COVID-19, fake news, and the sleep of communicative reason producing monsters: the narrative of risks and the risks of narratives

COVID-19, as *fake news* e o sono da razão comunicativa gerando monstros: a narrativa dos riscos e os riscos das narrativas

COVID-19, las *fake news* y el sueño de la razón comunicativa generando monstruos: el relato de los riesgos y los riesgos de los relatos

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, the world has witnessed growing tension from the pandemic dimension of a disease with severe epidemiological impacts and wide-reaching sociocultural and political spinoffs. In ideal conditions of public communication, the authorities would be aligned with a totally transparent system supplying abundant information and ease of understanding to generate credibility, confidence, and partnership with the media. In the hiatuses of acceptable versions and in the midst of indeterminations, individuals become their own experts, consuming fake news and reproducing fallacious risk narratives with disastrous consequences. The article discusses various aspects of fake news and the use of communicative reason by public authorities, citing the case of Iran and drawing parallels with the antivaccination movement and its consequences. The authors address the challenge of coordinated orientation of society with information, competing with pseudo-scientific pastiches that proliferate at breakneck speed in the absence of official data. All this raises the following question: which communication models should back the official narrative to create the conditions for collaboration and partnership with the media? What impacts would such models have on the proliferation of misleading narratives that citizens turn to during crises of appropriate orientation? The authors conclude that it is also the government's role to use its broad visibility to create references of safety under the primacy of communicative reason, sensitive to society's genuine questions and concerns. In short, government should produce responsible references on a monumental scale, oriented by the ethics of accountability in line with the common good.

Coronavirus Infections; Health Communication; Social Media

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic, the world has witnessed growing tension caused by the pandemic dimensions of a disease that spread quickly across various regions of the planet with severe epidemiological impacts and wide-reaching sociocultural and political spinoffs. In this scenario, there are no readymade, detailed, and indefectible strategic plans to apply to the coronavirus pandemic – everything is unprecedented. The guidelines by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Brazilian Ministry of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other domestic and international organizations have recommended universal contingency tactics based on the identification of clinical and epidemiological patterns backed by evidence that has still not been produced or validated. Although already well-known in expert circles and sufficiently publicized in the early 21st century (it is known that SARS is caused by a type of coronavirus and was widely mediated in the early 2000s), the term "coronavirus" is new in the social imaginary, and scientific understanding of its mutations also changes virtually daily. On any given day, an authority who routinely uses common sense may not give direct answers to certain questions because such answers do not exist yet (which does not exempt such authorities from keeping themselves and the public up to date.

Meanwhile, out of this vacuum of certainties, distorted versions of concepts and scientific facts proliferate, employing extraordinarily plausible narrative and rhetorical forms that flourish in the midst of the scarcity of contents recommending biosafety practices during a pandemic. The belligerent competition between technical narratives and their fake versions – whether or not committed to an agenda aligned with a given political effect or Zeitgeist, as in the spirit of our time – now offer an unprecedented profusion of information and fact-twisting. Such fast-flowing narratives that proliferate in the absence of (or only in) the official narrative, use their essentially intersubjective dimension to define, reorganize, and explain complex experiences and concepts through a sort of dread (*phobos*) in the face of the havoc wrought by the pandemic disaster. However disturbing or implausible, their explanations take the direction of their terrible inner meaning. In other words, not rarely they claim "knowledge of the secret causes of things", which (in order to launch the exponential dynamic of their replication) need to trigger a cathartic alarm in readers, whom they take by assault, throwing them off balance, and apparently allowing them to "see through the appearances they [by implication: science, health agencies, traditional media] use to try to fool you".

Thus, the production and dissemination of primary or secondary scientific communication is confused with tertiary appropriations, persecutory, ingenuous, prejudiced, aligned with political, criminal, or merely commercial agendas to validate ideas and concepts based on the mistaken – or misleading – scientificity of points of view. First-person accounts of domestic technologies with admirable effects or tragic situations that one witnesses are highly convincing due to their cathartic capacity to convey what it means to be there, to experience something in someone else's skin – the power of vicarious imagination.

All this proliferation of fallacious and dissonant voices appears to generate skepticism towards factual narratives at the planetary level, as well as the impression of an absolute lack of a center for references and orientation.

