

col. Mgr. Kristýna Holubová, Ph.D.

Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague

Faculty of Security Management

Department of Crisis Management

Police Education and Training Department

e-mail: holubova@polac.cz

ORCID: 0000-0001-9430-1880

Mgr. Lenka Jakubcová, Ph.D.

Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague

Faculty of Security Management

Department of Crisis Management

e-mail: jakubcova@polac.cz

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4166-0972

Mgr. Petr Klíma, MPA

Department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic

Crime Prevention Department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic

e-mail: petr.klima@mvcv.cz

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6005-2772

doc. Mgr. Oldřich Krulík, Ph.D.

Criminal Police and Investigation Service Office

Central Analytics Department

e-mail: oldrich.krulik@pcr.cz

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4048-5965

Spiritual Perception of the World and its Intersections with Disinformation Processes

Duchovní vnímání světa a jeho souvislosti s procesy dezinformace

Abstract

The article explores the relationship between spirituality, eschatological expectations, conspiracy mentality, and disinformation within contemporary security environments. Although the primary analytical focus is the Czech Republic and the wider European context, selected international examples are used to illustrate broader patterns. The study adopts an interdisciplinary qualitative approach combining conceptual analysis, insights from sociology of religion, psychological theories of conspiracy mentality, security studies, and comparative analysis of selected narratives. Particular attention is given to the ways in which spiritual and eschatological frameworks may become intertwined with disinformation processes and hybrid influence operations. Based on the comparison of traditional spiritual concepts, contemporary alternative spiritualities, and state-sponsored propaganda narratives, the article develops an original analytical model identifying both structural similarities

and fundamental differences among these phenomena. The findings suggest that spiritual narratives may function both as sources of resilience and as potential vulnerabilities within contemporary information environments.

Keywords: Spirituality, disinformation narratives, eschatological visions, security counter-measures.

Abstrakt

Článek zkoumá vztah mezi spiritualitou, eschatologickými očekáváními, konspirační mentalitou a dezinformacemi v současném bezpečnostním prostředí. Ačkoli se primárně zaměřuje na Českou republiku a širší evropský kontext, k ilustraci širších vzorců jsou použity vybrané mezinárodní příklady. Studie využívá interdisciplinární kvalitativní přístup kombinující konceptuální analýzu, poznatky ze sociologie náboženství, psychologických teorií konspirační mentality, bezpečnostních studií a srovnávací analýzu vybraných narativů. Zvláštní pozornost je věnována způsobům, jakými se duchovní a eschatologické rámce mohou prolínat s dezinformačními procesy a hybridními vlivovými operacemi. Na základě srovnání tradičních duchovních konceptů, současných alternativních spiritualit a státem podporovaných propagandistických narativů článek rozvíjí originální analytický model identifikující jak strukturální podobnosti, tak zásadní rozdíly mezi těmito jevy. Zjištění naznačují, že duchovní narativy mohou v současném informačním prostředí fungovat jak jako zdroje odolnosti, tak jako potenciální zranitelnosti.

Klíčová slova: Spiritualita, dezinformační narativy, eschatologické vize, bezpečnostní protiopatření, výzkumný projekt.

Introduction

Throughout history, certain segments of society have demonstrated a persistent tendency to interpret periods of crisis, uncertainty, or rapid social transformation through spiritual, metaphysical, or explicitly eschatological frameworks. This phenomenon becomes particularly visible in times marked by acute societal stress, such as pandemics, geopolitical instability, technological disruption, or economic volatility. The Covid-19 pandemic, the deterioration of the international security environment, and the emergence of new global risks offer illustrative contemporary examples of this long-standing pattern.

The article is organised into four interconnected parts. The first part clarifies the conceptual boundaries of spirituality and its relationship to misinformation. The second part examines eschatological expectations and conspiracy mentality as psychological and sociocultural mechanisms that may increase vulnerability to simplified explanatory frameworks. The third part presents illustrative examples of traditional spiritual narratives, contemporary spiritual innovations, and state-sponsored propaganda narratives. Building on these observations, the article develops a comparative analytical model presented in **Table 2**. The final part discusses the security implications of the identified relationships and formulates answers to the research questions.

From a security-studies perspective, these tendencies are not merely cultural or psychological curiosities. They increasingly overlaps with the dynamics of **disinformation, hybrid influence, and artificially generated content**, including influence activities associated with state and non-state actors. The exploitation of spiritual or eschatological narratives represents a potent tool for shaping perceptions, mobilising selected social groups, and amplifying existing grievances. Several studies¹ have documented that actors such as the Russian Federation systematically integrate religious symbolism, apocalyptic rhetoric, and metaphysical narratives into broader information-operations campaigns, particularly during periods of social and societal disorientation.²

The aim of this paper is thus twofold: 1) to explore how spiritual and eschatological worldviews shape the susceptibility of individuals to conspiracy thinking and disinformation; and 2) to analyse how these worldviews may themselves become **targets or instruments** of hybrid influence operations. In this context, there is an effort to try to answer the following (research) questions:

- 1) How do spiritual and eschatological worldviews influence susceptibility to conspiracy thinking and disinformation?
- 2) In what ways can spiritual or eschatological narratives become targets or instruments of hybrid influence operations?
- 3) What structural similarities exist between traditional spirituality, new spiritual movements, and state, driven propaganda, and where do they differ?
- 4) Why is this topic relevant for contemporary security policy?

To achieve this, the text first conceptualises key terms relevant to spirituality and disinformation. It then discusses theoretical approaches to eschatological expectations and their psychological and sociocultural functions. Building on these foundations, the study introduces the concept of “conspiracy mentality” and examines its potential intersection with contemporary spiritual discourses. Finally, a synthetic analytical

¹ This aspect was the content of a separate output within the respective research project: KRULÍK Oldřich et al. 2023. Indikativní monitoring/rešerše impaktovaných publikací, propojujících téma „policejní práce“ a „dezinformací“. Praha: Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague (internal document).

BEAULIEU, Brittany and KEIL Steven. 2018. *Russia as Spoiler: Projecting Division in Transatlantic Societies*. German Marshall Fund of the United States.

<http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep18872>

GALEOTTI, Mark. 2017. *Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages Its Political War in Europe*. European Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep21563>

JACOBS, Andreas; LASCONJARIAS, Guillaume. 2015. *NATO's Hybrid Flanks: Handling Unconventional Warfare in the South and the East*. Rome: NATO Defense College. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep10397>

² JAKUBCOVÁ Lenka; HOLUBOVÁ Kristýna and Karel ŠILINGER. 2023. Kyberprostor jako jedna z operačních domén hybridního válčení. In: *Sborník příspěvků konference CrisCon 2023*. Uherské Hradiště: Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně, p. 65-84. ISBN 978-80-7678-197-9. <http://hdl.handle.net/10563/52464>

JAKUBCOVÁ Lenka and Josef DUBSKÝ. 2024. Šíření dezinformací v kontextu hybridního působení. In: *Zvýšenie odolnosti Slovenska voči hybridným hrozbám pomocou posilnenia kapacít verejnej správy. Zborník príspevkov*. Bratislava: Akadémia Policajného zboru v Bratislave, p. 154-162. ISBN 978-80-8293-010-1.

model is presented in the form of a table that maps potential overlaps between traditional, new, and artificially generated spiritual narratives.

1. Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundations of this study integrate three complementary **perspectives (P)** that together provide a conceptual framework for analysing the relationship between spirituality, conspiracy mentality, and disinformation within contemporary security environments. These perspectives are drawn from the sociology of religion and contemporary spirituality, psychological research on conspiracy mentality, and security studies focusing on hybrid influence operations.

The first perspective (**P1**) builds on **sociological and anthropological research on religion and contemporary spirituality**. Spiritual worldviews are understood not merely as systems of belief but as interpretive frameworks through which individuals and communities construct meaning, identity, and explanations of reality, particularly during periods of uncertainty or crisis. Such frameworks may help individuals cope with existential anxieties, yet they can also create favourable conditions for the acceptance of simplified explanations and alternative interpretations of complex phenomena.

The second perspective (**P2**) derives from **psychological theories of conspiracy mentality and cognitive vulnerability**. Conspiracy thinking is conceptualised not as a simple consequence of misinformation or low education, but as a psychological predisposition associated with the search for coherence, certainty, and control in ambiguous or threatening situations. Conspiracy mentality thus functions as a cognitive mechanism shaping how individuals interpret social, political, and security-related developments. Research has also demonstrated overlaps between certain forms of spirituality, religiosity, and susceptibility to conspiracy narratives, particularly when both systems offer comprehensive explanatory models of reality.

