



COMMUNICATION PERCEPTION DURING COVID19 LOCKDOWN IN ITALY

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FIGHTING CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND FAKE NEWS



After a long study of bibliography and related topics, I started using my personal Facebook profile to fight conspiracy theories and fake news. According with bibliography, the only way to fight properly both phenomenon is:

- Help people developing analytical thinking (effective for both fake news and conspiracies)
- Debunking (effective only on fake news)

CONSPIRACIST IDENTIKIT

Low level of education

Desire to feel special and unique

Sense of powerlessness

Need for certainties

THESE FAKE NEWS
COULD DO HARM
TO PEOPLE !



Examples of fake news circulating on social net

- “Gargling with bleach, taking acetic acid or steroids, using essential oils and salt water protects against new coronavirus infection” (salute.gov.it, 2020)
- the virus cannot survive in the hot weather
- taking a high dose of chloroquine medication can protect you
- consuming large quantities of ginger and garlic can prevent the virus (un.org, 2020)



FIRSTDRAFT








7 TYPES OF MIS- AND DISINFORMATION



Also WHO, with the words of its president Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus speaks about “Infodemic” referring to the storm of news (true and fake) that are present on the web and warns the governments to fight it with any necessary mean.



FIRSTDRAFT MISINFORMATION MATRIX

	 SATIRE OR PARODY	 FALSE CONNECTION	 MISLEADING CONTENT	 FALSE CONTEXT	 IMPOSTER CONTENT	 MANIPULATED CONTENT	 FABRICATED CONTENT
POOR JOURNALISM		✓	✓	✓			
TO PARODY	✓				✓		✓
TO PROVOKE OR TO 'PUNK'					✓	✓	✓
PASSION				✓			
PARTISANSHIP			✓	✓			
PROFIT		✓			✓		✓
POLITICAL INFLUENCE			✓	✓		✓	✓
PROPAGANDA			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Italian unofficial communication (especially social networks) during the COVID19 lockdown period has been submerged by a huge quantity of fake news and conspiracies. In fact, it was the first “Infodemic” we had to face.



SOME ITALIAN FAKE NEWS, CONSPIRACIES AND MISINFORMATIONS

- 1- “We’re safe, virus will never come in Italy” vs. “We’re doomed, virus will spread really quickly” (divergent news from newspapers)
- 2- “Sars-Cov2 is just like a bit more than a common flu”/”Sars-Cov2 could be really deadly” (divergent news from famous Italian researchers – TV interviews)
- 3- Sars-Cov2 virus is alone/can be two or more viruses (divergent news from newspapers)
- 4- Hospitals are selecting intensive care units for young people, discharging the elders (fake news - newspapers)
- 5- “We must lockdown the Country!” / ”we must keep everything open!” (political divergent TV debate and newspapers)
- 6- Virus escaped a lab/Virus comes from an interspecific leap (divergent news)
- 7- Vitamin C prevents the contagion – Ginger prevents the contagion – Vitamin D cures the disease ...(fake news)
- 8- “Chinese do eat rats. Everyone saw them doing that” (fake news on TV - political interview from a famous regional governor – It caused a diplomatic accident with China)
- 9- Avigan (an antiviral medicine, Favipiravir) is the cure for COVID19 and the Japanese already use it. (fake news through a viral YouTube video)
- 10- Hyperimmune plasma from recovered people is THE ONLY cure (misinformation) and in Italy “they” (who?) don’t let us use it (fake news/conspiracy theory)
- 11- our government does not authorize autopsies on COVID19 deaths (fake news)
- 12- military trucks full of coffins in Bergamo are a lie: they are migrants who died in Lampedusa (fake news)
- 13- Sars-Cov2 is a bioweapon brought to China from USA military athletes during the military games with the purpose to disrupt Chinese economy (Conspiracy theory)
- 14- Sars-Cov2 is a bioweapon escaped from a BLS4 lab in Wuhan with the purpose to disrupt western economies (fake news + Conspiracy theory)
- 15- Bill Gates Foundation developed Sars-Cov2 to reduce Earth’s population (Conspiracy theory)
- 16- 5G network is involved in COVID19, giving same symptoms disguised as a virus (Conspiracy theory)
- 17- COVID19 do not exists. It’s an invention of government to disrupt public health system (Conspiracy theory)
- 18- Aliens sent Sars-Cov2 to remember us that we’re polluting the planet and wasting resources (Conspiracy theory)