Media, narratives of risk, and the ideal world

Internet searches on topics related to the protection and preservation of health are known to be driven either by proactive premeditation, seeking practical evidence-based information, applicable in the short, medium, or long term; or by reactive impulses, linked to ancestral fears, reactions of self-preservation or reaffirmation of atavistic beliefs devoid of scientific basis [1]. Despite the cacophonous sonority of the term in Portuguese, the WHO defines *infodemia* as an excessive amount of uncertain information on a given problem, especially associated with reactive searches in times of widespread fear, which can hinder the paths to solutions by creating tumult and mistrust among laypersons. In general, there is a prolific production and agile diffusion of misinformation during health emergencies with pandemic dimensions. In times of crisis, the communications media have always been essential protagonists, serving both reactive and proactive searches as quality vehicles for alerts,

reports, and recommendations for the community and authorities, but also as producers of versions on information in which incongruencies or gaps in meaning are identified. In a perfect world, soon after crises begin, those in charge of public biosafety should use transparency and provide the maximum amount of available information to reaffirm their credibility in the eyes of the media and society – an official narrative of credibility becomes the first condition for the reaction to the crisis situation, creating a successful two-way flow as a product of communicative reason/action. To warn a population segment of an imminent natural disaster, recourse to agile and synchronous communications media becomes a key imperative. These are followed by the various interpersonal communications resources via messages and narratives in the virtual networks, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, etc., expanding, amplifying, and retranslating by the power of direct interlocution. They link together as sources of confirmation or complementation of the contents published by the authorities, in mutual feedback with the living experience. Under ideal conditions, the official version, backed and transparent, precedes the interpersonal – contrary to what happened in Italy, where countless control failures, information leaks, and contradictory communications led to the disaster. The Italian social networks decried the government's plan to declare a quarantine in a fourth of the country (the North, with 16 million inhabitants), which led to mass flight of Italians attempting to take refuge in the South, where the health system is less developed than in the industrialized North. Given the haphazard diffusion of news and the profusion of ignored rules, resulting in the unbridled spread of transmission and rise in deaths, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced a nationwide quarantine, the most drastic decision by a country since the pandemic's beginning.

The media's capital sins

Catastrophes are known to represent tragic/dramatic and unpredictable situations that attract the communications media's attention, within the news values' classification [2]. Catastrophes are considered potentially valuable events, especially if there is evidence of guilt or if they can be attributed to human action or the environment itself, in a logic of causes and consequences, common to the journalistic narrative [3]. Just as visually macabre spectacles are especially prized by television networks, during the sleep of communicative reason, biological calamities that lend meaning to political-xenophobic or intolerant discourses in general are argumentatively "nutritive" to homilies of intolerance [4]. However, not unfairly, the media are usually criticized for the contours with which they portray tragic events or those involving death and destruction. Sensationalism is the capital sin – akin to lust – in the exploitation of human emotions that ends up contributing to the "social expansion of risk", although it can also be a virtue as long as it spawns precaution towards the possibility of future dangers. In addition, it is fair to add that the sensationalism does not go beyond its original and necessary counterpoint, the audiences' voyeurism [5]. Nevertheless, there are many other vices in the risk narrative besides sensationalism, namely the media's inclination to emphasize risk over safety. In a society overwhelmed by the idea of risk and its paradoxical characteristic of *being predictable although it cannot be predicted*", the newsworthiness of events going poorly and the negative angles gain ample space, based on the logic that *"bad news is good news"* [6] (p. 237) . This state of persistently imminent danger makes the catastrophe a genuine challenge for leading a democratic nation through communications processes. The official discourse of safety competes with other narratives centered on risk, and knowing how to deal at the biographical and political levels with fear and insecurity become a decisive civilizational qualification, such that improving the corresponding skills becomes a basic attribution of teaching institutions [6]. In addition to the emphasis on risk, the media are also prone to quick reproduction of incomplete, imprecise, or even contradictory information on events under way, which adds indeterminations [7,8], although this also reaffirms the need for fact-checking with the competent authorities. Thus, in an ideal world, the authorities are bound by the need for (and importance of) orderly, synchronous, technically precise, and useful communication. How else can one deal with the fear of ominous fates, in the face of the uncertainty of the unknown that accompanies it? At the political and communicative level, how does one deal with the fear if the causes are still incomprehensible, intangible, and inaccessible at the microbiological level?

