

Call for papers *Canadian Journal of Communication*

***MEDIATIZING THE PANDEMIC***  
***International perspectives***

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**ARGUMENT**

Since its outbreak in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the daily lives of citizens around the world. It simultaneously became a worldwide health, social, and political issue.<sup>1</sup>

From a political perspective, the public management of the pandemic has weakened the legitimacy and authority of some national governments. Many leaders seemed unprepared and ill-equipped to react to waves and outbreaks of the pandemic. Others fare better. However, they all had to guide the transformation of individual and collective behaviors as well as supervise the establishment of new social norms in their populations.<sup>2</sup> Many nations have also experienced an increasing circulation of conspiracist discourses and disinformation processes that have permeated public debate and endangered citizens' lives.<sup>3</sup> These phenomena were concurrent to a loss of public confidence in expert discourse (scientific, governmental, journalistic among others), which are of paramount importance in crisis management.<sup>4</sup>

The pandemic is also not without effect on the routines of news organizations and on the work of journalists<sup>5</sup>, who were faced with a double mission. First, they had to inform citizens about the evolution of the pandemic, about the actions of public authorities, and about appropriate sanitary measures (such as hand-washing, mask wearing or social distancing).<sup>6</sup> Second, they had to try to bring informative and credible journalistic content back at the center of busy information flows competing in a complex hybrid media systems<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, the urgent health context has also made more visible the economic and political influence of big digital companies (GAFAM). These private businesses have approached several national governments to offer tracking and monitoring services developed to help fight the pandemic, which brought up economic, ethical, and legal issues associated with the use of digital tools to curb contagion.<sup>8</sup> These digital initiatives have also raised questions regarding privacy and personal data protection.

Just over a year after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Communication* (CJC) invites contributions focusing on the different dynamics of the mediatization of the pandemic. By welcoming contributions from both a Canadian and comparative perspective, the issue aims, above all, to put into perspective how the pandemic affected political communication, journalism and public discourses in different national contexts, including Canada. Interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approaches as well as strong empirical case

studies are strongly encouraged for submission. The selected papers will be published, in French or in English, in a special issue of the CJC in 2022.

As part of this publication project, a workshop where selected papers will be presented and discussed is scheduled for February 2022. If sanitary regulations allow it, the event will be held in person at Université Laval, Québec City. An online alternative will be put in place otherwise. On this occasion, authors whose article proposals have been selected will be invited to present the first draft of their work. Members of the Scientific Committee will comment the papers at the workshop and help make the final selection of the papers that will be published in the dossier.

Proposals should focus on one of the following four thematic axes:

- **Axis 1: Governmental and administrative discourses on the pandemic**

Work on this theme examines governmental communication during the pandemic. Proposals should study, from an analytical, critical, or reflective point of view, the forms, contents and communication strategies of governments, public institutions, national public health managers and leaders of political executives regarding sanitary measures, social regulations and guidelines presented to populations. Empirical studies on discursive, digital or visual material as well as components of public and government communication would be particularly appreciated.

- **Axis 2: Journalistic treatment of the pandemic**

This axis follows a double objective. On the one hand, it seeks to examine how the pandemic affected the work of information and media professionals. On the other hand, it also aims at better understanding the challenges that the latter had to overcome to make their content available to the public. Having access to reliable, verified information produced by credible news organization is essential to the fight against the pandemic. Thus, submissions that enlighten the adaptations and the transformations of journalistic practices are encouraged, both from the point of view of the investigative techniques and functioning of newsrooms, as well as the strategies for legitimizing the role and work of journalists in a context of information abundance and disinformation.

- **Axis 3: Counter discourses and public debate in digital arenas**

Work on this theme analyzes the characteristics and the dynamics of communicational information phenomena arising from digital arenas during the COVID-19 pandemic. It should reflect on how digital technologies increase the visibility of discourses and counter-discourses produced outside institutional frameworks, such as governments or mainstream media. More specifically, paper submissions examining the production and circulation of discourses advocating against sanitary measures and vaccination as well as disinformation initiatives and conspiracist contents are encouraged.

