THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

PARTICULARS OF APPOINTMENT

HUMANITIES

SCHOOL OF ARTS, LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

ENGLISH, AMERICAN STUDIES AND CREATIVE WRITING

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

VACANCY REF: HUM-017985

Salary:	£33,309 per annum
Hours:	Full time
Duration:	24 months
Location:	Oxford Road, Manchester

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Enquiries about the vacancy, shortlisting and interviews:

Name: Peter Knight

Email: peter.knight@manchester.ac.uk

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Overall purpose of the job:

The University of Manchester is seeking to appoint a full time Postdoctoral Research Associate for two years to work on the AHRC-funded research project 'Everything Is Connected: Conspiracy Theories in the Age of the Internet' (AH/V001213/1), which is running from September 2021 to September 2024. The project is a collaboration between the University of Manchester, King's College London (KCL), KU Leuven and the University of Amsterdam. The aim of the project is to analyse the difference that the internet has made to the production, aesthetics and consumption of conspiracy theories (with a focus on the English-language datasphere). We are seeking a postdoctoral researcher with expertise in cultural studies and digital methods to help analyse the changing meaning and function of conspiracy theories in the digital age. The postholder will be employed by the University of Manchester in the first year, and by KCL in the second year; and they will also spend a month embedded in one of our partner organisations in London (either Demos or Sense about Science). The postholder will be

mentored by Prof. Peter Knight, the Principal Investigator of the project, in the Department of English, American Studies & Creative Writing at the University of Manchester, and Dr Clare Birchall in the Department of English at KCL. The postholder will receive training in digital methods and knowledge exchange/research impact as needed. The research team also includes the Co-Investigators Prof. Stef Aupers (Leuven) and Dr Marc Tuters (Amsterdam), and another two-year PDRA, Dr Lars de Wildt (Leuven), who is conducting ethnographic research into online conspiracy theory communities.

Key Responsibilities, Accountabilities or Duties:

Work processes and results

- Conduct a literature review on the changing modes of conspiracy theory transmission, and maintain the project's reference database
- Assist in the creation of datasets to identify the most important sites, platforms and influencers of online conspiracy culture
- Analyse and interpret data through a combination of qualitative methodologies and digital techniques
- Contribute to the development of data visualizations
- Research the history of conspiracy theories in earlier moments of the development of the internet
- Collate policy documents and news accounts concerning platform providers' engagement with conspiracy theories, and conduct interviews with the platforms, regulators, and fact-checking organisations
- Co-organise and assist with knowledge exchange and public engagement events associated with the project

Communication/Documentation
- Communicate effectively across a wide range of audiences, from scholarly to the non-academic
- Disseminate research findings in peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations, as well as blog posts for stakeholders and the public on the project website
- Manage the project website

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Essential Knowledge, Skills and Experience
Qualifications
- A completed PhD or equivalent in cultural studies/cultural history/cultural sociology, digital methods/digital humanities, American Studies, or a closely related discipline

Experience
- Experience in planning and conducting research activities, and conducting literature reviews
- Experience in conducting research into popular culture
- Experience with digital methods and data visualization

- Evidence of achievement in the execution, writing-up, and presentation of research studies
- A track record of, or coherent plans for, high-quality research publications

Skills and Aptitudes
- Competent in research design and information processing
- Experience of or interest in appropriate digital methods techniques
- Excellent writing and communication skills
- A professional and flexible approach to work
- Ability to develop knowledge exchange and research impact activities
- Ability to work independently, efficiently organise time, and competently execute delegated tasks to deadlines
- Ability to work as an effective member of a team, including liaising effectively with the PI and Co-Is, and external stakeholders

Other
- An interest in digital popular culture, especially conspiracy theories
- Ability to work collaboratively as well as in a self-directed mode;
- Resourcefulness as a researcher and ability to establish and prioritize objectives;
- Willingness to spend a month on a placement with one of the project's partner organisations in London

Desirable Knowledge, Skills, Experience, and Qualifications:

Experience
- Experience of conducting research on digital media culture
- Familiarity with digital methods/data analytics research
- Experience in carrying out semi-structured interviews and using Nvivo software
- Experience of disseminating research and working with stakeholders and the general public
- Experience in website maintenance and social media promotion

Skills and Aptitudes
- Knowledge of the field of conspiracy theory studies