



CHALLENGE 7: DON'T FORGET THE (MASS & SOCIAL) MEDIA EFFECT

HOW TO DEAL WITH MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION
DURING PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES

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“A democratic civilization will save itself only if it makes the language of the image into a stimulus for critical reflection — not an invitation for hypnosis.”

Umberto Eco, 1979

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Learning about **mass and social media effects**
2. Understanding why we are **susceptible to media spread of misinformation**
3. Finding ways to **make a critical use of the media**

MASS MEDIA THEORIES

What have we learned from mass media theories?



How media influence the topic of discussion



How media influence the receiver reception



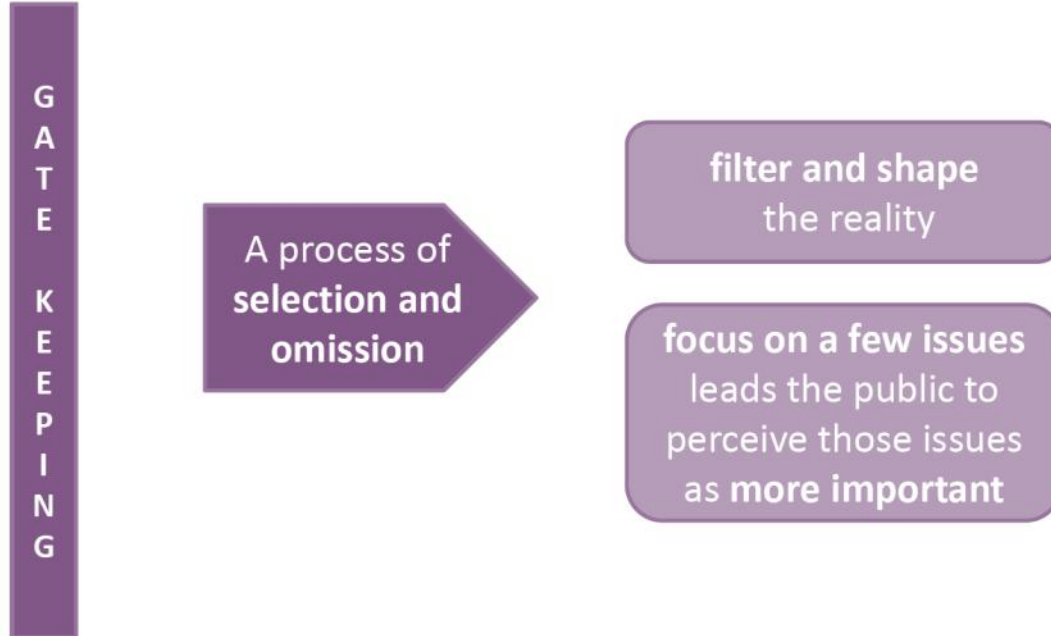
How media characteristics influence message

MASS MEDIA THEORIES

How media influence the topic of discussion

- **Newsworthiness:** the quality of being sufficiently interesting to be reported in news bulletins
- **Gatekeeping:** «The gatekeeping process shapes and produces various images of reality, not only because some bits of information are selected and others rejected, but because communication agents put information together in different ways.»