The third perspective (**P3**) draws on **security studies and research on hybrid influence operations**. Contemporary information environments are characterised by strategic efforts to shape public perceptions, identities, and decision-making processes. Hybrid actors frequently employ emotionally resonant narratives, symbolic references, and identity-based appeals to increase the effectiveness of influence activities. Spiritual, eschatological, and moral-dualistic themes represent particularly potent narrative resources because they offer clear distinctions between good and evil, promise renewal or salvation, and provide powerful interpretive frameworks during periods of societal uncertainty.

As a complex, these perspectives allow spirituality to be understood as a socially significant interpretive system that may contribute either to resilience or vulnerability, depending on the institutional context and the specific narratives through which spiritual beliefs are articulated. This approach also enables a comparison between traditional religious institutions, alternative spiritual movements, conspirituality, and politically instrumentalised narratives without conflating these distinct phenomena.

The study further acknowledges that the tendency to seek simplified explanations for complex realities is not limited to spiritual or religious environments. Similar mechanisms can be observed within political extremism, populist movements, ideological communities, and secular conspiracy cultures. Spirituality is therefore not treated as the cause of conspiracy thinking but as one of several domains in which

broader cognitive and social mechanisms associated with uncertainty, identity formation, and information influence become visible.

This interdisciplinary framework is operationalised through philosophical conceptual analysis, sociological and psychological theory, qualitative content analysis of narratives circulating within selected online communities and spiritual groups during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, and comparative analysis of traditional religious concepts, modern spiritual movements, and strategically constructed propaganda narratives. This approach enables the identification of structural similarities, such as apocalyptic framing, moral dualism, and charismatic authority, as well as crucial distinctions related to intentionality, ideological purpose, and operationalisation within hybrid influence campaigns.

Although the article draws on illustrative examples from various international contexts, its **primary analytical focus remains the Czech Republic and the broader European security environment**. Global cases are included only where they clarify mechanisms that transcend national boundaries and may also manifest within European societies. While the study is rooted in empirical observations from the Czech Republic, many of the identified dynamics appear relevant across contemporary European and Euro-Atlantic settings. The interdisciplinary perspective adopted here therefore seeks to connect security studies with insights from philosophy, psychology of religion, cultural sociology, and media studies – fields that rarely intersect in conventional security research.³

The sociological dimension of this framework draws on contemporary studies of spirituality and religion, while the psychological perspective relies on research on conspiracy mentality, religiosity, and cognitive vulnerability. The conceptualisation of the intersection between spirituality and conspiracy narratives is based on DYRENDAL'S study on conspiracy theory and religion,⁴ which highlights how religious and spiritual interpretive systems may overlap with “alternative information ecosystems”⁵ and facilitate the circulation of conspiratorial meaning-making.

As a complex, these sociological and psychological perspectives illuminate how spiritual worldviews, conspiracy beliefs, conspiratoriality, and alternative information environments interact to produce distinctive narrative patterns. This framework enables the identification of structural similarities, such as apocalyptic/eschatological framing, moral dualism, and charismatic authority, as well as crucial distinctions related to intentionality, ideological purpose, and the operationalisation of narratives within hybrid influence campaigns.

³ See HOLUBOVÁ, Kristýna; JAKUBCOVÁ, Lenka and Lukáš HŘIBŇÁK. 2024. Informační působení jako bezpečnostní hrozba – zkušenosti policejních sborů Pobaltských zemí. In: *Sborník příspěvků z konference CrisCon 2024*. Uherské Hradiště: Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně, p. 83-132. ISBN 978-80-7678-286-0. <http://hdl.handle.net/10563/56785>

⁴ DYRENDAL, Asbjørn. 2020. Conspiracy Theory and Religion. In: BUTTER, Michael and Peter KNIGHT (eds.) *Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*. London: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-42-945273-4. DOI: 10.4324/9780429452734; <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429452734>

⁵ DOUGLAS, Christopher. 2018. Religion and Fake News: Faith-Based Alternative Information Ecosystems in the United States and Europe. *Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 61-73. DOI:10.1080/15570274.2018.1433522; <https://1url.cz/0eo44>

2. Methodological limitations and analytical procedure

The study does not aim to test causal relationships through quantitative methods. Rather, it adopts an exploratory qualitative design intended to identify recurring patterns at the intersection of spirituality, conspiracy mentality, and disinformation. The analytical procedure consisted of three consecutive steps. First, relevant academic literature on spirituality, religiosity, eschatology, conspiracy mentality, and information influence was reviewed. Second, publicly available examples from media outputs, social networks, spiritual movements, and disinformation narratives were collected as illustrative cases. Third, these materials were subjected to qualitative comparative analysis focused on identifying recurring motifs, including apocalyptic expectations, charismatic authority, moral dualism, narratives of salvation, and constructions of external enemies. The resulting comparative model presented in **Table 1** and **Table 2** should therefore be understood as a heuristic analytical framework rather than as a statistically validated typology.

Several **limitations** should be also acknowledged. The article is based primarily on qualitative analysis and illustrative case studies rather than systematic quantitative evidence. Furthermore, the primary analytical focus is the Czech Republic and the broader European security environment, although selected international examples are also used for comparative purposes. Consequently, the proposed model should be understood as exploratory and heuristic rather than universally applicable across all cultural, religious, and geopolitical contexts.

2.1 Key Terms Related to the Topic

To provide at least a conditional conceptual frame for a topic that is inherently multifaceted, the authors present their understanding of several key and particularly sensitive **terms (T)**.

T1: Spirituality (Spiritual Perspectives as an Intersection of Disinformation). For the purposes of this study, *spirituality* is understood as an individual or collective search for meaning, transcendence, purpose, and connection with realities perceived as extending beyond everyday material existence. It may be expressed within established religious traditions as well as outside formal institutional settings.

The term *spirituality* is frequently used alongside related concepts such as *faith*, *religiosity*, *piety*, *contemplation*, and *mysticism*, which can easily lead to conceptual ambiguity. Although these terms capture specific aspects of human spiritual life, they should not be treated as interchangeable. Human spirituality is undoubtedly a complex phenomenon that can be interpreted through multiple disciplinary lenses, including philosophy, religious studies, psychology, and the study of art and symbolism.

For the purposes of this article, a philosophical perspective is adopted as the primary interpretive approach. Philosophy provides a general and foundational conceptual framework that partially intersects with other disciplines while offering the necessary analytical breadth to clarify how spiritual worldviews function as

meaning-making systems, particularly in contexts where they intersect with disinformation, conspiracy narratives, and hybrid influence activities.⁶

T2: Religion and Religious Institutions: Religion refers to institutionally structured systems of beliefs, practices, and authorities through which spiritual ideas are organised and transmitted. Established religious institutions, including Christian churches, Islamic communities, and other major religious traditions, represent historically developed frameworks that provide doctrinal interpretation, ethical guidance, and social regulation. Their theological teachings should not be conflated with the alternative spiritual movements discussed later in this article.

T3: Eschatology (Eschatological or Millennial Expectations and Their Misuse in Disinformation Activities): Eschatology is understood as a set of beliefs and narratives concerning the ultimate destiny of individuals, societies, or humanity as a whole. Eschatological motifs often include expectations of judgment, catastrophe, renewal, salvation, or the emergence of a transformed social order. These themes appear not only in major religious traditions but also in secular ideological narratives that frame historical developments as culminating in decisive, world-altering events.

In theological terms, eschatology refers to the study of the “last things”, events marking the end of the world or the final destiny of humankind. Within various religious traditions, it encompasses concepts such as the *Last Judgment*, resurrection, and the consummation of history. Although most prominent in Christianity, eschatological ideas are present across many religious systems and may also include philosophical reflections on the finitude of existence and the meaning of death.

Historically, predictions of the end of the world or of radical societal transformation have frequently intensified during periods of crisis, including pandemics, natural disasters, and transitions between centuries or millennia. Such expectations can create fertile ground for emotionally charged narratives that promise clarity, moral order, or salvation in times of uncertainty.

It is essential to distinguish between eschatological beliefs embedded within mainstream religious institutions and those circulating in alternative spiritual, conspiratorial, or sectarian movements. In established religious traditions such as Christianity or Islam, eschatological themes are typically situated within coherent theological systems, institutional authority, and ethical frameworks. Their presence therefore does not automatically imply susceptibility to conspiracy thinking or disinformation. By contrast, eschatological motifs in alternative spiritual or conspiratorial environments may be detached from institutional oversight and can be more easily instrumentalised within disinformation campaigns, hybrid influence activities, or identity-based mobilisation.

⁶ NESVADBA, Petr. 2024. *Několik předběžných poznámek k tématu „spiritualita“*. Work output within the research project “Resilience of Members of the Police of the Czech Republic to Disinformation Influences and the Possibilities of Strengthening their Resistance through Education”. Praha: Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague.

