

# LUISS



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of Political Science

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## CRISIS COMMUNICATION

An analysis of government  
communication and the Italian press  
during COVID-19

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Academic Year 2019/2020

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## Introduction

*“Five hundred agents for 43 breaches  
That is how red zones are locked down*

*In Lodigiano 35 checkpoints, another 8 in Padovano  
For two weeks you can neither enter nor leave  
If the situation gets worse, the army comes in”*

*Il Corriere della Sera*

The quote belongs to an article written by Fiorenza Sarzanini, which was published on February 24, 2020 on *Il Corriere della Sera* (*Il Corriere della Sera. Archivio*). It is one of the titles that characterized articles starting from mid-February, articles that spread panic in the whole peninsula. The advent of a foreign virus was not a new story, since Italy already experienced epidemics such as the Spanish flu in 1918 and Swine flu in 2009. What differed this time was the management of communication that created the so-called “infodemia”: an excessive amount of information provided by the media that cause confusion and panic among the populations. Individuals’ behavior is mainly caused by the tone of the news and how they are communicated to them; certain reactions must come with no surprise if an information is given with the purpose of provoking fear.

This aspect of communication inspired the focus of this paper, which deals with the topic of crisis communication. It disciplines communication management in periods of emergency, a management that should be carried out by the governments and its institutions. This is why the first chapter of this paper has as subject government communication in its basic form. It firstly provide a distinction between political and institutional communication; it is necessary in order to understand who is in charge of this duty. Secondly, it lists the principles of this type of communication that are essential to make it professional and effective. Lastly, the first chapter issues the advent of media and its engagement in government communication. The second chapter aims at narrowing the target. It discusses crisis communication and its management according to the different phases of a crisis and it provides examples of how this type of communication helps during viruses’ emergencies. Moreover, this part of the paper includes the analysis of the above-cited “infodemia”. The third and last chapter is a case study; a textual analysis carried out thanks to the use of the platform CO.ME.T.A. and the archives of *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*. The subject is the Italian press during the emergency of COVID-19. It shows how the newspapers managed communication in terms of

language and the consequent feedback from the people. The examination is supported by examples of the titles of articles published during the first three months of the emergency by the two journals previously listed.

# 1. Government Communication

Communication represents the basic element for the creation of interpersonal relationships. Any type of relationship, whether private, economic, or political, could not exist if there was no communication to mediate such exchanges. It can be stated that, today's society could not have been the same in the absence of communication. Any type of behavior is communicative, it is impossible not to communicate (Waltzlawick, Beavin Bavelas, and Jackson 1967). This is the reason why it is extremely important to shed light on this phenomenon, especially in the political field.

In every democratic system, communication is essential to establish a relationship with the citizens. A clear flow of information from the public administration will enable individuals to take part to the political life of the country. On the one hand, public communication's purpose is to inform citizens about their rights and to respond to the needs of effectiveness, efficiency and transparency. On the other hand, it puts in place processes of institutional innovation through the provision of services adapted to their needs. Therefore, the public communication activity is expressed in the ability of the state (through its branched organizational systems), of the parties and of the political movements, to interact with public opinion and respond appropriately to the expectations of individual citizens. (Sepe e Crobe 2014)

## 1.1 Political VS Institutional Communication

Public communication is a wide area, which comprehends diverse type of communication. The most relevant ones that will be examined are the political communication and the institutional communication. They may seem the same thing, but there are a few substantial differences.

Political communication deals with the types of communications that intervene in the relations between the political system, media, and citizens. The modern kind of political communication developed with the rise of political parties, in particular when the Liberal State took over the Absolutist one. The regimes of representative democracy are the most favorable for the growth of this discipline. At the beginning, it only aimed at gaining the consensus from the citizens to win the election. (Sorice 2011)

Today, this type of communication manages the political debate between representatives and represented. It delineates the strategic path political parties should follow, based on inputs acquired from public opinion and from the electorate. Therefore, it concerns all of the forms of communication used by political actors in order to reach specific goals. These are addressed to non-political actors, politicians, and political actors on their own activities. (Sorice 2011)

In contemporary society, the communication model adopted sees the fundamental intermediation of the media dis-intermediating the political actors from the political audience. When we analyze the models of political communication - understood as the relationship between society and the political system, it becomes essential to decline the concepts of public opinion and the political sphere. On the one hand, the concept of public reinforces the concept that it is possible to speak of political communication only in contexts of Participatory Democracies. In fact, in dictatorships it is not possible to develop a personal political opinion, since it is enforced by propaganda. On the other hand, the public sphere is intended as a platform for negotiating and reconciling contrasting interests. The public sphere is nothing but the place of discussion and not the organization of voting or the definition of strategies. (Sorice 2011)

According to Mazzoleni [2004] and Sorice [2011], there are two models of political communication. The first one is the Publicistic-Dialogical Model, which affirms that the relationship between the different actors is based on the development of a shared space. This communicative model does not depend on the media, but recognizes them as an essential element of contemporary society. The Media Model is the second one. It recognizes three supplementary actors, within the actors involved in the communicative processes. These are the political system, the media system, and the citizens. In this case, the media system almost completely replaces the public system and it proposes itself as a channel of exchange between political system and citizens.

In the content of the political message, not only are important the forms of verbal, non-verbal, and linguistic communication, but also those with a symbolic or ritual origin; so to invest all of the dimensions of the public's perception (Mazzoleni 2004). Not by chance, the political discourse (or political language) has undergone semiotics analysis. Political communication is not like others, it is intended to dissuade, convince and transform men. A semiotic analysis of political discourse will have to take into account its semantic coherence and locutive strength. A general hypothesis on its structure goes hand in hand with the description of the discursive strategies and the clarification of the different enunciative configurations, polemic or contractual, which represent the principles of the functioning of a true grammar of "power". (Fabbri e Montanari 2004)

Institutional communication differs from the political one since it is carried out by the public administration, either central or peripheral (Grandi 2001). It concerns all of the bodies of the public apparatus, being them parliamentary, governmental, regional, local authorities, universities, the assessorate, the a.s.l., etc. (UNSA Beni Culturali)

The aim of this type of communication is to promote the administration itself. It publicizes the identity of the public administration in consideration, its ideology, its functions, and its activities (Grandi

2001). However, the scope of institutional communication is also to publish norms and essential information that the citizens have the right to know. Since 1948, we can talk about this in terms of “right”. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, other than affirming the right to freedom of opinion and expression, it states that individuals have the right to inform themselves. People all over the world have to have the possibility to seek and receive information. (UN General Assembly)

On June 7 2000, the Italian legislature introduced the Law 150 to institutionalize public administrations’ communication (Legge n. 150/2000). It can be considered as the cornerstone of public communication for diverse reasons. Firstly, it sets the normative boundaries for this type of communication. It distinguishes between informing and communicating; two actions entrusted to the mass media and the public administration. Secondly, it recognizes communication as a fundamental element for the right functioning of the system. The interconnection with the citizens helps the public administration to endorse the needs of the people and to ameliorate the services that they provide. Thirdly, it introduces the roles of “Uffici Stampa” and “URP – Ufficio Relazioni con il Pubblico” (FORUM PA 2020). Art. 8 of Law 150/2000 states that the URP is entitled to communicate with the citizens. While, Art. 9 affirms that the “Uffici Stampa” are entitled to inform the people. The latter is not a mandatory figure to have in a public administration, contrary to the former. Art. 7 introduces the “Portavoce”, an optional figure that is more engaged in political communication, rather than the institutional one (Legge n. 150/2000). Finally, Law 150/2000 assigns a central role to the training of staff involved in public communication. (FORUM PA 2020)

According to Faccioli [2000], the communication of public administrations can be internal or external. In the first case, he talks about the communication that happens inside of the public body. It can be both horizontal (between different administrations) and vertical (between different levels of the same agency). The former is fundamental in order to facilitate bureaucracy. In the second case, communication can be divided as well into two different types: external communication towards citizens and external communication towards the media. The latter occurs through social communication campaigns and image promotion activities that seek to enhance the achievements of the institution with respect to the objectives set and the expectations of their target audiences.

Moreover, Gregorio Arena [2001] provided another subdivision of institutional communication. He recognized diverse types: communication of certainty, it publishes documents that regulates juridical relationships and it implies a top-down relation between the parts; communication service, it provides the public with information about a certain service to make it more accessible; communication of innovation, its scope is to ameliorate the services provided by the public administration and, in order

to do so, it gathers the feedbacks on them; communication of citizenship, it stresses the importance of citizenship since a stronger sense of community guarantees a better functioning of public administrations. (Arena 2001)

## 1.2 Principles of Government Communication

Every State has its own policies in matters of government communication. Each of these policies underlines the core principles of this type of communication. It is necessary to stress these values in order to guarantee the right functioning of the system and, most important, to ensure the citizens' right to acquire information. These values may differ from state to state, but the recurrent ones are openness, comprehensibility, responsibility, and neutrality.

Since governments are open institutions, the information they provide to the citizens cannot be subject to any restriction (Government Office 2017). Thanks to this transparency, people will be more engaged in the political life too and the principle of democracy will be well respected. In order to reach the largest share of population, the language used for institutional communications must be clear and comprehensible. In addition, it is necessary to give individuals with special needs the possibility to understand without problems (Government Office 2017). Each figure who communicates in institutional terms is responsible for what it states. Every information may have both negative and positive consequences. There must be reciprocal respect, with no interest in spreading fake information about anything or anyone regarding the system (Regeringskansliet 2012). This concept connects with the one of neutrality. All of the information coming from the government or the public administrations need to be free from any type of interference from a certain political party. (Government Office 2017)

Since each state is free to include the values which it considers most appropriate, Finland recognized also interactivity. A more interactive process leaves room for cooperation and feedbacks from the citizens. Moreover, interactivity is helped by the introduction of new technologies and the use of social media (Finnish Government). As political figures can share information in real time, people feel more involved in the life of the state and, therefore, they trust more the system. However, those political figures are required to make appropriate use of social media, to avoid losing their credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens.

Sweden, instead, introduced as core values relevance and timeliness. The two of them go hand in hand, and they refer to the fact that "communication must contribute to achieving the operational objectives in a resource-efficient manner" (Regeringskansliet 2012). In order to be efficient, the



government has to provide the citizens with information and measures that suit the current situation of the state. Consequently, to be relevant, communication has to be up-to-the-minute (Regeringskansliet 2012). A constant update of the news shared with the public helps the institutions to work better, to achieve the objectives set, and to monitor the situation. In this case, too, these measures will ensure more commitment from the citizens who will be willing to rely on their government without fear of being deceived.

Italy differs a little from other states since the Law 241/1990 promotes advertising, transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency. These are the principles to which the action of the public administration in the communicative field must conform (Legge n. 241/1990). It is important to give as much information as possible about the performance of the administrations, to increment and ameliorate their functioning. The efficacy of the administrative action is guaranteed by its transparency; the community has free access to the normative acts. The latter's effectiveness is measured based on their compliance with the needs expressed by the public. (UNSA Beni Culturali)

As stated previously, institutional communication has to be clear and accurate. Not only because it helps to govern the situation but also because it ensures the positive reputation of the State. If the institution communicates in the right way, they guarantee trust and appreciation from the population. These aspects are Edelman's objects of analysis, which is "a global communications firm that partners with businesses and organizations to evolve, promote and protect their brands and reputations" (EDELMAN). Every year they provide a barometer of the "trust situation" all over the world.

The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Executive Summary affirms that individuals do not trust their institutions since they do not believe in their potential. In economic terms, the population discredits the possibility of market growth. [Figure 1](#) (2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Executive Summary) shows the percent trust according to NGOs, Business, Government, and Media. There is an equal increment from the previous year, but the real gap appears between Business and Government. The disequilibrium between the two provides proof of how people perceive who governs them; they do not trust the government since they believe that they act in their own interests or in the interests of a few.

[Figure 2](#), instead, provides the list of the states under analysis and their trust index. There is a significant difference between the trust of the informed public (on the left) and the distrust of the mass population (on the right). The latter represents the 81% of the population (2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update), which might not be well educated. Therefore, the contrast between the two columns confirms the idea stated in the previous paragraph; governments act only in the interests of a few. The top three countries remain the same: China, India, and Indonesia. Since China is a

communist state, this unchanged position in the ranking may reflect the fact that everyone has access to the same type of information and they have no other choice that to trust the state, which they cannot change. However, the country experienced a significant decrease of the trust index that can be justified by the riots in Hong Kong started in March 2019.

