Validity Testing of the Conspiratorial Thinking and Anti-Expert Sentiment Scales during the
COVID-19 Pandemic Across 24 Languages from a Large-Scale Global Dataset

Hyemin Han ^{1*†} Angélique M. Blackburn ^{2†} Alma Jeftić ³ Thao Phuong Tran ⁴

Sabrina Stöckli ⁵ Jason Reifler ⁶ Sara Vestergren ⁷

^{1*}Educational Psychology Program, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL, USA.

²Department of Psychology and Communication, Texas A&M International University, Laredo,
TX, USA.

³Peace Research Institute, International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan.

⁴Department of Psychology, Colorado State University, CO, USA.

⁵Department of Consumer Behavior, University of Bern, Switzerland.

⁶Department of Politics, University of Exeter, United Kingdom.

⁷School of Psychology, Keele University, United Kingdom.

Author Note

Hyemin Han <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7181-2565>

Angélique M. Blackburn <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5378-3932>

Alma Jeftić <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9285-2061>

Thao Phuong Tran <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4038-8471>

Sabrina Stöckli <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8322-2906>

Jason Reifler <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1116-7346>

Sara Vestergren <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0514-6749>

Corresponding concerning this manuscript should be addressed to Hyemin Han,
University of Alabama, Box 870213, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, USA. Email: hyemin.han@ua.edu

†Authors equally contributed to this work.

Acknowledgements

We appreciate the COVIDiSTRESSII Global Survey Consortium members for their contribution to the scale design and data collection.

Word Count (main text): 4,204 words

Abstract

In this study, we tested the validity across two scales addressing conspiratorial thinking that may influence behaviors related to public health and the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the COVIDiSTRESSII Global Survey data from 12,261 participants, we validated the 4-item Conspiratorial Thinking Scale and 3-item Anti-Expert Sentiment Scale across 24 languages and dialects that were used by at least 100 participants per language. We employed confirmatory factor analysis, measurement invariance test, and measurement alignment for internal consistency testing. To test convergent validity of the two scales, we assessed correlations with trust in seven agents related to government, science, and public health. Although scalar invariance was not achieved when measurement invariance test was conducted initially, we found that both scales can be employed in further international studies with measurement alignment. Moreover, both conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiments were significantly and negatively correlated with trust in all agents. Findings from this study provide supporting evidence for the validity of both scales across 24 languages for future large-scale international research.

Keywords: Conspiratorial Thinking; Anti-expert Sentiments; Validation; International Survey; COVID-19

Introduction

Before and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, beliefs in conspiratorial theories and negative attitudes about experts have been on the rise. Conceptually, conspiratorial thinking is an increased likelihood to view the world in conspiratorial terms and attribute the causes of events to groups acting in secret for personal benefit against the common good [1,2]. Anti-expert sentiments, a phenomenon often studied alongside conspiratorial thinking, is a form of anti-elitist

and anti-intellectualism, which is marked by distrust of individuals who claim to be experts or have credentials about a topic [2,3]. The rise in conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiments in recent times may occur in part due to increases in use of conspiracy theories for political gain [3–5], the rise in confirmation bias in social media circles [6], inconsistencies in public health information [7], or the fact that conspiracy theories proliferate during societal crises and times of uncertainty [8]. Given the potential harm by conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiments, it is critical to have a rapid and effective global tool to assess both types of thinking in order to implement mitigation plans to improve science-driven public health and policy decisions.

Need for Cross-language Scale Validity for Rapid Data Collection During a Global Health Crisis

Conspiracy theories can influence social and political behaviours [1,3,9,10] and result in undesirable and even catastrophic social outcomes [3,7,11]. Of particular interest for an international health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic is that believing conspiracy theories was linked to vaccine hesitancy [6], reduced compliance with containment measures [7,12,13], and reduced behaviors linked to civic and social responsibility [14]. Specifically, doubters and deniers of COVID-19 risk tended to believe conspiracy theories related to the pandemic, expressed anti-elitist sentiments, and reported low compliance with measures to reduce the spread of the virus [12]. Low trust in institutions, including the scientific community, is also linked to vaccine hesitancy as well as compliance with preventive measures in general [15–17]. Finally, conspiracy theories and negative attitudes towards experts have other detrimental effects such as increasing uncertainty and discrimination against marginalized groups [9].