The sleep of communicative reason and the risks of narratives

Francisco Goya appeared to want to graphically explain his judgment of Spanish society in his time, which portrayed in the satirical series *Los Caprichos* as demented, corrupt, and ripe for ridicule [9]. The aquatint *El Sueño de la Razón Produce Monstruos* (*The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*) (Figure 1) is the 43rd in the series, produced for the newspaper *Diario de Madrid*. The image shows a man (possibly Goya himself) asleep among his writings and drawings, his reason dulled by slumber, bedeviled by creatures prowling in the shadows. The print includes owls (symbols of philosophy and wisdom), who appear to be trying to wake him, and bats, apparently symbolizing folly or ignorance. The full epigraph of this 43rd *Los Caprichos* reads, "*fantasy abandoned by reason only produces impossible monsters. United with her* [reason]*, she* [fantasy] *is the mother of the arts and the origin of their marvels*". *Los Caprichos* may praise reason, but only as works of fantasy – one only perceives dormant reason by imagination, never by the path of reason itself. The preparatory sketch for the etching appears to be even more explicit in its inscription: "*the author dreaming. His only purpose is to ban prejudicial superstition and perpetuate, with this work of fantasy, his steadfast witness to Truth*" [9] (p. 37). Some art critics, perhaps considering the enlightened ideals in vogue in the artist's time, contend that the monsters in the shadows symbolize the world's myths, beliefs, and vulgar prejudices and the "*people's widespread prejudicial ideas*" [9] (p. 37). Meanwhile, what does sleep itself represent? What is the symbolic reason for giving in to sleep? What leads us to renounce the vigil of enlightenment and the "*escape from nonage by drawing on one's own understanding with no outside orientation*" [10] (p. 17). Of course, when asleep, we cannot recognize and denounce the monsters of ignorance, prejudice, and lies. In this context, besides philosophy and wisdom, what else do the owls represent that are trying to free the man from the lethargy of ignorance and prejudice?

Iran is an Islamic country with a Shiite majority in which there are severe prohibitions on the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Various processes of political, scientific, and cultural communication are systematically distorted by the peculiar imperatives of theocracies with a totalitarian profile. The precarious and distorted scientific communication cohabits with beliefs and numerous religious interdictions in a context of widespread ignorance of elementary biological concepts. Iranians are experiencing major mistrust towards a government that first brushed off the COVID-19 epidemic that now dominates the country, while the government now insists that the epidemic is under control. A story published in a tabloid in early February about a British professor who claimed he could cure COVID-19 with whiskey and honey swept the Iranian social media like wildfire. The imminence of the end of time spawned symbolic monsters well known to historians of the Black Plague. The sleep of communicative reason instrumentalized by rumors of ethanol's purifying powers led thousands of people to drink its toxic methyl byproduct, given the hazardous analogy with the antiseptic power of ethyl alcohol, which is unavailable in an Islamic country [11]. Since early March, when the pandemic became publicly visible, hundreds of people died in the midst of thousands with methanol poisoning, including a five-year-old boy who went blind after being forced to drink the "instrument of salvation" by purification. The fake news on the purported remedy's efficacy swept the country's social networks, and the fear of COVID-19, combined with mistrust and misinformation, led thousands of people to suffer methanol poisoning. The official narrative on alcohol-based disinfectants as a hygienic measure was mixed with the fake narrative on drinking methanol (with ethanol itself unavailable on the market). According to Hossein Hassanian, of the Iranian Ministry of Health [11], "*We are fighting on two fronts here (...) we have to cure people with methanol poisoning and also fight the coronavirus*". In terms of cultural policy imperatives, how does Brazil differ from Iranian theocratic society?

