

When polarization and disinformation go hand in hand: the discourse in the quality European press

Political Communication Research Section - Call for Proposals 2023

- Disinformation campaigns and truth-making
- Polarisation and mediated hate speech

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Disinformation is one of the most urgent threats facing contemporary societies around the world (Tandoc, Wei Lim, & Ling, 2017). There are numerous papers from Communication Sciences that address the phenomenon that was triggered by the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States in 2016 after that has been decisive in European events such as Brexit, the management of the COVID19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine.

The phenomenon of information disorders takes place in a highly polarized political scenario. The polarization among the social groups inside a country -as has been observed in movements such as the yellow vests in France (Souillard et al., 2020)- and both partisan (González, Rodríguez and Castromil, 2010; Teruel, 2016) and affective polarization (Torcal and Comellas, 2022)- as is currently observed in Spain- are determining factors in public discourse.

This research addresses the presence of informative disorders in a context of polarization through the analysis of the quality press of three decisive countries in Europe: France, Spain and the United Kingdom. The objective is to study the relationship between the two concepts (polarization and disinformation) in important newspapers from three countries with different media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2003) between 2017 and 2022.

This is an international diachronic study that makes it possible to compare more than three hundred articles from six newspapers representing different editorial lines between 2017 and 2022. A quantitative discourse analysis has been carried out as a qualitative frame study.

According to the conference subtheme Media, Information and Communication, this proposal seeks to determine solutions to disinformation and polarization posed by the European press. That is, what are the actors that must intervene to stop this problem and what are the urgent practices that could be implemented.

The first fundamental conclusion to be drawn is that disinformation is a contemporary weapon, used by states and political leaders to destabilize western democracies. Regarding the international significance of the problem, the

responsibility of the political agents of the big powers (the United States, Brazil, Russia) and, primordially social media, is clearly indicated (Tucker et al., 2018). It is also affirmed, as second conclusion, that social networks do not create disinformation but reproduce it and in this way feed polarization.

The press highlights the importance of European regulation to fight disinformation, even if it is insufficient to stop the problem, and points to technology companies as responsible for disseminating this content that increases political polarization.