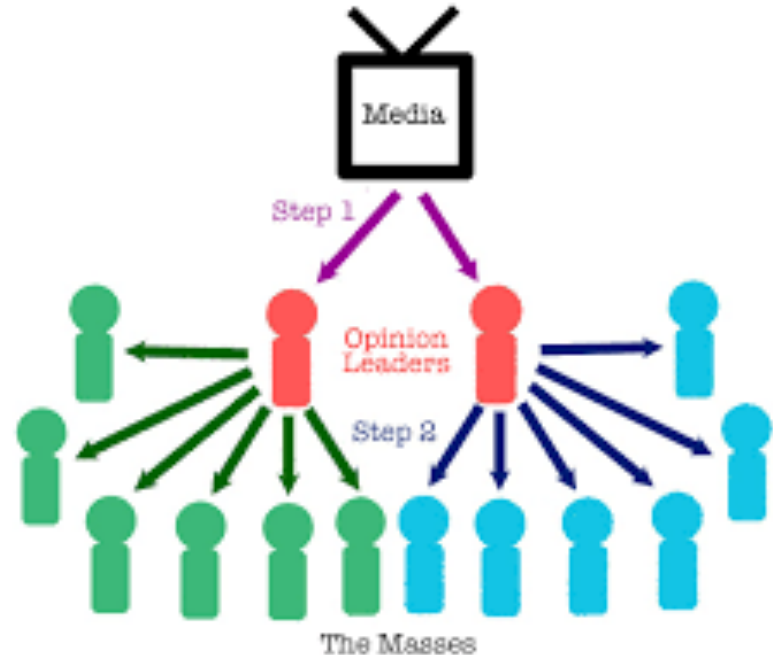
MASS MEDIA THEORIES



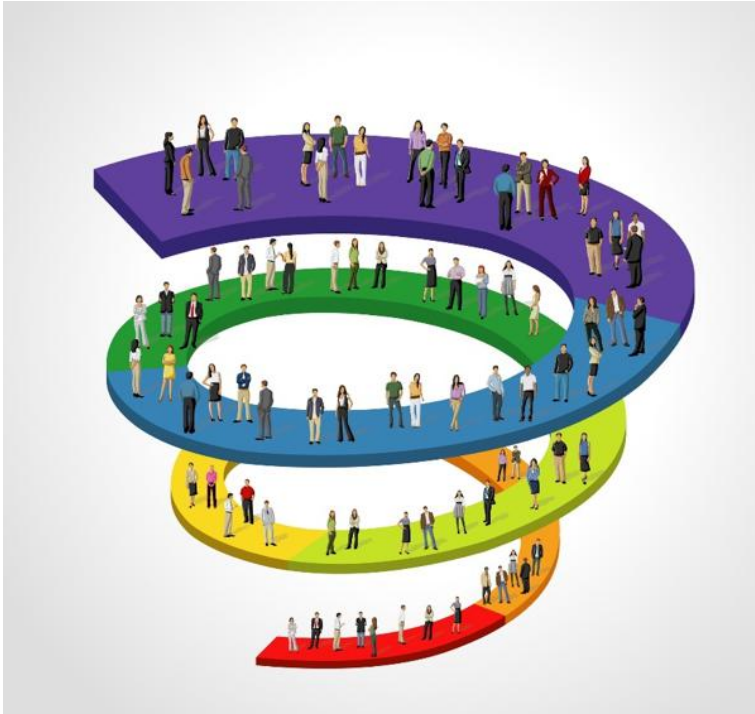
MASS MEDIA THEORIES

How media influence the receiver reception

- From **hypodermic needle** to the **two-step flow of communication** (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1966)



MASS MEDIA THEORIES



How media influence
the receiver reception

- The **Spiral of silence**
(Noelle Neumann, 1974)

MASS MEDIA THEORIES

How media characteristics influence message

- From **Medium theory** to **Media richness theory**: the message is influenced by the medium and the medium fits the message

"In the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes."

Andy Warhol

WHAT CHANGES WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

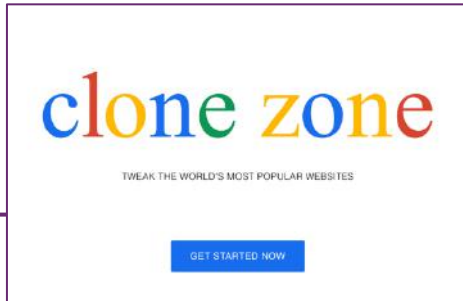
- Social media are like a **stage**
 - We are the interpreters
→ we are **responsible**
- **Filter bubbles**
 - The risk of information polarization
- **Echo chambers**
 - The risk deriving from homophily



WHAT CHANGES WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Facilitators of information disorders on social media:

- Message **sophistication**
- **Speed** of diffusion
- **Anonymity** of the source



WHAT CHANGES WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Health and science information on social media are often problematic because:

- Spread **harmful health messages**
 - ex. antivaccine rethoric, misinformation about Zika virus, Lyme disease and Ebola-related prevention and treatment strategies
- Falsehoods can diffuse «**farther, faster, deeper and more broadly**»
- Online environments do **exhibit polarization** characteristics where misinformation can spread virally
(*Caulfield et al 2019*)