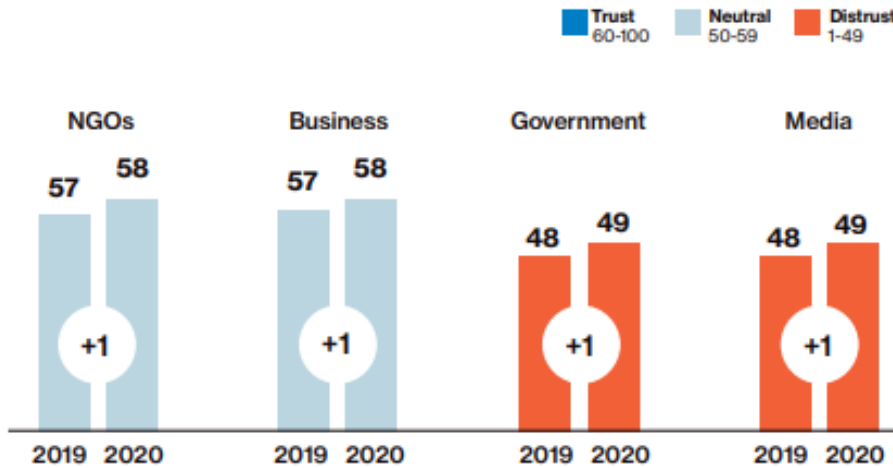


Figure 1. Percent trust - 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Executive Summary.

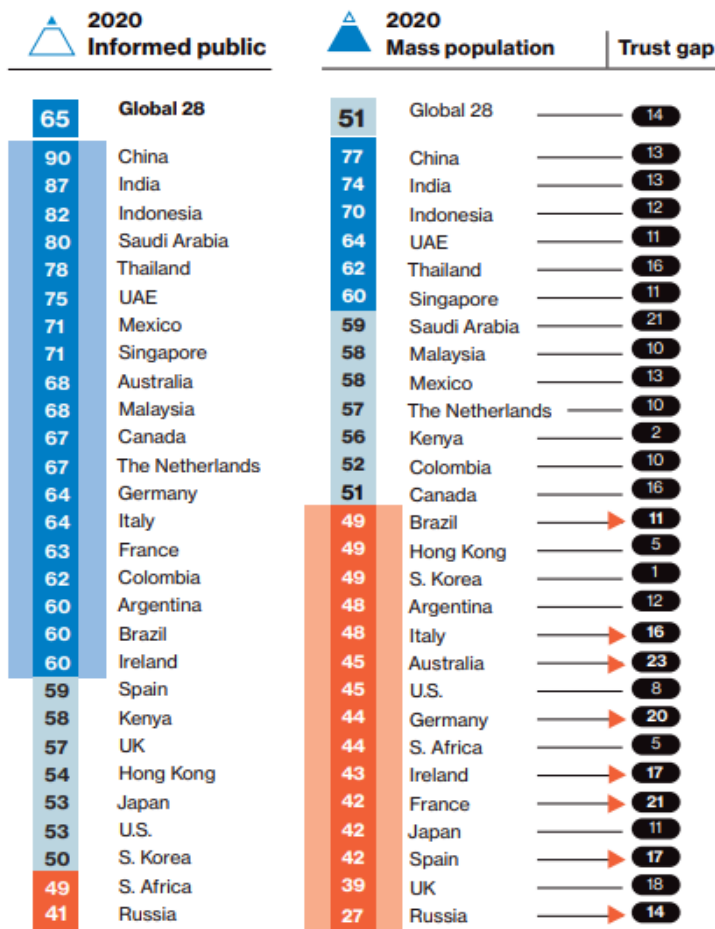


Figure 2. Trust Index - 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Executive Summary.

### 1.3 Media Engagement

Media have significantly evolved in the past years and, by so doing, they have evolved the way governments use them too. New media “are forms of communication that facilitate the production, dissemination, and exchange of political content on platforms and within networks that accommodate interaction and collaboration.” (Owen 2017)

The advent of the first mass media, the newspaper, only occurred in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was controlled by the government. This situation did not last too long as protests for a free press begun and they ended only once it became a democratic force (YouTube 2018). It needs to be taken into account that in certain countries the freedom of the press was a very serious problem. In particular, this occurred during the dictatorships’ period. Only certain newspapers were allowed to circulate and the information in them were strictly supervised. For instance, Italy experienced censorship during the Fascist Period from 1922 to 1945. Nowadays, freedom of the press, and the freedom of media in general, is one of the main requirements in order to be part of the European Union. (Wikipedia 2020)

After the newspapers, governments were engaged in all of the following forms in which they transformed: from the radio to the social media. However, what really changed the way governments communicate was the advent of internet. It created a real net between citizens and the public administration. Before, governance was seen as a top-down structure. Now, everyone is at the same level since everyone has access to information and can communicate without constraints (Milza). Internet implied the birth of the so-called “intranet”, which is an isolated net used by private companies (public administrations in our case) to communicate. Although it is only for internal use, with intranet it is still possible to communicate with the external network and other networks through appropriate communication systems and related protection (Wikipedia 2020). The internet not only plays a central role in the development of the communication strategies, but also forms social relations. It is able to create virtual communities, which, of course, can affect and are affected by the public life. (Buttinelli, Ciervo, Costantino, Geria, Loreto, Messina, Pistone e Seghetta 2016)

At the end of the ‘90s, governments and public institutions introduced websites and institutional portals. Their aim was to stimulate the participation of the citizens in the political life and to facilitate the diffusion of information (Buttinelli, Ciervo, Costantino, Geria, Loreto, Messina, Pistone e Seghetta 2016). During the years, these portals underwent processes of innovation since they did not satisfy the principles of transparency, openness, and comprehensibility. For example, Italy introduced the Directive 3/2001. It was promulgated by the Ministry of Public function and its aim was to set the guidelines for the usability and accessibility of public administration’s websites. (Direttiva 3/2001)

Government's news management is highly influenced by some environmental factors: political system, media system, and media culture. The government will use a different approach depending on their characteristics. For instance, if a Presidential System characterizes a State, communication will be focused on the chief executive to maintain public support. This will be ensured with the help of communication specialists that guide the president in the media management. If, instead, we find ourselves in a Parliamentary System, communication will try to manage the political debates between parties and the parliament. Media, in this case, "are used as vehicles to influence the discourse within the governmental system." (Pfetsch 1999)

As stated in the previous paragraph, the role of the government social media manager is increasingly important. Their role is to run the social media accounts of the state, providing relevant news for the citizens and information to make them actively aware of what goes on in the country. This is not an easy task; social media managers have to be clear and *inter partes*. They follow the processes of creation, publication, and post-publication of the news. They analyze the level of engagement reached in order to adjust their work in the future. The type of language and news will change according to the level of government, audience, needs, and services (Gilgenbach 2020). Some states rely on specific agencies for the coordination of their social media accounts. One of them is Hootsuite, which proposes some suggestions for a better communication. These recommendations can be found in their annual report on social media trends in government and are an increment in video and visual content, maximize the budget to get more with less, introduce a plan for unexpected situations, stress privacy laws, and ameliorate the analysis of their impact. (HOOTSUITE 2019)

Hootsuite [2020] analyzed the importance of social media in governance and it provided a list of their benefits. Firstly, media usage increases citizens' engagement. Secondly, they help building public trust. Thanks to social media, political actors can be more transparent with the public and show them their trustworthiness. Thirdly, institutions have the possibility to communicate through their official accounts to tackle the problem of fake news. Fourthly, the timeliness of the media allows for rapid feedbacks. These are very useful for politicians to test their capacity to communicate the right message. Fifthly, social media are less costly than the other mass media governments were used to rely on before. Lastly, these type of media are essential during crisis communication. It is important that the language of certain messages is analyzed well before being shared to avoid further alarmism. (Tran and Bar-Tur 2020)

## 2. Crisis Communication

The previous chapter provided us with the proof of the importance of communication in government management. Here, the focus shifts on another type of communication carried out by the institutions: Crisis Communication. “A crisis or a threat of crisis creates the need for information” (Coombs and Holladay 2012) and, since crises are unpredictable, a specialized communication is required. Some examples of crises are the terrorist attacks of 9/11 or the one in London in 2017, a financial crisis such as the 2008 one, and the global pandemic COVID-19.

A crisis is an event that significantly threatens the future and the functioning of a system, causing negative outcomes and requiring mindful attention from management. Although it is an unpredictable event, it has to be considered as something that may happen. Institutions and organizations should always expect these events in order to be prepared. (Coombs and Holladay 2012)

In order to understand better crisis communication, it is necessary to place it in a wider perspective. Risk management, issues management, and reputation management are public relations areas that directly relates to crisis communication. If the latter is ineffective, it causes the need for one of the previously listed aspect to come into being. For instance, there is a strong connection with reputation management. Crisis communication helps protecting states or companies’ reputations during a crisis and certain reputations may influence crisis communication. This example shows how crisis communication does not operate by itself; it is always intertwined in a bigger picture. (Coombs and Holladay 2012)

### 2.1 Crisis communication management

Crisis communication is usually prepared during “normal” times; it is decided before a crisis occurs in order to have time to analyze all of the possible outcomes and to be ready for all of them. To be ready for a crisis means to reduce significantly the impact on the society and the consequences. Governments must introduce a Crisis Communication Plan (Ministero dell’Interno 2017), which lists the measures to implement before, during, and after a crisis. A good plan is necessary to ensure an effective spread of information, both internal and external. Clear messages have to arrive to the population; this implies that the news must be checked for language and truthfulness. The latter is a crucial aspect since it influences the feedback from the individuals, their reactions to the crisis and their confidence in the institutions. These three facets can change completely the aftermath of a crisis, making communication management easier or more difficult.

In order to ensure the continuity of the information, the Crisis Communication Plan should introduce the figure of the spokesperson. As a component of the Crisis Committee, it plays a central role since it communicates what the committee states or plans to do. Communication must be guaranteed 24 hours a day, therefore, there may be the need to appoint more than one spokesperson. In this case, all of the delegates have to come from the same background in terms of knowledge and communication style. The person in charge has to be aware of the cruciality of its role. Dealing with people implies the fact that he or she has to make sure to reassure the population to avoid the panic effect.

Coombs and Holladay (2020) identified three phases of crisis management: pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis. Each of them is handled differently and it requires the spread of a certain type of knowledge. Crisis communication intervenes according to the main necessities of the phase (Coombs and Holladay 2012):

- Pre-crisis: here communication focuses on the identification of the causes of the crisis and on the reduction of the risk. Prevention plays a major role, since receiving information about a crisis can help coping with it afterwards. If the people in charge are aware of a potential crisis, they can act accordingly and avoid a negative reaction by building a solid set of measures or by reducing the possibility of that crisis.
- Crisis response: in this phase, crisis communication tries to give guidelines for institutions to spread appropriately information during the crisis. If the institution itself spreads the news about the emergency, there would be “less reputational damage than if the news media were the first to deliver the information” (Coombs and Holladay 2012). Avoiding silence is essential not to let room for people’s imagination. Everything has to be communicated quickly and accurately.
- Post-crisis: communication at this stage aims at dealing with the consequences of a crisis. This phase comprehends also an analysis of the measures implemented. To understand what went wrong in the management of the previous emergency is crucial; it helps the institutions to ameliorate their systems for the future, they can learn from their mistakes.

Previously in this paper, it has been stressed the importance of a clear and effective communication in order to gain trust from the public. If crisis communication is managed correctly and effectively, it can lead to excellent results on this matter. The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update shows evidence about it. Last spring, in fact, the firm released a barometer that linked trust and COVID-19 Pandemic. With reference to the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Executive Summary, the analysis was conducted on eleven markets: China, India, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Canada, S. Korea, Germany, U.S., U.K., France and Japan. (2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update)

Through the next graphs, we are able to perceive the impact of the pandemic on the people's trust on the institutions. [Figure 3](#) shows how the Trust index has globally increased after the advent of COVID-19. Even France and Japan, the most distrusted ones, experienced an increase in the level of trust. The global rise in confidence on the part of the people implies a good work on the part of the crisis committees and, in particular, an effective crisis communication. [Figure 4](#) provides the proof of this assumption; it exhibits the different trust percentages according to the diverse institutions. After the pandemic, governments show the highest level of trust and, as stated by the graph, it was the first time for them to be the most trusted. NGOs and business come right after with only one point of difference, while media are the least trusted institution. It signifies that in an emergency, an efficient crisis communication management can change the perspectives of the population and bring back the trust that governments deserve.

