

Understanding and analysing online conspiracy theories and communities.

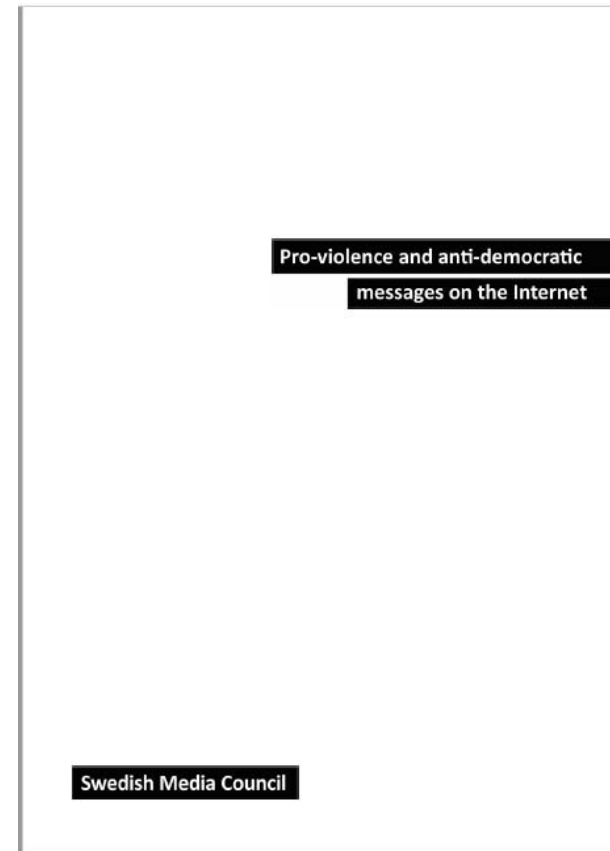
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Global Media and Information
Literacy (MIL) Week Feature
Conference
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Outline

- MIL and critical thinking
- Conspiracy theories
- Digital media
- Critical thinking

My trajectory

- 2013: “Pro-violence and anti-democratic messages on the internet” (Swedish media Council)



Quotes from the report

- Being recruited to and radicalised within the framework of proviolence and anti-democratic extremist groups is a question of **adopting, more or less uncritically, an image of the world** where hate is the driving force and violence the legitimate means.
- This fact places great demands on people young and old **to retain a critical view of information** and sometime sharply angled messages that we come across in both traditional and digital media.
- Trying to counteract each of these by itself is not meaningful, and the proposed measures are therefore at an overarching structural level, aimed at **reinforcing individuals' ability to critically evaluate and interpret media messages**.
- The aim is to **reinforce media users' abilities to evaluate critically, to analyse and understand** both online and offline material, to teach children and young persons to question and compare different information sources, to partake of independent investigations and to be able to evaluate texts, audio and image material



6 KEYS TO CRITICAL THINKING

based on Bloom's Taxonomy

Remember Retrieve relevant knowledge from long-term memory showing - naming - listing - reciting finding - recognizing - choosing matching - relating Can you recall? Where is? Who is? Can you list four? How would you describe? How could you explain? Which of these is true? false?	Analyze Separate a whole into parts and determine their relationships classifying - investigating - dissecting experimenting - dividing - discovering simplifying - differentiating reorganizing Why do you think? What is the relationship? Can you compare? contrast? What idea is relevant to? How would you categorize? What can you infer?	Understand Construct meaning from instructional messages organizing - discussing - interpreting paraphrasing - summarizing - outlining reviewing - relating - showing What is the main idea of? Can you find an example of? How would you summarize? What might happen next? How do you explain? What ideas or facts show?
Evaluate Make judgements based on criteria and standards valuing - debating - prioritizing assessing - justifying - monitoring watching - rating - critiquing Which is more important? Is there a better solution to? Can you defend? What are the pros of cons? Why is... of value? How would you feel it?	Apply Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation practicing - choosing - interviewing implementing - operating - developing planning - solving - generating What would happen if? How could you clarify? Who do you think? Which approach would you? How would you use? What is a situation like?	Create Combine elements or ideas to form a new whole building - combining - formulating constructing - devising - improving changing - adapting - producing What is an alternative to? Could you invent? Can you compose a? What is your theory about? How can you imagine? What could you design to?

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your critical thinking advocate

6 critical questions

things to think about when someone has something to say

who

Who said it?
 Someone you know? Someone famous?
 Someone in authority?
 Should it matter who said it?

what

What did they say?
 Did they give facts or opinions?
 Did they give all the facts?
 Did they leave something out?

where

Where did they say it?
 Was it in public or in private?
 Did other people have a chance to talk about the other side?

when

When did they say it?
 Before, after, or during an important event?

why

Why did they say it?
 Did they explain their opinions?
 Were they trying to make someone look good or bad?

how

How did they say it?
 Were they happy, sad, angry, or didn't care? Did they write it or speak it?
 Could you understand it?

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Conspiracy theories

- Logical fallacy?
- Pathological? (paranoid personality)
- Conspiracy culture
 - “a radical and generalized manifestation of distrust that is deeply embedded in the cultural logic of modernity and is, ultimately, produced by ongoing processes of modernization in contemporary society”. (Aupers 2012: 24)

Furthermore...

- Conspiracist thinking encourages the individual to “think for themselves”, to be suspicious to authorities, not to take proposals at face value...
- i.e. the same things we ask our students to do?

Digital media

- Alternative facts
- Digital enclaves
- Group polarization
- Eco-chambers
- Filter bubbles
- Confirmation bias

Critical thinking

- Skill or disposition?
- General skill or subject-specific skill?
- Findings from a recent study (Nygren et al. 2018) seems to support the notion that critical thinking is a subject-specific skill.

MIL and critical thinking

- Critical thinking = central part of MIL definitions
- BUT: skill or disposition/attitude?
- If critical thinking is a subject-specific skill, what does it mean for MIL-promotion?
- How teach critical thinking about media without accidentally confirming the conspiracy theory agenda?

Thank you!

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