

The Narrative Structure of Conspiracy Beliefs in Czech Society: Analyzing Core Narratives and Justifications Amid the War in Ukraine

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Data

- Data from the project “The Covid and Post-Covid Era”
- Purposive sampling + snowball method, 6 interviewers.
- Total dataset: 60 interviews, 15 of which met the definition of conspiracy narratives (secret plot by two or more actors with malevolent intentions).
- Semi-structured interviews focused on the experience of the war in Ukraine and understanding of the causes of the conflict.

Core Narratives

1. The connection between war and COVID: everything is connected and is the work of dark forces

Rewriting the story of COVID

„...if there's a lethal weapon, it's from Wuchan, that threatens everybody and that we have to protect ourselves against and we have to make two-meter spacing and vaccinate ourselves and we have to have an army in the streets controlling movement, then if in a month's time it actually suddenly goes to weaponization and to war in Ukraine and that we have to support our neighbor... it's interesting, it's interesting, like it definitely probably indicates some sort of like proxy problem, or I guess it didn't matter if it was a virus, if it was a war or something, it was just a need to sort of vent these things, it was a need to show strength I guess^v

„it was a war on COVID and now it's a war on Russia“

Core Narratives

1. The connection between war and COVID: everything is connected and is the work of dark forces
2. Russian ~~aggression~~ special operation is legitimate

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Core Narratives

1. The connection between war and COVID: everything is connected and is the work of dark forces
2. Russian ~~aggression~~ special operation is legitimate
3. We should not help Ukraine to fight Russia
4. We should not help Ukrainian refugees
5. The government and the official media are manipulated and not to be trusted

Narrative positioning

Narrators actively engage in social positioning by drawing on available dominant discourses (master narratives) or by constructing their own alternative counter-positions. (Davies & Harre, 1990, Bamberg, 2005).

Certain narrative features may signal the speaker's position or point of view, indicating a particular alignment in relation to others—both those being spoken about and those being spoken to.

Positioning I – Characters in the story and their positions

„Thanks to Putin, all the biological laboratories in Ukraine have been destroyed.“

“No one stands a chance against Putin, yeah?! Putin teams up with India and China and everyone else is tiny in comparison. But like, why would he do it? He’s not trying to kill people, yeah? He’s going after injustice and he’s just cleaning things up here!”

Positioning I – Characters in the story and their positions

"They're loud, rude, drunk, and even when they're sober, they make noise and act like they own the place. I'd say they behave worse than Czechs, yeah."

Positioning I – Characters in the story and their positions

"They're loud, rude, drunk, and even when they're sober they're..."

"Well, they come here, collect benefits, and then go back on vacation."

Positioning I – Characters in the story and their positions

"Well, they come here, collect benefits, and then go back on vacation. Or there was this funny video recently, it lasted one day on Facebook — some Ukrainians on a beach in Turkey and they supposedly tried to attack a woman who had a tattoo of Putin on her shoulder. There were four of them, but she turned out to be a world champion wrestler or something like sumo, and she took them all down! But seriously, what are Ukrainians doing on a beach in Turkey?! How can they even afford to go on vacation?!"

Positioning II. – in interaction

Interviewer: First question, how did you experience the outbreak of the war in Ukraine?

Participant: There is no war in Ukraine. There is only a special military operation on the territory of the Russian Federation, Ukraine does not exist, it has no borders, it is not a state, only Ukrainians live on the borrowed territory of the Russian Federation, which is the successor of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. So there is no war.

I: Okay, so how did you experience the outbreak of this military operation, this military conflict on the territory of the Russian republic?

P: Special military operation. Of course, I understand the intention, the goal, and it certainly came at the right time, because a week or two later the Russian Federation, that is the Russians living on the territory of the Russian Federation, would be attacked with biological weapons by the fascist Ukrainians and their allies from America.

I: I sense a bit of indignation from you.

P: Indignation I don't know, rather yes, at the most over the fact that there are still fascists, that there are still, or descendants of fascists, yeah, Bandera and German fascists, and I understand that they need to be eradicated, they need to be (...) eradicated everywhere, not only on the territory of Ukraine, unfortunately they have spread all over the world. There are a lot of them. In our country, in Poland and in Europe. They need to be eradicated everywhere.

Positioning III. Who am I?

I've read so much that the human brain is not even capable of it, or I don't know. From the beginning, we are taught the wrong way! or they don't want to tell us ehm, all the information. If we knew everything, we would be in a completely different place. And some people live in a kind of bubble and don't want to know more. They're content with the way they live.(...)

They live within the system we have in place — work, upbringing, work, sleep, food. Providing for the family, paying debts, constantly paying money. All the things the state and others demand from us. And that's how they drive us into a trap! We stop thinking! Some individuals don't know how to think at all!

Positioning III. Who am I?

P: I don't watch TV. I check everything on alternative sites, of which I have 10-15, and compare. Yeah? It's about finding out that information, and not just from one source, but from multiple sources. Well, we don't have TV – since covid. No news at all, no radio at all, it's completely useless.

I: And how did you get into the alternative media - did somebody recommend it to you or did you sort of start finding out on your own?

P: On my own, on my own. I'm looking, I'm looking. I look, I read, I find out. If I'm interested, I keep on finding out and...sort of. No, nobody recommended it to me.

Generalized scheme of positioning

- Me or us: the searching, critical thinkers, going to the essence that is hidden - versus the unthinking, manipulated majority
- I know (we know) what's really going on here -> they don't know.

Vs. literature:

- Need to protect self-esteem
- Need for uniqueness
- Need for meaning

Thank you for your attention



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