

# Nature Returns: Dolphins and Dinosaurs. On Fake News, Photoshop Urban Legends and Memes during the COVID-19 Lockdown

*Eda Kalmre*

Folklore Department of the Estonian Literary Museum  
eda@folklore.ee

## ABSTRACT

*The article traces a narrative trail of social media posts and fake news in the early months of COVID-19 about how the reduction in pollution caused by the lockdown will allegedly have such a positive effect on the environment that nature will be restored. The study sheds light on this context and observes the change in rhetoric through the cultural matrices of various genres. It discusses whether an image is capable of telling a credible story. If it can, what is the relationship between context, truth and rhetoric and what role does humour play? In this article, however, the texts are accompanied by photographs depicting the events so it is easy to observe how visuality, which in fake news is part of the truth rhetoric, transforms into a vernacular critique of the truth itself. As to the material presented here, a contemporary legend researcher cannot ignore the legend motifs used in the viral visual narratives known as memes.*

## KEYWORDS

*fake news; contemporary legend; rumour; meme; tall tale; social media; parody*

EL RETORN DE LA NATURA: DOFINS I DINOSAURES. SOBRE NOTÍCIES FALSES, PHOTOSHOP, LLEGENDES URBANES I MEMS DURANT EL CONFINAMENT PER LA COVID-19

#### RESUM

*L'article traça un rastre narratiu alimentat per publicacions i notícies falses a les xarxes socials durant els primers mesos de la quarantena de la COVID-19 sobre com la reducció de la contaminació causada per la quarantena suposadament tindria un efecte positiu en el medi ambient i la natura es recuperaria. L'estudi aporta llum al context del tema i observa el canvi de la retòrica a través de les matrius culturals de diversos gèneres. La discussió rau en el fet de si una imatge és capaç d'explicar una història creïble. Si aquest és el cas, quina relació hi ha entre context, veritat i retòrica i quin paper hi juga l'humor en tot això? Pel que fa a aquest tema, però, és fàcil observar com la visibilitat, que en les fake news forma part de la retòrica de la veritat, ja que el text va acompanyat d'una fotografia que representa l'esdeveniment, s'ha transformat en la crítica vernacular de la mateixa veritat. Pel que fa al material que es presenta aquí, un investigador de llegenda contemporània no pot ignorar els motius de llegenda utilitzats en les narracions visuals virals conegudes com mems.*

#### PARAULES CLAU

*notícies falses; llegenda contemporània; rumor; mem; rondalla d'exageracions; xarxa social; paròdia*

REBUT: 19/01/2022 | ACCEPTAT: 13/02/2022

As a folklorist, since the beginning of 2020 I have been fascinated to observe vernacular responses to the global crisis because much of what people communicate about all the aspects of the current global emergency on social media is based on folklore: i.e., beliefs, urban legends, rumours, jokes and narratives. In turn, these are built upon motifs, models and structures that have been of significant cultural relevance in the past. Folklorists throughout the world have collected the material independently and in the framework of joint projects (see Kõiva, Voolaid 2020).<sup>1</sup> A collaboration article by Estonian folklorists provides a fresh review of the folklore in the early months of the pandemic (see Hiimäe, Kalda *et al.* 2020). The following examples of memes were collected during the first months of the pandemic from social media posts by the author's nearly 400 Facebook contacts from the Belief Narrative Network (BNN) and International Society for Contemporary Legend Research (ISCLR). It should be pointed out right from the start, however, that the number and variability of the memes that reflected the pandemic in a positive light was quite small in relation to the overall meme repertoire circulating at the time. It should also be pointed out that most of them originated in English-language social media and spread globally as English-language memes, and only a few were adapted to the local Estonian context.

