

"THE FIGHT AGAINST DISINFORMATION IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC: THE CASE OF DIARIO SUR"

Disinformation, hoaxes and intentional falsification of data, generically covered under the term 'fake news', have become a major problem that threatens everything from basic aspects of daily life to national security or public health. This flow of false, erroneous or inaccurate information (Wardle and Derakhsan, 2017) achieve greater virality on social networks specially because of international important events. During Covid-19 pandemic technology and networks have been used on a large scale to help people, but, at the same time, they also amplified the infodemic, according to the World Health Organization (2020). Consequently, this global crisis has returned journalism and the media to the center of information production and makes them the main antidote against misinformation in the Covid era.

The objective of this research is to analyze the importance of the local or regional press in the context of the pandemic as a credibility reference, in first place, and specifically in the fight against disinformation, in second place. Previous studies show that traditional media hold in general more trust than social media (Newman et al., 2020). The media that has been chosen, Diario SUR (Málaga, Spain) was a pioneer in the fight against disinformation (Palomo and Sedano, 2018). To achieve these objectives, a combined methodology has been developed based on an analysis of audiences and consumption and in-depth interviews with journalists for the newspaper.

We have analysed audiences and subscriptions since January 2019 to April 2022. The results show that the newspaper's audience curves reflect that the highest rates of page views and visits clearly coincide with each wave of Covid-19. Another important result: the most read news in the online edition of the newspaper was, precisely, the denial of Health Ministry to a hoax that circulated on WhatsApp in November 2020. All this vindicates the value of journalism during the pandemic and the post-covid era.