Language and communication are highly relevant to contemporary theories of ideology, and in this context the work of Jürgen Habermas fills a gap by introducing the concept of communicative rationality as a process of understanding through speech acts in conversation. Thus, whether through the violence of censorship by the Iranian theocracy or by the "fragmented consciousness" in contemporary industrial societies [12], we see the same system of political thinking by which individuals or groups build and implement an understanding of the world they inhabit in order to construct power agendas to back them. Thus, both in Iran and in the high political circles in Washington DC (USA), where COVID-19 treatments are recommended based on sunlight and injecting bleach [13], such ideologies "de-polemicize" or take meanings for granted, simplifying a complex variety of meanings in a

Figure 1

El Sueño de la Razón Produce Monstruos, (The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters) Francisco Goya, 1797.

handful of convenient truths. Indeterminations, ambiguities, and ranges of options are transformed into monolithic certainties with single solutions. By such means, under the monopoly of truths on a horizon of information overflow, a communicative structure also becomes systematically distorted, producing the monsters of prejudice and feeding the beasts of ignorance. This said, are we also subject to some form of systematically distorted communication? Are we in a state of nonage, hostages to gossip and pseudo-technical rumors that proliferate unchecked in states of ignorance?

The monsters represented by fake information on COVID-19 vary in their themes, scope, and reach. Some of the most dangerous contents are those that spread in Iran on dubious health advice, such as "preventing" or "curing" the infection with a specific substance (e.g., chloroquine, recently in the political limelight).

Such imprecise claims pose a clear and direct threat to individuals, the community, and public health. In addition to the cure-alls and health vagaries, there are also politically and racially loaded unscientific claims on COVID-19. South-African sociologist Stanley Cohen described the historical recurrence of various "moral panics" as phenomena associated with conditions, persons, or groups – the "folk devils" – depicted as serious threats to collective values and interests [14]. In the face of imminent dangers, figures defined by Cohen [15] as "moral crusaders" develop risk narratives that intersect with the hovering fear, haunting reason, imperious ignorance, or emerging threat, inciting the public to hatred and the call for immediate reaction. Such narratives, like those now claiming that persons of a given origin are more likely to spread COVID-19, and that the novel coronavirus was engineered in laboratories as part of a spurious conspiracy, have led to several notorious cases of discourses of hate and discrimination. A good example of such haunting fear and ignorance is the antivaccination movement. Mass immunization is considered one of the major biotechnological advances in controlling diseases and reducing deaths from epidemics. Nevertheless, there have always been examples of clashes between the need for public interventions and moral narratives or those related to individual freedoms. In England, the *Compulsory Vaccination Act* of 1853 sparked the rage of the upper-middle class, as an attack on their freedom to decide on their children's immune status. The late 20th century witnessed a similar phenomenon, when the internet was already dizzyingly expanding its power of influence and access to primary sources of scientific communication across various social segments. The pace of primary and secondary scientific communication had exploded – the scientific community was celebrating millions of de papers published in PubMed and the dissemination of papers ahead of print. In 1998, physician Andrew Wakefield [16] published an article in the *Lancet* suggesting that the MMR vaccine predisposed vaccinated individuals to mercury exposure and autism. Despite the small sample size (12 children), the uncontrolled design, and the speculative nature of the conclusions, the paper offered a powerful narrative of scientifically validated risk for the antivaccination movement, adding new monsters to the public health scenario [15]. MMR vaccination rates began to fall as never before, in light of the purported risk of post-vaccination autism, and 22 years later, only 32.9% of individuals 10 to 40 years of age in São José do Rio Preto (Brazil), presented anti-measles antibodies (contrasting with the pre-internet generation, in which 99% of individuals over 50 years of age are immunized against the disease) [17]. In recent decades, antivaccination virtual networks have continued to gain ground, influence, and victims due to vigorous impetus from various allies, including celebrities that have embraced the cause in debates broadcast by the mass media [18].

It is now clear that risks have assumed a cardinal role in the scientific, political, and communicative scenario, influencing the ebb and flow of political tides and becoming one of the main vectors in the nation's sociocultural dynamics. Meanwhile, there are frequent challenges to the monopoly of scientific pretentions to absolute truth: science becomes increasingly necessary, although less and less sufficient for the socially binding definition of truth. Beck [6] (p. 237) points to this contemporary reflexive scientification which opens the doors to addressees and users of science to "*new opportunities for persuasion and development in the processes of production and use of scientific results*". Technologies touting Flat Earth, global warming denialism, antivaccination discourse, and intelligent design emerge and prosper in mediatic format. With the advent of broadband and Web 2.0 and radical reformulation of the interaction between medias and their consumers, the former opinionated recipient, once a passive consumer of print or broadcast communications vehicles, shifted somewhat more towards the center of media production processes by adopting and disseminating new positions based on fluid truth systems. In this scenario, redefined by new producers and recipients of messages in mutual

interaction (although still clustering in niches and bubbles), the narratives are aligned in mutating areas of truth that adapt to the breezes of veracity that blow alternately in the direction of the predominance of official discourse, then towards the persecutory fallacies, pseudo-scientific hypotheses, or propositions of intolerance whose zoning is erratic and unpredictable, with calamitous consequences.