## 1. Image and word. Similar phenomena and the cultural forms with which they are described

Memes – shared messages of images and texts – are a symbolic phenomenon characteristic of interpersonal communication during the pandemic period. The participatory culture that operates through memes is often highly intense and universal. While communicating by memes has been growing in popularity on social media for years, the global pandemic, which saw human interaction move largely online, has made it truly rampant. Estonian journalist Esta Tatrik argued in the local daily *Postimees* that, owing to the memes that flooded social media at the start of the latest corona crisis, we were undoubtedly in for one of the wittiest and most entertaining apocalypses ever (Tatrik 2020). Indeed, provisionally, the contemporary meme<sup>2</sup> formula is arguably the most visible and expressive genre in the social media communication of the participatory culture of the pandemic period. The term largely signifies the transmitting of visual information online, a mix of ideas and images that spread virally. Humour, repetitiveness, dialogicity, simplicity, creativity, artistry, playfulness, imagery, unpredictability and the digital context – all these keywords characterise memes (Shifman 2007, 2011, etc.). Shifman's methodological and theoretical views on the study of memes have been further developed by Bradley Wiggins, who in his latest study focused on

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<sup>1</sup> One of the major international projects on this subject is 'Humor during the Global Corona Crisis' with Giseline Kuipers (Leuven Catholic University) and Mark Boukes (University of Amsterdam) as lead partners, bringing together scholars from more than 30 countries, including Estonia. The questionnaire, which was translated into different languages <<https://edu.nl/kp8xe>>, was used to ask respondents to send jokes, including memes shared among internet users. The global corpus is available for all project partners for the purposes of comparative research (Kõiva, Voolaid 2020: 183).

<sup>2</sup> The term 'meme' was adopted by Richard Dawkins for describing small units of cultural transmission as a parallel to biological genes (Dawkins 1976). Lately, memes have become a part of popular self-expression in online communication.

the intertextuality, semiotics and ideology of memes (Wiggins 2019). Folklorists have also been inspired by Shifman's works, but they have also followed 'their own path' by seeing analogues in earlier folk tales, including contemporary legends, of the material (memes) that appeared on social media. In a sense, these discussions are reminiscent of the discussion on the genre of modern legends and classical legends in the 1980s. These were mostly found to be rediscovered stories that transcend cultural boundaries and largely spread through the mass media, but are not new in form, function or meaning. Rather, they express an adaptation to the modern environment, and they have been closely connected to jokes (*schwank*) and tall tales (cf Klintberg 1990).

Joking is indeed at the forefront in memes, with humour adding a softening and generalising effect to the message (even if it is the message of anxiety and doubt). Most contemporary material circulating in popular form and style serves as a response to some real-life event and a news story describing or interpreting it. Folklore researchers have agreed to approach this kind of material as *newslore*. Vernacular responses can be expressed not only in memes but also in various other genres: songs, movies and other parodies, jokes, urban legends, animated cartoons, digitally modified photos, etc. All this material could be regarded as a kind of news-based vernacular media critique (see Frank 2011: 7, 166 ff.).

These days, memes and their interpretation have captured the interest not only of folklorists but also of social psychologists and researchers into contemporary communication, popular culture and humour. For nearly twenty years now, contemporary legend researchers have been studying material in which seemingly truthful subject matter is initially presented in picture form. Russell Frank (2003) was one of the first authors to write about it. He called these photo-based stories *photographic* or *photoshop urban legends*. The emergence of image material of this sort was greatly influenced by major catastrophes such as the World Trade Centre terrorist attack, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, etc. I remember the 2007 conference of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research in Dublin, at which the American folklorist Diane Goldstein, outside her conference presentation, referred to these seemingly authentic photographs of extraordinary or curious events circulating on the internet as a novel visual narrative genre. At that time, the general agreement at this international panel was that an image tells a story, that an image/photo inherently contains the rhetoric of truth because the photographer has captured a real moment and what is seen with one's own eyes is believable. Also, such visual narratives employ universal motifs known in folktales (i.e., in culture).<sup>3</sup> In his article, Russell Frank proposes three main criteria that an image would have to meet to be regarded as an urban legend in the form of a photograph: (1) the image must tell a story; (2) it must be extraordinary, believable, but still false; (3) it must express, at least obliquely, anxiety about threats to our health, safety and psychic equilibrium. In this preliminary article on the topic, Frank points out two "technical" methods that are used to construct a story of this sort. The visual narrative may be created either by using a real (true) photo or a so-called hoax photo (digitally altered photo). To characterise the nature of this phenomenon, Frank proposes a genre

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<sup>3</sup> The talk and the discussion among all panel participants took place at the end of the conference (author's note).

specification known in earlier narrative tradition of tall-tale jokes and calls it a *tall-tale photograph* (Frank 2003: 120).<sup>4</sup>

As in memes and tall tales, the apparent and difficult-to-control truth gap plays an important role. In the case of memes using photos in digital media, one of the criteria is the creation of veracity through a link with reality.