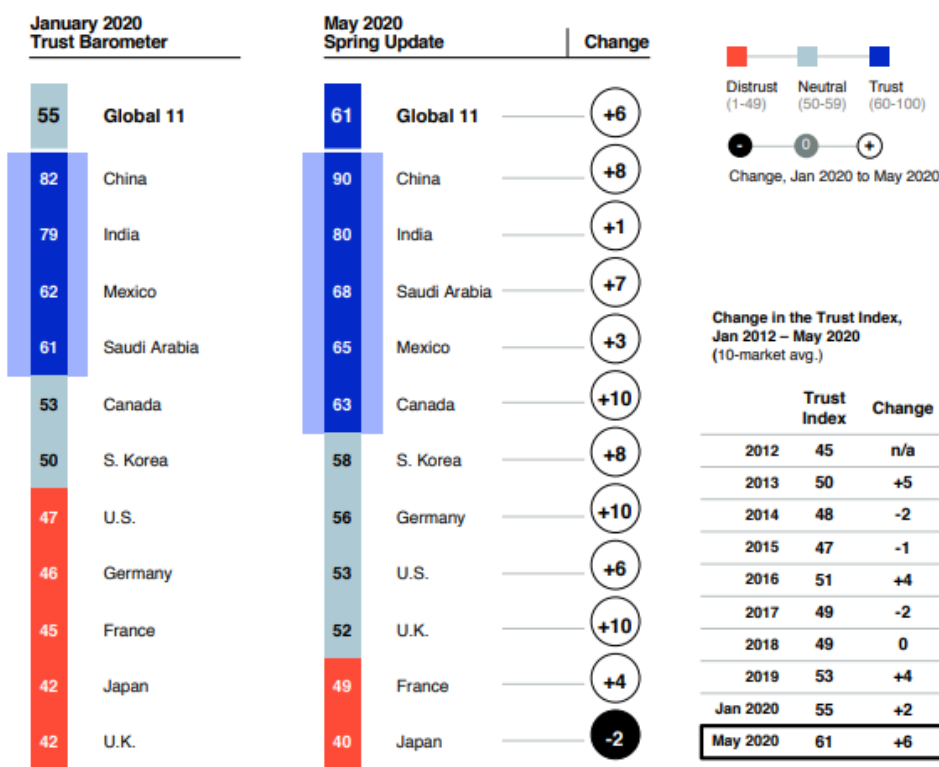


Figure 3. Trust index - 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update.

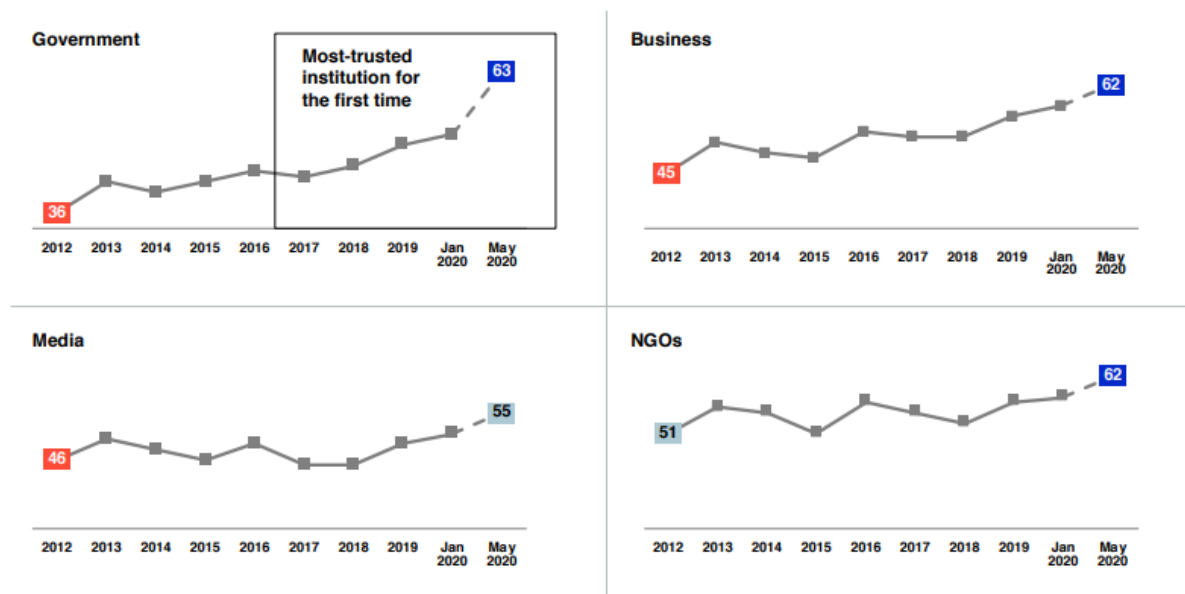


Figure 4. Percent trust (10-market average) - 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update.

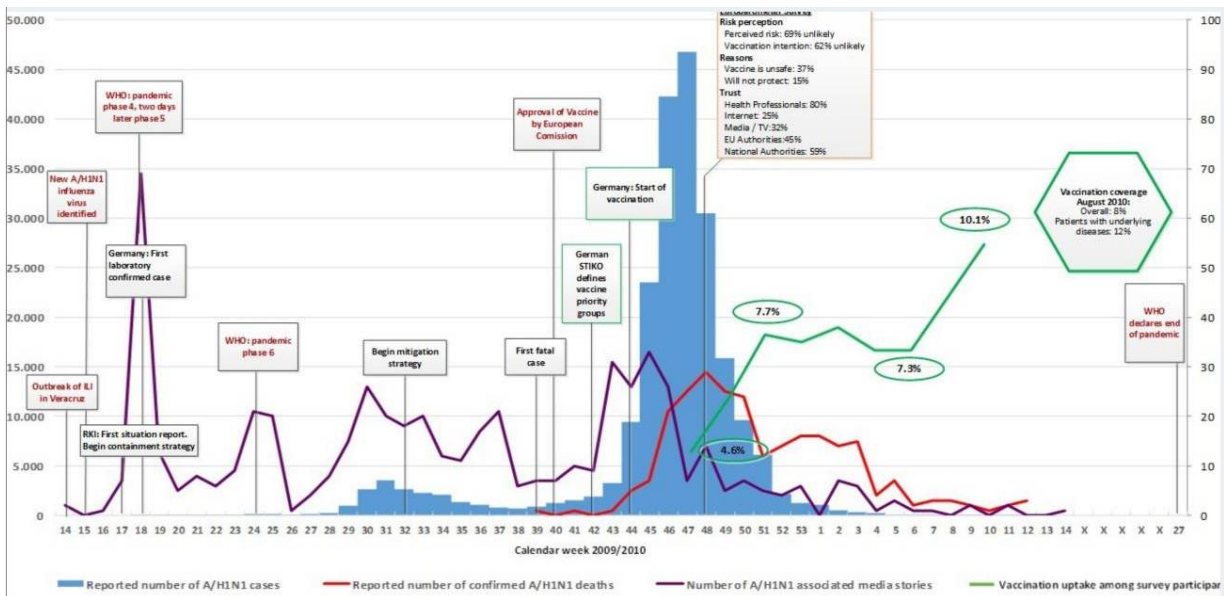
Every state has its own ideas and rules about the topic. There are different strategies of communicating with the people according to how much the government believes that the individuals should be involved and know about a certain circumstance. It mostly depends on the type of government that characterizes a state but another reason may be the awareness of the impact, and consequently of the feedback, that a crisis can cause among the population. However, this could not be the best option in case of a pandemic. If the latter occurs, crisis communication can be crucial in order to guarantee the right behavior of the citizens and to avoid the spreading of the virus.

In 2009, the AH<sub>1</sub>N<sub>1</sub>, most commonly known as Swine Flu, affected diverse countries of the world. Starting from Mexico, it mostly damaged the American, part of Europe, and China (Wikipedia 2020). Since the first one was the Spanish Flu, this influenza was considered the second pandemic experienced by the globe. A study conducted in 2016, analyzed this influenza under diverse point of view, one of them was the media usage and its impact. The states taken into account were Germany, UK, Denmark, Spain, and Czech Republic. (Reintjes, Das, Klemm, Richardus, Keßler, and Ahmad 2016)

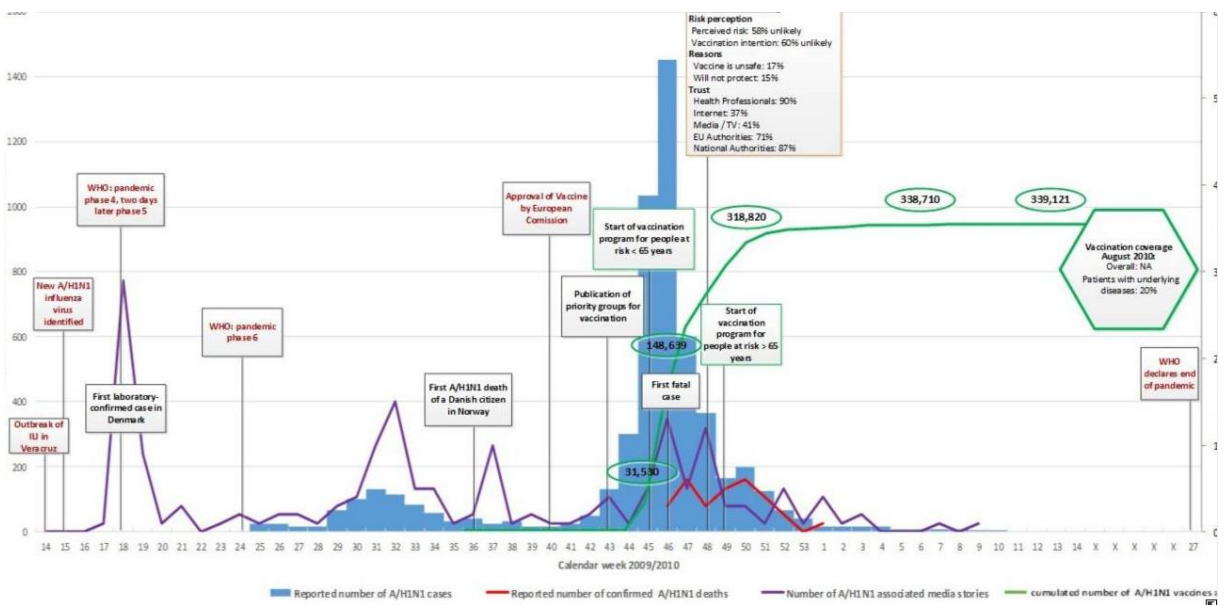
All of the five European countries managed crisis communication differently. This is shown by the following graphs, where it can be noticed that the purple lines indicating media attention follow different paths. However, the aspect that they have in common is that when media was at its highest engagement, the number of cases was none or very low. As the use of media started declining, the



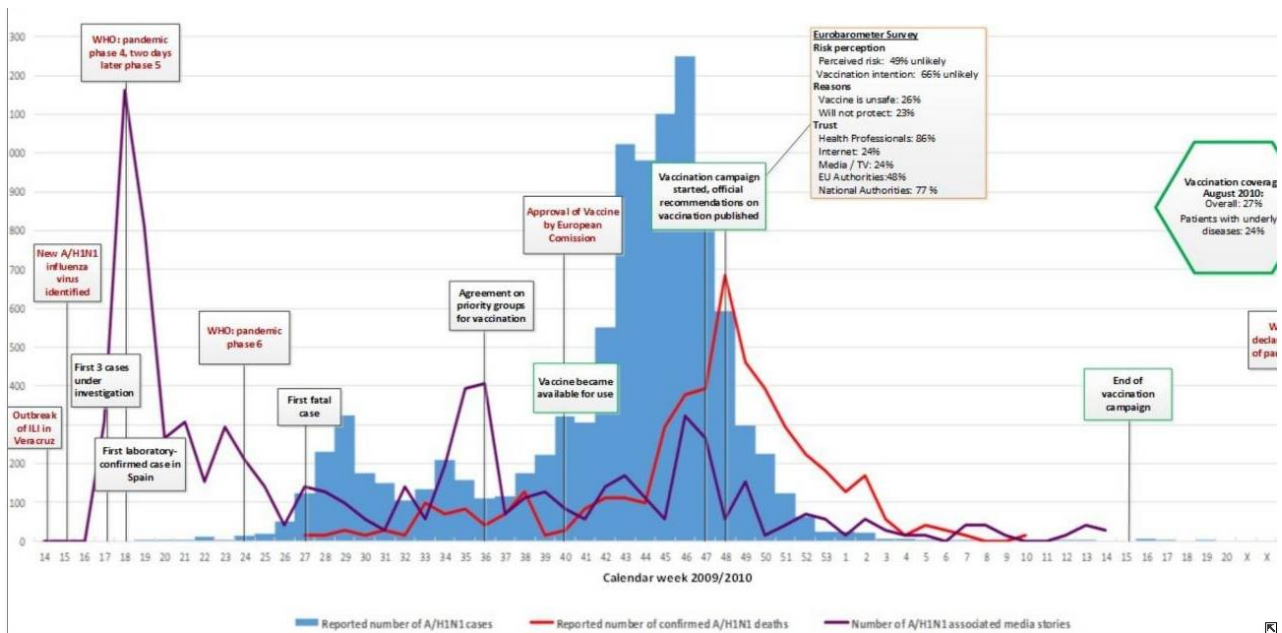
cases increased (Reintjes, Das, Klemm, Richardus, Keßler, and Ahmad 2016). This proves again how communication helps during these types of crises to keep the population controlled and safe.



