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PROJEKTI

Projekta «Dezinformācijas un savvērestību radītie riski demokrātijai: Latvijas pieredzes pārlūkošana» ietvarā. LZP reģistrācijas numurs Nr. Izp-2019/1-0278

Public education about Covid-19 and disinformation: analysis of Latvian memes on Facebook

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“We’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic” (February, 2020)

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,
Director-General of the World Health Organization



- Information - assess the knowledge and data sets that are available and shared among communicative actors (participants) in a problematic situation (Kim & Grunig, 2011)
- Misleading information - created or disseminated without manipulative or malicious intent (UNESCO, 2018).
- Disinformation - “deliberate (often organized) attempts to confuse or manipulate” (UNESCO, 2018) for economic or political reasons or simply disrupting public communication processes.

News, media usage and literacy

- Around 1.5 million people in Latvia use the Internet, and one of the most common reasons for using the Internet is the use of social media.
- 1/3 of the respondents in Latvia use information sources more often during Covid-19, but 59% say that news consumption has not changed (Latvijas Fakti, 2020).
 - Consumption of various information resources and media is closely related to the age of the respondents
 - in the age group 16-30 years the use of social media reached 98%
- Respondents are more skeptical about their ability to distinguish reliable information in the media from fabricated and misleading information (NEPLP, 2021).
 - 18% (+ 7%) of respondents admitted that they lack the knowledge to recognize false information;
 - 29% (+ 7%) admitted that they had ever believed in false information and only understood it later;
 - only 23% (-13%) of respondents are convinced that they can distinguish fake news from real news.
- Public trust the media and public institutions is important in crisis situations.

Social media and disinformation

- Anti-vaccine activists on different platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter reach more than 59 million followers (Center for Countering Digital Hate, 2021)
- Owners of social media platforms are looking for solutions that prevent the dissemination of misinformation, but the results are not enough.
 - platforms were found to be unable to respond to 95% misinformation about Covid-19 and vaccines



How is disinformation being fought in Latvia?

- Sections and columns on news portals, television, radio
- Educational brochures, lectures, seminars created by the Ministry of Culture and NGOs
- Discussions of public members

Meme and humor

- Meme: an easily replicated unit of cultural knowledge or information that is spread by imitation.
- Only through the collective use that the artifact becomes an Internet meme (Osterroth, 2015)
- Humor plays an important role in shared experience, which is affected by demographic, psychographic, cultural and sub-cultural factors (Sekulovska, 2007).
- Humor in memes creates intertextual references based on both the cultural heritage of the local community and global cultural references. Memes are constantly connected to the logic and rhythm of social media and networks, which helps to understand how society expresses and thinks about itself (Denisova, 2019).

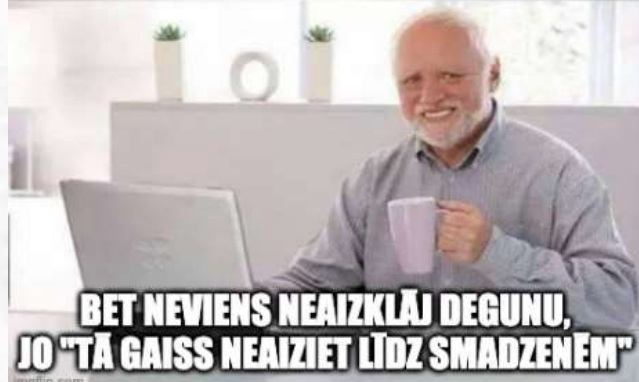
Methodology

- The aim: to analyze the content of memes, which reflects to the coronavirus pandemic and disinformation or misinformation.
- The main object of research is memes created by social activists who are interested to fight against disinformation and educate people by information and humour.
 - Facebook page «Ar masku pa dzīvi»
 - The authors of this page are in favor of science and vaccines, so using humor and various types of intertextual references, they try to resist the disinformation and misinformation that prevails in society and on social media.
- 106 posts

Main results

- Humor in memes creates intertextual references based on the culture and social-political situation in Latvia
 - Covid-19
 - Vaccination
 - Protests
 - Mental health
 - Fight against misinformation and Covid-19 deniers
 - Cognitive dissonance
- Communication by memes uses a diverse approach, less often using information as data, but more often the comparative approach of humor and arguments from opponents of vaccination, which contrasts with what the scientists say.
- The use of memes has its drawbacks and problems as it creates a simplified view of the situations and ridicule the opposite opinions.
- Format of memes does not allow the use of a broad base of arguments.