While truthfulness, which is often ostensible and difficult to verify, plays an important role in legends and fake news, one of the criteria in memes using photos on the digital media is the creation of believability through a bond with reality. Limor Shifman has used photos to study the creative processes that exploit shared and repetitive patterns in memes, and claims that photo-based memes act as a kind of hypersignification mechanism, in which the code itself becomes the focus of attention and functions as prospective photography, and photos are increasingly seen as the raw material for future images. Eventually, by combining these two frames, memes are conceptualised as operative signs—textual categories that are designed as an invitation for (creative) action. While these qualities have been known to appear, in one way or another, in traditional forms of photography too, they have transformed into governing logics in an era characterised by an amalgamation of digital photography and participatory culture (Shifman 2014).

The message that memes convey is not only light and humorous throughout. Many of them can be viewed through the lens of belief and legend research, on the scale of moving (unfixed) truth and reality, which is so characteristic of legends (Bennett 1988: 32–33, etc., Ellis 2018: 400, etc.). The fact that truth falls into different categories depends on how we are able to demonstrate whether they are objectively true or false. This liminal truth scale, with its lack of safe standards, is the very factor that keeps legends and rumours that mediate their content in shorter genres in circulation. However, even debunked urban legends contain elements that are verifiably part of contemporary realities and their changes (Ellis 2018: 401).

One of the most representative examples of the ambivalence (or the sliding truth scale) of a photo-edited meme is ‘Tourist Guy’ (also ‘WTC Guy’ or ‘The Accidental Tourist’). The photo taken from atop the World Trade Centre (WTC) in New York appears to capture a moment before a plane crashes into the tower. The photo was claimed to have been made from a negative from a camera found in the rubble and clearly shows the first plane about to hit the tower. It also shows a happy posing tourist, totally oblivious of the impending tragedy. The photo of the unsuspecting tourist, posing on the observation deck of the twin tower in New York on the morning of September 11, with a plane heading directly toward the tower, depicts an extraordinary situation and initially seemed quite credible, circulating on the internet for a while with this message. The story, however, proved to be a hoax.<sup>5</sup> The dissemination of the photo is highly reminiscent of the

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4 Bill Ellis (2004) has also defined the relationship between legends and humour.

5 Soon a debate followed about the story and web sceptics and analysts revealed that the photo only demonstrates its author’s poor Adobe Photoshop skills, as the image-processing software is for professionals. In the photo, the plane is approaching from the north, so the tower should be the southern tower. There was no observation deck on the southern tower and even if there had been one, it would not have been open before 9:30. However the planes crashed into the towers around 9 o’clock. Experts discovered that the plane on the

viral spread of the 2021 image of Bernie Sanders sitting in the audience of the US presidential inauguration. The only difference was that while Sanders' crouching, slightly absurd-looking figure wearing large mittens was a presence in itself, and therefore easily fitted into any context, the image of the tourist became popular online but retained much of the original idea of him being unsuspecting: he was added to photos where something was about to happen. So the accidental tourist could be found on a beach with a giant wave approaching, in JFK's car before the assassination, a moment before a zeppelin crash and other similar situations.