THE SURVEY



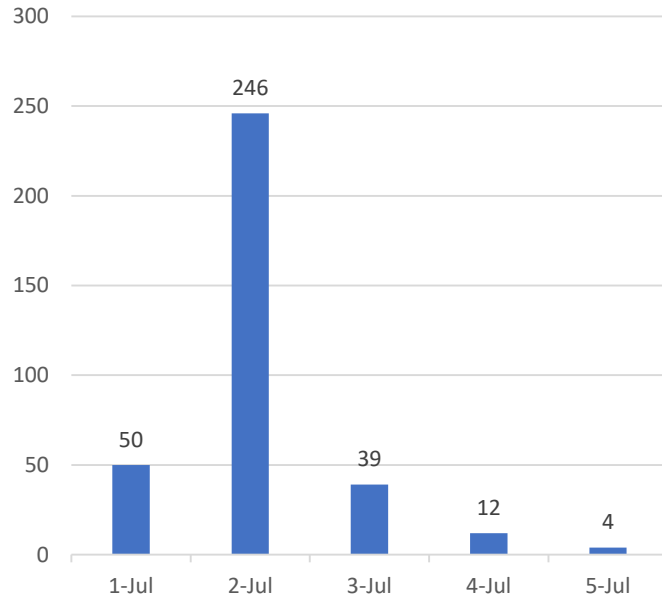
I started a web survey (in Italian) in order to verify the perception of social users towards COVID19 and the communication done so far at all levels in Italy

The survey was composed by 24 different questions:

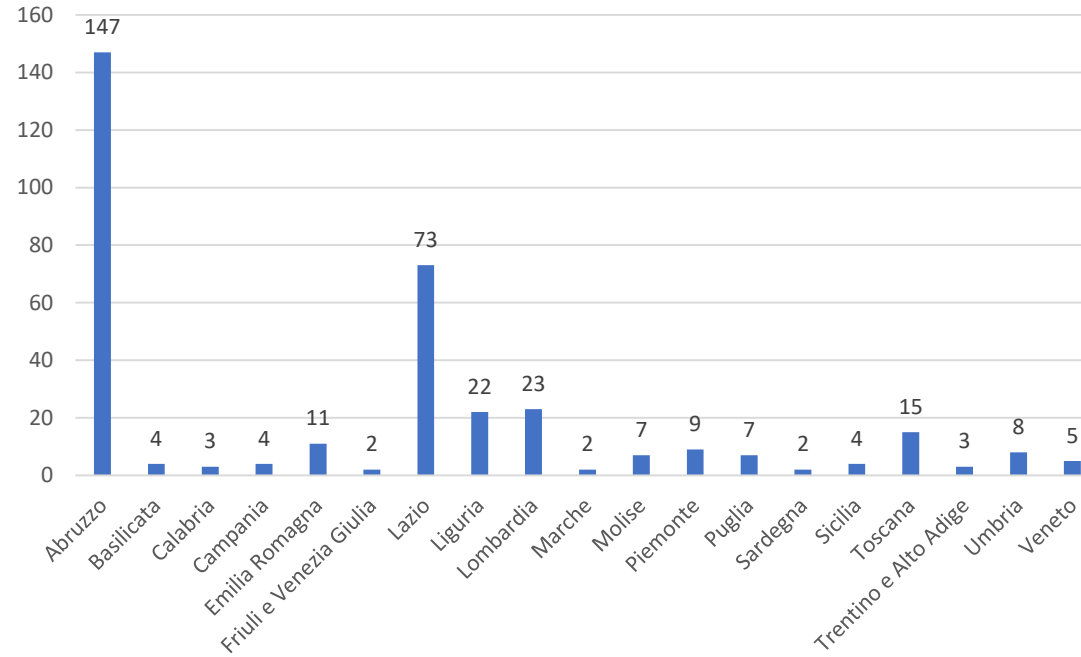
- 3 questions on general data (age, gender, region of residence)
- 6 question with single answer
- 3 questions with multiple choice answers
- 11 questions with answers on a on ordinal scale from 1 to 10
- 1 open-ended question