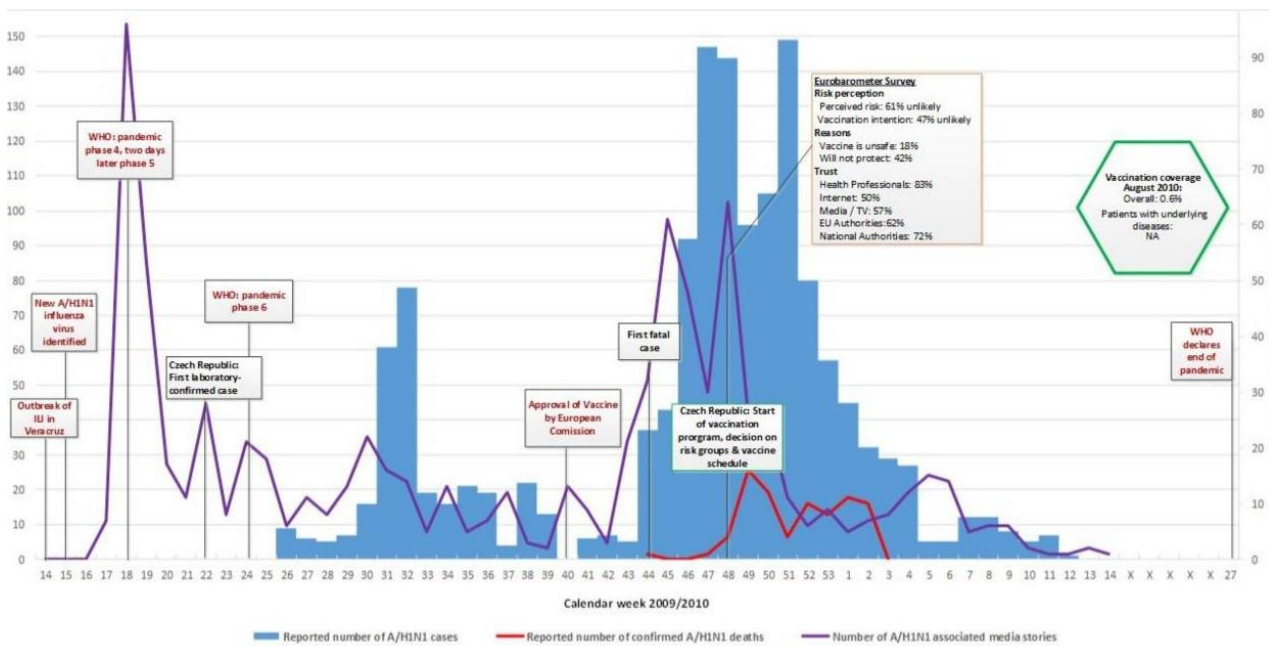
Graph 1. Epidemiology, key events and media attention during the A/H1N1 pandemic in Germany. (Reintjes, Das, Klemm, Richardus, Keßler, and Ahmad 2016).



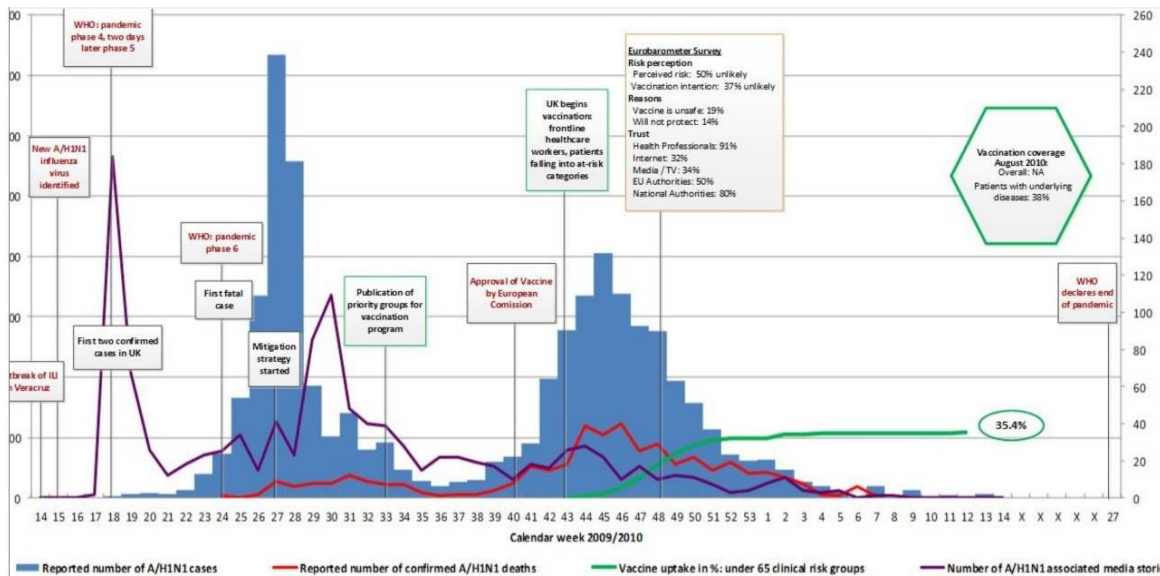
Graph 2. Epidemiology, key events and media attention during the A/H1N1 pandemic in Denmark. (Reintjes, Das, Klemm, Richardus, Keßler, and Ahmad 2016).



Graph 3. Epidemiology, key events and media attention during the A/H1N1 pandemic in Spain. (Reintjes, Das, Klemm, Richardus, Keßler, and Ahmad 2016).



Graph 4. Epidemiology, key events and media attention during the A/H1N1 pandemic in Czech Republic. (Reintjes, Das, Klemm, Richardus, Keßler, and Ahmad 2016).



Graph 5. Epidemiology, key events and media attention during the A/H1N1 pandemic in UK. (Reintjes, Das, Klemm, Richardus, Keßler, and Ahmad 2016).

## 2.2 The media and the crisis

When a crisis occurs, it occurs also a greater demand for information. The use of media for crisis communication is essential since it helps to divulgate information to everyone and it guarantees timeliness. However, it is more appropriate to talk about social media rather than just media. The advent of social media revolutionized the way crisis are communicated to and perceived by the public. Although adults still prefer media such as televisions or online newspapers, the new generations rely on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, or even Instagram to be updated with the world outside.

In crisis communication matters, social media can have positive aspects. First, the speed at which information run through these media is unrivalled. It suffices to think that in a minute, Twitter gains 278,000 new tweets (SYSOMOS) and every day, 60 million photos are shared on Instagram (Diario della Fromazione 2017). Second, everyone has a voice. This means that during an emergency, social media reveal the real perceptions of individuals, their feelings and worries. Through this aspect of “listening”, information are collected to understand the general impact of a crisis: to manage the reactions and to cope better with the consequences of a crisis. Third, social media give the possibility to communicate during hard times. People can get in touch with their relatives and let them know they are well or others can find someone else to talk to in order to find comfort and share their feelings. Last, through these media it is possible to launch awareness campaigns or even stimulate donations. (Alexander 2013)

The main tips to follow in order to guarantee an effective crisis communication are to implement a Social Media Policy, to communicate honestly and with compassion, to cite only appropriate sources, and to “avoid “trend-jacking” or activities that appear profit-driven” (Cooper 2020). The latter is an essential point since nowadays everything is judged. If people think that the message or the campaign carried out by a company seems profit-driven, that would cause dissent and complaints. It would ruin the reputation of the firm in consideration since individuals would categorize it according to its mistake. A clear language is necessary also to avoid these unpleasant events.

However, media have also negative aspects when it comes to crisis communication. One of them is the spread of misinformation. It refers to the spread of fake news about a certain topic, which circulate with no control since it is difficult to distinguish reliable sources. This happens through social media as they leave room for everybody to express their knowledge, thoughts, and opinions. Many institutions created certified accounts or websites to avoid this phenomenon and to redirect individuals to the right sources to take into account. For instance, during COVID-19, the World Health Organization launched the WHO Information Network for Epidemics (EPI-WIN), a new platform to share specific information and their official updates. (Zarocostas 2020)

In the light of COVID-19, the USC Melady Lab in collaboration with New Voices created a platform that analyzes Twitter conversations on the topic. In particular, it focuses on the spread of misinformation providing tools to identify which source is reliable. The data collected results in an overall negative sentiment. Table 1 projects that from the beginning of March until the end of June, the majority of tweets were perceived as politically biased or unreliable. These results show how information was spread in a certain period and how the institutions controlled them. Towards the end of April, the table shows a peak for both the already mentioned categories. (USC MELADY LAB 2020)

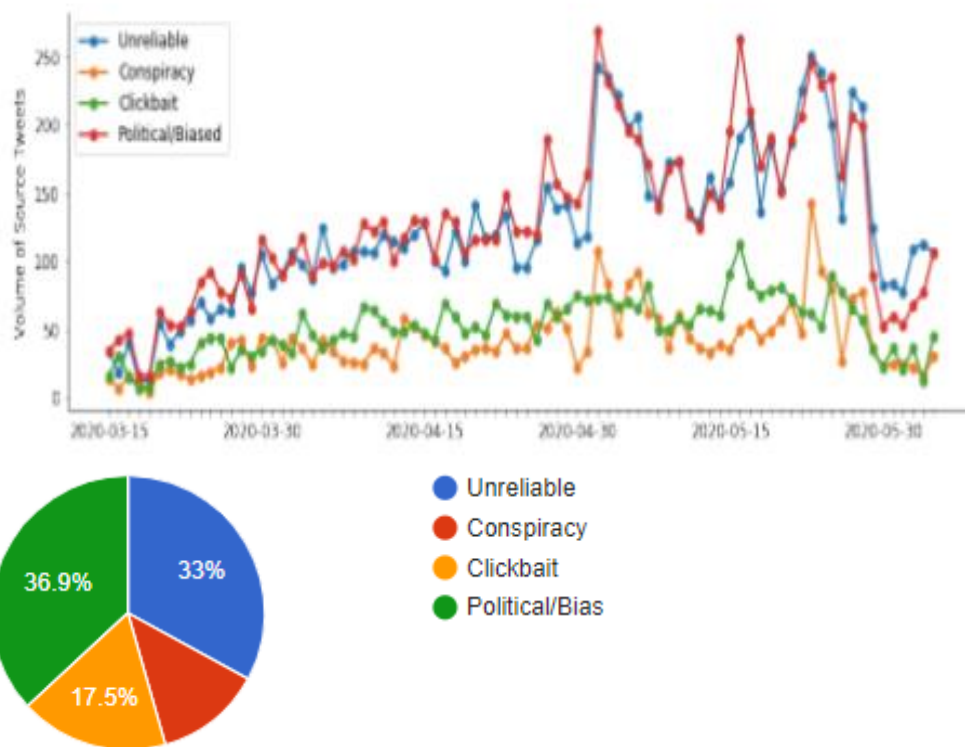


Table 1. Volume of misinformation source tweets by type per day in March-June. (USC MELADY LAB (2020))

## 2.3 Infodemia

The term “Infodemia” was firstly used, and invented, by David J. Rothkopf in his article “When the Buzz Bites Back” on the Washington Post. The article was published in 2003, the year of the SARS epidemic and with this term, he tried to stress the fact that in that period, the world was living two epidemics. The first one was the disease, while the second one was an “information epidemic”: the excessive circulation of information, which is overwhelming for the individuals and often does not come from reliable sources (TRECCANI 2020). The term was then approved as a neologism and used even by the WHO to describe the discomfort created by the media.