Some phenomena are commonly referred to as “**millennial expectations**”.⁷ These expectations sometimes culminating in destructive or self-destructive acts. A notable example is the *Heaven’s Gate* group, whose 38 members committed suicide in 1997, believing this would transport them to a spaceship trailing the Hale-Bopp comet.⁸

In recent decades, new religious movements have emerged that combine traditional spiritual elements with modern ideas about consciousness transformation and the “new era”. These movements often emphasize inner transformation, meditation, and esoteric practices (such as those associated with the *New Age*). They may also incorporate mystical elements intertwined with pandemic-related fears. Postmodern theories of spirituality highlight how spirituality evolves in the context of global crises and how new forms of spirituality (such as those linked to the pandemic) respond to the chaotic and ambiguous conditions of contemporary life.⁹

The pandemic has prompted numerous self-proclaimed prophets to announce the imminent day of judgment – or, at minimum, the end of an evil age and the dawn of a better, more just era.¹⁰ In relation to the coronavirus crisis, many individuals claimed to have foreseen the situation, either through personal visions or by interpreting existing sources, including Mayan writings – popular particularly in 2011 and 2012.¹¹ Such narratives symbolically process events against which individuals feel powerless, offering either a scapegoat (via conspiracy theories) or fantasies of global destruction or transformation.¹²

In this context, interpretations of NOSTRADAMUS’ alleged prophecies regarding the coronavirus pandemic cannot be overlooked: “*It will be the year of the double number (2020), from which the crown (corona) will rise and in the darkness of the night will spread the plague in the land of the seven hills (Rome, the capital of Italy, which was the first European epicentre of the disease). It will turn the twilight of humanity into dust to destroy the world.*” Similar eschatological narratives have historically

⁷ DEIN, Simon. 2021. Covid-19 and the Apocalypse: Religious and Secular Perspectives. *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 60, pp. 5–15. DOI: 10.1007/s10943-020-01100-w; <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01100-w>; <https://1url.cz/leo4T>

⁸ CARA, Dan. 1999. Červenec je měsícem ohlašovaného konce světa. *Lidové noviny*, 3 July 1999.

⁹ BAUDRILLARD, Jean. 2009. *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* Calcuta: Seagull Books. ISBN 978-19-0649-740-8.

FOUCAULT, Michel. 2005. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982. New York: Picador, p. 15n. ISBN 978-0-31-220326-9.

¹⁰ ŠVELA, Vladimír. 2021. Když konec světa nepříjde. Jak se lidé, kteří čekali apokalypsu, vyrovnali s šokem, že neproběhla. *iHNed.cz*, 5 March 2021. <http://vikend.ihned.cz/c1-66892070-kdyz-konec-sveta-neprijde-jak-se-lide-kteri-cekali-apokalypsu-vyrovnali-s-sokem-ze-neprobehla>

¹¹ PLASOVÁ, Anita. 2020. Covid jako černá labuť. Kdo trefil předpověď, co se stane v roce 2020? *Seznam Zprávy*, 30 December 2020. <https://1url.cz/aeo4m>

JÍCHOVÁ, Darina. 2020. Jaký bude rok 2021? Astroložka, která předpověděla pandemii, řekla, co nás čeká. *Blesk*, 25 October 2020. <https://1url.cz/veo4V>

KOSTÍČOVÁ, Zuzana, Marie. 2010. *2012: Mayský kalendář, transformace vědomí, dva světy a rovnováha*. Praha: Malvern. ISBN 978-8-08-758005-9.

¹² MATULA, Miloš. 2012. *2013: Hvězdná brána k Novému věku*. Praha: MM Production. ISBN 978-8-09-045565-8.

accompanied epidemics, wars, terrorism, and, conversely, technological breakthroughs, solutions to energy crises, and the eradication of incurable diseases.¹³

A comparable wave of apocalyptic speculation occurred in 1999 and 2000, later reinterpreted as a prediction of the September 11, 2001 attacks: “Nostradamus warned that on August 11, 1999, the king of terror would descend from the heavens”.¹⁴

Ambiguous interpretations of the prophecies of the blind Bulgarian mystic Vangelia GUŠTEROVA, better known as Baba Vanga, predicted famine, alien invasion, and another pandemic in 2022. The virus was allegedly to originate from Siberia, released from permafrost due to melting ice.¹⁵

The pandemic thus “activated” a wide range of eschatological narratives – from heralds of the end of the world to prophets of a coming era of justice. When dramatic events fail to materialize at the predicted time, claims often shift to assert that change has occurred invisibly (e.g., the birth of a saviour or contact with cosmic intelligences).¹⁶

Spiritual tension also manifests within segments of the **environmental movement**. Some activists warn of impending cataclysm with such intensity that they resemble religious visionaries. Greta THUNBERG’S declaration at the 2019 Davos Economic Forum: “*I ask you to act as if your house is on fire. Because it already is*” – illustrates the fusion of millennial fears with the archetype of the charismatic prophetic child.¹⁷

T4: New Spiritual Movements and Conspirituallity: New spiritual movements represent heterogeneous forms of contemporary spirituality that often combine religious, esoteric, therapeutic, ecological, or self-development elements. These movements typically operate outside traditional institutional structures and draw on diverse symbolic resources, narrative traditions, and practices. Within certain contexts, such movements may intersect with conspiracy-oriented interpretations of social and political realities. This convergence has been described as **conspirituallity**, the fusion of spiritual worldviews with conspiracy narratives that frame societal developments as the result of hidden actors, secret agendas, or transformative cosmic processes. Conspirituallity emerges particularly in environments where spiritual beliefs emphasise

¹³ DIMDE, Manfred. 1994. *Nostradamus – Apokalyptické desetiletí*. Praha: Natajoga. ISBN 974-8-08-872503-8.

Co všechno předpověděl pro rok 2021 nejslavnější věstec Nostradamus? 2021. *Blesk*, 1 March 2021. <https://1url.cz/teo4h>

¹⁴ Lidstvo ohroženo! Astrologové varují. 1999. *Blesk*, 10 May 1999.

¹⁵ Bulharská vědma nastínila i setkání s mimozemšťany. 2021. *Lidovky*, 31 December 2021. Proroctví Baby Vangy na příští rok: Mají přijít mimozemšťané i nová pandemie. 2021. *Nova TV*, 29 December 2021. <https://1url.cz/3eo4R>

¹⁶ PINCHBERG, Daniel. 2017. *How Soon Is Now? From Personal Initiation to Global Transformation*. London: Watkins. ISBN 978-1-78-028972-4. *Jerry Jenkins*. <https://jerryjenkins.com/about/>

¹⁷ Greta Thunberg. *World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/authors/greta-thunberg/>
DEIN, Simon. 2021. Covid-19 and the Apocalypse: Religious and Secular Perspectives. *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 60, pp. 5-15. DOI: 10.1007/s10943-020-01100-w; <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01100-w>; <https://1url.cz/leo4T>

holistic explanations of reality, distrust of institutions, or the expectation of profound societal transformation. In such settings, spiritual narratives may provide emotionally resonant frameworks that make conspiracy interpretations appear coherent, meaningful, or morally justified. However, spirituality represents only one of several possible vehicles through which conspiracy mentality may be expressed.

The tendency to seek simplified explanations for complex social realities is not confined to spiritual or religious environments. Similar mechanisms can be observed in **political extremism, populist movements**, ideological communities, and secular conspiracy cultures. Conspiratoriness should therefore be understood as one manifestation of broader cognitive and social dynamics associated with uncertainty, identity formation, and the search for meaning in rapidly changing information environments.

T5: Conspiracy Mentality: Conspiracy mentality is understood as a relatively stable psychological predisposition to interpret significant events as the result of hidden actors operating with secret and often malicious intentions. This predisposition can be observed across religious, spiritual, political, ideological, and secular environments and should not be regarded as a phenomenon unique to spirituality.

Within this study, *conspiracy mentality* is provisionally defined as the tendency of some individuals to believe that particular events or situations are orchestrated by influential groups pursuing covert agendas. This mentality often facilitates the acceptance of claims that disregard scientific evidence. Importantly, conspiracy mentality is not correlated with educational attainment; it is observed among individuals across all levels of education.¹⁸ It represents a general cognitive vulnerability that increases susceptibility to specific forms of misinformation.

A deeper understanding of the relationship between spirituality, religiosity, and conspiracy mentality requires distinguishing between conspiracy theories cultivated within certain religious or spiritual traditions and conspiracy theories functioning as a distinct form of quasi-religious belief.¹⁹ In the latter case, conspiracy narratives may provide existential meaning, moral orientation, and a sense of belonging similar to religious worldviews.

Contemporary information ecosystems, particularly social networks and social media, significantly amplify the dissemination of conspiracy narratives. These platforms enable large numbers of individuals to share implausible explanations of local and global events, often portraying the world as governed by clandestine alliances and suggesting that “nothing is as it seems”. Concepts such as the *deep state* exemplify this worldview: even individuals who do not fully endorse the term may still assume the existence of covert alliances among powerful actors. The Covid-19 pandemic, for instance, has been framed by conspiracy narratives as a manufactured crisis designed to exert control or generate profit.