ANATOMY OF MISINFORMATION



The three elements
of information
disorder

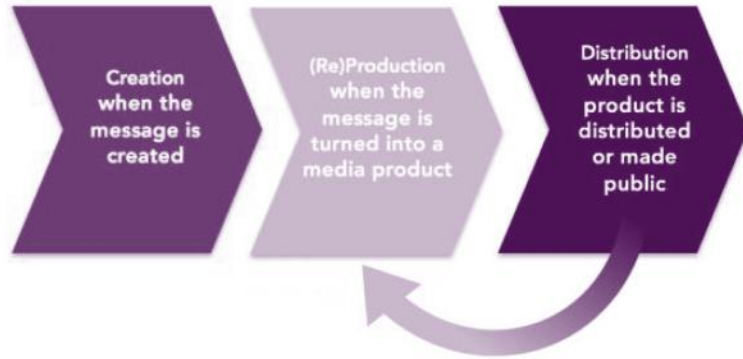
- Agent
- Message
- Interpreter

(Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017)

ANATOMY OF MISINFORMATION

Three phases of information disorder

(Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017)



BEST PRACTICES - AGENT

“communications in a public health crisis are as crucial as medical intervention . . . in fact, communications policies ARE a medical intervention.”

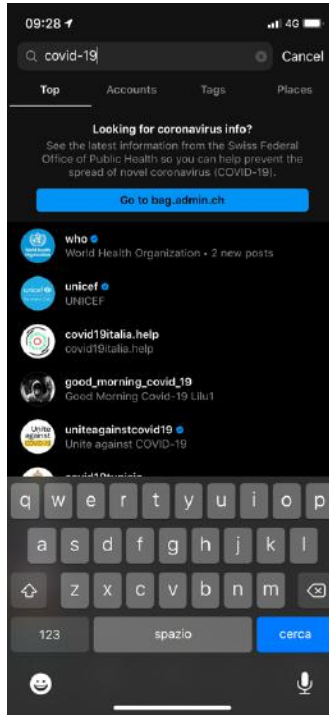
(Heidi Tworek, Twitter)



BEST PRACTICES - AGENT

- **Don't overload people with information**—short, shareable bullet points are far more effective.
- **Pairing visuals with text** helps us to remember, such as using photos with text, or videos with audio and subtitles.
- **Include infographics** such as flowcharts, timelines, and Venn diagrams, which all need to work on mobile devices.
- **Use fun videos**—ask your kids to show you the handwashing dances on TikTok, the video sharing service.
- These are a great way to **reach younger audiences** and **good for older generations too**: Gloria Gaynor's washing her hands to "I Will Survive" is exactly the sort of viral information we need to be spreading. (Tworek, 2020)

BEST PRACTICES - MESSAGES



Social media platform have started to sensitize towards misinformation by redirecting to official information sources