The advent of an event such a crisis creates an opportunity for media to be more present in the system. By this, it is meant the fact that there may be more information and updates to spread, which implies and overwork and an over exposure of news. It automatically, and unconsciously, creates a sort of competition between the various newspapers, websites, blogs, etc. to gain views from and the preferences of the public. This phenomenon creates the overload of information that gives birth to the Infodemia and its negative consequences. The latter mainly deals with the psychological impact on people but also with the spread of misinformation.

The result of an information epidemic is the creation of panic among the population, which starts acting irrationally and it becomes more difficult for the governments to control the situation (Rothkopf 2003). For instance, when the COVID-19 pandemic came into being, people from states like America or England began to assault supermarkets and raid of all necessities. The thing impressed the rest of the world was the raid of toilet paper. This irrational behavior was caused by the overwhelming news that were spread every day on the topic. Moreover, Infodemia creates confusion among people since they are not sure about the truthfulness of the news they are receiving. Fake news are dangerous since worsen the psychological conditions of individuals; people may feel anxiety or pressure on decision-making processes. Misinformation takes place since there is no control over what is published on the web. (Paho 2020)

### 3. Case Study: Textual Analysis of Italian Press during COVID-19 Pandemic

#### 3.1 Overview

At the beginning of 2020, everything was expected except for a global pandemic. The news about the Chinese Virus seemed too far away from us, but they actually were not. By the end of January, the first cases arose in Italy. It only took one month to start spreading uncertainty and paranoia among citizens. On February 21, the area of northern Italy was defined for the first time as “red zone”. A few days after, it was put in lockdown in order to avoid the virus from spreading. Public transportation, festivals, and sports events were all suspended. Angelo Borrelli, head of Civil Protection, started something that accompanied us for the next three months: the reading of the daily bulletin with the numbers regarding the spread of the virus. The fear of the virus increased and people began to escape from the red zones to return to the regions of origin, causing new cases of the virus all over Italy. March 9<sup>th</sup>, the whole country was identified as red zone and the President of the Council Giuseppe Conte announced that Italy was put in lockdown (Alfonso and Comin 2020). People were not allowed to leave their dwellings if they did not have a valid justification. Self-certifications authorized individuals to go out only to get groceries, to go to work (only for a few), or for extremely urgent reasons. On March 12, Covid-19 is officially identified as pandemic (Alfonso and Comin 2020). During the subsequent two months of lockdown, the country was bombed with information coming from every field and none of it brought positivity until the end of the quarantine.

#### 3.2 Italian crisis management

The Italian system has procedures to be applied in case of crises, which are listed and explained in the “Manuale Nazionale per la gestione delle crisi”. The President of the Council Carlo Azeglio Ciampi approved this manual in 1994 and its aim was to provide a decision-making body, a coordination body, and a management body to be “used” to face a crises. In matters of decision-making, the main actor who plays a role is the President of the Council, followed by the Council of Ministers and the Strategic-Political Committee CoPS. Their duty is to analyze the incumbent crisis and decide the measures that need to be adopted. Interministerial Group Situation and Planning NISP and the Technical Interministerial Commission of Civil Defence CITDC rule the coordination body. The scope of these two bodies is to coordinate and manage the functioning of the ministries involved in a crisis. Lastly, the public administration is responsible for the management of the crisis, depending on its level of severity. (Ministero dell’Interno 2017)



The management of crisis in Italy ameliorate thanks to the DPCM of May 5, 2010. This decree introduced measures based on the manual mentioned in the previous paragraph; it deals with the national organization of crisis management. It was inspired by the procedures provided by NATO and the European Union, to allow for timely and effective interrelations. The DPCM introduces also an upgrade for the bodies that dealt with the coordination and the decision-making of crisis management. Moreover, it upgraded the *intelligence*. The overall scope was to improve the system without creating new bodies or structures. (Gazzetta Ufficiale 2010)

### 3.2 Textual Analysis

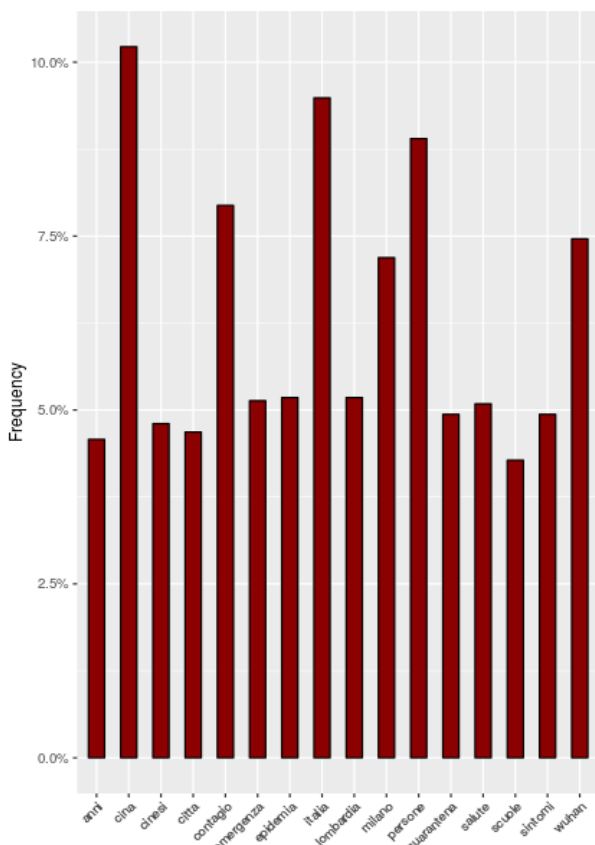
As many other countries, Italy was victim of the two pandemics: COVID-19 and Infodemia. Italians complained on how communication was carried out during the crisis, many denounced a heavy exploitation of the media that disseminated scaremongering, confusion, and panic. In order to understand this aspect, the last part of the paper will provide a textual analysis of four main Italian newspapers: Il Corriere della Sera, Il Sole 24 Ore, ilPost, and La Repubblica. To execute the analysis, the interactive platform CO.ME.T.A. (Zavarrone et al. 2020) supported providing data and the following charts. The timeline goes from the beginning of January until the beginning of April.

The first two newspaper under analysis are Il Corriere della Sera; with a matrix dimension of 6520704 elements, and La Repubblica; whose matrix is bigger since it counts 189497385 elements. The platform affirms that the former's day on which it published the highest number of articles is March 1, 2020, while the latter's day is February 1, 2020. [Bar-plot 1](#) shows the frequency of the most used words in the articles of Il Corriere della Sera in the three-month timeframe. The highest frequency belongs to the term "China", followed by "Italy", "people", and "contagion". The least used words, instead, are "schools", "years", and "cities"; however, all of them still have a frequency of 50 repetitions at least. On the contrary, [bar-plot 2](#) provides the frequency of the words used in La Repubblica's editorials. The differences are unmistakable since the terms with a highest frequency are not the same of the ones previously listed. Here, "people" is at the top with more than 10% and after that come "Italy", "emergency", and "home". This means that La Repubblica's articles focused more on messages that created awareness on the situation in our country and in how the people should act: by staying at home. Another significant difference is the presence of the words "Milan" and "Lombardy" in [bar-plot 1](#), and the absence of them in [bar-plot 2](#). The reason behind this is the fact that Il Corriere della Sera is a journal founded in Milan, therefore, since the virus took place there, it is moved more in mentioning the city and the region of origin. La Repubblica has its headquarters

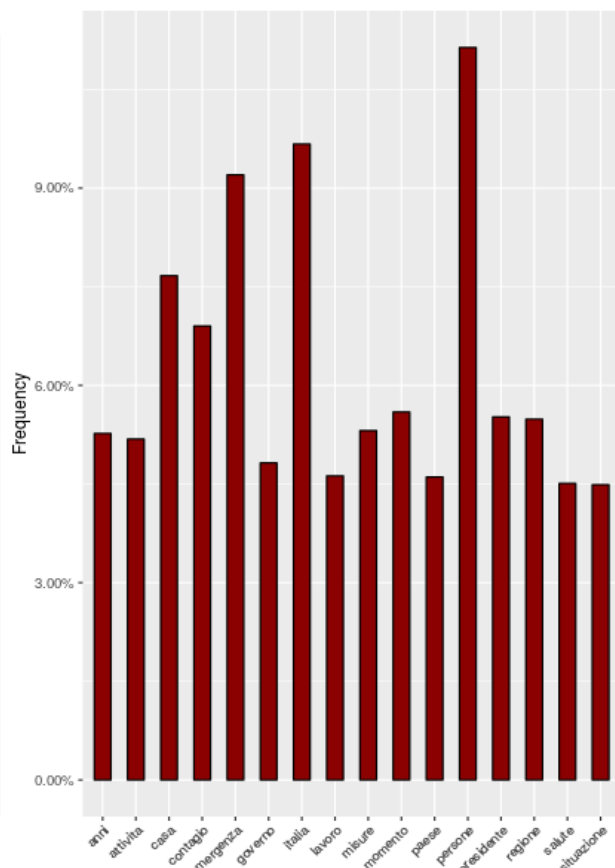


located in Rome this is probably why it has a broader approach concerning the mentioning of certain cities in particular.

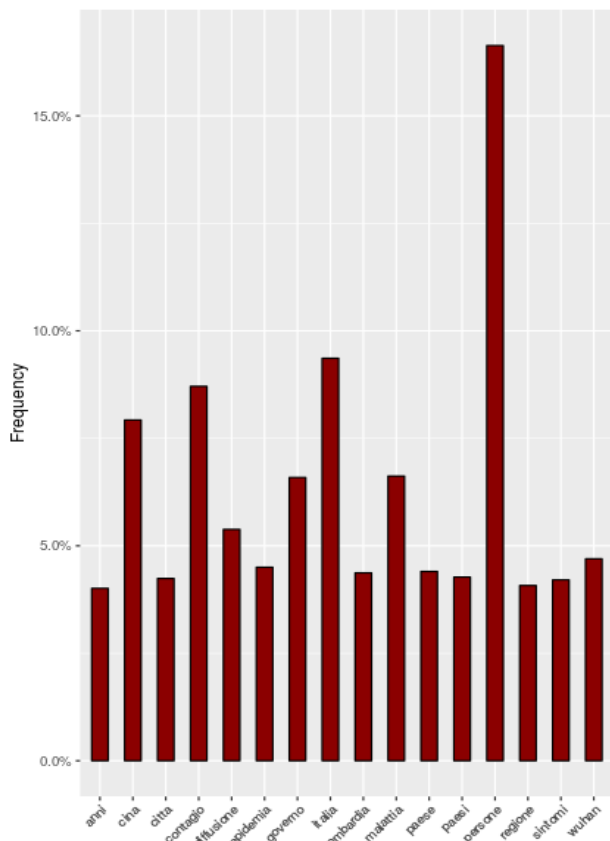
The frame changes when it comes to [bar-plot 3](#) and [bar-plot 4](#). They display the words' frequency of the articles published by, respectively, ilPost and Il Sole 24 Ore. In the first case, there is a disproportionate use of the term “people” with more than 15% of frequency. The other words are significantly lower in percentage: “Italy”, “contagion”, and “China” are all below 10%. Il Sole 24 Ore mixes two semantic fields; the one already appeared in the other newspapers and the one that characterizes its economical nature. “Emergency”, “Italy”, “measures”, and “activities” are the most frequent words and the latter two represent the pragmatic and practical disposition of the journal.



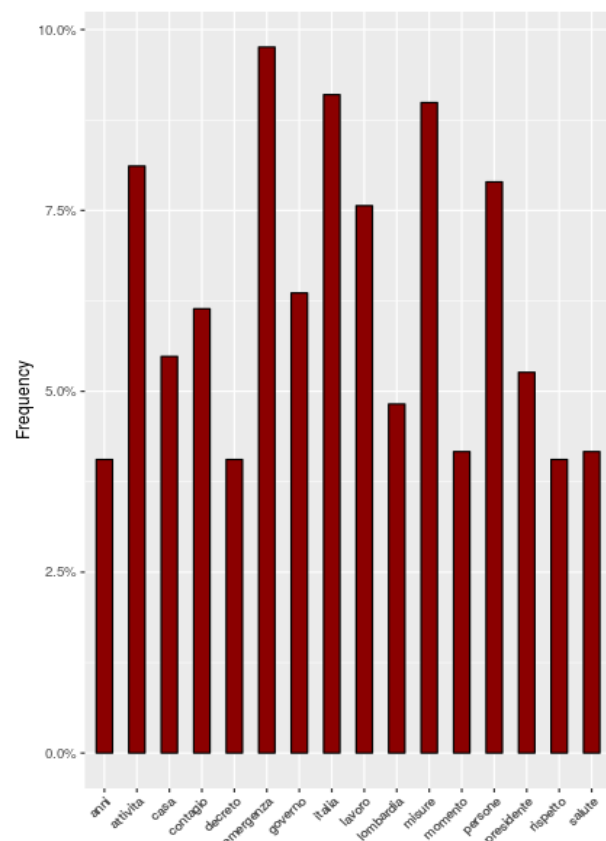
Bar-plot 1. Words frequency – C.d.S. – CO.ME.T.A.