Overall, both conspiracy theories and negativity towards experts can have lasting impacts on the trajectory of a global (health) crisis. Therefore, a consistent method of measuring

conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiments across languages is needed, especially when considering political and public health events on a global scale. Reliable means to rapidly assess these beliefs across countries are necessary to implement mitigation strategies [3]. This is particularly critical, as interventions to reduce these beliefs with accompanying behaviors may be fairly straightforward and rapidly implemented [16].

There are an endless number of conspiracy theories that attract individuals across different demographics [e.g., 12,18], so a singular scale which measures specific conspiracy theory beliefs is difficult to generalize. Uscinski et al. [1] developed the Conspiratorial Thinking Scale (CTS) assessing individuals' general disposition towards believing conspiracy theories. Previous work showed that individuals with conspiratorial thinking are also more likely to report anti-expert beliefs, and vice versa [14,19]. As such, the COVIDiSTRESSII Consortium developed an Anti-Expert Sentiment Scale (AESS) [20] to gauge individuals' levels of distrust in expert consensus.

However, these scales have yet to be validated across different languages. This is critical because a general conspiratorial thinking scale in different languages provides a way to compare conspiracy theorizing across political contexts in a way that studying specific conspiracy theories could not. Likewise, the AESS was designed to be generalizable across countries and contexts. The CTS and AESS are the shortest of the available scales and, once validated across languages, provide scholars with a cost-effective and efficient way of measuring conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiment in multi-country studies.

Relationship between Conspiratorial Thinking and Anti-Expert Beliefs, and Trust as a Mean to Validate Scales

Robust associations have been reported between general conspiratorial thinking and trust in government, science, and public health institutions [2,13]. Moreover, trust in an institution, whether political or scientific, was tightly coupled with conspiratorial thinking specifically related to that institution [2,21,22]. For instance, a strong correlation has been observed between belief in conspiracy theories related to vaccines and reduced trust in science and institutions [6]. Likewise, trust in government mediated the inverse relationship between conspiratorial thinking and compliance with social distancing behaviors to reduce the spread of disease [13]. The relationship between trust and conspiratorial thinking is so robust that mere exposure to a conspiracy claim has been shown to negatively affect trust in government institutions, even of institutions that were not connected to the conspiracy theory [23].

The likelihood of believing a particular conspiracy theory appears to be driven to some degree by exposure to information related to the conspiracy (e.g., within one's social network), while also heavily driven by a combination of general conspiratorial thinking and trust [1], which in turn can affect how one perceives the information they are exposed to. Also, studies that included diverse psychological constructs and demographics documented denialism of expert information as the strongest predictor of believing in COVID-19 conspiracy theories as measured by the CTS and partisan and ideological motivations [14]. Partisanship appears to drive the direction of conspiratorial thinking in such a way that members of one political party are more inclined to believe conspiracy theories about another, and vice versa, even when the degree of general conspiratorial thinking did not differ between political parties [1]. In other words, the degree of trust in an institution is linked to conspiratorial thinking related to that institution, and

perhaps to other government institutions and services more broadly [23]. Hence, a negative association of conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert beliefs with trust could be expected.

This study

In this paper, we tested the validity of scales capturing conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiments that may influence behaviors related to public health during an epidemic or pandemic. In particular, we used two scales: the 4-item Conspiratorial Thinking Scale (CTS) adapted from Uscinski et al. [1] and a 3-item Anti-Expert Sentiment Scale (AESS) designed by the COVIDiSTRESSII Consortium [20] and tested their cross-language validity. While a number of conspiracy belief scales have been tested [24–27], we selected the CTS due to its face and content validity. Given that the CTS has been used in various previous studies examining conspiratorial thinking within the context of COVID-19 research, it is possible to assume that its validity has been supported by findings from such studies. However, so far, the scale has been primarily used within the US context, it might need to be tested in diverse settings. The COVIDiSTRESSII Consortium opted to adapt a short new scale that fully captured the concept of anti-expert sentiments using items created by a co-author, and which included three questions about belief in expert knowledge compared to confidence in one's own knowledge.

