

Conspiracy Theories in Digital Communities on Facebook. An Analytical Viewpoint

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the increase in the popularity of anti-vaccine groups and the dissemination of conspiracy theories on social media. The generated pseudoscientific conspiracy theories as a result lead to the spreading of information of a xenophobic, racist or potentially negative impact on society. The project focuses on filling a research gap that would in-depth show the phenomenon of generating and disseminating conspiracy theories in Poland related to vaccination in social media. The project will answer the following research questions:

1. What types of conspiracy theories are generated by the digital anti-vaccine community?
2. What contexts, e.g. cultural, economic, political or social, support the process of generating conspiracy theories?

The methodological strategy will be carried out in accordance with the assumptions of virtual ethnography (netnography) based on an exploratory case study. A Facebook group will be selected for the research. The project takes an interdisciplinary perspective, drawing on the achievements of media studies and social communication, sociology and anthropology.

The purpose of the submission is to present the current state of implementation of the project, which has received funding under the Strategic Program Excellence Initiative of the Jagiellonian University: theoretical assumptions, the adopted research procedure, challenges related to the ethical dimension of the research and the results achieved.

Keywords: anti-vaccine groups, COVID-19, ethnography, users, social media