Bar-plot 2. Words frequency – R. – CO.ME.T.A.



Bar-plot 3. Words frequency – P. – CO.ME.T.A.



Bar-plot 4. Words frequency – S.24.O. – CO.ME.T.A.

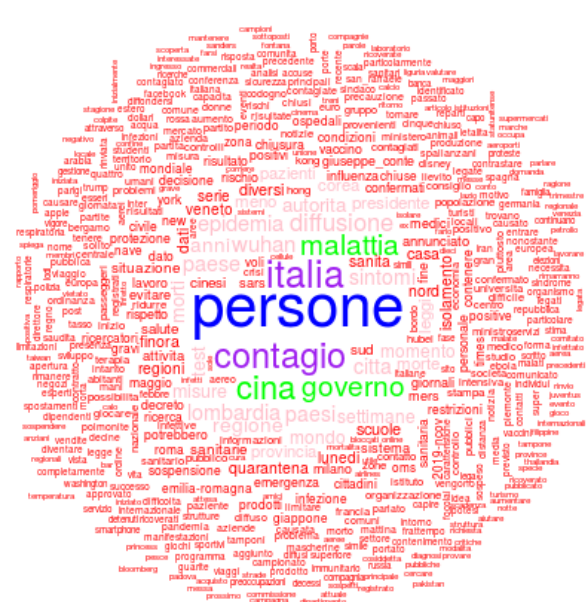
The above analysis can be easily doubted if things are looked from another point of view. The interactive platform created word-clouds of the most frequent words in the articles of the above-cited newspapers. This graph provided us with a different perspective of the situation. With a words' minimum frequency set at 50, [word-cloud 1](#) and [word-cloud 2](#) show how the framework in the case of Il Corriere della Sera and La Repubblica is broader than the one presented by the bar-plots. There are many more words used by the journalists in their articles but, still, to some of them is given more importance (the ones in the middle). Things change for ilPost and Il Sole 24 Ore also in this case; the matrixes of these two newspapers are significantly smaller than the previous ones, they are respectively 15 million and 3 million. If we want to have the same perspective for all four newspapers, it is necessary to change the setting of the platform. Now, words' minimum frequency is changed to 1 and [word-cloud 5](#) and [word-cloud 6](#) present a bigger figure with more words, and some of the acquire importance. In the case of [Il Sole 24 Ore](#), there are new terms to which is given significance and these are the ones colored in green that were not present before. For what concerns ilPost, its figure expanded providing a broader view but with less relevant than the ones already mentioned.



Word-cloud 1. C.d.S. – CO.ME.T.A.



Word-cloud 2. R. – CO.ME.T.A.



Word-cloud 5. P. – CO.ME.T.A.



Word-cloud 6. S.24.O. – CO.ME.T.A.

The next part of the analysis will engage data only from Il Corriere della Sera and La Repubblica.<sup>1</sup> Now, the focus shifts to the impact of the articles on the individuals. In crisis communication, using certain words instead of others can affect significantly the perceptions of the people and consequently their feedback. The following line-plots show the average sentiment score of the population: a score is assigned to the words of the text, which varies depending on the method, on the basis of which it

<sup>1</sup> The reason behind this decision is because the platform chosen for this analysis did not provided enough information about the other two newspapers.

is established whether the words used in the article can be associated with positive or negative feelings (Reagan, Danforth, Tivnan, et al. 2017). The time period remains set at three-month, the months in which the COVID-19 emergency has escalated.

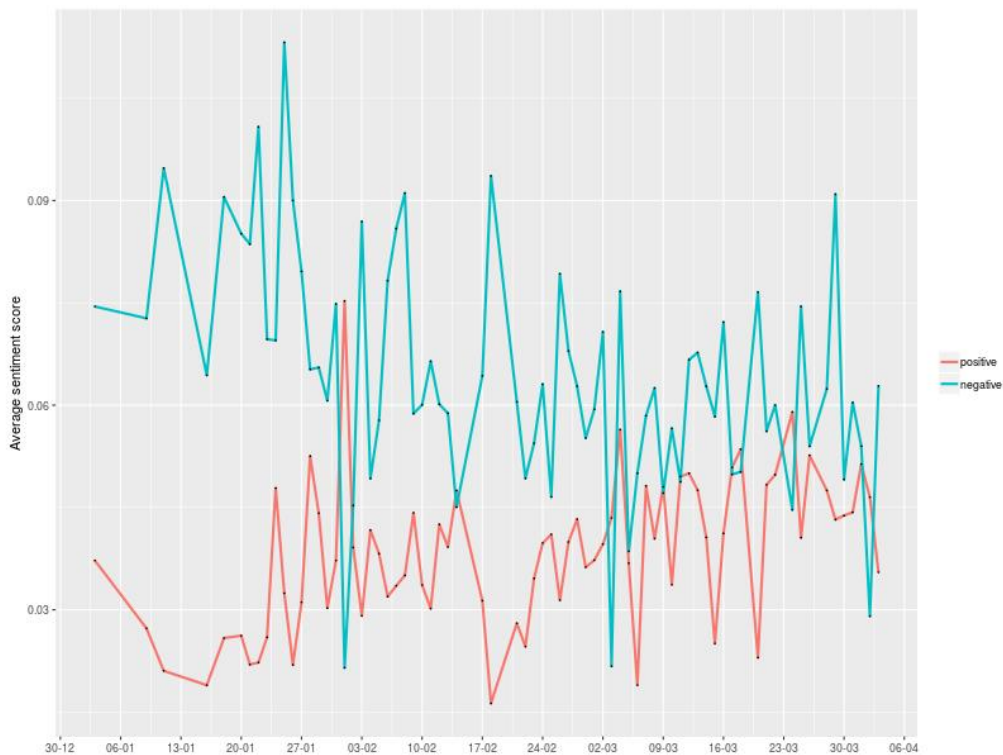
In [line-plot 1](#) appears the overall opinions derived from Il Corriere della Sera's articles. The negative feeling prevails over the positive one. This means that communication created confusion and panic among the population. However, it is clear that in some circumstances the positive sentiment arose to the level of the negative one and, in even less cases, it overtakes it. To understand the trend exposed by the graph, it needs to be related with the D.P.C.M. declared by the prime minister, Giuseppe Conte. The first and highest peak of the positive sentiment corresponds to the day in which the government declared the state of emergency for 6 months. This summit was reached after positive feelings caused by the first provisions against the virus. On February 23, 2020 the first decree-law was announced and to that day it can be noticed an increase in the red line of the line-plot. This trend continues in correspondance to the following D.P.C.M.: on 25/02, 1/03, 4/03, 8/03, 9/03, 11/03, and 22/03 (Openpolis 2020). It signifies that news about the bills declared by the government brought relief among the people.

On average, articles published by La Repubblica sprout levels of negative and positive feelings similar to those of Il Corriere della Sera; in both cases, the positive sentiment has a mean of 0.5. However, the trend looks different since the blue and the red lines are less intertwined, as [line-plot 2](#) shows. The highest and lowest peaks of the negative sentiment are all at the beginning of the graph, when the virus started approaching in our country. The trend then decreases causing a consequently rise in the positive perceptions. La Repubblica in fact, seems to have adopted a peculiar strategy of communication; it began with raw and catastrophic news and then, almost out of the blue, switched to a softer and comforting communication of a prompt recovery. As for Il Corriere della Sera, La Repubblica trends were affected by the release of the decree-laws. The red line rises in correspondence of the dates listed in the previous paragraph.

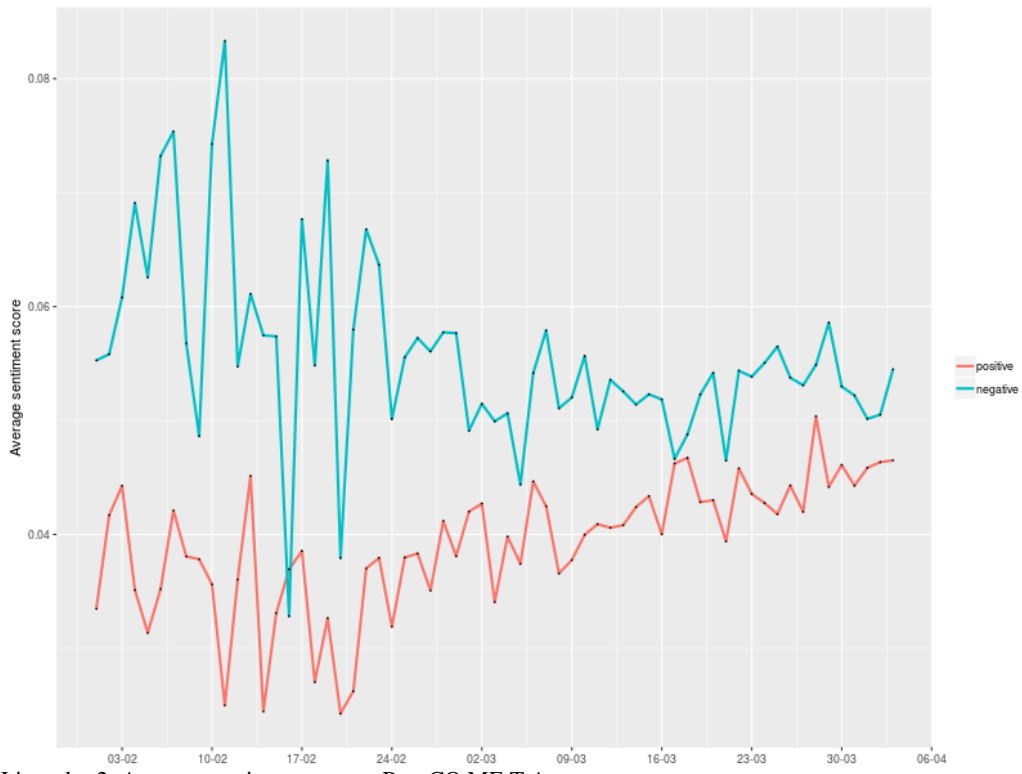
To deepen the topic on La Repubblica, the first article about the virus was published on January 4, 2020 and its title was "China, pneumonia epidemic: SARS terror returns". The content is quite informative and the information provided were not confirmed already, the cases were exclusively in China and with a very low number (La Repubblica 2020). The alarmism began by the end of the month when different titles appeared on the newspaper. For instance, on January 30, 2020 an article written by Michele Bocci recited "Go to the Italians' return: "Quarantine in barracks or hotel"". It gave a different idea of the situation since it brought awareness about the gravity of what was happening in Wuhan (Bocci 2020). According to [line-plot 2](#), the first peak of negative sentiment was

around February 9 and 10, 2020. In fact, in those days the titles that “stole the show” were about the increment of the cases, a higher number of deaths, and the arrival of the virus in Italy. (La Repubblica. Archivio.)

For what concerns Il Corriere della Sera and as it was stated before, the highest peak results in [line-plot 1](#) towards the end of January. On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> of that month the titles of the articles were quite alarming, this explains the negative sentiment of the population. A couple of examples are “China isolate Wuhan Trains and planes blocked”, “Virus, in China sick boom Four armored cities”, or “Virus, first cases in Europe”. When the negative sentiment reached its first lowest peak, and positive one reached its highest, the articles were spreading information about more strict controls and updates on the “isolation” of the virus to start the research of a cure. The lowest point of the positive sentiment corresponds to the period in which the news were all about the first contagion in Lombardy. It created panic among the individuals since it meant that the virus was circulating also in Italy and the fear to experience the same situation of China was extreme. (Il Corriere della Sera. Archivio.)



Line-plot 1. Average sentiment score - C.d.S. – CO.ME.T.A.



Line-plot 2. Average sentiment score – R. – CO.ME.T.A.

## Conclusion

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the individuals have the right to acquire information. This is achieved thanks to the existence of “communication”; the essence of our lives. Without exchanges of this kind, many things would not be possible and even more would not have happened. It is part of every aspect of the everyday life, and for this reason, there are diverse type of communication to take into account. The one that mainly affects our societies is government communication, which is carried out by the system with two purposes. These are identifiable in two subgroups of this type of communication: political and institutional.

