

Fake news and Conspiracy Narratives in the Covid-19 Crisis: An International Comparison

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Abstract : Already well before the Corona pandemic hit the world, 'fake news' were no longer regarded as harmless twists of the truth but as intentionally composed disinformation, often with the goal of manipulative populist propaganda. During the Corona crisis, particularly conspiracy narratives have become a worldwide phenomenon with dangerous consequences (anti vaccination myths). The success of these manipulated news need s to be counteracted by trustworthy news, which in Europe particularly includes public broadcasting media and their social media channels. To understand better how the main public broadcasters in Germany, the UK, and France used Instagram strategically, a comparative study was carried out. The study – comparative analysis of Instagram during the Corona Crisis In our empirical study, we compared the activities by selected formats during the Corona crisis in order to see how the public broadcasters reached their audiences and how this might, in the longer run, affect journalistic strategies on social media platforms. First analysis showed that the increase in the use of social media overall was striking. Almost one in two adult online users (48 %) obtained information about the virus in social media, and in total, 38% of the younger age group (18-24) looked for Covid19 information on Instagram, so the platform can be regarded as one of the central digital spaces for Corona related information searches. Quantitative measures showed that 47% of recent posts by the broadcasters were related to Corona, and 7% treated conspiracy myths. For the more detailed content analysis, the following categories of analysis were applied: • Digital storytelling and instastories • Textuality and semantic keys • links to information • stickers • videochat • fact checking • news ticker • service • infographics and animated tables Additionally to these basic features, we particularly looked for new formats created during the crisis. Journalistic use of social media platforms opens up immediate and creative ways of applying the media logics of the respective platforms, and particularly the BBC and ARD formats proved to be interactive, responsive, and entertaining. Among them were new formats such as a space for user questions and personal uploads, interviews, music, comedy, etc. Particularly the fact checking channel got a lot of attention, as many user questions were focused on the conspiracy theories, which dominated the public discourse during many weeks in 2020. In the presentation, we will introduce eight particular strategies that show how public broadcasting journalism can adopt digital platforms and use them creatively and, hence help to counteract against conspiracy narratives and fake news.

Keywords : fake news, social media, digital journalism, digital methods

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