- **Axis 4: Pandemic, AI, and digital technologies**

This last theme focuses on debates related to the integration of artificial intelligence systems and digital tools designed to control the spread of COVID-19. It seeks to put into perspective the economic and political interests that shaped these technologies as well as their effectiveness and benefits to fight the pandemic. Proposals investigating the political, ethical, and legal issues generated by the collection, processing, and use of personal data during the pandemic are welcomed. Empirical studies backed by theoretical and critical reflection on legal, ethical, and democratic issues related to the use of digital resources will be particularly appreciated.

## **SUBMISSION PROCESS**

Paper proposals must be sent in French or English at [mediatisation.covid19@ulaval.ca](mailto:mediatisation.covid19@ulaval.ca).

They must contain the names of the authors, a title, as well as a 400 words summary. It must present the research problem, the case(s) studied, the research questions and hypotheses, the methodology, and the expected scientific contribution. These abstracts will be evaluated by members of the Scientific Committee for the first selection of papers to be presented at the workshop in February 2022.

## **PLANNED TIMETABLE**

**23/06/2021:** Launch of the call for contributions

**30/08/2021:** Deadline to submit a paper proposal

**30/09/2021:** Notification to authors of the selection or rejection of their proposal

**01/02/2022:** Submission of a first draft of the paper by authors

**18-19/02/2022:** Workshop at Université Laval

**04/03/2022:** Notification to authors of the final selection or rejection of their paper

**15/04/2022:** Submission of the revised version of the paper by authors

**22/04/2022:** Submission of the selected papers to the journal's external reviewers

**June to November 2022:** final revisions of the selected papers and production of the issue

**December 2022/Beginning 2023:** Publication of the journal issue

## **ISSUE EDITORS**

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<sup>1</sup> See: AGARTAN, T., COOK, S. & LIN, V. (2020). Introduction: COVID-19 and WHO: Global institutions in the context of shifting multilateral and regional dynamics. *Global Social Policy*, 20(3), 367-373; BOBBA, G. & HUBÉ, N. (2021). *Populism and the Politicization of the COVID-19 Crisis in Europe*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

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<sup>2</sup> HAN, Q., ZHENG, B., CRISTEA, M., AGOSTINI, M., BÉLANGER, J. J., GUTZKOW, B., KREIENKAMP, J., REITSEMA, A., VAN BREEN, J., ABAKOUMKIN, G., ... & LEANDER, N. P. (2020). Trust in government and its associations with health behaviour and prosocial behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. *PsyArXiv*. Preprint. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/p5gns>

<sup>3</sup> BOULIANNE, S. et al (2021). La mésinformation sur les plateformes de médias sociaux et dans différents pays. Rapport Mars 2021. URL : <https://roam.macewan.ca/islandora/object/gm%3A2823>.

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<sup>4</sup> BENKLER, Y.; FARIS, R. & ROBERTS, H. (2018). *Network Propaganda. Manipulation, Desinformation and Radicalization in American Politics*, New York, Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup> CASERO-RIPOLLÉS, A. (2020). Impact of Covid-19 on the media system. Communicative and democratic consequences of news consumption during the outbreak. *El profesional de la información*, v. 29, n. 2, e290223. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.mar.23>

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<sup>6</sup> On this subject, see: ANWAR, A., MALIK, M., RAEES, V. & ANWAR, A. (2020). Role of Mass Media and Public Health Communications in the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Cureus*, 12(9), e10453. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.10453>

<sup>7</sup> CHADWICK, A. (2013). *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Powers*, New York, Oxford University Press.

<sup>8</sup> TAGMATARCHI STORENG, K. & DE BENGUY PUYVALLÉE, A. (2021): The Smartphone Pandemic: How Big Tech and public health authorities partner in the digital response to Covid-19, *Global Public Health*, DOI: 10.1080/17441692.2021.1882530

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