COVID-19 Case: A Definition of Infodemia through Online Italian Journalism

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Abstract : The spreading of new Coronavirus (COVID-19) in addition to becoming a global phenomenon, following the declaration of a pandemic state, has generated excessive access to information, sometimes not thoroughly screened, which makes it difficult to navigate a given topic because of the difficulty of finding reliable sources. As a result, there is a high level of contagion, understood as the spread of the virus, but also as the spread of information in a viral and harmful way, which prompted the World Health Organization to coin the term Infodemia to give 'a name' the phenomenon of excessive information. With neologism 'Infodemia', the World Health Organization (OMS) wanted, in these days when fear of the coronavirus is raging, point out that perhaps the greatest danger of global society in the age of social media. This phenomenon is the distortion of reality in the rumble of echoes and comments of the global community on real or often invented facts. The general purpose of the exploratory study is to investigate how the coronavirus situation is described from journalistic communication. Starting from La Repubblica online, as a reference journalistic magazine, as a specific objective, the research aims to understand the way in which journalistic communication describes the phenomenon of the COVID-19 virus spread, the spread of contagion and restrictive measures of social distancing in the Italian context. The study starts from the hypothesis that if the circulation of information helps to create a social representation of the phenomenon, the excessive accessibility to sources of information (Infodemia) can be modulated by the 'how' the phenomenon is described by the journalists. The methodology proposed, in fact, in the exploratory study is a quanti-qualitative (mixed) method. A Content Analysis with the SketchEngine software is carried out first. In support of the Content Analysis, a Diatextual Analysis was carried out. The Diatextual Analysis is a qualitative analysis useful to detect in the analyzed texts, that is the online articles of La Repubblica on the topic of coronavirus, Subjectivity, Argomentativity, and Mode. The research focuses mainly on 'Mode' or 'How' are the events related to coronavirus in the online articles of La Repubblica about COVID-19 phenomenon. The results show the presence of the contrast vision about COVID-19 situation in Italy.

Keywords : coronavirus, Italian infodemia, La Republica online, mix method