I submitted the survey on Facebook on July 1st at 22:30h, asking for a little help from my friends to fill in the questionnaire and sharing the link. I also assured them that it would not have taken more than 5 minutes. This survey collected in 5 days 351 answers (*Graph.1*) from all over Italy but with a majority from central Italian regions.

THE SURVEY

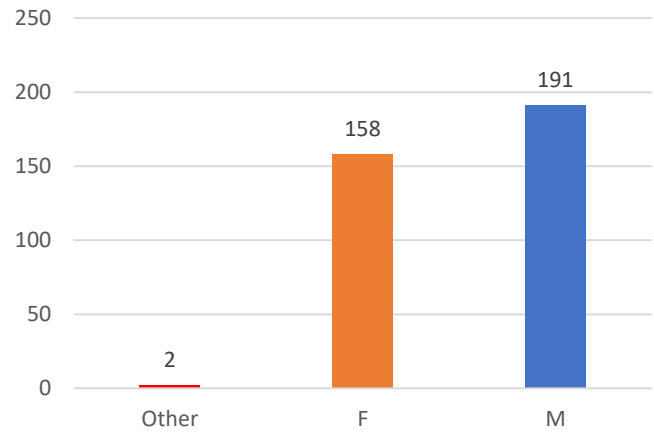


TIMELINE AND FREQUENCY

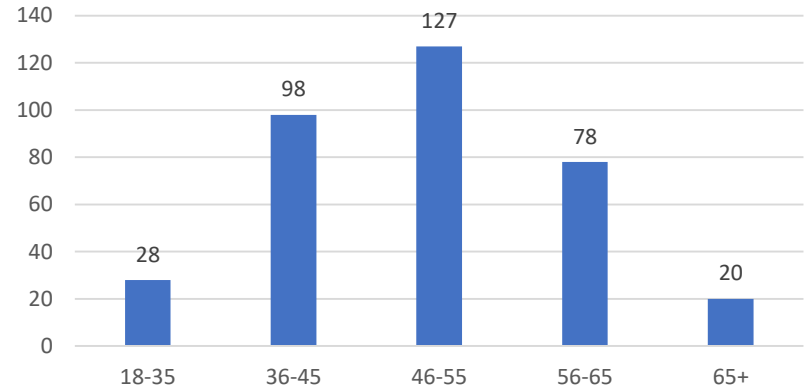


GEOGRAPHICAL PROVENIENCE

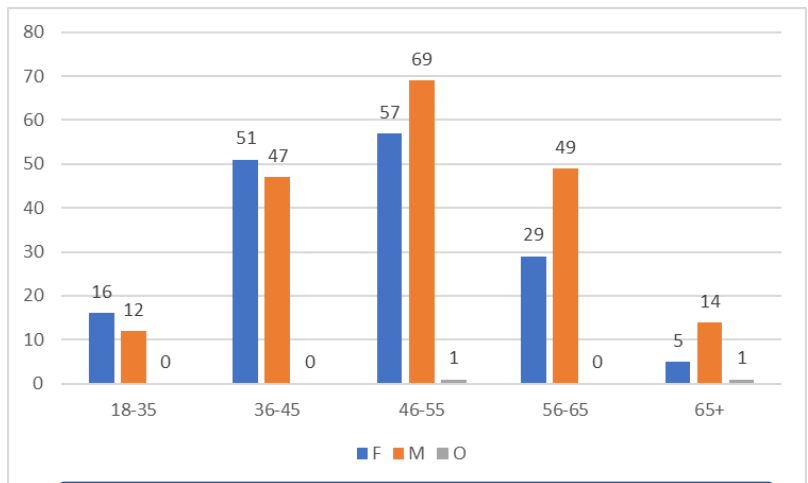
THE SURVEY



GENDER DISTRIBUTION



AGE DISTRIBUTION



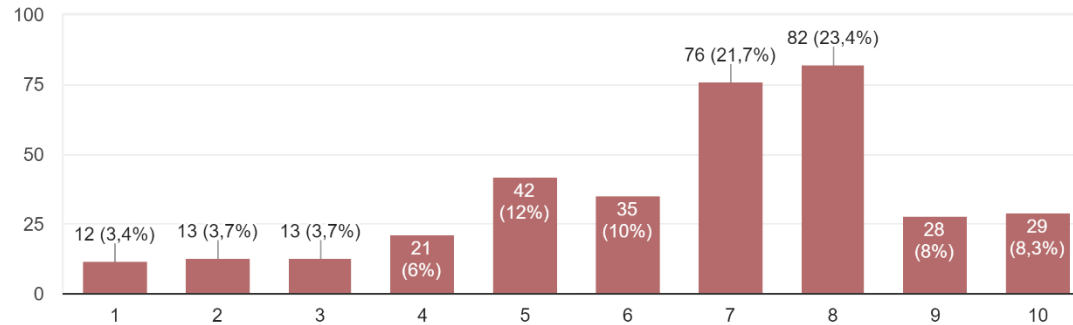