On the one hand, political communication deals with political parties and their development since it comprehends the delineation of their strategies of action to gain more consent. Media are considered as an essential tool for political communication as they enable politicians to reach a wider number of people and possible electorates. However, the closeness to the individuals does not have to compromise the level of the language. It has the purpose of convincing and persuading the population; therefore, it has to express authority, trust, worthiness, and positivity. It will sure comply with the particular period lived by the State.

On the other hand, institutional communication is performed by the public administration of the State. Its aim is to provide the population with information about the institutions, the projects in place, the opportunities they can catch, and their rights and duties. The Italian system facilitated institutional communication with Law 150/2000, which introduced the figures in charge of this task: press offices, URP, and spokespersons. Institutional communication ensures the right functioning of the system, with a communication that is both internal and external. However, this is ensured in turn by the presence of certain fundamental principles. The core values that guarantee an effective communication may vary from State to State, but some of them are common to all. They are the principle of openness, comprehensibility, responsibility, and neutrality and their scope is also to protect the principle of democracy in the communicative process. In addition, communication must be clear and accurate to help the government gain trust and appreciation from the citizens; an aspect that should not be underestimated.

The event that revolutionized the way governments communicate was the advent of media and their evolution into social media. By the end of 1990, public administrations and institutions created their own websites and then approached the world of social media with their official accounts. This enables people to be informed in a faster way and to be more engaged in the political life of their countries. Moreover, it was good for the government to be so close to the citizens as it was able to get feedbacks

and understand the perceptions of the population on various topics. However, media are not easy to be used properly since sometimes politicians, or even institutions, may lose credibility. This is the reason why the systems have to introduce necessarily the figure of Social Media Manager, which guarantees an appropriate use and contents for the accounts of the State.

The fundamentality of communication is seen when it comes to a crisis and in this case, we would have to talk about crisis communication. This type of communication happens to be put in action when emergencies or natural disasters occur, and the institutions, or the government itself, carry it out. Cases of crisis do not happen frequently nor are predictable, but have to be considered as possible scenarios for the future. States have to act as if it could happen anything at any time. In fact, governments “arm” themselves with a Crisis Communication Plan established in times of peace, so to be able to analyze and take into consideration all of the possible causes, outcomes, and consequences of crises. The scope of crisis communication is to communicate clearly and effectively an emergency to the population and to avoid the creation of the panic effect. It aims at controlling the reactions of the individuals through the usage of the most appropriate tone and language. Here, media and social media play a crucial role and sometimes do not act according to the guidelines provided by the media managers or the governments. Too much information can cause the spread of misinformation or even the phenomenon of “infodemia”.

A practical example is the situation lived by Italy in the first half of 2020. The advent of COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected crisis that has not been properly managed in terms of communication. The textual analysis of the Italian press showed how some newspapers ignored the fact that the tone with which they would have expressed an information could have had repercussion on the entire population. The panic effect experienced by our country worsened the management of the situation for the government. This happened when the measure declaring the lockdown for the red zones in northern Italy slipped in the hands of the journalists, who immediately share it in the wrong way causing chaos. However, this remains a hypothesis since another school of thought believes that it was all done on purpose. If people would have not known of the imminent lockdown, the response could have been worse. Moreover, also communication could have been managed in that way on purpose in order, for newspapers, to gain more attention from the individuals and so more readers.

Overall, the importance of communication is often forgotten. An effective control of the information shared to the public would guarantee rational behavior from the population and trustworthiness of the governments and the institutions. Most importantly, who talks to the people must use appropriate language and tone to avoid crises to end up in fake tragedies. Moreover, everyone should be aware on how to recognize reliable source to fight the phenomenon of fake news and misinformation. To be



informed is a right and to inform is a duty. As such, they both have to be performed properly and in the best way possible.

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## Riassunto

### *“Cinquecento agenti per 43 varchi Così si blindano le zone rosse*

*Nel Lodigiano 35 posti di blocco, altri 8 nel Padovano  
Per due settimane non si potrà né entrare né uscire  
Se la situazione peggiorerà, in campo anche l'esercito”*

*Il Corriere della Sera*

La citazione appartiene ad un articolo di Fiorenza Sarzanini, pubblicato il 24 febbraio 2020 su Il Corriere della Sera. Si tratta di uno dei titoli che hanno caratterizzato gli articoli di giornale a partire da metà febbraio, articoli che diffusero il panico in tutta la penisola. L'avvento di un virus straniero non è una storia nuova, dal momento che l'Italia ha già fatto esperienza di epidemie come l'influenza spagnola nel 1918 e l'influenza suina nel 2009. Ciò che differisce questa volta è la gestione della comunicazione che ha creato la cosiddetta "infodemia": una quantità eccessiva di informazioni fornite dai media che causano confusione e panico tra le popolazioni. Il comportamento degli individui è provocato principalmente dal tono delle notizie e da come vengono loro comunicate; certe reazioni non devono sorprendere se un'informazione è data con lo scopo di provocare paura.

### Comunicazioni Governative

La comunicazione rappresenta l'elemento fondamentale per la creazione di relazioni interpersonali. Qualsiasi tipo di relazione, sia essa privata, economica o politica, non potrebbe esistere se non ci fosse una comunicazione per mediare tali scambi. Si può affermare che la società di oggi non sarebbe potuta essere la stessa in assenza di comunicazione. Qualsiasi tipo di comportamento è comunicativo, è impossibile non comunicare. Questo è il motivo per cui è estremamente importante fare luce su questo fenomeno, soprattutto in campo politico.

In ogni sistema democratico la comunicazione è essenziale per stabilire un rapporto con i cittadini. Un chiaro flusso di informazioni da parte della pubblica amministrazione consentirà ai singoli di partecipare alla vita politica del paese. Da un lato, lo scopo della comunicazione pubblica è informare i cittadini sui loro diritti e rispondere alle esigenze di efficacia, efficienza e trasparenza. D'altra parte, mette in atto processi di innovazione istituzionale attraverso la fornitura di servizi adeguati alle loro esigenze. Pertanto, l'attività di comunicazione pubblica si esprime nella capacità dello Stato (attraverso i suoi sistemi organizzativi ramificati), dei partiti e dei movimenti politici, di interagire con l'opinione pubblica e di rispondere adeguatamente alle aspettative dei singoli cittadini.

La comunicazione pubblica è un'area ampia che comprende diversi tipi di comunicazione. I più rilevanti che saranno esaminati sono la comunicazione politica e la comunicazione istituzionale. Possono sembrare la stessa cosa, ma ci sono alcune differenze sostanziali. La comunicazione politica si occupa dei tipi di comunicazione che intervengono nelle relazioni tra il sistema politico, i media e i cittadini. Il moderno tipo di comunicazione politica si sviluppò con l'ascesa dei partiti politici, in particolare quando lo Stato liberale sostituì quello Assolutista. I regimi di democrazia rappresentativa sono i più favorevoli per la crescita di questa disciplina che, all'inizio,

mirava solo a ottenere il consenso dei cittadini per vincere le elezioni. Ad oggi, invece, questo tipo di comunicazione gestisce il dibattito politico tra rappresentanti e rappresentati. Delinea il percorso strategico che i partiti politici dovrebbero seguire, sulla base dei contributi acquisiti dall'opinione pubblica e dall'elettorato. Pertanto, riguarda tutte le forme di comunicazione utilizzate dagli attori politici per raggiungere obiettivi specifici. Questi sono indirizzati ad attori non politici, politici ed alle attività degli attori politici.

La comunicazione istituzionale differisce da quella politica in quanto è svolta dalla pubblica amministrazione, sia essa centrale o periferica. Riguarda tutti gli organi del l'apparato pubblico: parlamentari, governativi, regionali, locali, universitari, assessorati, ecc. L'obiettivo di questo tipo di comunicazione è quello di promuovere l'amministrazione stessa. Pubblicizza l'identità della pubblica amministrazione in considerazione, la sua ideologia, le sue funzioni e le sue attività. Tuttavia, il campo di applicazione della comunicazione istituzionale è anche alle norme pubbliche e alle informazioni essenziali che i cittadini hanno il diritto di conoscere. Dal 1948, possiamo parlare di questo in termini di "diritto". L'articolo 19 della Dichiarazione universale dei diritti dell'uomo, oltre ad affermare il diritto alla libertà di opinione e di espressione, afferma che gli individui hanno il diritto di informarsi. Le persone di tutto il mondo devono avere la possibilità di cercare e ricevere informazioni. Il 7 giugno 2000 il sistema legislativo italiano ha introdotto la Legge n. 150 per istituzionalizzare la comunicazione delle pubbliche amministrazioni. Può essere considerato come la pietra angolare della comunicazione pubblica per diverse ragioni.

Ogni Stato ha le proprie politiche in materia di comunicazione governativa. Ciascuna di queste politiche sottolinea i principi fondamentali di questo tipo di comunicazione. È necessario delineare tali valori al fine di garantire il corretto funzionamento del sistema e, soprattutto, il diritto dei cittadini di ottenere informazioni. Questi valori possono differire da stato a stato, ma quelli ricorrenti sono apertura, comprensibilità, responsabilità e neutralità. Poiché i governi sono istituzioni aperte, le informazioni che forniscono ai cittadini non possono essere soggette ad alcuna restrizione. Grazie a questa trasparenza, anche la gente sarà più impegnata nella vita politica e il principio di democrazia sarà ben rispettato. Per raggiungere il maggior numero di abitanti, il linguaggio utilizzato per le comunicazioni istituzionali deve essere chiaro e comprensibile. Inoltre, è necessario dare alle persone con bisogni speciali la possibilità di capire senza problemi. Ogni persona che comunica in termini istituzionali è responsabile di ciò che dichiara. Ogni informazione può avere conseguenze negative e positive. Ci deve essere rispetto reciproco, senza alcun interesse a diffondere informazioni false su qualcosa o chiunque riguardi il sistema. Questo concetto si collega a quello della neutralità. Tutte le informazioni provenienti dal governo o dalle pubbliche amministrazioni devono essere libere da qualsiasi tipo di interferenza da parte di un determinato partito politico.

I media si sono evoluti in modo significativo negli ultimi anni e, così facendo, si sono evoluti anche i modi in cui i governi li utilizzano. I nuovi media "sono forme di comunicazione che facilitano la produzione, la diffusione e lo scambio di contenuti politici su piattaforme e reti che consentono l'interazione e la collaborazione." Alla fine degli anni '90, governi e istituzioni pubbliche hanno introdotto siti web e portali istituzionali. Il loro obiettivo era stimolare la partecipazione dei cittadini alla vita politica e facilitare la diffusione delle informazioni. Nel corso degli anni, questi portali hanno subito processi di innovazione in quanto non soddisfacevano i principi di trasparenza, apertura e comprensibilità. Ad esempio, l'Italia ha introdotto la direttiva 3/2001. È stata promulgata dal Ministero della funzione pubblica e il suo scopo era quello di fissare le linee guida per l'usabilità e l'accessibilità dei siti web della pubblica amministrazione. La gestione delle notizie del governo è

fortemente influenzata da alcuni fattori ambientali: sistema politico, sistema dei media e cultura dei media. Il governo utilizza un approccio diverso a seconda delle loro caratteristiche. Per esempio, se uno stato è caratterizzato da un sistema presidenziale, la comunicazione si focalizzerà sul capo esecutivo per garantire il supporto del pubblico. Questo sarà garantito con l'aiuto di specialisti della comunicazione che guidano il presidente nella gestione dei media. Se invece ci troviamo in un sistema parlamentare, la comunicazione cercherà di gestire i dibattiti politici tra partiti e parlamento. I media, in questo caso, "sono usati come veicoli per influenzare il discorso all'interno del sistema governativo."