¹⁸ FRISCHLICH, Lena, et al. 2021. Right-wing Authoritarianism, Conspiracy Mentality, and Susceptibility to Distorted Alternative News. *Social Influence*, vol. 36, December, pp. 24-64. <https://osf.io/xj7tm/>

¹⁹ DYRENDAL, Asbjørn. 2020. Conspiracy Theory and Religion. In: BUTTER, Michael and KNIGHT, Peter (eds.) *Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*. London: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-42-945273-4. DOI: 10.4324/9780429452734; <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429452734>

This worldview positions “enlightened” individuals as those who possess access to hidden truths. The more fantastical the narrative, the more its proponents perceive themselves as uniquely informed. Such mechanisms have long been exploited within hybrid influence activities and intelligence operations, which explains why conspiracy narratives remain part of the traditional arsenal of information manipulation.

Before the rise of social media, conspiracy theories and blatant falsehoods circulated primarily through tabloid press, which was widely regarded as entertainment rather than credible information. This dynamic has shifted in cyberspace, where editorial oversight is minimal and entertainment media frequently depict worlds governed by secret forces. For individuals unable to distinguish fiction from reality, such portrayals may reinforce conspiratorial thinking. Populist actors often exploit these vulnerabilities by attacking “detached elites,” calling for the dismantling of the “system,” and presenting themselves as defenders of “ordinary people”.²⁰

The authors also draw on studies describing *anti-rationality* as a life attitude, which resonates at the intersection of spirituality and susceptibility to conspiratorial influence.²¹ With appropriate caution, it can be argued that there is a distinction between *authentic spirituality* and forms of “spirituality” that promote harmful beliefs. Human spirituality can enhance resilience and emotional stability, but it can also diminish resilience and foster dependency, particularly in the context of conspiratoriality, sectarian movements, or groups that propagate harmful narratives. Resistance to misinformation is therefore likely related to broader psychological resilience, emotional grounding, and cognitive stability.

T6: Disinformation and Hybrid Influence. Disinformation is understood as intentionally false or misleading information disseminated to influence perceptions, attitudes, or behaviour. Hybrid influence refers to broader strategies that combine informational, political, social, cultural, and psychological instruments to shape how target audiences interpret events and make decisions. Within contemporary information environments, disinformation and hybrid influence frequently exploit emotionally resonant narratives, including religious and spiritual motifs.

Religious and spiritual framing can significantly enhance the effectiveness of disinformation for several reasons. **First**, individuals tend to accept information that confirms their deeply held beliefs, values, and emotions. When disinformation aligns with religious identity, it can strengthen group cohesion and mobilise specific segments of the population more effectively. **Second**, spiritual narratives often provide simple, memorable, and morally charged explanations of complex realities, making them highly transmissible across diverse audiences. **Third**, religious authorities enjoy high levels of trust in many communities. When misleading information is endorsed or

²⁰ PEHE, Jiří. 2020. Americká popkultura si už dlouho hraje s konspiračními náměty, USA na to ale teď doplácí. *Deník N*, 11 November 2020. <https://1url.cz/neo4F>

²¹ ATROSZKO, Paweł, A.; SKRZYPIŃSKA, Katarzyna and Julia M. BALCEROWSKA. 2021. Is There a General Factor of Spiritual Intelligence? Factorial Validity of the Polish Adaptation of Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory. *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 60, pp. 3591-3605. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10943-021-01350-2>
JASINSKAJA, Lahti, I. and Jolanda JETTEN. 2019. Unpacking the Relationship between Religiosity and Conspiracy Beliefs in Australia. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 58, No. 4, pp. 938-954. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30706498/>

disseminated by such authorities, it is more likely to be accepted by their followers.²² **Fourth**, spiritual and religious messages frequently employ moral framing, which disinformation can exploit to legitimise itself by presenting certain actions or interpretations as morally superior. **Finally**, religious and spiritual narratives can be used to intensify polarisation and conflict, enabling hybrid actors to manipulate tensions between groups for strategic purposes.

Some spiritual and religious groups maintain an active presence on social media, where emotionally charged content is prioritised by algorithmic systems. These communities may function as **highly motivated networks that disseminate narratives tirelessly and without compensation**, thereby amplifying the reach of misinformation. The combination of trusted messengers, emotionally resonant content, and algorithmic amplification creates favourable conditions for the spread of disinformation within spiritual and religious environments.

2.2 Analytical Distinction Between Actors

To avoid conceptual ambiguity, this article distinguishes between several analytically different categories of actors whose roles, intentions, and modes of influence vary substantially (see also **Table 1**). These include 1) established religious institutions; 2) alternative spiritual movements; 3) sectarian or highly manipulative groups; 4) ideological and extremist actors; 5) terrorist organisations, and 6) state or non-state disinformation actors. Although these categories may occasionally share certain narratives, symbols, or rhetorical techniques, they differ markedly in their objectives, legitimacy, organisational structures, and operational practices. The aim of this article is therefore not to equate these actors, but to identify specific points at which their narratives may converge or interact within contemporary information environments.

Table 1: Distinction Between Actors, potentially involved in spiritually or eschato-logically related communication (own elaboration).

Actor	Main objective	Legitimacy	Use of violence
established religious institutions	Spiritual guidance	Institutional	No
alternative spiritual movements	Spiritual transformation	Variable	Rare
sectarian or highly manipulative groups	Strong internal control	Contested	Possible
ideological and extremist actors	Political or ideological change	Low	Sometimes
terrorist organisations	Political goals via violence	None	Core feature
state or non-state disinformation actors	Influence operations	Strategic	Indirect

²² Human Dimension Commitments and State Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic. 2022. *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*. ISBN 978-39-0312-855-2. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/2/468114.pdf>
DOUGLAS, Christopher. 2018. Religion and Fake News: Faith-Based Alternative Information Ecosystems in the United States and Europe. *Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 61-73. DOI:10.1080/15570274.2018.1433522; <https://1url.cz/0eo44>

2.3 Analytical Boundaries of the Study

This study does not seek to evaluate the theological validity of religious beliefs, nor does it suggest that spirituality, religion, or eschatological thinking are inherently linked to disinformation. Rather, the analysis focuses on situations in which spiritual, conspiratorial, or apocalyptic narratives intersect with contemporary information environments. As it was already mentioned, the primary geographical focus is the Czech Republic and the broader European security environment, while selected international examples are used illustratively to demonstrate mechanisms that may transcend national boundaries.

3. Potential for comparison between the different eschatological approaches

This section serves as a conceptual bridge linking the preceding theoretical framework with the subsequent comparative analysis. While earlier chapters outlined key characteristics of spirituality, eschatological expectations, and their psychological implications, the following part focuses on how these elements converge or diverge across traditional spiritual systems, modern alternative movements, and deliberately crafted propaganda:

Traditional spiritual attitudes (not only regarding the imminent apocalypse): Traditional spiritual and religious systems (Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, but also many others) often include ideas about the end of the world or about the apocalypse. These ideas are often associated with some form of “purification” or “transformation”, which can take place in the form of a final judgment or a transition to a differently perceived new era.

New “spiritual” concepts (for example, in relation to the topic of coronavirus): The coronavirus situation was in many ways a catalyst for the emergence of concepts that often combine elements of traditional spirituality with new trends, such as mysticism, esotericism, conspiracy theories and movements focused on “transformation of consciousness”. These approaches were influenced both by fears about the pandemic and the need to find solace in difficult times.

Industrially produced propaganda: Projects where it is possible to identify the actions of state actors, specifically the Russian Federation, in the background, use religious and spiritual motives to strengthen the political agenda. This form of communication focuses on creating an emotional and ideological connection between the population and the state on the one hand (for example within the Russian Federation) and, on the other hand, creating tension and discontent in the space of “hostile countries”. It is a kind of paradox that, at the behest of Moscow, these narratives are proclaimed by people who recently, or even still, present themselves as followers of anti-religious materialism or neo-paganism.