AGE AND GENDER DISTRIBUTION

THE SURVEY

PERCEPTION ON PANDEMIC AND HEALTH EFFECTS (FEAR)

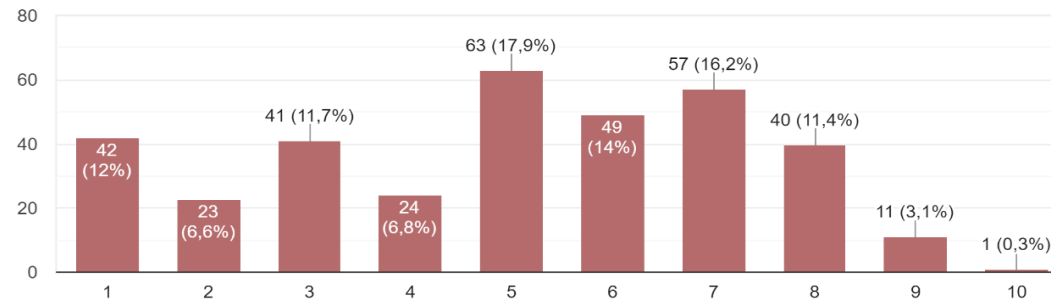
Quanto sei stato/a spaventato/a da questa pandemia e dagli effetti sulla salute delle persone?
 Indica un valore dove 1= Per niente e 10= Tantissimo (es. panico, ansia etc.)

351 risposte



Quanto ti sei sentito/a rassicurato/a dalla comunicazione istituzionale? Indica un valore dove 1=Per niente e 10=Tantissimo

351 risposte



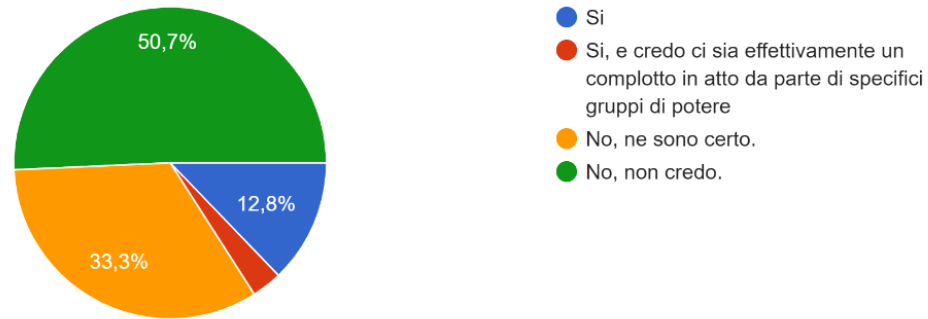
PERCEPTION ON INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNICATION (REASSURANCE)