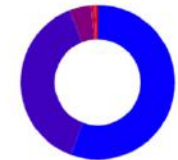
BEST PRACTICES - MESSAGES

Help to dismantel the **filter
bubble**

My political bubble
Made from my friends list using PolitEcho.org



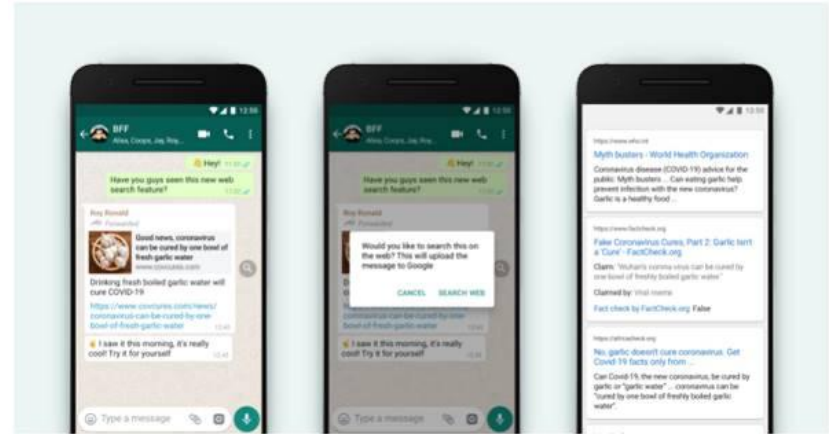
Friends



News Feed

BEST PRACTICES - INTERPRETER

→ How platforms work against fake news **massive-forward on WhatsApp**

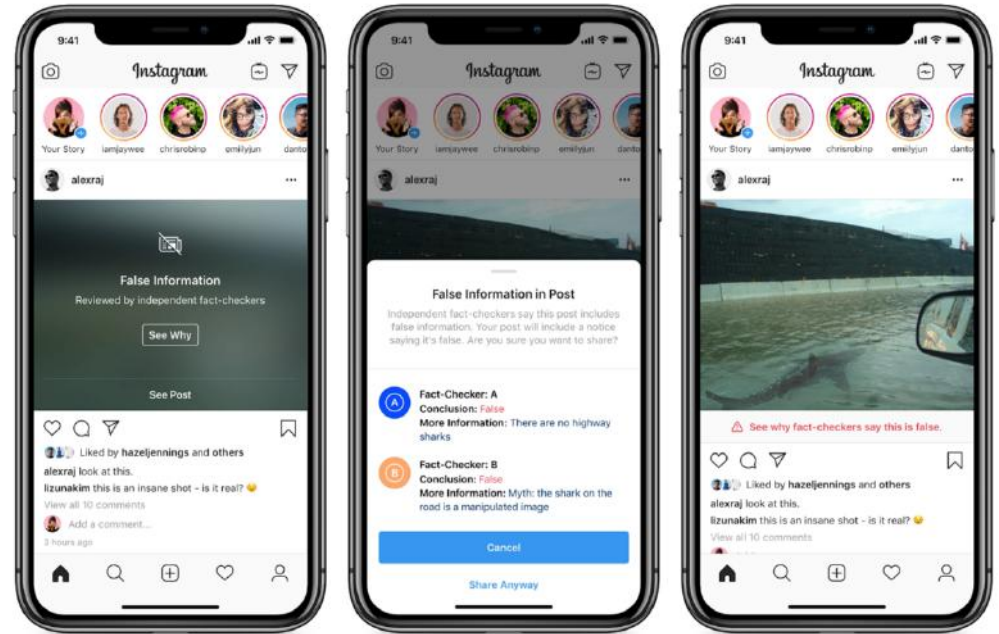


WhatsApp provides a [special forwarded label](#) to messages shared in chats that have been forwarded many times. These two arrows 🔄 help people know when they've received a message that was not written by a close contact. Earlier this year, we set [limits](#) on how many times they can be sent at once to maintain the private nature of WhatsApp.

Today, we're piloting a simple way to double check these messages by tapping a magnifying glass button in the chat. Providing a simple way to search messages that have been forwarded many times may help people find news results or other sources of information about content they have received.

BEST PRACTICES - INTERPRETER

→ How platforms work against fake news **Labeling on Instagram**



RECOMMENDATIONS

(Wardle & Derakhshan 2017)

- **Technological:** social media participate in fact-checking initiatives that flag disputed content or add a Public Service Announcement-type message at top of the New Feed with tips to spot false news or invest in initiatives promoting media literacy (News Integrity Initiative) or close bots accounts
 - Limitation: it is part of the solution, but cannot be the only solution (commercial interests)
- **Credibility scores (blacklist):** social media could integrate them in their algorithm so that content from less credible sources would be down-ranked and therefore less seen
 - Limitation: if people question the authority of the institution attributing the scores, this could backfire (importance of transparent criteria)
- Initiatives to **increase the trust in the media**, such as policies on "strategic silence" or fact-checking initiatives
 - Limitation: no overlap between the people seeing the fake news and people seeing it debunk
- **Educational:** media literacy programs
- **Regulatory:** like the German Network Enforcement Law (primary for hate speech)
 - Limitation: freedom of expression, censorship

TAKE HOME MESSAGE

gatekeeping?

What institutions should do: **build a dialogue with the community before crisis**

- Be present on **mass and social media**
- Learn the **language of social media** and what grasps audience attention
- **Avoid** sharing misinformation
- Invest on **technological monitoring solutions**
- **Contribute to positive** information sharing

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