3.1 “Traditional” eschatological spiritual concepts, activated during the coronavirus situation

The emergence of “spiritual innovations” is a completely natural process in most European countries, for which conditions are currently very favourable. The emergence of almost any project of this kind is not accompanied by any persecution. In addition, there is a huge influence of social networks. The most bizarre prophet or

herald of the end of the world will always find at least a few dozen followers on the Internet on a global scale, with whom he or she can develop his or her visions. In the context of post-communist countries, the basic parameters have been more or less the same since the 1990s. The coronavirus situation has apparently not increased the level of religiosity, but rather transformed the situation: *“Conspiracy is such an implicit religion of the present, and it has therefore grown significantly after the pandemic. Religious features are absolutely clearly visible in conspiracism, it just does not have the label of religion that we are used to. So if the pandemic has caused anything, it is the growth of religiosity in this specific segment”*.²³

Rather than simply seeking opportunities to exploit the pandemic to their advantage, a certain percentage of organizations may be inspired by the spread of the virus, death and disruption it leaves behind. These aspects, typical of groups such as Aum Shinrikyo (Supreme Truth, existing since 1984, using the name Aleph after 2000) and Covenant, Sword and the Arm of the Lord (CSA, active from 1971 to 1985), may perceive a global pandemic as a harbinger of the prophesied end of the world, or as a manifestation of their understanding of deity's displeasure with humanity. A pandemic that evokes biblical plagues or “divine punishments” could then act as a catalyst for their subsequent activities.²⁴ In other words, although some terrorist organizations employ religious, apocalyptic, or transformative narratives, their defining feature remains the strategic use of violence to achieve political, ideological, or religious objectives. Consequently, terrorism should not be analytically conflated with spirituality or spirituality-driven movements.

The same is true for jihadist groups such as the so-called Islamic State, whose worldview also includes elements of waiting for the end of the world. As an example of related thinking, Abubakar SHEKAU, one of the leaders of Boko Haram, declared that true believers are protected from the virus, and consequently denounced efforts to combat the disease.²⁵

²³ Religionist Zdeněk VOJTÍŠEK in: KUBANT, Vít and Martin ŠTORKÁN. 2023. Rituály v Kutnohorské sektě byly bizarní. *iRozhlas*, 22 July 2023. <https://1url.cz/Feo4S>

²⁴ Hearings on Global Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Case Study on the Aum Shinrikyo. 1995. *Senate Government Affairs Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (Minority Staff); Federation of American Scientists*, 31 October 1995, p. 91. https://fas.org/irp/congress/1995_rpt/aum/
LIFTON, Robert, Jay. 2000. *Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism*. New York: Metropolitan Books. <https://archive.org/details/destroyingworldt0000lift>
LOADENTHAL, Michael. 2020. The 2020 Pandemic and Its Effect on Anarchist Activity. *Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale*, 15 May 2020. <https://1url.cz/seo4l>
DICKSON, Caitlin. 2020. A Pandemic of Conspiracy Theories Spreads across the Internet and Around the World. *Yahoo News*, 21 May 2020. <https://news.yahoo.com/a-pandemic-of-conspiracy-theories-spreads-across-the-internet-and-around-the-world-195903321.html>
BERTRAND, Natasha. 2020. Department of Homeland Security Warns of Increase in Violent Extremism Amid Coronavirus Lockdowns. *Politico*, 23 April 2020. <https://1url.cz/Meo4G>
²⁵ CAMPBELL, John. 2020. *Boko Haram's Shekau Labels Anti-COVID-19 Measures an Attack on Islam in Nigeria*. Council on Foreign Relations, 17 April 2020. <https://1url.cz/0eo4X>
BASIT, Abdul. 2020. The COVID-19 Pandemic: An Opportunity for Terrorist Groups? *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, No. 3, p. 7-12. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26915444>

It is also interesting that several platforms from East Asia are addressing the topic of the connection between Covid -19 and the end of the world, often referring to the **Book of Revelation**.

A globally active platform called “**Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light**”, headquartered in the Republic of Korea, released a statement saying, “*Rumors are circulating that the coronavirus vaccine may be the “mark of the beast” of Revelation 13.*”²⁶

On February 18, 2022, **Shincheonji, the Church of Jesus**, a platform founded in 1984 in the Republic of Korea, held a European online press conference. According to church leaders, the Covid – related developments are the “sixth trumpet” of Revelation 9: “*The COVID-19 pandemic has brought disease, disaster, and hardship around the world, while also restricting religious activities.*” At the same time, the belief was expressed that this event will serve as an opportunity to renew Christianity in Europe.²⁷

The International Meditation Society of the Supreme Spiritual Teacher Ching Hai (originally from Vietnam, now headquartered in the Republic of China (Taiwan) states that it “*clarifies ancient prophecies relevant to today and explains the inexorable law of cause and effect (karma) known for thousands of years in current events*”, Covid - 19, among other things, is interpreted as punishment for destroying the planet, killing animals and unborn children.²⁸

Conservative Christian portals increasingly cited biblical passages predicting the “end of the age.” Apocalyptic warnings – common during plagues and at the close of centuries or millennia – re-emerged with renewed intensity. Evangelical pastor Gerald FLURRY in the United States claimed that the coronavirus was a divine sign, a horseman of the Apocalypse destined to exterminate a quarter of humanity and guide survivors toward righteousness before the final battle between Good and Evil.²⁹

An illustration of the “halfway” position can be found in an article from William LIND, “politically over-profiled”, so-called paleo-conservative thinker, a supporter of a number of concepts that can be described as conspiracy theories. His frequent claim is that “the end of the world as we know it is near” and the only solution to the situation is radical autonomy of individuals and small communes and a return to conservative (Christian) values. He also talks about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on society, saying that the whole situation is a great inspiration for the

²⁶ *Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light*. <https://www.hwpl.kr>

HWPL: Zahájení náboženského semináře. 2021. *Česká tisková kancelář*, 10 October 2021.

²⁷ Evropská tisková konference Shincheonji, církve Ježíšovy. 2022. *Česká tisková kancelář*, 23 February 2022.

Shincheonji: Nové nebe, nová země. <https://www.shincheonji.cz>

²⁸ Pandemie z pohledu Nebe. 2022. *Česká tisková kancelář*, 19 January 2022.

Krátký životopis Mistryně Ching Hai. *Mezinárodní meditační sdružení nejvyšší mistryně Ching Hai v České republice*. <https://spojenisbohem.cz/zivotopis.php>

Supreme Master Television. <http://www.SupremeMasterTV.cz>

²⁹ *Gerald Flurry*. <https://geraldflurry.com/>

FLURRY, Gerald. 2020. Coronavirus and Other Modern Plagues in Prophecy. *The Trumpet*, April 2020. <https://www.thetrumpet.com/22001-coronavirus-and-other-modern-plagues-in-prophecy>

development of “4th generation weapons”, including genetic engineering for biological warfare and other forms of using weapons of mass destruction (genetically modified diseases etc.).³⁰ This is a text in a relevant periodical that is included in academic databases.

A specific reaction to the coronavirus situation, on the contrary, was the labelling of efforts to resolve the situation through quarantine and other measures, described by their opponents as an obsession comparable to religious fervour, the “religion of covidism”, including “false prophets”. *“A new world religion of the 21st century was born, based on a saviour ideology – covidism. It is now in its initial and most aggressive phase. It shows signs of undemocratic regimes. A new saviour authoritarianism is taking shape. There is brutal propaganda, unofficial censorship, water cannons, tear gas, riot police... It is a phenomenon where negative expectations lead to negative impacts or, conversely, positive expectations lead to positive impacts. This usually happens unconsciously through the link between belief and behaviour.”*³¹

Both during the coronavirus period and at other times in the past, public favour has fluctuated from praise to condemnation of the same “prophet”.³² *“Due to a respiratory disease, harsh interventions were initiated in the economy and politics... It thus acquired the value of a self-fulfilling prophecy”.*³³

An example is evolutionary biologist Jaroslav FLEGR, who became famous for predicting thousands of coronavirus -related deaths per day: *“From today in 30 days, we will have a thousand, over a thousand a day, a thousand people will die every day and we will do nothing about it, because those people are already infected”.*³⁴ Thanks to this, FLEGR has become a media star, alternately admired and condemned by some parts of the population.

3.2 New spiritual concepts, sects and forms of manipulation

A very illustrative case from the perspective of the subject is the one known as the “Kutenberg sect” (Czech Republic, Central Bohemian Region). For about 20 years, there existed a group of people, including university graduates, led by a healer that enforced extreme obedience even in the most intimate matters. In an attempt to please their leader, the members even resorted to self-harm. However, in 2023, the guru forced two members to participate in his suicide, which exposed the group. Despite its long duration, the sect was not a spiritually consistent project.

³⁰ LIND, William S. 2020. The End of Big: The Coronavirus, amid all the Destruction, Is a Return to Reality. *American Conservative*, No. 3, p. 12.

³¹ KLÍMA, Michal. 2021. Média a nové náboženství covidismu. *Echo24.cz*, 5 December 2021. <http://echo24.cz/a/SdZyt>

³² ŠEDO, Alexi. 2021. Covidový Babylon. *Pražský deník*, 17 May 2021.

STERN, Jessica. 1999. *The Ultimate Terrorists*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. ISBN 978-0-67-400394-1.

³³ HOLUB, Petr. 2020. Kdybychom nepropadli falešnému poplachu, mohli jsme druhou vlnu zvládnout. *Echo24.cz*, 9 December 2020. <http://echo24.cz/a/SZfRE>

³⁴ Slovník covidové éry. 2021. *Reflex*, 11 March 2021.