One of the forms of contemporary media communication that is closely related to the historical matrix of legend or tall tale is fake or false news. A fake news story may serve widely different aims and purposes: it may cause political instability, convey a belief (e.g., conspiracy theory), be sensational, entertaining, etc. Several definitions emphasise that fake news is a misinforming, deliberately false, often unverifiable and sensational journalistic text (Ellis 2018: 401). At this point, a folklorist and legend researcher, however, draws an association with a tall-tale joke, which aims to make fun of the audience. In today's communication, it is very easy for one to become another; for example, an accidentally overheard joke that some believe to be true could be turned into a fake news story out of ignorance (see Kalmre 2013), whereas a photo added to the fake news story serves to confirm the validity of the text through visual perception. In terms of differences, urban legends may perhaps rely more on traditional elements or plots than fake news. Another of the differences (but perhaps also a common feature) is that the creators of fake news are usually consciously lying to their audience, for whatever reason, whereas a narrator of a legend may believe the story or not. However, when a piece of fake news is presented as credible (even when there are doubts about its truthfulness), it enters circulating communication and becomes part of a cultural debate and a form of legendry (Ellis 2018: 402; Mould 2018: 414).

In what follows, I will trace how the narrative theme of nature's recovery during the pandemic was transformed through the genre matrices of folklore and contemporary media described above, the broader context of the material, the adaptation of the popular topic to the local context, the narrative motifs and strategies used to either achieve or parody credibility, and, finally, the significance and purpose of the tiny piece of newslore.

## 2. Sightings of dolphins in Venice canals: too good to be true

The COVID-19 pandemic, which evolved into a global catastrophe in 2020, was a kind of continuation of the crisis in nature and climate that had been escalating and had intensified in 2019. It involved climate change caused by pollution and global warming, major fires, deforestation, the destruction of nature, the loss of many wildlife species and anomalous animal behaviour. In other words, the issue facing humanity – economic prosperity versus a sustainable natural environment

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photo is a Boeing 757, not the Boeing 767 that crashed into the tower. The weather on the morning of September 11 was sunny, which does not explain why the tourist is dressed in warm clothes. The reality, however, was that a Hungarian named Peter had edited a photo of himself to show to his friends and, as is common on the internet, everything travels at lightning speed. The actual photos had been taken on 28 November 1997 (see Frank 2003 and Shifman 2014).

– was already a major global problem before the pandemic broke out. And another extraordinary thing happened – the concern about the future of the world, incited by a Swedish schoolgirl Greta Thunberg, reached many young people who organised climate protests all around the world.

In the first months of the COVID-19 lockdown, I traced a narrative trail in the media and social media, inspired by various news articles, about how the reduction of pollution resulting from lockdown was having a positive effect on the environment. The photo news stories at the end of March 2020 reported the return of swans and dolphins to Venice’s canals, previously swarming with tourists but now under COVID-19 lockdown. These reports were even more promising because the international media had for some time been publishing articles about crowds of tourists and the harmful effect of tourism on this historic city. For this reason, which was no secret, I too believed and liked a similar article that had been shared on Facebook. Online news channels broadcast different versions of the story (Kaur 2020, see also *BBC News 2020*; *The Guardian* and many others).

It is psychologically and culturally understandable, and traceable in time, that such dream-like rumours<sup>6</sup> are rapidly generated and spread. In a critical situation, the general public expects such stories, and in our current internet era, many of them have a motivated, identifiable author. As they did with the origins of the WTC tourist photo, the international media quickly determined the original source of the Venice hoax and debunked it. The story about swans and dolphins had started from a Twitter post. From there it had been picked up by a number of media outlets, spread further and given millions of likes on Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok. It was also, with genuine sincerity, distributed on Estonian social media (see, e.g., *Naiselikkuse saladused* [Secrets of femininity], etc.). The photos showing clear water, fish, dolphins and swans in the canals of Venice played an immense role in making this fake news item credible.



Screenshot.