## Comunicazione d'emergenza

La comunicazione d'emergenza è di solito preparata durante tempi "normali"; si decide prima che si verifichi una crisi per avere il tempo di analizzare tutti i possibili scenari e per prepararsi ad ognuno di essi. Essere pronti per una crisi significa ridurre significativamente il suo impatto sulla società e le sue conseguenze. I governi devono introdurre un Piano di Comunicazione della Crisi che elenca le misure da attuare prima, durante e dopo una crisi. Un buon piano è necessario per garantire un'efficace diffusione delle informazioni, sia interne che esterne. Messaggi chiari devono arrivare alla popolazione; ciò implica che le notizie devono essere controllate per il linguaggio e la veridicità. Quest'ultimo aspetto è cruciale in quanto influenza il feedback degli individui, le loro reazioni alla crisi e la loro fiducia nelle istituzioni. Questi tre aspetti possono cambiare completamente le conseguenze di una crisi, rendendo la gestione della comunicazione più facile o più difficile. Al fine di garantire la continuità delle informazioni, il piano di comunicazione della crisi dovrebbe introdurre la figura del portavoce. Come componente del Comitato di Crisi, svolge un ruolo centrale in quanto comunica ciò che il comitato dichiara o prevede di fare. La comunicazione deve essere garantita 24 ore al giorno, quindi, ci può essere la necessità di nominare più di un portavoce. In questo caso, tutti i delegati devono avere lo stesso background in termini di conoscenze e stile della comunicazione. Il responsabile deve essere consapevole della cruciale importanza del suo ruolo. Trattare con le persone implica il fatto che lui o lei deve assicurarsi di rassicurare la popolazione per evitare l'effetto panico.

Ogni stato ha le proprie idee e regole sull'argomento. Ci sono diverse strategie di comunicazione a seconda di quanto il governo ritenga che gli individui debbano essere coinvolti e conoscere una certa circostanza. Dipende principalmente dal tipo di governo che caratterizza uno stato, ma un altro motivo può essere la consapevolezza dell'impatto, e di conseguenza del feedback, che una crisi può causare tra la popolazione. Tuttavia, questa non potrebbe essere l'opzione migliore in caso di pandemia. Se quest'ultima si verificasse, la comunicazione di crisi può essere cruciale per garantire il giusto comportamento dei cittadini e per evitare la diffusione del virus.

Quando si verifica una crisi, si verifica anche una maggiore richiesta di informazioni. L'uso dei media per la comunicazione d'emergenza è essenziale in quanto contribuisce a divulgare l'informazione a tutti ed a garantire la tempestività. Tuttavia, è più appropriato parlare di social media piuttosto che solo di media. L'avvento dei social media ha rivoluzionato il modo in cui la crisi viene comunicata e percepita dal pubblico. Anche se gli adulti preferiscono ancora i media come la televisione o i giornali online, le nuove generazioni si affidano ai social media come Twitter, Facebook, o anche Instagram per essere aggiornati con il mondo esterno. Nelle questioni di comunicazione di crisi, i social media possono avere aspetti positivi. In primo luogo, la velocità con cui l'informazione passa attraverso questi media è senza rivali. Basti pensare che in un minuto Twitter guadagna 278.000 nuovi tweet ed



ogni giorno 60 milioni di foto sono condivise su Instagram. In secondo luogo, tutti hanno una voce. Questo significa che durante un'emergenza, i social media rivelano le reali percezioni degli individui, i loro sentimenti e preoccupazioni. Attraverso questo aspetto di "ascolto", si raccolgono informazioni per comprendere l'impatto generale di una crisi: per gestire le reazioni e per affrontare meglio le conseguenze di una crisi. Terzo, i social media danno la possibilità di comunicare nei momenti difficili. Le persone possono entrare in contatto con i loro parenti e far loro sapere che stanno bene o altri possono trovare qualcuno con cui parlare per trovare conforto e condividere i loro sentimenti. Infine, attraverso questi media è possibile lanciare campagne di sensibilizzazione o addirittura stimolare donazioni.

Tuttavia, i media hanno anche aspetti negativi quando si tratta di comunicazione d'emergenza. Il termine "Infodemia" fu inizialmente usato e inventato da David J. Rothkopf nel suo articolo "When the Buzz Bites Back" sul Washington Post. L'articolo è stato pubblicato nel 2003, l'anno dell'epidemia di SARS e con questo termine, ha cercato di sottolineare il fatto che in quel periodo, il mondo stava vivendo due epidemie. La prima era il virus, mentre la seconda era una "epidemia di informazioni": l'eccessiva circolazione di informazioni, che è schiacciante per gli individui e spesso non proviene da fonti affidabili. Il termine è stato poi approvato come neologismo e utilizzato anche dall'OMS per descrivere il disagio creato dai media. Il risultato di un'epidemia di informazioni è la creazione di panico tra la popolazione, che inizia ad agire in modo irrazionale e diventa più difficile per i governi controllare la situazione. Ad esempio, quando è nata la pandemia COVID-19, persone provenienti da Stati come l'America o l'Inghilterra hanno iniziato ad assaltare supermercati e fare razzia dei beni di prima necessità. Questo comportamento irrazionale è stato causato dalle notizie schiaccianti che sono state diffuse ogni giorno sul tema. Inoltre, l'infodemia crea confusione tra le persone in quanto non sono sicuri della veridicità delle notizie che stanno ricevendo. La disinformazione avviene in quanto non vi è alcun controllo su ciò che viene pubblicato sul web.

## Analisi testuale della stampa italiana durante la pandemia COVID-19

Come molti altri paesi, l'Italia è stata vittima delle due pandemie: COVID-19 e Infodemia. Gli italiani si sono lamentati di come la comunicazione è stata effettuata durante la crisi, molti hanno denunciato un pesante sfruttamento dei media che ha diffuso allarmismo, confusione e panico. Per comprendere questo aspetto, questa parte del documento fornirà un'analisi testuale di quattro principali quotidiani italiani: Il Corriere della Sera, Il Sole 24 Ore, ilPost e La Repubblica. Per eseguire l'analisi, la piattaforma interattiva CO.ME.T.A. ha supportato la fornitura di dati e i seguenti grafici. La cronologia va dall'inizio di gennaio fino all'inizio di aprile.

I primi due giornali in esame sono Il Corriere della Sera, con una matrice di 6520704 elementi, e La Repubblica, la cui matrice è più grande dal momento che conta 189497385 elementi. Il [bar-plot 1](#) mostra la frequenza delle parole più utilizzate negli articoli del Corriere della Sera nei tre mesi. La frequenza più alta appartiene al termine "Cina", seguito da "Italia", "persone" e "contagio". Le parole meno usate, invece, sono "scuole", "anni" e "città"; tuttavia, hanno sempre una frequenza di 50 elementi. Al contrario, il [bar-plot 2](#) fornisce la frequenza delle parole usate negli editoriali de La Repubblica. Le differenze sono inequivocabili poiché i termini con una frequenza più alta non sono gli stessi di quelli precedentemente elencati. Qui, "persone" è al primo posto con più del 10% di frequenza, dopodiché ci sono "Italia", "emergenza" e "casa". Questo significa che gli articoli di La Repubblica si sono focalizzati maggiormente sui messaggi che hanno creato consapevolezza sulla situazione nel nostro Paese e su come le persone avrebbero dovuto agire: stando a casa. Un'altra

differenza significativa è la presenza delle parole "Milano" e "Lombardia" nel [bar-plot 1](#), e la loro assenza nel [bar-plot 2](#) del bar. La ragione di ciò è il fatto che Il Corriere della Sera è una rivista fondata a Milano, quindi, dal momento che il virus ha avuto luogo lì, si preoccupa di più di menzionare la città e la regione di origine. La Repubblica ha sede a Roma ed è per questo che probabilmente ha un approccio più ampio per quanto riguarda la menzione di alcune città in particolare.

Lo scenario cambia quando si tratta di [bar-plot 3](#) e [bar-plot 4](#). Essi visualizzano la frequenza delle parole degli articoli pubblicati da, rispettivamente, ilPost e Il Sole 24 Ore. Nel primo caso, c'è un uso sproporzionato del termine "persone" con più del 15% di frequenza. Le altre parole sono significativamente più basse in percentuale: "Italia", "contagio" e "Cina" sono tutte al di sotto del 10%. Il Sole 24 Ore mescola due campi semantici; quello già apparso negli altri quotidiani e quello che caratterizza la sua natura economica. "Emergenza", "Italia", "misure" e "attività" sono le parole più frequenti e le ultime due rappresentano la disposizione pragmatica e pratica della rivista.

La prossima parte dell'analisi coinvolgerà i dati presi solo da Il Corriere della Sera e La Repubblica. Ora l'attenzione si sposta sull'impatto che i titoli degli articoli hanno avuto sugli individui. Nella comunicazione d'emergenza l'uso di alcune parole invece di altre può influenzare in modo significativo le percezioni delle persone e di conseguenza il loro feedback. Le seguenti line-plot mostrano il punteggio di sentimento medio della popolazione; fornisce i sentimenti causati dagli articoli pubblicati dai quotidiani. Il periodo di tempo rimane fissato a tre mesi, i mesi in cui l'emergenza COVID-19 è aumentata.

Nel [line-plot 1](#) compaiono le opinioni generali derivate dagli articoli del Corriere della Sera. Il sentimento negativo prevale su quello positivo. Questo significa che la comunicazione ha creato confusione e panico tra la popolazione. Tuttavia, è chiaro che in alcune circostanze il sentimento positivo ha raggiunto il livello di quello negativo e, in alcuni casi, lo ha supera. Per comprendere il trend esposto dal grafico, occorre che esso sia messo in relazione con i D.P.C.M. dichiarati dal Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri Giuseppe Conte. Il primo e più alto picco del sentimento positivo corrisponde al giorno in cui il governo ha dichiarato lo stato di emergenza per 6 mesi. Questo vertice è stato raggiunto dopo i sentimenti positivi causati dalle prime disposizioni contro il virus. Il 23 febbraio 2020 è stato annunciato il primo decreto legge e fino a quel giorno si nota un aumento della linea rossa della trama. Questa tendenza continua in corrispondenza dei seguenti D.P.C.M.: 25/02, 1/03, 4/03, 8/03, 9/03, 11/03 e 22/03. Significa che le notizie nei decreti dichiarati dal governo hanno portato sollievo tra la gente.

In media, gli articoli pubblicati da La Repubblica hanno gli stessi livelli di sentimenti negativi e positivi; in entrambi i casi, il sentimento positivo ha una media di 0,5. Tuttavia, la tendenza sembra diversa dal momento che le linee blu e le linee rosse sono meno intrecciate, come mostra il [line-plot 2](#). I picchi più alti e più bassi del sentimento negativo sono tutti all'inizio del grafico, ovvero quando il virus ha iniziato ad avvicinarsi al nostro paese. La tendenza diminuisce quindi causando, di conseguenza, un aumento delle percezioni positive. La Repubblica, infatti, adottò una peculiare strategia di comunicazione; iniziò con notizie crude e catastrofiche per poi, quasi di punto in bianco, passare ad una comunicazione più morbida e confortante di pronta ripresa. Come per Il Corriere della Sera, anche i trend di La Repubblica sono stati influenzati dal rilascio dei decreti legge. La linea rossa sale in corrispondenza delle date elencate nel paragrafo precedente.

Per approfondire l'argomento, il primo articolo di La Repubblica sul virus è stato pubblicato il 4 gennaio 2020 e il suo titolo era "Cina, epidemia di polmonite: ritorna il terrore della SARS". Il contenuto era abbastanza informativo e le informazioni fornite non erano ancora state confermate, i

casi erano esclusivamente in Cina e con un numero molto basso. L'allarmismo iniziò alla fine del mese, quando titoli diversi apparvero sul giornale. Per esempio, il 30 gennaio 2020 un articolo scritto da Michele Bocci recitava "Via al ritorno degli italiani: "Quarantena in caserma o in albergo"". Ha dato un'idea differente della situazione poiché ha portato consapevolezza circa la gravità di ciò che stava accadendo a Wuhan. Secondo il [line-plot 2](#), il primo picco di sentimenti negativi è stato intorno al 9 e 10 febbraio 2020. Infatti, in quei giorni i titoli che fecero scalpore riguardavano l'incremento dei casi, un maggior numero di morti, e l'arrivo del virus in Italia.

Per quanto riguarda Il Corriere della Sera e come si è detto in precedenza, il picco più alto si ottenne verso la fine di gennaio, come mostrato dal [line-plot 1](#). Il 23, 24 e 25 di quel mese i titoli degli articoli erano abbastanza allarmanti, questo spiega il sentimento negativo della popolazione. Un paio di esempi sono "Cina isolare Wuhan Treni e aerei bloccati", "Virus, in Cina boom di malati Quattro città blindate", o "Virus, primi casi in Europa". Quando il sentimento negativo raggiunse il suo primo picco più basso, e quello positivo raggiunse il suo massimo, gli articoli stavano diffondendo informazioni su controlli più rigorosi e aggiornamenti sull'isolamento del virus per avviare la ricerca di una cura. Il punto più basso del sentimento positivo corrisponde al periodo in cui le notizie erano tutte sul primo contagio in Lombardia. Ha creato il panico tra gli individui in quanto significava che il virus circolava anche in Italia e la paura di fare la stessa fine della Cina era estrema.