Interview with Jaroslav FLEGR, 22 October 2020, shortly after the announcement of a partial lockdown in the Czech Republic: Mrazáky a tisíce mrtvých. Kočičí proroctví profesora Flegra se naštěstí nenaplnuje. 2020. *Novinky.cz*, 19 November 2020. <https://1url.cz/Heo45>

In Plasy (Czech Republic, Pilsen Region), the Fire Dragon sect still exists, whose similarly charismatic guru “God the Jester” faced investigation due to the death of one of its members during a home birth.³⁵

Even formally highly educated people are not immune to manipulation. Sometimes it is quite the opposite. *“Educated and intelligent people ask more questions and are therefore more insecure. Sometimes this can escalate to a certain internal stress, which may not be reflected, but which is somewhere inside the person, and then they experience a certain effort to find answers to their questions. Find certainty about their insecurity wherever possible... The only prevention against manipulation or against being manipulated is humility. The most risky factor is often intellectual individualistic stupidity, that I hold everything firmly in my hands, no one will dictate anything to me, I will recognize everything. Whoever thinks this has one foot in some manipulative group”.*³⁶

In a similar vein, other expressions are articulated as: *“Why do people join such sects and trust their leaders implicitly? Experts believe that the main reason is the desire for friendship and faith in the salvation that is promised to them. It is also evident that the age-old human hope that if we find the “answer”, life will not be so complicated”.*³⁷

3.3 Industrially produced propaganda

A specific perspective on the processes related to the hybrid actions of the Russian Federation. Hybrid, often apparently pro-Kremlin, campaigns often use spiritual motives to support so-called traditional values (which in reality are far from dominant in the Russian Federation) and to discredit so-called “Western” or “liberal” influences, which are presented as corrupt and destructive. This approach may also include motives that support isolationism and passivity, especially if such processes within Euro-Atlantic countries weaken social cohesion and active resistance to hybrid influences. **Small streams of anti-system activists (and narratives) merged into a single disciplined subculture during the coronavirus pandemic.**³⁸

It is important that these narratives are usually quite flexible, sometimes even deliberately formless, aim-oriented. Thus, everyone can interpret the related narratives according to his or her nature. The target group in this case may be emotionally unstable individuals and members of a relatively broad socially disadvantaged group – who, due to the impacts of economic development and technology, but also the loss of unambiguous interpretations of traditional values, represent the ideal addressees of the relevant manipulative influence, which offers them a subjectively acceptable starting point.

³⁵ Centrum „Ohnivý drak“. <http://www.ohnivy-drak.cz/>

³⁶ Religionist Zdeněk VOJTÍŠEK in: KUBANT, Vít and Martin ŠTORKÁN. 2023. Rituály v Kutnohorské sektě byly bizarní. *iRozhlas*, 22 July 2023. <https://1url.cz/Feo4S>

³⁷ CARA. Dan. 1999. Červenec je měsícem ohlašovaného konce světa. *Lidové noviny*. 3 July 1999.

³⁸ Police specialist Vojtěch MOTYKA; in: KOTALÍK, Jakub. 2021. Extremisté se chtějí přizivit na odporu k opatřením. *Novinky*, 16 March 2021. <https://1url.cz/Meo4P>

A statement from the Christian blog “For God’s Sake!” [Proboha!], where the author defines himself against the concept of qAnon, can be quite illustrative: *“Groups like qAnon, although they are generally considered dysfunctional, function for many Christians as an Island of Failed Toys. Those who feel marginalized by secular society find here not only solace, but also visibility and a role in the grand story. It is a paradise created for justification against supposed enemies, where the truth of these narratives is as dubious as a flat Earth, but seemingly irrelevant to its followers.”*³⁹ In the related discussion under the post, several suggestions are heard, for which it is actually indifferent whether it is spontaneous or industrially created. An equation is put between authentic Christianity, opposition to liberalism, to any political and social engagement, as well as opposition to the institutions of open democracy, especially elections. And it is quite possible that at a certain crossroads in life, some authentic Christian will begin to believe that this will be his compass for his future behaviour. **Every segment of society is therefore covered by conspiratorial-disinformation and ultimately anti-democratic influence:** *“For me, it is better to believe in God than to end up as a mental wreck of liberal democracy. And the good news is that after those years of spiritual poverty, more and more people are starting to come to churches again. The article amused me and as a Christian I am sending a message to the author that I do not go to the elections – and he should understand this – we cannot believe in things that do not exist – elections in which the voter cannot verify that his vote was really and correctly counted are not elections but only faith in elections, Otherwise I will pray for you tonight”.*⁴⁰

Journalist Jessikka ARO from Finland adds to the topic: *“Russia... carries out a lot of covert operations that use **microtargeting**, that is, they target very narrow groups of people... These communities can become radicalized very quickly. And that is exactly what the Russians are trying to do. They want to control real people, their decision-making and voting behaviour, at least remotely from their troll farms. They are trying to influence them to go to the streets to protest against or for anything, any topic that suits the Kremlin”.*⁴¹

The claim that the European Union and the United States are morally, culturally, and economically destroyed, while the Russian Federation (or the People’s Republic of China) are strong and their traditional spirituality makes them morally stronger than the West, appears mainly among chain mail readers. This corresponds to the idea that “the West is decadent, gender-mad, and barren”, while “the East protects traditional family and faith.” This is a lie for “spiritually minded losers”.⁴² In the Czech Republic, Jiří Maria MAŠEK, for example, belonged to this subculture. In addition to statements about the fact that he had long foreseen everything that was happening, he

³⁹ DELONY, Stuart. 2024. Jak se křesťané stávají cílem pro podvodníky a konspirační teorie. *ProBoha!*. 21 July 2024. <https://1url.cz/qeo49>

⁴⁰ DELONY, Stuart. 2024. Jak se křesťané stávají cílem pro podvodníky a konspirační teorie. *ProBoha!* 21 July 2024. <https://1url.cz/qeo49>

⁴¹ BASTLOVÁ, Marie. 2025. Seznam je dechberoucí, expertka popisuje hybridní útoky Ruska na USA. *Seznam Zprávy*, 2 May 2025. <https://1url.cz/Meo4Y>

⁴² ŠAFR, Pavel. 2025. 5 měsíců do voleb: V Česku probíhá dezinformační kampaň. Zde je 10 nejčastějších lží. *Forum 24*, 22 April 2025. <https://1url.cz/reo4n>

recommended the overthrow of “satanic governments” and call the citizens “to take power into their own hands”.⁴³

Another important person in this regard is molecular biologist Soňa PEKOVÁ, regularly participating in the spread of unverified narratives during the coronavirus pandemic. In an interview for the Internet platform “Radio Liberty”, focused on the spread of pro-Kremlin narratives, on 6 April 2022, she called on the public to pray for the health of Vladimir PUTIN, who allegedly destroyed laboratories working on the production of pathogens in Ukraine. *“Because the fact that he shattered and bombed there [...] caused there to be no wave of viruses [...] Give him a prayer, he deserves thanks for shattering it.”*⁴⁴ Over time, the standard and once appreciated scientist began to perceive herself as a not entirely specified spiritual being, different from „ordinary people“, as a herald of the coming golden age (which could equally be a cataclysm or a transformation): *„I am the administrator of the world, one of twelve, I am the only one in the experience, I am a being of light, my original family is light... It will be good, it is simply a planned, programmed, written scenario, they are still working out what the final closing scene will look like, because there are thirteen administrators of the world. There are also dark forces there who are afraid of me because I closed the gates to them, so they are trying something there.”*⁴⁵

One of the umbrella approaches that can be attributed to this kind of worldview is, for example, “Global Liberation”, literally a departure from social processes perceived as “enslavement” (Global Walk Out). Examples of similar worldviews include the Sovereign Citizen Movement (existing since the 1970s in the United States of America), the Freeman on the Land Movement (Canada), or the Reich citizens in Germany (referring to the German Empire before 1918). Some supporters of this type of approach believe that their homeland is not a state, but a private corporation that lacks any authority over them – for example, to enforce payment of taxes, compliance with laws, sending children to school etc. However, these people usually do not hesitate to use the benefits or externalities resulting from the existence of the state. For example, in the context of the Czech Republic, these are the concepts of “Czechoslovaks” (their idea is conceived in such a way that with the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and its disintegration into the Czech Republic and Slovakia at the turn of 1992 and 1993, their obligations to the state ended, and the successor countries, primarily the Czech Republic, are private corporations) and the concept of “Living Humans” (often involving a number of personal connections with “Czechoslovaks”, with whom they also share a deep admiration for the Russian Federation, but they are much more consistent in aspects of personal self-sufficiency, ideally through independent estates). The leaders of both interconnected concepts do not object to personal enrichment, for example in the form of requests for direct

⁴³ Cesta životem. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/cestazivotem?locale=cs_CZ

⁴⁴ VAVRO, Peter. 2024. Hvězdná konspirátorka se vrací. Soňa Peková má šanci na životní misi. *Forum 24*, 18 January 2024. <https://1url.cz/9eo46>
HORÁK, Otakar. 2022. Po lžiach o korone sa Peková zastáva Putina. *Deník N*, 21 April 2022. <https://1url.cz/ieo48>

⁴⁵ JANEKOVÁ, Lucia. 2023. Preslávila sa dezinformáciami o Covid-19, v súčasnosti má blízko k ezoterickej sekte. *InfoSecurity*, 18 September 2023. <https://1url.cz/qeo4U>

financial contributions or by selling other goods, including “identity cards” of the defunct Czechoslovakia.⁴⁶

3.4 Integrated Comparative Model

The following comparative model (**Table 2**) represents the authors’ original analytical contribution. It was developed through a qualitative comparison of theoretical literature and illustrative cases discussed throughout the article and is intended to visualise recurrent structural similarities and differences among spiritual, conspiritual, and propaganda narratives. Rather than establishing causal relationships, the model serves as a heuristic framework that highlights how various narrative systems may converge at the level of symbolic structure while diverging in purpose, origin, and strategic intent.