Assuring the measurement validity of the two scales in different languages is the first step to take before conducting international research on the topic. In addition, during the survey process, participants were presented with survey forms in different languages depending on their first language. Hence, we focused on the measurement validity across different languages in the present study. We tested the measurement invariance and alignment of these scales across 24 languages and dialects using the COVIDiSTRESSII Global Survey dataset. In addition, we also examined whether the measurement model can be applied to individual language groups. If the

measurement model is valid within each individual group, then researchers who intend to collect data from a single language group but do not intend to conduct international comparison would be able to use the measures written in their own language.

The measurement invariance test was conducted to examine whether the scales in different languages were designed to measure the same construct in the same measurement structure across different languages [28]. The presence of scalar invariance, which assumes the same factor loadings and intercepts across groups, is essential to assure the quality of cross-national research using the scales [29]. Measurement alignment was performed to address the potential issue of measurement non-invariance reported by the measurement invariance test as done in prior COVID-19-related international survey studies if needed [15]. The measurement alignment process was expected to address non-invariance so that researchers would be able to conduct cross-national comparison. Whether the measures written in a single language can be employed in studies focusing on one language group, not international comparison, was also examined during the invariance test process.

We then assessed the convergent validity of each scale by testing the expected correlations between both CTS and AEES scales and items measuring trust in institutions. We predicted negative correlations between both scales and different trust items. In particular, because trust in political entities is related to conspiratorial thinking [9], we predicted a negative correlation between the CTS and trust in one's national parliament or government. We also predicted negative correlations between the AEES and trust in the scientific community and the World Health Organization (WHO). Positive correlations between CTS and AEES and negative correlations of each scale with trust, as demonstrated in previous literature, would indicate that the scales are measuring the intended constructs.

Methods

Dataset

The COVIDiSTRESSII Global Survey is a pre-registered, large-scale international survey dataset collected online by a consortium of over 150 international researchers who used local recruitment methods and snowball sampling to recruit anonymous volunteers from 137 countries across the globe [20]. This survey was administered online from May 28th through August 29th of 2021. The data collection process was initially reviewed and approved by the Research, Enterprise and Engagement Ethical Approval Panel at the University of Salford (IRB number: 1632). The cleaned dataset included responses from 15,740 participants from 137 countries (see Blackburn et al. (2022) [20] for further details about the data collection and cleaning processes).

Because measurement invariance test and measurement alignment involve confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), following statistical guidelines, we analyzed responses in language groups where $n \geq 100$ [30,31]. After excluding language groups with $n < 100$, we retained 12,261 responses in 24 language groups for further analysis. Demographics of the participants are presented in Table S1.

Materials

All items were first prepared in English. Then, the English version was translated and back translated into various languages by researchers with native language skills.

Conspiratorial Thinking Scale

At the beginning of the survey section addressing conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiments, participants were presented with the following statement: “We will now present a few statements about the COVID-19 virus and about you. Please read the statements and indicate

to what extent you agree with them.” Then, conspiracy thinking was measured with four items. These four items were slightly modified from Uscinski et al. [1]. The four items were: ”much of our lives are being controlled by plots hatched in secret places,” “even though we live in a democracy, a few people will always run things anyway,” “the people who really ‘run’ the country are not known to the voter,” “big events like wars, recessions, and the outcomes of elections are controlled by small groups of people who are working in secret against the rest of us.” Responses were anchored to a 7-point Likert scale, “1: Strongly disagree-7: Strongly agree.”

Anti-Expert Sentiment Scale

Based on findings relating conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiments [1,14], the items for the AESS were formulated by experts in the COVIDiSTRESSII Consortium based on previous research, e.g., [1–3]. The items consist of: “I am more confident in my opinion than other people’s facts,” “most of the time I know just as much as experts,” “experts really don’t know that much.” Answers were anchored to a 7-point Likert scale, “1: Strongly disagree-7: Strongly agree.”

Trust

To test convergent validity of the two scales, we also collected data about trust in agents that are addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. Following methods from Lieberoth et al. [32], seven items were used to survey trust in these seven agents: parliament/government; police; civil service; health system; the WHO; government’s effort to handle Coronavirus; scientific research community. Responses were anchored to an 11-point scale, “No trust-10%.....90%-complete trust.”