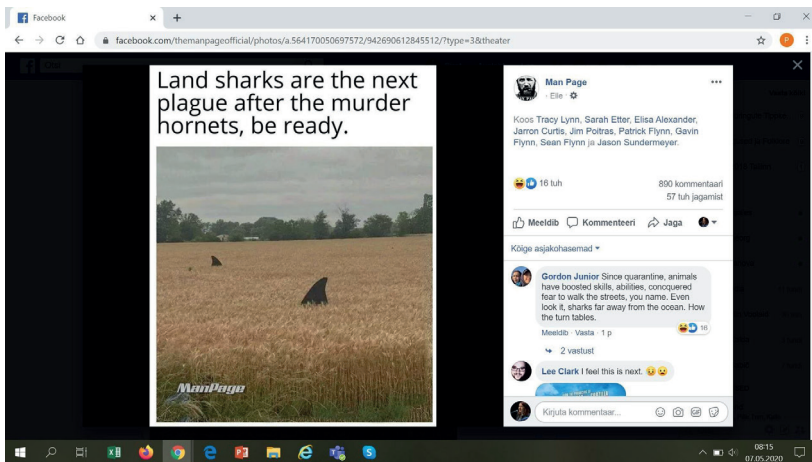
<sup>6</sup> Donald Allport and Leo Postman have referred to such anticipated hearsay as dream or foggy rumours (Allport; Postman 1947). One of these rumours, for instance, was about how Stalin’s death could have ended the atrocious war.



The video clip used in the post, however, had been made at a port in Sardinia, in the Mediterranean Sea, hundreds of kilometres from Venice. Likewise, the author who compiled the news was not aware that the swans mentioned in the post are by no means unusual in Venice (they are frequently seen in the canals of Burano). It turned out that the original photo that went viral had a highly motivated author, a Kaveri Ganapathy Ahuja from New Delhi, India, who was reported to have enjoyed the attention she received as a result of her March 16 Twitter post<sup>7</sup> and photo. “The tweet was just about sharing something that brought me joy in these gloomy times,” she said. She never expected media channels to pick it up or it to go viral or cause any harm. (Daly 2020)

### 3. Vernacular media critique

The news of the water in Venice clearing up and dolphins returning to the canals was debunked in a matter of days by the international digital press and social media. However, before it was debunked, it had gone viral, perhaps largely because of the context of the global pandemic, in which life and communication took place mainly online. Possibly because of the fact that the topic spread so widely and there was such a need for positive news, the following memes parodying the fake news became equally popular, or perhaps even more so. For example, the meme about sharks in a field during the next pandemic, on Facebook’s Man Page, prompted 890 comments and was shared 57,000 times.<sup>8</sup> Memes about this fake news were also parodied in Estonia.



The Man. Land sharks are the next plague murder hornets, be ready.

<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the original post was no longer accessible at the time of writing this article in April 2021.

<sup>8</sup> The Man Page on Facebook at <<http://facebook.com/themanpageofficial/photos/a.56417005697572/942690612845512/?type=38&?+theater>>



The news was circulated and spread, but was declared false within a few days. Ahuja uploaded her viral post on 16 March and by 20 March the *National Geographic* had already written about it being a deliberate fake (see Daly 2020). On March 23, I retrieved the meme adapted to the Estonian context about dolphins in the Emajõgi River and added it to my collection.

Below, I will discuss some of the more characteristic memes in photo narratives parodying this news piece. While the message of nature returning is prominent in these memes, the local vernacular responses are often set against a background of local symbols and realities. The memes are highly representative because the Emajõgi River and the picturesque Taevaskoda cliffs were expected to recover during the quarantine period. The Emajõgi River had only recently been at risk of pollution from a paper factory on the riverbank, and Taevaskoda, one of the sacred sites in Estonia, was no longer on the route of the riverboat “Lonni” during the coronavirus lockdown. So “dolphins have once again come to mate in Taevaskoda”. This original local adaptation emerged in a special meme group *Põlva meemid* (‘Memes of Põlva’).



Dolphins\_river



Dolphins\_Taevaskoda

As early as March 24, the Estonian online humour and satire magazine *Abiratas* ('Extra wheel') posted a brief fake news story about dolphins in the Emajõgi River in Tartu. The fake news was adapted to the local context: "the factory closures along the riverbank have made the water so clean that dolphins, who have not been seen here for over a century, have returned..." <<http://abiratas.ee>>.