Table 2 presents a synthetic overview designed to map potential intersections, parallels, and divergences between: **a)** traditional spiritual concepts or attitudes, **b)** new or alternative spiritual concepts, and **c)** industrially produced propaganda, particularly that associated with state-sponsored disinformation. The model is not intended as a definitive typology; instead, it provides an analytical tool that enables researchers to visualise how different types of narratives may share motifs such as apocalyptic tropes, promises of salvation, or fear-based mobilisation, even though they differ substantially in their objectives and operational contexts.

The coding system (**S1, D1, S2, D2**) is used solely for internal cross-referencing within the text. It illustrates relationships of **similarity (S)** and **difference (D)** between the three categories, thereby supporting a clearer analytical comparison of how various forms of spirituality may become intertwined with, or exploited by, disinformation processes.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Společenství prohlášených živých člověků*. <https://www.zivyclovek.com/>
Společenství legitimních věřitelů České republiky. *Facebook*. <https://1url.cz/31fbZ>
Svobodné seskupení Djeržava Československaja. *Facebook*.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1322031795308842/>

⁴⁷ Source: brainstorming within the author team, based on:
BEZALEL, Glenn, Y. 2021. Conspiracy Theories and Religion: Reframing Conspiracy Theories as Bliks. *Episteme*, vol 14, No. 4, pp. 674-692. DOI: 10.1017/epi.2019.4; <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2019.46>
DYRENDAL, Asbjørn. 2020. Conspiracy Theory and Religion. In: BUTTER, Michael and KNIGHT, Peter (eds.) *Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*. London: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-42-945273-4. DOI: 10.4324/9780429452734; <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429452734>
Katehon. <https://katehon.com/>
ŠTAHAN, Matija. 2023. Katechon or Satan? The Russian Deception. *Providence*, 9 October 2023. <https://providencemag.com/2023/10/katechon-or-satan-the-russian-deception/>

		Relationship to traditional spiritual attitudes	
New “spiritual” concepts	Similarities (S1)	Apocalyptic vision	In many traditions, there are visions of the end of civilization, which may mean the destruction of the old, impure world, followed by a new, better world.
		Omens and signs	Both traditional and modern apocalyptic visions are often accompanied by signs that indicate the approaching end (natural disasters, wars, epidemics).
		Crises and paradigm shifts	As in traditional apocalyptic visions, in new ones, pandemics and global crises are seen as harbingers of greater transformation. Some of the new concepts have argued that COVID-19 is an opportunity for spiritual awakening, personal transformation, or a transition to a “new era”.
		Connection to “modern” spiritual concepts	In many cases, ancient spiritual teachings have been reinterpreted in the context of modern technologies (online spiritual communities), leading to new forms of “virtual globalized movements”.
		Salvation versus destruction	Traditional spiritual ideas often associate the “end of the world” with religious salvation or a new beginning, with an emphasis on ethical or spiritual growth at the individual and societal levels.
		Hardships overcoming	Traditional and modern spiritual trends often offer visions of what a “new society” will look like, even at the expense of a period of pain and fear.
	Differences (D1)	Collective versus individual	Traditional visions focus on the overall fate of humanity or a particular nation, while modern spiritual concepts can also be strongly personal.
		Commercialization and online culture	In some cases, modern spiritual approaches have turned into a business, where spirituality has become a product offered through the social media, which is different from traditional religious communities.
		Speed of processes	Traditional concepts place more emphasis on patience, perseverance and accept difficulties as part of life, while modern (but also explicitly artificially created) trends can be based more on the desire for rapid, “positive” change
Industrially produced propaganda	Similarities (S2)	To some extent, the similarities mentioned above (S1) can also be applied here.	
		The role of fear	Just like some spiritual concepts that play on the fear of the apocalypse, completely artificially created propaganda often uses fear to manipulate and control. In this case, it is a fear of external or completely fabricated threats that are portrayed as existential.

	Differences (D2)	Political and ideological manipulation	Unlike traditional spiritual visions or modern spiritual trends, which can be focused on personal or collective transformation, the propaganda of the Russian Federation is primarily focused on political goals, or rather, the justification of military or political actions.
		Creation of an “enemy”	While traditional spiritual teachings and modern spiritual trends rather address internal problems and the path to spiritual awakening, propaganda focuses on the creation of a specific “enemy” and “victim”, which is essentially a political strategy, not a spiritual or spiritual philosophy.
		Narrative of “apocalypse” or “struggle between Good and Evil”	Propaganda (in the context of the war in Ukraine) often portrays the conflict as a battle between “Good” (traditional values) and “Evil” (the “decadent” Western culture). This narrative is reminiscent of traditional visions where only the “good” side can survive a catastrophe.

4. Discussion

The article provides an interdisciplinary exploration of the interplay between spirituality and disinformation, drawing on philosophy, sociology, psychology of religion, crisis studies, and security studies. Its central argument is that spiritual and eschatological expectations form powerful interpretative frameworks that can either strengthen or weaken societal resilience.

A key contribution is the recognition that spirituality, contrary to common assumptions, can operate as both a protective factor and a vulnerability. Certain forms of spirituality enhance emotional stability, moral orientation, and resilience. In contrast, pseudospirituality or conspirituality (tendency toward conspiracies) can provide simplified explanations for complex phenomena and reinforce cognitive distortions. These systems often thrive in environments marked by fear, uncertainty, and distrust.

The discussion of conspiracy mentality reveals that conspiratorial thinking is not limited by education level. Instead, it is rooted in psychological predispositions and existential needs, including a desire for certainty, a sense of belonging, and simple narratives that turn chaos into order.

The article’s treatment of eschatology is particularly insightful. It shows that crises, pandemics, wars, ecological threats, invariably activate apocalyptic thinking, which can take traditional or modernized forms. The authors document how Covid-19 inspired a wide range of spiritual entrepreneurs.

The most security, relevant part concerns **hybrid influence**. Here, the authors argue persuasively that spiritual narratives are ripe for exploitation because they resonate emotionally, can be reframed into “struggles between Good and Evil,” and provide ready – made symbolic structures. Disinformation strategies often use these motifs to sow confusion, encourage fatalism, or cultivate admiration for authoritarianism masked as “defense of traditional values”.

The final sections on sects and spiritual groups provide examples of how spiritual ideas can evolve into manipulation, exploitation, or radicalization. Importantly,

the article highlights that vulnerability is not limited to the uneducated; highly educated individuals may be even more susceptible due to intellectual overconfidence and existential insecurity.

The article thus contributes to understanding how spiritual systems intersect with information security. It offers conceptual clarity, empirical grounding, and a practical tool (the comparative table), making it relevant for police, intelligence services, and policymakers who should understand not only overt propaganda but the deeper cognitive and cultural ecosystems that enable its spread.

Answers to the introductory questions are in this regard as follows:

1) How do spiritual and eschatological worldviews influence susceptibility to conspiracy thinking and disinformation? Spiritual and eschatological worldviews provide interpretative frameworks that simplify complex realities through metaphysical explanations, moral dualism, and narratives of cosmic struggle. These worldviews may reduce uncertainty but simultaneously make individuals more receptive to disinformation framed in prophetic or religious language. Apocalyptic motifs, predictions, and “signs” resonate with pre-existing beliefs, making certain people more prone to accepting conspiratorial narratives, especially during crises such as pandemics or geopolitical instability.

2) In what ways can spiritual or eschatological narratives become targets or instruments of hybrid influence operations? Hybrid actors, particularly state-sponsored disinformation producers, exploit spiritual narratives because they generate strong emotions, offer clear villains and saviors, and penetrate identity structures. Propaganda campaigns often appropriate religious symbols, proclamations of the “end of the age,” or narratives of moral decay to support political aims. These narratives may justify military actions, portray adversaries as embodiments of “Evil,” or foster fatalism and passivity in target populations. Their symbolic flexibility allows them to be tailored for microtargeted influence.