Analysis plan

Measurement invariance test

To examine whether the two scales were valid across different languages, we performed a measurement invariance test with *lavaan* [33]. Before examining the cross-language validity of the scales, their internal consistency was tested in terms of Cronbach's α . Following the internal consistency testing the theoretical measurement model of each scale was tested with CFA while setting the language as a group. Because responses to the items were anchored to a 6-point Likert scale, we employed the diagonally weighted least squares estimator as suggested by DiStefano and Morgan (2009) [34].

Measurement invariance was examined in terms of whether model fit indicators, i.e., RMSEA, SRMR, CFI, changed significantly when different levels of model constraints were applied [31]. We tested four different levels of measurement invariance, configural, metric, scalar, and residual invariance [29]. First, the most lenient invariance, configural invariance only assumes the equal measurement structure across different groups. Presence of configural invariance suggests that the examined factor structure can be validly applied across different groups [37, 38]. Thus, if configural invariance is achieved, the examined scale can be used within one specific group with the tested measurement model provided cross-group comparison is not conducted. Second, metric invariance additionally assumes equal loadings. Third, achievement of scalar invariance requires equal intercepts. Fourth, the strictest invariance, residual invariance, assumes the presence of equal residuals. In general, scalar invariance is a minimum requirement for between-group comparison. In the case of metric invariance, we required $\Delta\text{RMSEA} < +.015$, $\Delta\text{SRMR} < +.030$, and $\Delta\text{CFI} > -.01$. For the other invariance levels, we examined whether $\Delta\text{RMSEA} < +.015$, $\Delta\text{SRMR} < +.015$, and $\Delta\text{CFI} > -.01$ [28].

203 ***Measurement alignment***

204 If at the least scalar invariance was not achieved, we performed measurement alignment
205 to address the existing measurement non-invariance between different languages. Measurement
206 alignment was performed with the *sirt* package [35]. It addresses non-invariance by adjusting
207 factor loadings, intercepts, and group means across different groups [29].

208 After conducting measurement alignment, we examined whether the alignment process
209 was successful with two R^2 indicators, $R^2_{loadings}$ and $R^2_{intercepts}$. Those R^2 values indicate the extent
210 of non-invariance in factor loadings and intercepts, respectively [36]. $R^2 = 1.00$ indicates that
211 100% of non-invariance was successfully absorbed through alignment while $R^2 = .00$ means that
212 none of non-invariance was resolved. In general, whether less than 25% of non-invariance
213 remains after alignment is regarded as a criterion to determine the success of alignment [36].
214 Thus, we examined whether both R^2 values were 75% higher in the present study. If both values
215 exceeded the cut-off, we assumed that non-invariance was successfully addressed, and thus,
216 scalar invariance was achieved through alignment.

217 In addition, we also examined whether there were any significant unique item parameters
218 in both the factor loadings and intercepts across language groups, which were deemed to
219 demonstrate significantly deviated loadings or intercepts relative to other groups. This process
220 was conducted by performing *invariance_alignment_constraint* implemented in *sirt*. The
221 function was developed to adjust factor loadings and intercepts across groups so that the aligned
222 model can absorb non-invariances through measurement alignment. Once more than 25% of item
223 parameters reported significant unique parameters, we deemed that there was significant
224 measurement non-invariance either in loadings or intercepts. The 25% cut-off value was
225 employed from Asparouhov and Muthén (2014) [36].

Once measurement alignment was completed, we calculated factor scores with adjusted factor loadings and intercepts for each language group. We used the factor scores for further analyses. Furthermore, we tested whether measurement alignment was capable of producing consistent outcomes. For repetitive cross-validation, we employed a simulation test, which was originally implemented in the format of Monte Carlo simulation for cross-validation of measurement alignment [39]. We generated a simulation dataset with $N = 100, 200$, and 500 per group. Then, we performed measurement alignment with the generated dataset and examined whether it produced outcomes consistent with CFA. The consistency was quantified in terms of Spearman correlation coefficient between factor mean scores estimated by alignment and CFA (see supplementary materials in Lieberoth et al. (2021) for methodological further details [32]). The same simulation process was performed 500 times with multiprocessing for cross-validation with improved computational power [40]. Following Muthén and Asparouhov (2018), which employed the same procedure, we assumed that a mean correlation value $\geq .95$ means good consistency and reliability of alignment [39]. For additional information, correlation between factor variances estimated by measurement alignment and CFA was also examined.