How have we reached this stage? Perhaps the views of neglected citizens, the State, Science, and the Economy – pillars of safety in the face of global risks – were exhausted, presenting themselves as a sort of partisanly linked and institutionalized irresponsibility [19]. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, how is it possible to live with and survive a crisis doubled by the multiplicity of risks and panaceas facing the authorities and media? We are living in the realm of personal and conflicting opinions in the midst of a collapse of pertinence and propriety – from national presidents who prescribe ineffective drugs [20] or defend injecting bleach [13] to celebrities suddenly promoted to the status of public health authorities and self-taught chemists that prescribe antisepsis with alcohol [21]. The internet has added an ocean overflowing with information for us, but despite ample access to the largest library amassed in history, the collective imaginary is saturated with lightning narratives with twisted summaries of imminent dangers calling for protective measures, ahead of the competent authorities for the purpose.

Our current world

For some time, virtual network platforms in the United States have resisted assuming an editorial role, pressured by a liberal ethic that also involves not censoring manifestations that could be seen as having political content. However, on April 14, we used Google to search for information on "coronavirus", and the search results were surprising. There was no commercial advertising, product displays, or hierarchical links using algorithms to direct us to the sites prioritized by the search mechanisms On the contrary, what appeared were government (and nongovernmental) sites and official media sources, since the ordering algorithms that generate results according to the user's choice pattern were no longer in effect. Something has really changed: there has been actual care in verifying the results' trustworthiness. The owners and operators of the large social media platforms have explicitly decided to prioritize official sources and traditional communications media as a way of controlling the "infodemia". In the principal social networks (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Instagram, and Pinterest), the search results related to COVID-19 are predefined in similar fashion. For example, Instagram features pop-ups encouraging American users to visit the website of the (CDC), and British users are urged to visit the site of the National Health System (NHS). On Facebook, an "Information Center" mixes curated information and official medical advice; on Pinterest, the only infographics and memes found on topics like "COVID-19" or "hydroxychloroquine" are those produced by internationally renowned health agencies such as the WHO. Some of the more radical decisions taken by the tech companies include the new policy by Twitter to remove misinformation that contradicts official public health advice, such as tweets encouraging people not to follow physical distancing measures and the new limits by WhatsApp in forwarding messages.

Undeniably, there is an evident contrast with the way the social media platforms dealt with misinformation in the recent past. What made them change strategies so abruptly? The dimension of planetary calamity in the risk narratives? Could they have been pressured to renounce their ethic of liberty to align themselves with the new moral order oriented by responsibility? A key question: why had they failed to do this earlier? Is an imminent bio-hecatomb the necessary categorical imperative for them to distance themselves from the discourses of persecutory hate, antivaccination propaganda, and other variants of fake news? The platforms realize that a balance between the liberal ethic and social responsibility would allow them to be more aggressive in cases of misinformation on the novel coronavirus than on political misinformation. However, misinformation continues to circulate, largely on the social medias. According to Carl Bergstrom [22], professor of biology at the University of Washington (Seattle, USA), who also studies and has published a book on misinformation, the efforts by social media companies are modest and sluggish. They built a broad ecosystem that involves everything related to engagement, investing in forms of viral propagation while never investing anything in trustworthiness. A study by the Reuters Institute [23] analyzed the spread of 225

false or misleading claims on the coronavirus and found that 88% of the claims appeared on social media platforms, compared to 9% on television and 8% in other news vehicles. According to a study by the Pew Research Center [24], 30% of American adults believe that COVID-19 was developed in a laboratory. A conspiracy theory that falsely linked 5G to the coronavirus pandemic brought extreme consequences in the real world, including threats and harassment against telecommunications engineers and attacks on gasoline pumps and telephone poles [25].