Reactions from «right side»



kad viņš ir smuks, bet netic maskām un
domā, ka covidu laboratorijā uztaisīja Bilis Geitss



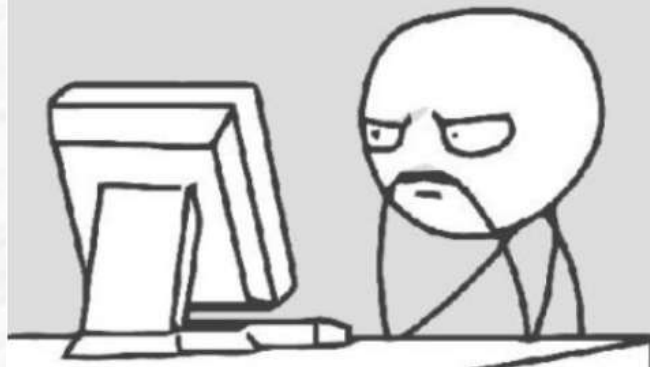
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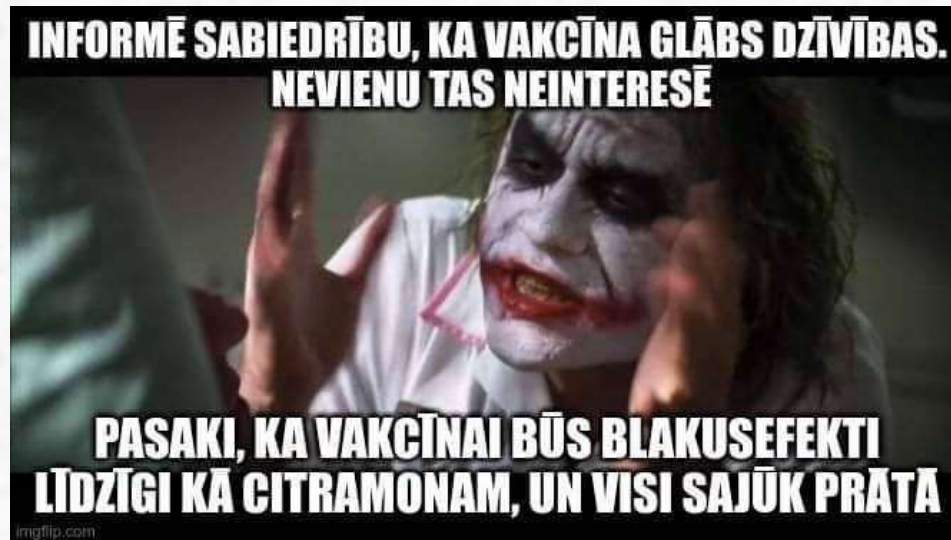
Viņš: COVID neeksistē. To saka vairāki zinātnieki.

Es: Kuri zinātnieki?



kad centies izdomāt, kā kodolīgāk atspēkot facebook rakstu, kurā ir 5 loģikas kļūdas, 3 sazvērestības teorijas un 17 gramatikas kļūdas





Kad tu saproti, ka ir piektdiena



UN ka šodien tiks aktivizēta manavakcina.lv



LIZDA 14.jūlijā:

"mēs esam prēt vakCinēšANos, jO ir pĀRāk
MAZ inFORMācijaS pĀR covid-19 vAKCinĀM!"



LIZDA 20.jūlijā:

"mēs esam prēt vakCinēšANos, jO ir pĀRāk
DAUDZ inFORMācijaS pĀR covid-19 vAKCinĀM!"



Reactions from «another side»



kā es domāju, ka
izskatos, kad ar savu
vidusskolas izglītību
feisbukā kritizēju
epidemiologus

kā es patiesībā izskatos



Conclusions

- Memes can
 - be an effective tool to catch attention
 - capture the mood or assessment of a group of society on a topic
 - can systematize knowledge
 - strengthen the connection between the communicator and the audience
- Risks:
 - sometimes meme activism is performative, simplistic, and used as a tool to silence dissent
 - temporary activity; offline activity may not be available
 - meme activism sanctions simplistic and naive political beliefs
- Future work: compare data with other social groups and countries

Thank you!

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