Other memes interpret the recovery of nature from a somewhat different angle, and show the return of extinct wildlife to the world that has been cleansed by the coronavirus pandemic. For example, while people stay at home and the streets are empty, the once extinct animals – dinosaurs – are returning to Scotland.



Dinosaurs

This theme was strongly supported by (seemingly) realistic photos of wild animals roaming city streets, looking through windows and behaving otherwise unnaturally, which circulated alongside fake news and memes mostly in late March 2020, as if depicting the reality of the early days of the global pandemic. I saved some of these photos in my collection, as it is reasonable to think that while these events were clearly real, the number of photos circulating at the start of the pandemic suggests that many of them are 'fake', as their makers indulged in photo manipulation or faked the context. Some of the animal photos that went viral were quickly debunked by the media as fake (e.g., the photo about drunken elephants in Yunnan Province)<sup>9</sup> (see also Daly 2020). One of the most popular fake photos in Estonia featured a bear peeking in through a window, wondering where all the people were.

<sup>9</sup> See <[https://twitter.com/Spilling\\_The\\_T/status/1240387988682571776?s=20](https://twitter.com/Spilling_The_T/status/1240387988682571776?s=20)>.



Bear

One particular event in Estonia confirmed the importance of the anomalous animal behaviour and seemed to support the general opinion on this matter. On May 14–15, there was an incident in Tallinn involving two bears that had wandered into the city; they were caught, and people were warned about them. The incident caused a lot of excitement and inspired the spread of news articles and also all kinds of folklore: linguistic jokes, memes, etc. Piret Voolaid wrote about the reverberations of the bear saga in Tallinn on social media and the intertextual nature of creating such material: “By modifying existing cultural texts, internet users rely on shared glocal<sup>10</sup> cultural repertoire and textual resources in the collective memory of the community (in our case, Estonians). Both oral lore and master narratives, acquired by mediation of texts read at school, compulsory school repertoire, but also music (song lyrics), art, films, advertisements and mass media, will become the sources of adaptable motifs.” (Voolaid 2020)

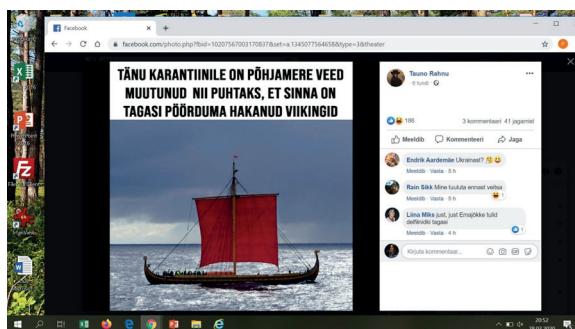
In yet another meme category, the subject of the world becoming new and the return of nature is extended with the idea that history will return, too. For example, thanks to the coronavirus quarantine, the North Sea became so clear that the Vikings returned, the forests in Belarus were cleansed and were once again inhabited by partisans, and while dolphins were returning to Italy, Lenin and Stalin were returning to Russia.

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<sup>10</sup> “The hybridity of multiple events and the following folkloric reverberations could be observed as a phenomenon called glocalisation. The word glocalisation derived from globalisation and localisation was introduced by America sociologist Roland Robertson in the late 1990s and it stands for the concurrent existence of global and local, social, political and economic phenomena” (Voolaid 2020).



Partisans\_back



Vikings



Rusia :



Lenin\_Stalin

#### 4. Conclusion

The diachronic evolution of a piece of fake news to a vernacular critique of the same news presented as truth, usually in the form of memes, is a fairly conventional path in contemporary media represented by participatory culture. This phenomenon is typically brief; it emerges and disappears quickly. In fact, the whole process discussed here, from emergence to downfall and disappearance, took perhaps just a couple of weeks.

In terms of fake news, however, visibility is part of the truth rhetoric as the text is accompanied by a photograph depicting the event, thus transforming it into the vernacular critique of the same truth. Diane Goldstein (2018) has argued that the memes here mark a kind of intertextual link with falsity and stupidity. At the same time, like discursive strategies, it is highly typical to borrow prior texts, illustrations and photos to demonstrate this false truth, ignorance, and inadequacy (Goldstein 2018: 474).