The lone citizen-cum-self-styled-expert selects the information, celebrities, and networks of expertise or fallacies that will decide on his fate in exercising his status as frightened self-specialist, deciding on more assertive sources than others among the fake news (more acceptable or less unbearable) in WhatsApp and Facebook. New vicarious tensions emerge and produce studies on the proportion of relevance assigned to the topic in the mediatic self-referencing circles. There are central narratives that give rise to generations of new narratives, perhaps impelled by atavistic fears: real cases of autism shown in movies, TV, or social networks are eloquent as evidence of sequelae from vaccines or from anything else one wishes to associate with them.

In an ideal world, we would have authorities presenting abundant, synchronous, objective, precise, and easy-to-comprehend information in a totally transparent system, spawning credibility and trust. On the contrary, appalled, we have witnessed the iron fist of political vanities in dispute in the mediatic scenario and antagonistic perspectives between authorities from distinct fields. The spectacle is resolved by defenestration – identifying the political sin of catalyzing attention to supply the microphones with an abundant narrative, albeit dissonant in belligerence with others of political and economic genealogy. In this scenario, what do we need in this moment of upheaval? Clear and transparent statements should provide the basis for personal dialogues on the virtual networks, taking the initiative as sources of alerts on the origin, prevention, and dynamics of the epidemic's expansion. The current scenario shows us a flipside – Facebook and Twitter have removed posts by government authorities that produced coronavirus misinformation, including posts by President Jair Bolsonaro on the efficacy of chloroquine [20]. Thus, top political officials garner attention and produce misinformation through the social medias and networks, which also serve as direction and driver for policy decisions.

In a perfect world, without decision-making processes contaminated by systematically distorted communication, we would have media using a virtuous sensationalism, offering a system with the best information's simplicity and completeness. Risk communications would be balanced with communications on safety conditions, and the narratives' completeness would be consistent with the authorities' discourse – turning to the authorities repeatedly based on a relationship of trust. In this scenario, the mediatic pretensions to "absolute information" would also engender other limits and potentialities. Above all, they should also assume the task of fact-checking, a social role that is now highly necessary given the fluidity of areas of truths in mutation, producing monsters by the sleep of communicative reason. There would be space in the debate for attention to the refutations that test science's pretensions to universal explanation.

On an ideal planet, this would mean inviting the patrons of creationism, flat-earthers, and antivaccination doyens to public exposure and debate of their beliefs and convictions in conditions of symmetry and equality with dissonant voices and as an exercise of refutation or validation of their truth systems, as done in Australia 10 years ago to contain the antivaccination movement [26,27].

A conclusion

When we tell a story, we circumscribe characters in time and space to focus the light on a given aspect of our plot, which contains embedded values and moral premises – this is an essentially intersubjective dimension of the narrative containing a major share of its illocutionary power. Aristotle defined catharsis as a property of narratives of moral purge, through pity or fear (*phobos*), since the dramatized and staged stories offer the freedom to glimpse all sorts of unpleasant and unbelievable events which, since they are narrated and distant, lose their harmful power while preserving their ethical and pedagogical reach [28]. Ricoeur [29] adds that a narrator's persuasion relies on offering the reader a worldview that is not ethically neutral, but which implicitly or explicitly groups ways of perceiving

and evaluating life. Thus, narratives belong to the historical dimension but above all emanate from the ethical dimension due to their claim (inseparable from the narration) to ethical justice, where it is up to the reader, now the agent, to choose between the multiple acts of correctness presented by the text.

Concerning the tensions pertaining to our biosafety, Fleck [30] would say that our collective thinking circulates between esoteric and exoteric circuits of thought. We might add that our thinking searches for secure truths, essential for the species' psychological survival and endeavoring to translate the political and religious thought styles in the process. In a context of exponentially growing doubts, uncertainties, and anxieties, combined with disputes by narratives that lead to misgovernment and vacancy of central reference, the problem of epidemic control of diseases and fake news is expanded. Huge obstacles appear for the coordinated orientation of society with information, since pseudo-scientific pastiches of these versions proliferate at breakneck speed, combined with the vacuity of official information.

