

JOURNALISTS ARE ALSO FRONTLINE WORKERS AGAINST CORONAVIRUS: A WELL COMMUNICATED PROBLEM IS A HALF SOLVED PROBLEM

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COVID-19 has changed our lives forever. The world we knew until now has been transformed totally. Within this context, risk communication is playing a decisive role when informing, transmitting, and channelling the flow of information in society. Crisis communication is fundamental in risk situations since it is responsible for maintaining an accessible and transparent relationship in the different flows of information and communication. However, crisis communication is not only about transmitting knowledge but also about finding ways of transmitting comprehensive information that reflects uncertainty and enables the public to make fact-based decisions. Society needs to feel informed by qualified experts; otherwise, they will seek out the information, which may be unproven, rumoured, or simply false news.

Unfortunately, in recent months we have seen an increase of fake news and unproven facts about COVID-19 on the Internet, which affects the reaction of society and especially the willingness to follow the anti-COVID measures. This situation is a huge challenge for the media, which have the difficult task of informing and at the same time finding a balance between panic and total neglect of the situation. According to a poll on BNT's "Referendum" TV program, only 7.7% said they were not worried about the coronavirus. More than 60% said they are worried about the lack of enough doctors and medical care in our hospitals. At the same time the pandemic is widening social and economic divisions. There are many people who criticize the official media for information about the course of the infection.

From my professional experience as a journalist I can say that any attempt to have a TV discussion with experts on the topic of coronavirus spread, provokes a lot of criticism from people who prefer to believe in alternative and conspiracy theories. Fighting fake news is not so easy especially when trust in institutions seems to be really critical in crisis situations.

The WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that we're not just fighting an epidemic, we're fighting an infodemic. The infodemic is as real as COVID-19.

Journalists are also frontline workers against coronavirus. Today, our teams have to deal on one hand with the spread of the virus, which reduces people in our newsrooms, and at the same time we have to fulfil our commitment to inform and verify facts. This situation requires a new way of acting, of informing and leading - at every level in our public life. If we win the battle with disinformation and distrust I believe we will win the war against the coronavirus.

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