

For this assignment, I wanted to dive into the world of conspiracy theories. I thought it would be interesting to curate content that would subtly nudge the viewer into believing crazy things, much like real algorithms do on platforms like TikTok and YouTube. To do this, I chose the most absurd conspiracy I knew of that wasn't too damaging or dangerous, that Finland doesn't exist. My target audience for the project was people already into conspiracy theories, since it would be almost impossible to convince someone not into them that a whole country doesn't exist. I intentionally used sentences like "Intrigued? You should be, that means you have a curious mind" to target this subset of people to avoid the negative stigma of conspiracy theories and replace it with the positive characteristic of curiosity. I also never used the word conspiracy theory for this same reason. The end goal was simple; convince my audience that Finland doesn't exist.

Starting out, I had a paragraph about Finland where I asked random facts about the country to highlight that the majority of people don't know much about it. Of course, not knowing who the prime minister of Finland is doesn't mean the whole country doesn't exist, but it's enough of a hook to get conspiracy fans interested.

Next, I intentionally deflected away from the topic and talked about something seemingly unrelated, Japan's overfishing problem. I included a link to an article that describes this, and all of the facts are true. I did this to lay down the framework of the conspiracy, and take my audience from objective truth to lies. Notably though, I did use some deception making rhetorical choices like saying the Japanese had decimated their seas, and that they were on the brink of starvation to make the situation seem more dire than it actually was. Also, I didn't mention that the article is about the current situation rather than the historical one, but I gave enough in the primer that I didn't expect my audience to actually read it.

The next piece of content I had was a wikipedia article about buffer states that again is entirely true. However, if the reader is paying attention they will notice that it doesn't really connect to what I am talking about. Rather, it's another piece of truth I'm feeding them to my audience to slowly acclimate them to the coming conspiracy. I expected my audience to now have the feeling that Japan and the Soviet Union were facing serious problems that would require a major solution. After this article I quietly introduce the theory in a paragraph. I made up facts but confidently stated them to convince the reader.

The next piece of content was another article about Russo-Japanese relations. I figured that after saying Finland doesn't exist it was smart to go straight back to truth so as not to shock my audience too much. In this section I also start asking questions of my audience which is in the playbook of conspiracy theorists. I actually only contextualized a tiny fragment of the article, a part where the Japanese were given fishing rights around the Soviet Union in the Pacific since it fit the narrative that the Japanese and Soviets had a history of signing fishing agreements. I left out everything else since it didn't directly tie into this narrative I was attempting to build. I was hoping at this point I had given my reader just enough facts and stirred up just enough doubt that they would start to fall for what I was saying. I also started putting the word Finland in quotes to unconsciously cast doubt on the country.

The next piece of content was a random web page from Nokia talking about their presence in Asia. Again, it is all real but I wanted to cast doubt on it in order to convince my reader that Nokia was set up as a means to transport fish to Japan. I continue to ask my reader questions like "why do they need 4500 employees in a country that barely uses their products" to keep casting doubt on what in truth is a legitimate company. I also have no idea if Nokia is popular in Japan, but since it isn't popular in the US, I make that assumption. I also say things

like “Looking at Nokia’s website it’s impossible to know what they actually do.” While this is true, it just means that they have a bad website, not that they are a sham corporation designed to conceal the fact that a whole country doesn’t exist. With this piece of content, I want to start to build something that is potentially believable out of the confusion I had artificially created.

The next piece of content I had is the old Nokia logo, which hilariously turns out to be a fish. I intentionally didn’t say much in the primer and let the visual do the convincing. This is a classic type one error where there is absolutely no connection but there appears to be. I intentionally don’t explain that the fish was used as the company’s logo since their original location was near a stream with salmon in it.

The next piece of content I added is simply a map of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Again, it’s completely true, but I’m trying to make the point that it was constructed for the sole purpose of transporting fish to Japan. I include real facts including that it cost \$24 billion to build, while leaving out the fact that it quickly paid for itself. This piece of content is a great visual since it looks like it goes directly from where Finland is to Japan. However, that’s the distance Russia spans so of course it looks like that. Also this map has a funny mistake where it says Finland is Russia which I call out to further build my narrative. At this point, I’m assuming my reader is decently convinced, and going forward will include random facts that I can misconstrue to make it appear Finland doesn’t exist.

This is exactly what I did with the next piece of content which says how many tourists visit Finland per year. The point of this was to divide that number by the world’s population to make it seem like almost no one goes there. I cherry picked a site that had tourism in 2021 since not many people were traveling from the pandemic. This serves my narrative well since usually

the number is more than 10 million. This sets up the next series of facts I provide which attempt to make Finland look fake.

The second of these facts is the fact that the Finnish language is insanely difficult. I included a British Council article saying that the language is notoriously difficult, but then say that the language was designed that way to keep people out of the country. I also say that Finnish has similarities to Japanese, which is completely untrue but something no one would fact check this far into my argument. I am intending that all of these little unrelated details come together and start to build some form of credibility for my argument.

In the next section I tackle the glaring hole of why don't other countries say something about Finland not existing. I include an article that details how Finland leads the world in five categories, then using some statistical trickery to attempt to confuse my audience. I say that the odds of a country leading the world are $(1/195)^5$, however, there's no randomness to it. The reason that Finland leads the world is due to deliberate action by their government, not random probability. At this point, I'm basically using every tool at my disposal to make the country look fake no matter how ridiculous. I can do this at this point since I built a foundation of fact and slowly went deeper into the conspiracy.

Next, to lend ethos to my argument I include an article by The Culture Trip that talks about the conspiracy. The article describes it as a conspiracy and states that it's a meme, but since I don't intend my reader to really read the article I omit those parts. Just having an actual magazine post a story about it can make it look just credible enough for my purposes. I also say in my primer that after running the article the magazine's sales plummeted, this is completely made up, but again no one will fact check it. I consider this to be one of the most convincing

pieces of content so save it for last, much like how the “closer” in baseball is one of the best pitchers who they put in to finish up the game.

The next piece of content is a pretty obviously edited map that shows Finland not being real. If I had included this first, it would’ve been laughed off as fake. However, since I kept it for last my audience is probably pretty susceptible to the insanity of my arguments at this point and won’t question it as much. I also said it surfaced in the Edward Snowden leaks, which is not true but lends some ethos to it and explains the fact that the reader has never seen it before since it’s something the government is hiding.

My final piece of content is a satirical video by some Finnish youtubers who attempt to find out the “truth”. The video is obviously satire, but I say that they are investigative journalists which might make it seem more believable. I’m also heavily banking on the fact that my audience has been brainwashed enough to believe anything I say at this point.

All in all, I think I did a good job organizing the content in a way that would convince people. A major limitation was the fact that the conspiracy itself is incredibly stupid, but I tested my curation on several people and they were decently convinced. Since the people I tested it on aren’t conspiracy theorists in the first place, I think the results would be even better for my target audience.