As to the material presented here, a researcher of contemporary legend cannot but notice the legend motifs used in the viral visual narratives known as memes. One such belief narrative motif is the existence of extinct animals, Bigfoot or the Loch Ness monster. Another recognisable narrative motif which has also been used as a parody is the belief that heroes (here Lenin, Stalin, partisans and Vikings) are not dead but continue to exist somewhere and reappear in opportune circumstances. While these beliefs are rooted in more archaic folklore, the ideas about the secret existence of extinct beings and animals (dinosaurs, etc.) have probably been reinforced by more recent fantasy literature and films. The motif about heroes being secretly alive somewhere has been influenced by popular culture as well. Yet another contemporary legend-like theme in these memes and fake photos is the main message that they convey: wild animals and birds, such as bears, killer bees/wasps, sharks and dolphins display anomalous behaviour, leave their natural habitat and pose a threat to humans (see also Campion-Vincent 2004, Meder 2007, and others).

Photo-editing of dangerous or, in this context, rare animals and the resulting creation of a new fake photo telling a story about a special or dangerous situation is a creative process in online media communication, similar to that used in older narrative creation and following a repetitive pattern. A good example of this is how a photo of a great white shark, taken by photographer Thomas Peschak more than ten years ago in South Africa, took on a life of its own on the internet. This dangerous sea creature, copy-pasted from Peschak's original photo, has inspired the creation and spread of photo narratives about the shark appearing in flooded cities after a hurricane, or following an unsuspecting man in a small boat, etc. (see Keefe 2018). Sharks (not only the one photographed by Peschak) and alligators or crocodiles often feature in the fake photos spread online and pose a secret threat from the waters in cities flooded by hurricanes (see, e.g., Frank 2003: 126, and elsewhere).

Humour is an integral part of crisis behaviour, and internet users today can share memes and thus participate in the process. Media criticism mediated by such memes also highlights topical issues through the use of humour, in this case the increasing concern for the future of the world, the natural environment and wildlife. Folklorists certainly do not question the wisdom of sharing memes and leave this issue entirely to social scientists, psychologists, media and political researchers. The general understanding is that fake news gives false hope, needs to be controlled and the truth clarified. Mainstream media also try to do this because, for example, a review of online publications after eleven months showed that in some cases the dolphins and swans had been edited out and only the claim about Venice's canals becoming clearer had remained (see, e.g., *The Guardian*).

These fake news stories, or "photoshopped" urban legends or rumours were spread globally but easily "translated" into local contexts. Mixing credible and

fabricated texts, photos, and videos is highly characteristic of the material on the coronavirus pandemic. Like rumours and urban legends, the visual narratives discussed here reflect people's latent dreams about a better, freer, cleaner and safer world. This is one of the lesser known functions of beliefs and urban legends.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, from a folkloristic point of view, these rumours, which were originally spread as fake news in the form of tall tales (memes) and later in the form of legends with a sliding truth scale, are part of a coping strategy, so-called crisis humour. At the same time, the rumours also functioned as belief tales that conveyed a positive image of the largely apocalyptically perceived pandemic and giving a broader meaning to human existence. Even if the fake news and memes that emerged later lack truth value, they convey the idea of nature recovering and certainly offer hope and a sense of wellbeing.

The social psychologist Erin Vogel has argued that “the need to seek out things that make us feel good may be exacerbated [during the pandemic period] as people try to come to grips with a pandemic, a collapsing economy, and sudden isolation [...] In times when we're all really lonely, it's tempting to hold on to that feeling, especially if we're posting something that gives people a lot of hope,” says Vogel. The idea that animals and nature could actually flourish during this crisis “could help give us a sense of meaning and purpose – that we went through this for a reason.” (Daly, 2020)

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<sup>11</sup> In my approach to the urban legend ‘The boy saved by a snake’, I pointed out the aspect of such belief narratives that builds upon miracles and hopes. Anything is possible and everything can change for the better (Kalmre 2018: 35).



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