Whom does fake news serve? We know what such news is made of: narratives coinciding with a certain reality, of which they take control for purposes of credibility, although within a system of values and representations that disorient and stratify contagious information, defining and simplifying recognizable scenarios and above all enticing the reader with a twisted modality of ethical justice. It is the role of government to draw on its wide visibility to produce references of safety under the primacy of communicative reason, sensitive to society's genuine concerns and needs. To produce, by these means, and on a monumental scale, "vaccines" of pertinent references, oriented by elements of justice aligned with the common good. On the flipside of this scenario, we are living in a time when fake narratives, gone viral with communications technologies acting on a global scale, exploited by Cambridge Analyticas, Trumps, Messiahs, and spurious political groups serving authoritarian power projects and contaminating and debilitating the health of democracies. Any coincidence is a mere similarity...

Contributors

P. R. Vasconcellos-Silva conducted the theoretical conception, drafting, and final revision. L. D. Castiel collaborated with the conception, drafting, and final revision.

Additional informations

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Resumo

Desde o início do surto da COVID-19, percebe-se uma crescente tensão provocada pela dimensão pandêmica de uma doença que trouxe severos impactos epidemiológicos e desdobramentos socioculturais e políticos. Em condições ideais de comunicação pública as autoridades deveriam alinhar-se a um regime de total transparência com informações abundantes e de compreensão facilitada para gerar credibilidade, confiança e parceria com as mídias. Nos hiatos de versões aceitáveis e em meio a indeterminações, os indivíduos tornam-se experts *de si mesmos, consumindo* fake news *e reproduzindo narrativas de risco falaciosas com consequências desastrosas. Discutem-se diversos aspectos ligados às* fake news *e ao uso da razão comunicativa por autoridades públicas, citando o caso do Irã e estabelecendo paralelos com o fenômeno da antivacinação e suas consequências. Descreve-se o desafio do direcionamento coordenado da sociedade por meio de informações, competindo com pastiches pseudo-científicos que proliferam em ritmo frenético na vacuidade de dados oficiais. Levanta-se, assim, a seguinte questão: quais modelos comunicativos deveriam pautar a narrativa oficial para gerar condições de colaboração e parceria com as mídias? Que impactos tais modelos teriam na proliferação das narrativas enganosas às quais recorrem os cidadãos em crise de orientações pertinentes? Conclui-se que é também papel do governo lançar mão de sua ampla visibilidade para gerar referências de segurança sob o primado da razão comunicativa sensível às genuínas interrogações da sociedade. Em síntese, produzir em escala monumental referenciais responsáveis, norteados por elementos de ética da responsabilidade alinhados ao bem comum.*

Infecções por Coronavírus; Comunicação em Saúde; Mídias Sociais

Resumen

Desde el inicio del brote de la COVID-19, se percibe una creciente tensión provocada por la dimensión pandémica de una enfermedad que ha traído consigo severos impactos epidemiológicos y despliegues socioculturales y políticos. En condiciones ideales de comunicación pública, las autoridades deberían estar alineadas a un régimen de total transparencia con información abundante y de comprensión fácil para generar credibilidad, confianza y un clima de colaboración con los medios de comunicación. Ante la carencia de versiones aceptables y imbuidos por indeterminaciones, los individuos se convierten en expertos de sí mismos, consumiendo fake news *y reproduciendo relatos de riesgo falaces con consecuencias desastrosas. Se discuten diversos aspectos vinculados a las* fake news *y al uso de la razón comunicativa por parte de las autoridades públicas, citando el caso da Irán, y estableciendo paralelismos con el fenómeno antivacunas y sus consecuencias. Se describe el desafío para orientar coordinadamente a la sociedad mediante información, compitiendo con pastiches pseudo-científicos, que proliferan con un ritmo frenético ante la vacuidad de los datos oficiales. De esta forma, se plantea la siguiente pregunta: ¿qué modelos comunicativos deberían pautar el relato oficial, con el fin de generar condiciones de colaboración y alianza con los medios de comunicación? ¿Qué impactos tendrían tales modelos en la proliferación de relatos engañosos a los que recurren los ciudadanos que no disponen de información pertinente? Se concluye que es también papel del gobierno utilizar su amplia visibilidad para generar referentes seguros con la ayuda de la primacía de la razón comunicativa, sensible a los genuinos interrogantes de la sociedad. En resumen, generar a gran escala referentes responsables, orientados por elementos de la ética de la responsabilidad alineados con el bien común.*

Infecciones por Coronavirus; Comunicación en Salud; Medios de Comunicación Sociales