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### Strategies to Deal with Fake News in Iran's Media Space (Case Study: Infodemic Covid-19)

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

#### Introduction:

The covid-19 pandemic, as a new and unknown disease, caused inflammation and concern of the world community and resulted in the illness and death of millions of people around the world.

During the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country, we witnessed the phenomenon of information disruption and the confusion of some journalists and activists in the field of information, audiences, politicians and executive officials. This research, with the pathology of the information process during the

Corona period in Iran, deals with the strategies to deal with fake news in Iran's media space in the way of dealing with fake news of Covid-19.

### **Method:**

This research is qualitative research that uses the theme analysis of 15 interviews with social communication experts and media activists to identify the strategies to deal with infodemic covid-19 in Iran and presented a network of themes for it and specified the dimensions and components of each theme.

### **Results:**

Based on the findings of this research, five solutions have been identified in the form of five comprehensive issues to deal with fake news of Covid-19 in Iran, which are: 1-activist journalism, 2- rebuilding national trust, 3- Preventive public relations. 4- Depoliticization of scientific phenomena. 5- Legal-judicial actions. In order to realize this method of activist journalism, these items identified as organizing themes should be put on the agenda: Demanding by science journalism, the formation of Fact checking infodemic management desk, the use of artificial intelligence, the ability to deal non-passively with rumors and fake news, Attention to the quality of media instead of quantity, media convergence and improving the cognitive skills of the audience.

In order to realize the "restoration of national trust", these items should be put on the agenda: strengthening independent journalism, maximum action and minimum announcement, and Transformation in the way of governance. Public and private institutions that are responsible for the covid-19 disease and its consequences should inform by using the "preventive public relations" model.

One of the main challenges and concerns of the interview participants is the political confrontation in Iran with scientific phenomena. Legal-judicial measures include criminalization, removal of false content from online sites and platforms, official complaint by the Ministry of Health and other institutions, fine and arrest of violators.

### **Conclusions:**

Comparing the results of this research with the studies conducted abroad in this field, it can be said that in foreign research, the themes of rebuilding national trust, developing partisanship, and strengthening independent journalism have received less attention. In domestic research, these issues are not mentioned much. In Iran, there are many economic, political and social obstacles in the way of independent journalism, and it is overcome by the official and sovereign media. Since in many countries, independent media have a good prosperity, foreign researchers have not reached such a category in examining solutions to deal with fake news.

If news sources and authorities have a specific political and party identity, they take steps to produce and distribute correct information in order to maintain the credibility and status of their organization. In a situation where people are not affiliated to any guild, group or party, they do not have to worry about refuting their claims and statements, and they easily create and publish fake content. In other words, belonging to a guild, group, and party increases the costs of lying. The development and strengthening of partisanship in the country and the competition of real parties provide a platform to deal with fake and false news.

Also, journalists and the press and media will go towards discovering the truth with more confidence and courage in a situation where they have the support of the party and have the support of the parties. The lack of support of parties and organizations from the media makes the journalist to be alone in the path of discovering the truth.

In Iran, political parties do not have serious and persistent activities, and political hangouts have replaced real party organizations. "Depoliticization of scientific phenomena" is a proposal that seems necessary in the crisis of health communication. During the covid-19 pandemic, Iran's political system turned to political propaganda at some points, which was caused by the phenomenon of attention seeking.

Depoliticization of science provides a platform for the free activity of journalists in the fields of science and health. Because they can fact-check the claims related to the country's scientific progress with a demanding spirit.

The findings of this research about the necessity of "horizontal distribution of information and avoiding vertical hierarchy" are consistent with Castells' theory of "network society". Due to the fact that citizens travel widely in social networks, sending information from a communication source in a vertical and mandatory manner is not working and horizontal message distribution should be on the agenda. According to the findings of the research on "strengthening independent journalism" and the "network society" theory, it can be said that the networks spreading lies in Iran's media space have sometimes replaced independent media.

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Data available on request from the authors.

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#### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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