	FEAR	REASSURANCE
Media	6,58	Media 4,97
Errore standard	0,12	Errore standard 0,12
Mediana	7,00	Mediana 5,00
Moda	8,00	Moda 5,00
Deviazione standard	2,24	Deviazione standard 2,33
Varianza campionaria	5,00	Varianza campionaria 5,44
Curtosi	-0,01	Curtosi -0,99
Asimmetria	-0,69	Asimmetria -0,24
Intervallo	9,00	Intervallo 9,00
Minimo	1,00	Minimo 1,00
Massimo	10,00	Massimo 10,00
Somma	2311,00	Somma 1744,00
Conteggio	351,00	Conteggio 351,00
Livello di confidenza(95,0%)	0,23	Livello di confidenza(95,0%) 0,24

THE SURVEY

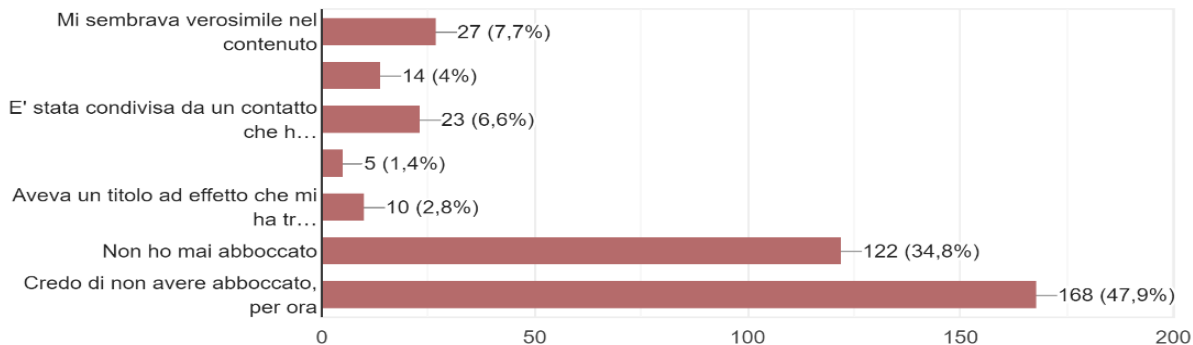
Sei caduto/a vittima (anche solo per sbaglio) di Fake News, bufale o notizie che riportano a teorie cospirative?

351 risposte



Come sei caduto/a nella trappola della Fake News?

351 risposte



Have you fallen victim (even if by mistake) of Fake News, hoaxes or news that report to conspiracy theories?

Yes

yes, and I believe there is indeed a conspiracy going on by specific groups of power

No, I am sure

No, I don't think so

How did you fall into the fake news trap?

Answers are shown from top to bottom order like follows:

- It seemed likely to me in content
- It triggered an emotional reaction (For example: indignation / anger / hate / fear etc.)
- It was shared by a contact who has my esteem and whom I thought was very reliable
- It was shared on a viral level and therefore I thought it was true
- It had an effect title that misled me
- I never bite
- I guess I haven't bite for now



THERE ARE MANY LESSONS LEARNT FROM COVID19 «FIRST WAVE»

(but it seems that media and decision makers didn't)

- From the data obtained and analysed, the support activities of institutional communication by subjects with appropriate skills, unassailable professional curricula and high credibility (**The right messengers**) can make the difference between an effective and widespread communication and a botched and chaotic one.
- In particular a single individual, even with very modest resources of time and money, could reach several hundred people (sometimes thousands) in just few days and obtain very positive results (**The right medium**).
- IT IMPLIES THAT SOCIAL COMMUNICATION MUST BE RETHOUGHT AND REMODELLED, not limiting itself to periodic bulletins with statistics or public statements (
- The use of a language understandable to all and the absence of sensational or alarmist tones has been rewarded by users in terms of trust, but also corresponds to a greater awareness of the problem, which is thus tackled appropriately. (**The right message**)
- The “right message” from the “right messenger” through the “right medium” can make the difference, and this is according to results obtained from the First Infodemic Convention (WHO)

These suggestions should be taken in charge mostly by the so called “mainstream media” such as radio and television, especially considering the really low results obtained