Correlation analysis

We examined the correlation between conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiments, and seven trust items to test the convergent validity of the two scales. In the case when measurement alignment was conducted, we employed factor scores that were calculated with adjusted factor loadings and intercepts for the correlation analysis to address the issue of measurement non-alignment [17]. For additional information, we also examined the correlation between factor scores estimated without alignment and trust variables as well.

Results

Measurement invariance test

When the internal consistency of each scale was examined in terms of Cronbach's α , both the CTS ($\alpha = .85$) and AESS ($\alpha = .74$) reported at least acceptable consistency. Findings from the measurement invariance test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Results from the measurement invariance test

	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	Δ RMSEA	Δ SRMR	Δ CFI
Conspiratorial Thinking						
Configural invariance	.072	.037	.993			
Metric invariance	.083	.021	.976	.011	-.015	-.016
Scalar invariance	.155	.118	.868	.072	.060	-.108
Anti-expert Sentiment						
Configural invariance	.000	.000	1.000			
Metric invariance	.064	.040	.978	.064	.040	-.022
Scalar invariance	.157	.101	.735	.093	.061	-.243

As shown, although configural invariance, which supports the equal measurement structure across languages, was achieved in both scales, metric invariance as well as scalar invariance were not achieved due to changes in RMSEA, SRMR, and CFI exceeding the cut-off values. Although the raw values of RMSEA ($\sim .08$), SRMR ($< .08$), and CFI ($\geq .90$) per se were seemingly acceptable, the changes exceeded the set thresholds (i.e., Δ RMSEA $< +.015$, Δ SRMR

< + .030, $\Delta CFI > -.01$). Hence, we conducted measurement alignment to address the measurement non-invariance issue.

Measurement alignment

We performed measurement alignment for the two scales to address non-invariance to enable future cross-national investigations using the scales. First, when measurement alignment was performed for the CTS, the resultant $R^2_{loadings} = .97$ and $R^2_{intercepts} = .99$. Second, in the case of the AEISS, $R^2_{loadings} = .85$ and $R^2_{intercepts} = .99$.

Furthermore, our inspection of item parameters also showed that no more than 25% of item parameters reported unique parameters. In the case of the CTS, 6.2% of factor loadings and 19.8% of intercepts reported significant unique item parameters (see Tables S2 and S3 for the groups reported significant item parameters in CTS factor loadings and intercepts, respectively). When the AEISS was examined, 6.9% of factor loadings and 19.4% of intercepts demonstrated significant unique item parameters (see Tables S4 and S5 for the groups reported significant item parameters in AEISS factor loadings and intercepts, respectively). In all cases, the proportions were below the cut-off value, 25%. These findings support the point that measurement non-invariance in both factor loadings and intercepts were successfully addressed.

The simulation test for consistency check reported that measurement alignment was capable of producing consistent and reliable outcomes across repetitions. In all cases, $N = 100$, 200, and 500, the mean correlation between the factor mean scores estimated by alignment and original CFA exceeded .95 (see Cor (mean) in Table 2). As proposed by Muthén and Asparouhov (2018), the good correlation coefficient resulting from the simulation test suggests that measurement alignment was able to produce consistent outcomes, in terms of factor loadings and intercepts, across trials.

Table 2

Repetitive simulation test results

	<i>N</i> = 100		<i>N</i> = 200		<i>N</i> = 500	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
CTS						
Cor (mean)	.96	.02	.97	.01	.97	.01
Cor (var)	.85	.05	.85	.04	.85	.03
AESS						
Cor (mean)	.95	.01	.96	.01	.96	.01
Cor (var)	.62	.15	.69	.12	.71	.11

Note. Cor (mean): correlation between factor mean scores estimated by measurement alignment and CFA across repetitions. Cor (var): correlation between factor variances estimated by measurement alignment and CFA across repetitions.

For additional information, factor loadings and intercepts per group before and after measurement alignment are reported in the supplementary materials. Factor loadings and intercepts in each group estimated by multigroup CFA are reported in Tables S6 and S7, respectively. Those resulting from measurement alignments are demonstrated in Tables S8 and S9, respectively.

Correlation analysis

The result of the correlation analysis is presented in Table 3. In Table 3, CTS and AESS factor scores were estimated with factor loadings and intercepts adjusted through measurement alignment. The same correlation pattern between variables was also found when factor scores estimated without alignment were examined (see Table S10).

