2024].
- Roszak, Theodore, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1969).
- Rudhyar, Dane, *Astrological Timing: The Transition to the New Age* (San Francisco, New York and London: Harper and Row, 1969).
- Sherry, Emma, 'The Vulnerable Researcher: Facing the Challenges of Sensitive Research', *Qualitative Research Journal*, Volume 13, Issue 3, (2013), 278–288. DOI: [10.1108/QRJ-10-2012-0007](https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-10-2012-0007).
- Shpolberg, Masha, and Elizabeth Mears, 'New Age, New Media: TikTok as Ritual Practice', *Media Fields Journal*, 16 (2021), 1-17. Available at: <http://mediafieldsjournal.org/new-age-new-media/2021/4/18/new-age-new-media-tiktok-as-ritual-practice.html>. [Accessed 5 August 2024].
- Šolc, Vladislav, 'Dark Religion and Conspiracy Theories: An Analytical Viewpoint.' *Jung Journal*, Volume 13, Issue 4, (2019), 14–34. DOI: [10.1080/19342039.2019.1676142](https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2019.1676142).
- Sun, Tianze, Carmen C. W. Lim, Jack Chung, Brandon Cheng, Lily Davidson, Calvert Tisdale, Janni Leung, Coral E. Gartner, Jason Connor, Wayne D. Hall, Gary C. K. Chan, 'Vaping on TikTok: a systematic thematic analysis'. *Tob Control*, Volume 32, Issue 2, (2023) 251-254. DOI: [10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2021-056619](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2021-056619).
- Sweney, Mark, 'The Rise of TikTok: Why Facebook is worried about the booming social app', *The Guardian*, 9th April 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/apr/09/rise-of-tiktok-why-facebook-is-worried-booming-social-app>. [Accessed 26th August 2024].
- Thorley, John, 'When was Jesus Born?', *Greece and Rome*, Volume 28, Issue 1, (1981), 81-89. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383500033520>.
- Tiffany, Kaitlyn, 'Why Kids Online are Chasing 'Clout'', *The Atlantic*, 23 December 2019, Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/12/clout-definition-meme-influencers-social-capital-youtube/603895/>. [Accessed 30 September 2024].
- TikTok, 'Terms of Service', August 2023. Available at: <https://www.tiktok.com/legal/page/eea/terms-of-service/en>. [Accessed 17 August 2024].
- Video 8, 'We're in the Age of Aquarius?', [TikTok], URL redacted for privacy. 11 February 2022. [Accessed 14 May 2024].
- Wallaroo Media, 'TikTok Statistics', 7 May 2024. Available at: <https://wallaroomedia.com/blog/social-media/tiktok-statistics/>. [Accessed 14 August 2024].

- Ward, Charlotte and Prof. David Voas, 'The Emergence of Conspirituality', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Volume 26, Issue 1, (2011), 103-121. DOI: 10.1080/13537903.2011.539846
- Ward, Katie J., Cyber-Ethnography and the Emergence of the Virtually New Community. *Journal of Information Technology*, Volume 14, Issue 1, (1999), 95-105. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/026839629901400108>.
- Whitsel, Brad, 'Ideological Mutation and Millennial Belief in the American Neo-Nazi Movement', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 24, Issue 2, (2001), 89-106, DOI: 10.1080/10576100117722.
- Wright, Jared M. and Stuart Wright, 'The Future of QAnon: Emergent Patterns of Social Movement Adaptation and Change', In: M.K. Miller, ed. *The Social Science of QAnon: A New Social and Political Phenomenon*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 291-307. DOI: DOI:10.1017/9781009052061.023.
- York, Michael, *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements*, (Maryland, US: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995).
- Zhao, Yang, 'TikTok and Researcher Positionality: Considering the Methodological and Ethical Implications of an Experimental Digital Ethnography', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Volume 23, Issue 1, (2024), 1-11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231221374>.