

Politics of Conspiracy Theories (SAPO)

The Christchurch attack and the circulation of #falseflag in the hybrid media environment

Project duration: Nov 11, 2019 – Dec 31, 2021

Funder: The Helsingin Sanomat Foundation

Amount: 100 000 eur

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The vulnerability of the hybrid media environment emerges particularly clearly when something exceptional such as a terror attack, natural disaster or a political coup takes place. In our current media circumstances during this type of violent events a small, but growing amount of data containing conspiratorial narratives. The circulation of contents in what we call hybrid media events are both translocal and transplatform. In these events the circulating contents contain at the same time professionally produced journalism and amateur commenting, pictures, videos, texts and combinations of these, memes, news, lore and gossip. Despite this, media institutions and journalism still have a significant role in content production, meaning making and deciding what gains wider attention.

It has been shown that informational influence is a part of the circulation of conspiratorial narratives. This is done to cause confusion and erode social trust. In the case of the Christchurch terror attacks the role of these narratives become topical enough for Finnish media to cover these issues. Originally the SAPO project set out to study the circulation of conspiracy narratives in the Christchurch case and the societal significance of these as well as the role of professional journalistic media in the circulation.

The SAPO project was linked with the Hybrid terrorizing (HYTE) research project funded by Academy of Finland, and utilized the extensive social media data collected on the Christchurch attack in HYTE. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic the visibility of conspiracy narratives in public and politics began to grow on a global scale. SAPO reacted to this by collecting and analysing conspiracy narratives related to the pandemic and QAnon in Finland. The project continues in a new research initiative by the team called Mediatized Religious Populism (MERELPO). This research project makes use of the data and findings of SAPO.