300 Table 3

301 *Correlation between conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiment with trust*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Conspiratorial Thinking								
2. Anti-expert Sentiment	.45							
3. Trust in parliament/government	-.44	-.17						
4. Trust in police	-.40	-.18	.70					
5. Trust in civil service	-.42	-.20	.74	.76				
6. Trust in health system	-.39	-.26	.57	.66	.69			
7. Trust in the WHO	-.37	-.31	.43	.38	.48	.50		
8. Trust in governmental effort	-.40	-.17	.79	.61	.67	.57	.46	
9. Trust in scientific research community	-.40	-.41	.39	.39	.47	.55	.61	.46

302 *Note.* Conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiment scores were calculated based on results from
 303 measurement alignment. In all cases, $p < .001$ after applying false discovery rate correction.

304 **Discussion**

305 When measurement invariance was tested, although both scales achieved configural
 306 invariance, they were not able to demonstrate metric invariance. Given scalar invariance is
 307 required for multigroup comparison, the two scales might not be used for such comparison
 308 without additional processing. The results of measurement alignment suggest that the process
 309 was able to handle the measurement non-invariance issue in a satisfactory manner for both the
 310 CTS and AESS. The majority of the non-invariance existing in loadings ($\geq 85\%$) and intercepts

($\geq 99\%$) across different languages was absorbed by adjusting loadings and intercepts. Also, in all cases, less than 25% of item parameters demonstrated significant unique parameters. Hence, although scalar invariance was not achieved when measurement invariance test was conducted initially, we found that both scales can be employed in further international studies with measurement alignment. Furthermore, the repetitive simulation results suggest that measurement alignment was capable of producing consistent outcomes across trials in the present study.

One point to note is that configural invariance was achieved in both scales, so researchers who intend to collect data from one language group can use the scales if they do not compare scores across different language groups. Given presence of configural invariance means that the same factor structure is valid across different groups [37, 38], using the scales for further analyses within one group can be justifiable even without alignment. However, given scalar invariance was not achieved, if international comparison involving multiple languages becomes a goal, then measurement alignment may be required.

The result of the correlation analysis also provides additional evidence supporting the validity of the two scales. Both conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiments were significantly and negatively associated with trust in all agents. The finding was consistent with prior research regarding how conspiratorial thinking and objective vaccine knowledge within the context of COVID-19 (e.g., “the government is trying to cover up the link between vaccines and autism.”) were associated with trust in science and institutions [6]. The pattern of effects was also consistent with previous literature, with the strongest correlations within institutions and significant correlations across all trust agents [23]. That is, the negative correlation between the CTS and trust in one’s national parliament or government is consistent with previous literature indicating that trust in political entities is related to conspiratorial thinking [21]. Likewise,

negative correlations between the AESS and trust in experts—the scientific community and the WHO—is consistent with previous literature [19]. The similar correlation pattern was found when correlation analysis was performed with factor scored without alignment. This may provide additional evidence supporting that the two scales can be used within one language group even without conducting measurement alignment when international comparison is not performed.

Conclusions

To summarize, we validated the 4-item CTS and 3-item AESS across 24 languages and dialects using the COVIDiSTRESSII Global Survey dataset ($N = 12,261$). Although scalar invariance was not achieved when the measurement invariance test was conducted initially, we found that both scales can be employed in further international studies with measurement alignment. For future studies focusing on only one language group, not international comparison, researchers may use the two scales composed in one language for their analyses since configural invariance was achieved and the measurement model was validated across groups. Moreover, both conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiments were significantly correlated with each other and negatively correlated with trust in all agents. As both conspiratorial thinking and anti-expert sentiments have negative implications for political events and public health and safety, having a consistent measure across languages is critical for rapid data collection in the face of an international disaster or public health crisis. The findings from this study provide evidence supporting the validity of both scales across 24 languages for future large-scale international research, and can thus be used to measure these factors during a global health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Availability Statement

All data files and analysis scripts for this study can be found under this link:

https://github.com/hyemin-han/COVIDiSTRESS2_belief_scales.

Financial support

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts of Interest: None.

