

COVID-19 and Fake News

Subjects: Public Administration

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COVID-19 can be defined as a global pandemic caused by a coronavirus that first surfaced in 2019. Fake news refers to false reports that can be found in digital media. The combination of these two concepts creates an especially mismanaged situation that can result in widespread unease among the population, to whom the news appears continuously and without quality filters.

Keywords: COVID-19 ; fake news ; media literacy

We live in a digital society. To put this fact into context, we must focus on the data; 48.97% of the world population uses the Internet, according to the World Bank ^[1]. This percentage grows exponentially if we look only at the ratio of developed countries with advanced technological infrastructures and notable levels of industrialisation, where this percentage is more than 77.42% according to the same source. The Internet has changed the way in which the world is seen and understood, but, above all, it has changed the way in which people communicate. Human relationships could not be understood today without social media, which has a penetration rate of 70% in Europe and North America ^[2]. In fact, according to data provided by Statista ^[2], in a single minute on the Internet, 69 million messages are sent from WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, there are 5000 downloads on TikTok, 500 h of videos are uploaded onto YouTube, 197.6 million emails are sent, and there are 2 million Twitch views. In summary, society as a whole spends a large part of its time on the Internet both for leisure and for work; mankind today lives in a network society ^[3].

However, although leisure and connectivity are an essential part of people's daily lives, information gathering is an activity that is also carried out through these channels. The data provided by Digital News Report ^[4] on this question establishes that 82% of people use digital media (including social networks) as an information channel. The smartphone is the preferred device for accessing news, with 69% compared to the 49% who prefer the computer, and 18% who prefer the tablet. However, all social progress brings with it a series of consequences. In this case, although society is more interconnected than ever, it also has to face a hyperproduction of pseudo-contents ^[5] (contents containing intentionally false information) for which perhaps it is not prepared, and which have become a globalised problem that generated great confusion during the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

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