3) What structural similarities exist between traditional spirituality, new spiritual movements, and state-driven propaganda, and where do they differ? All three narrative systems share structural elements such as apocalyptic imagery, moral polarization, charismatic authority, and promises of salvation or transformation. They also rely on emotionally charged storytelling and offer meaning in times of crisis. However, they differ fundamentally in intent and origin. Traditional spirituality focuses on ethical formation and meaning-making; new spiritual movements often blend esoteric ideas with modern anxieties and commercialized self-help; propaganda weaponizes these symbolic structures for strategic political purposes, constructing external enemies and legitimizing state narratives.

4) Why is this topic relevant for contemporary security policy? In an era of information overload, social fragmentation, and global crises, spiritual frameworks increasingly shape public interpretations of events. Understanding how these frameworks intersect with disinformation helps security institutions, especially police forces, recognize cognitive vulnerabilities within the population. Moreover, hybrid influence campaigns actively exploit spiritual narratives to polarize society, undermine democratic institutions, and mobilize (or demobilize) selected groups. Therefore, integrating spiritual, cultural analysis into security decision-making is crucial for preventing misinformation, driven instability.

The principal contribution of this study lies not in demonstrating that religion or spirituality generate disinformation, but in identifying specific mechanisms through which spiritual, conspiratorial, and hybrid influence narratives may intersect within contemporary information environments. The article shows that similar symbolic structures – such as apocalyptic expectations, moral dualism, promises of salvation, and charismatic authority – may appear in otherwise fundamentally different contexts. Recognizing these structural similarities while maintaining clear distinctions between religious institutions, spiritual movements, conspiracy communities, and disinformation actors represents an important prerequisite for both scholarly analysis and security practice.

5. Practical Implications and Recommendations

The findings presented in this article indicate that the relationship between spirituality, conspiracy mentality, and disinformation should be approached as a multidimensional phenomenon situated at the intersection of psychology, sociology, religion, security studies, and strategic communication. The analysis suggests that spiritual and eschatological narratives are not inherently problematic. On the contrary, spirituality may serve as an important source of resilience, meaning-making, and psychological stability during periods of uncertainty. Risks emerge primarily in situations where spiritual narratives become intertwined with disinformation, conspiracy theories, manipulation, or hybrid influence activities.

From a security perspective, it is therefore important to distinguish between established religious institutions, alternative spiritual movements, conspiratorial communities, extremist actors, and organized disinformation campaigns. Although these actors may occasionally employ similar symbolic repertoires – such as apocalyptic visions, narratives of salvation, or moral dualism – they differ substantially in terms of objectives, legitimacy, organizational structures, and methods of influence. Effective risk assessment requires preserving these distinctions and avoiding simplistic associations between religion, spirituality, and security threats.

Several practical **implications (I)** arise from the analysis are as follows:

I1: Strengthening information resilience: Public institutions should continue supporting initiatives focused on media literacy, critical thinking, and information resilience. Educational activities should not concentrate solely on identifying false information but also on understanding psychological and emotional mechanisms that make individuals receptive to simplified explanatory narratives during periods of crisis and uncertainty.

I2: Cooperation with religious and community actors: Established religious institutions may represent important partners in strengthening societal resilience. Churches and faith-based communities often possess significant levels of trust and social capital, enabling them to contribute to community stability, social cohesion, and the dissemination of reliable information during crises. Security institutions should therefore view such actors not only as subjects of analysis but also as potential partners in resilience-building efforts.

I3: Monitoring conspiratorial and hybrid narratives: Security and analytical institutions should pay increased attention to the emergence of narratives that combine spiritual symbolism, conspiracy beliefs, and disinformation themes. Such narratives

may become particularly influential during periods characterized by societal anxiety, geopolitical instability, public health emergencies, or rapid technological change. Monitoring should focus on identifying influence mechanisms rather than evaluating the theological content of beliefs.

I4: Strategic communication: Public communication should acknowledge that many conspiracy narratives fulfil emotional and identity-related functions. Merely correcting factual inaccuracies may therefore prove insufficient. Strategic communication efforts should combine factual accuracy with culturally sensitive and socially credible forms of communication that address concerns, fears, and uncertainties directly.

I5: Future research: Further interdisciplinary research is required to better understand the relationships between spirituality, religion, conspiracy mentality, and susceptibility to information manipulation. Particular attention should be devoted to comparative studies examining differences between mainstream religious institutions, alternative spiritual movements, secular conspiracy environments, and politically motivated influence operations.

Ultimately, the central security challenge is not spirituality itself, but the ability of various actors to exploit existing existential anxieties, identity needs, and demands for certainty through simplified narratives that obscure the complexity of contemporary social and political realities.

Summary

This article examines how spiritual worldviews, including traditional religious beliefs, modern alternative spirituality, and eschatological expectations, intersect with susceptibility to conspiracy theories and disinformation. Drawing primarily on empirical observations from the Czech Republic, but with clear parallels across Western societies, the authors show how periods of crisis (pandemics, security instability, technological disruption) intensify people's tendency to seek transcendent or metaphysical explanations. These worldviews may provide emotional comfort, but also make certain individuals more vulnerable to narratives framed in spiritual, prophetic, or apocalyptic language.

The article outlines the conceptual boundaries of "spirituality", explains the psychological mechanism of conspiracy mentality, and demonstrates how spiritual narratives, "old" and "new", can be repurposed for hybrid influence operations. State and non, state actors, often use spiritual symbolism, apocalyptic imagery, or moral dualism to mobilize audiences, undermine societal trust, and create emotional resonance.

Table 1 outlines the analytical distinction between actors potentially involved in spiritually or eschatologically oriented communication. It summarises the categories examined in this article and highlights their differing roles, intentions, and modes of influence. Although these actors may occasionally employ similar symbolic motifs or narrative techniques, they vary substantially in legitimacy, organisational structure, and strategic purpose.

Table 2 maps structural parallels and differences among traditional religious eschatology, new spiritual movements (including pandemic, related spiritualities), and

industrially produced propaganda. While all three categories share motifs such as fears of the apocalypse or the promise of renewal, they differ fundamentally in intent: traditional and alternative spiritualities focus on meaning, making, whereas propaganda focuses on political manipulation. The article concludes that monitoring these intersections is vital for security policy, especially for police forces, as spiritual frameworks increasingly shape vulnerability to misinformation.

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Illustration: It is probably no coincidence that one of the faces of the "Worldwide Liberation" project is the MEP for the Alternative for Germany, Christine ANDERSON; Robert KENNEDY junior and other "notable" people are also depicted, preparing to "reignite the flame of freedom", or rather to speak out against the so-called "global agenda", which is a conspiratorial concept claiming that the world elites are planning variously specified enslavement projects with the planet or humanity.⁴⁸



⁴⁸ Global Walkout. X; Twitter, 21 August 2022.
<https://twitter.com/LFJIreland/status/1561343751859183616>

col. Mgr. Kristýna Holubová, Ph.D. (*1977)

Graduate of the Faculty of Law of the Charles University in Prague. She works as the head of the Education Department of the Police Education and Training Unit of the Police of the Czech Republic. At the same time, she is an academic at the Crisis Management Department of the Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague (specialist on security policy and international cooperation). She participated in the integration processes of the Czech Republic into the European Union and Schengen cooperation. Author and co, author of professional thesis and articles focused on topics of internal security inc. disinformation and the use of modern technologies.

Mgr. Lenka Jakubcová, Ph.D. (*1982)

She is a graduate of the Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague, where she has been working as an academic at the Department of Crisis Management since 2006. She has also been a lecturer at the Central European Management Institute since 2012. She focuses mainly on crisis management, population protection and the integrated rescue system. Since January 2023, she has been the leading investigator of the project Resilience of the Police of the Czech Republic to Disinformation Interference and the Possibility of Strengthening their Resistance through Education (VK01020187).

Mgr. Petr Klíma, MPA (*1967)

Between 2014 and 2019, the senior employee of the Department of Security Research and Police Training of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic. From 2019 until now, senior employee of the Crime Prevention Department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic. Author and co, author of professional and popularization articles and conference contributions, especially on the topics of internal security and crime prevention.

doc. Mgr. Oldřich Krulík, Ph.D.; corresponding author (*1975)

Between 2001 and 2009, employee of the security policy department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic (fight against terrorism; anti, corruption measures). Between 2010 and 2020, academic worker of the Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague. He currently works within the Department of Central Analysts of the Office of Criminal Police and Investigation Services and in other educational and research institutions. Author and co, author of several dozens of professional and popularizing articles and chapters in monographs, especially on topics of internal security.