References

1. **Uscinski JE, Klofstad C, Atkinson MD.** What Drives Conspiratorial Beliefs? The Role of Informational Cues and Predispositions. *Political Research Quarterly* 2016; **69**: 57–71.
2. **Lewandowsky S, Gignac GE, Oberauer K.** The Role of Conspiracist Ideation and Worldviews in Predicting Rejection of Science. Denson T, ed. *PLoS ONE* 2013; **8**: e75637.
3. **Motta M.** The Dynamics and Political Implications of Anti-Intellectualism in the United States. *American Politics Research* 2018; **46**: 465–498.
4. **Duplaga M.** The Determinants of Conspiracy Beliefs Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic in a Nationally Representative Sample of Internet Users. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 2020; **17**: 7818.
5. **Gauchat G.** Politicization of Science in the Public Sphere: A Study of Public Trust in the United States, 1974 to 2010. *American Sociological Review* 2012; **77**: 167–187.
6. **Milošević Đorđević J, et al.** Links between conspiracy beliefs, vaccine knowledge, and trust: Anti-vaccine behavior of Serbian adults. *Social Science & Medicine* 2021; **277**Published online: May 2021.doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.113930.
7. **Romer D, Jamieson KH.** Conspiracy theories as barriers to controlling the spread of COVID-19 in the U.S. *Social Science & Medicine* 2020; **263**: 113356.
8. **van Prooijen J-W.** An Existential Threat Model of Conspiracy Theories. *European Psychologist* 2020; **25**: 16–25.

- 386 9. **Jolley D, Mari S, Douglas KM.** *Consequences of Conspiracy Theories*. In: Butter M,
387 Knight P, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*. 1st ed. Abingdon, Oxon ;
388 New York, NY : Routledge, 2020.: Routledge, 2020, p. 231–241.
- 389 10. **Jolley D, Douglas KM.** The social consequences of conspiracism: Exposure to
390 conspiracy theories decreases intentions to engage in politics and to reduce one's
391 carbon footprint. *British Journal of Psychology* 2014; **105**: 35–56.
- 392 11. **Moore A.** Conspiracies, Conspiracy Theories and Democracy. *Political Studies Review*
393 2018; **16**: 2–12.
- 394 12. **Rothmund T, et al.** *Scientific Trust, Risk Assessment, and Conspiracy Beliefs about*
395 *COVID-19 - Four Patterns of Consensus and Disagreement between Scientific Experts*
396 *and the German Public*. 2020.
- 397 13. **Bruder M, Kunert L.** The conspiracy hoax? Testing key hypotheses about the
398 correlates of generic beliefs in conspiracy theories during the COVID -19 pandemic.
399 *International Journal of Psychology* 2022; **57**: 43–48.
- 400 14. **Uscinski JE, et al.** Why do people believe COVID-19 conspiracy theories? *Harvard*
401 *Kennedy School Misinformation Review* 2020; Published online: 28 April
402 2020.doi:10.37016/mr-2020-015.
- 403 15. **Han H.** Trust in the scientific research community predicts intent to comply with COVID-
404 19 prevention measures: An analysis of a large-scale international survey dataset.
405 *Epidemiology and Infection* 2022; **150**: e36.
- 406 16. **Yaqub O, et al.** Attitudes to vaccination: A critical review. *Social Science & Medicine*
407 2014; **112**: 1–11.
- 408 17. **Han H.** Testing the validity of the modified vaccine attitude question battery across 22
409 languages with a large-scale international survey dataset: within the context of COVID-
410 19 vaccination. *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics* 2022; **18**: 2024066.
- 411 18. **Shahsavari S, et al.** Conspiracy in the time of corona: automatic detection of emerging
412 COVID-19 conspiracy theories in social media and the news. *Journal of Computational*
413 *Social Science* 2020; **3**: 279–317.
- 414 19. **Merkley E.** Anti-Intellectualism, Populism, and Motivated Resistance to Expert
415 Consensus. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 2020; **84**: 24–48.
- 416 20. **Blackburn AM, Vestergren S, COVIDiSTRESS II Consortium.** COVIDiSTRESS
417 diverse dataset on psychological and behavioural outcomes one year into the COVID-
418 19 pandemic. 2021; Published online: 2021.doi:https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/428pz.
- 419 21. **Miller JM, Saunders KL, Farhart CE.** Conspiracy Endorsement as Motivated
420 Reasoning: The Moderating Roles of Political Knowledge and Trust: CONSPIRACY

