

From information to infodemic in a period of global health crisis

20th- 21st May 2021, University of Caen (France)

Call for proposals

The global health crisis caused by the Coronavirus Covid-19 is generating a considerable amount of information which regularly includes fake news, in French, "infox" (Commission for the enrichment of the French language, 2018). This virus, unknown a year ago, is responsible for nearly 50 million confirmed cases and more than one million deaths (Le Monde, 6/11/2020). It has led to the imposed lockdown of three billion people and "threatens all humanity" according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). This conference aims to highlight and analyze the means of circulating and sharing false information in the context of a global health crisis (Europe, Asia, Africa, America, etc.)

Before the appearance of the Coronavirus Covid-19, the most common false information on the web was related to health (vaccination, AIDS, menstruation, cancer, diet, alternative medicine, etc.) (Romeyer, 2020). The coronavirus-Covid-19 has brutally propelled an avalanche of partially or totally false information to the forefront of the global media scene, particularly via the digital media (Berriche, 2020, Wardle, 2020). Hence the pandemic is accompanied by an "infodemic" (WHO, 2020), an epidemic of information based on the spread of rumours and false truths (Cardon, 2019), and on the inflation of journalistic products. This phenomenon known as *infobesity* is causing concern in public opinion (Zimdars & McLeod, 2020).

The World Health Organization (WHO) considers this phenomenon to be a major problem in that it is likely to hamper real responses to the pandemic. It combines multiple elements that are commonly at the heart of human concerns: anxiety about an unknown disease, fear of how fast-spreading it may be, lack of understanding of the measures taken by the authorities, confusion in connection with erratic and contradictory official communication (Frau-Meigs, 2020).

The characteristic of information disorders is that they evolve quickly and become more complex (Badouard, 2017, Cardon, 2019, Wardle, 2020): it would seem that most often falsehoods are mixed with the truth: completely fabricated content becomes rarer, it gives way to decontextualizations which skew real facts by modifying their meaning to a greater or lesser extent (Georget, 2020). Both the infox distribution strategies launched by unscrupulous pharmacies and the infox set in motion by disoriented individuals are constantly evolving (Cardon, 2019, Mendès-France, 2020).

This international conference aims to observe and understand the practices and reactions of the public to the infodemic (Cardon, 2019, Berriche, 2020) in the context of an international crisis, and to identify the conditions for creating and maintaining confidence in information (Wardle, 2020). The work will be grouped around **four themes**:

1. The organizers and regulators of the system

- Platforms: How to regulate infodemia on platforms (Marique, 2018) ? Is transparency the only way out (Marique, 2019, 2020)? What is the role of *click bait* (Cagé, 2019)?
- Legislators: The free exchange of ideas is thus affected by technical and / or economic mechanisms which lead to the presentation of information whose reliability and quality of treatment can be extremely variable (Mouron, 2020): what legal arsenal may be used to fight against infox (Sauvage, 2017)? Will the European competition law against anti-competitive conduct be useful "in regulating fake news" (Chaiehloudj, 2018)? Is there a need to *"act on this confidence in information in two stages, rather like what is done on the level of the European Union: a first round of measures, leaning towards self-regulation?"* A second round, based on co-regulation, more discussed with the general public and with the other partners (Frau-Meigs, 2019)?

2. The actors

- Official structures: all are concerned, from an international (WHO) or local level (city, region) to a national level (government). Should we ban political advertising (Cagé, 2019)? Is the proposal for an international certification by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) which would highlight the media producing reliable information sufficient (Deloire, 2018)?
- Infox decoders, traditional media *fact-checking*: what is their real effect? How can they strengthen (and in some cases create) public confidence in their job? How effective are the different formats (text, image, short video, icons and other visual markers) and dissemination methods (social media, newsletter, site of each media, common site, SEO)?
- Contesting media: RT and Sputnik represent Russian informational influence *"the extent of which goes far beyond the spectrum of soft power, from "troll" farms to cybernetic actions"* (Audinet, 2019), is their influence real? (Mettler, 2019)?
- Individuals, those who are not very active, such as followers or relayers, and those who are very active and likely to be helped or guided: how do the public react to the infodemic that accompanies the spread of Covid-19 ? How do they stay informed during a health crisis? How do they form an opinion?

3. The sources, forms and effects of infox

- Origins and categorization of infox: while rumours have always existed (Mercier, 2018), infox uses all the power of digital technology to develop. It seems that two major sources can be identified. What is an infox? On the one hand, it seems that pharmacies may be paid by individuals, companies or states to influence information, shape opinions, or modify (e)reputations. On the other hand, individuals motivated by disorder or the pleasure of causing harm may create or relay infox. (Frau-Meigs 2019). Can we identify other sources related to other forms of motivation? Can deceptive content circulating on the internet be grouped together under this generic term (Wardle, 2020)?
- Propagation of infox: who spreads it and for what reasons (Frau-Meigs 2019), how is it received, does it have an effect on the public exposed to it (Cardon, 2019), and if so, what is its impact (Berriche, 2020)? What is its effect on the *"conversational network"* (Cardon, 2019)? Doesn't this incessant flow of information go hand in hand with credulity (Bronner, 2019)? Is it a confusion or a contamination of private and public spaces (Flichy, 1996)?

4. Media and Information Literacy (MIL)

- What strategies should be adopted in terms of MIL? What tools should be developed with which audiences, and how? What levers of action should be mobilized to reach people with little access to training programmes and / or who are particularly vulnerable to false information? How can critical thinking be developed in the general public? What can pedagogy and media education offer?
- Should infox be integrated into the online debate based on educational methods? Are other methods practiced or to be developed? How can critical thinking be developed (Bronner, 2019) based in particular on our “retro-judgement” (Bronner, 2019)? How may people be educated “about the manipulation of language and the biases to which they are subjected” (Faillet, 2018)?

Scientific committee :

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Organisation committee :

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Proposals with last name, first name, affiliation and email address will take the form of a summary of 3000 characters including spaces and an indicative bibliography of ten references. They will specify

the theme in which the proposal fits. Indications on the field, the corpus and research methodology are expected. They must be submitted before February 15, 2021 on the site:

scienceconf.com

The proposals will be subject to a double blind evaluation process. The results of the work of the scientific committee will be communicated on **April 1, 2021**.

Participants will be able to transform their speech enriched with the content of the debates into an article for the journal *Les cahiers du numérique* which will process the proposals according to its usual selection method.