

Exercise 2 Conspiracy theories

Duration : 1 hours

Equipment :

Computers, internet connection, pencils, scrap paper, video projector. Use this link

https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/identifying-conspiracy-theories_en

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this activity is to **identify as a group the 'tools' conspiracists use** (unveiling a 'mystery', rhetoric, analysing details) as well as to point out the audio-visual techniques used in conspiracist videos (frightening music, robotic voices, deceptive editing, analysis of symbols, etc.).

To make the activity run more smoothly, it is preferable to find a video in advance that has clearly identifiable conspiracist arguments and elements. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8rKgUJ05YU>

Here are some of the elements to be identified in the video:

1. Anxiety-inducing ambiance: Often, you hear a robotic or mysterious voice accompanied by frightening music (such as in a horror film).
2. Special effects: As with the sound, visual effects such as drawings, edited photos, or 'face morphing' can sum up the theory and make it simple and memorable.
3. The video is well-structured and well-edited: The structure usually follows a certain logic, such as by starting with a historical element to lend the video a scientific air. Photomontages (series of images) are also a major factor.
4. Quotes pulled from articles or statements: This takes the quotes out of the context of an article, news report, or a person's statement (such as a politician or scientist) in order to provide evidence for the theory.
5. Truthful but surprising elements: This is not a matter of taking a fact or statement out of context, but rather of using a true fact or real image, such as images or videos of cats behaving strangely.

6. Uncertain or completely false elements: Some of the pseudo-evidence for the presented theory include elements that are wholly made up, extremely uncertain, or unproven. These are slipped into the explanations to overwhelm and confuse viewers.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before starting the exercise, find a conspiracist video about a current topic or specific issue such as terrorist attacks, new world order, or epidemics. (Try and find your own video)

2. Set up the room: Seat students in front of the projection surface and show the video using a projector. You should instruct them to write down the elements used in the video to persuade viewers and identify the main message, thus identifying the tools – i.e. the form – and the meaning – i.e. the function.

3. Note taking: Participants are asked to take notes throughout the video to be able to report on their comments and impressions.

4. Class discussion: Ask participants about the elements they identified and tell them about elements they may not have seen. This is also a chance to expand the discussion to things participants frequently see on the internet: Have they already seen videos like this before? On which topics? Did those videos convince them? Does the video target a particular group as the enemy, such as politicians or banks?