- 421 ENDORSEMENT AS MOTIVATED REASONING. *American Journal of Political Science*
422 2016; **60**: 824–844.
- 423 22. **Mari S, et al.** Conspiracy Theories and Institutional Trust: Examining the Role of
424 Uncertainty Avoidance and Active Social Media Use. *Political Psychology* 2022; **43**:
425 277–296.
- 426 23. **Einstein KL, Glick DM.** Do I Think BLS Data are BS? The Consequences of
427 Conspiracy Theories. *Political Behavior* 2015; **37**: 679–701.
- 428 24. **Brotherton R, French CC, Pickering AD.** Measuring Belief in Conspiracy Theories:
429 The Generic Conspiracist Beliefs Scale. *Frontiers in Psychology* 2013; **4**Published
430 online: 2013.doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00279.
- 431 25. **Lantian A, et al.** Measuring Belief in Conspiracy Theories: Validation of a French and
432 English Single-Item Scale. *International Review of Social Psychology* 2016; **29**: 1.
- 433 26. **Stojanov A, Halberstadt J.** The Conspiracy Mentality Scale: Distinguishing Between
434 Irrational and Rational Suspicion. *Social Psychology* 2019; **50**: 215–232.
- 435 27. **Swami V.** Social Psychological Origins of Conspiracy Theories: The Case of the Jewish
436 Conspiracy Theory in Malaysia. *Frontiers in Psychology* 2012; **3**Published online:
437 2012.doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00280.
- 438 28. **Putnick DL, Bornstein MH.** Measurement invariance conventions and reporting: The
439 state of the art and future directions for psychological research. *Developmental Review*
440 2016; **41**: 71–90.
- 441 29. **Fischer R, Karl JA.** A Primer to (Cross-Cultural) Multi-Group Invariance Testing
442 Possibilities in R. *Frontiers in Psychology* 2019; **10**Published online: 18 July
443 2019.doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01507.
- 444 30. **Han H.** Exploring the association between compliance with measures to prevent the
445 spread of COVID-19 and big five traits with Bayesian generalized linear model.
446 *Personality and Individual Differences* 2021; **176**: 110787.
- 447 31. **Rachev NR, et al.** Replicating the Disease framing problem during the 2020 COVID-19
448 pandemic: A study of stress, worry, trust, and choice under risk. *PLOS ONE* 2021;
449 **16**Published online: 10 September 2021.doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0257151.
- 450 32. **Lieberoth A, et al.** Stress and worry in the 2020 coronavirus pandemic: Relationships
451 to trust and compliance with preventive measures across 48 countries. *Royal Society*
452 *Open Science* 2021; **8**: 200589.
- 453 33. **Rossee Y.** lavaan : An R Package for Structural Equation Modeling. *Journal of*
454 *Statistical Software* 2012; **48**Published online: 2012.doi:10.18637/jss.v048.i02.

- 455 34. **DiStefano C, Zhu M, Mindrilă D.** Understanding and Using Factor Scores:
456 Considerations for the Applied Researcher. *Practical Assessment, Research, and*
457 *Evaluation* 2009; **14**: 20.
- 458 35. **Robitzsh A.** *Package 'sirt'*. 2021 Accessed 27 September 2021.
- 459 36. **Asparouhov T, Muthén B.** Multiple-Group Factor Analysis Alignment. *Structural*
460 *Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 2014; **21**: 495–508.
- 461 37. **Vandenberg RJ, Lance CE.** A Review and Synthesis of the Measurement Invariance
462 Literature: Suggestions, Practices, and Recommendations for Organizational Research.
463 *Organizational Research Methods* 2000; **3**: 4-70.
- 464 38. **Xu H, Tracey TJG.** Use of Multi-Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis in Examining
465 Measurement Invariance in Counseling Psychology Research. *The European Journal of*
466 *Counselling Psychology* 2017; **6**: 75-82.
- 467 39. **Muthén B, Asparouhov T.** Recent methods for the study of measurement invariance with
468 many groups: Alignment and random effects. *Sociological Methods & Research* 2018; **47**:
469 637-664.
- 470 40. **Han H, Dawson KJ, Walker DI, Nguyen N, Choi Y-J.** Exploring the association between
471 character strengths and moral functioning. *Ethics & Behavior* 2022.