

Call for paper- ComPol n.2/2023- The Geopolitics of Disinformation

Editor:

Francesco Amoretti (Università degli Studi di Salerno)

Events such as the pandemic emergency and the war in Ukraine have directed the attention of governments and the international scientific community to the issue of disinformation, which has become a strategic area in the redefinition of geopolitical power dynamics, and in the framing of narratives designed to legitimize political-military actions and to address public opinion, in both democratic and autocratic regimes. The symbolic (but also material) salience of the clash results from the use of audio-visual contents and a technological arsenal that makes disinformation plausible. Furthermore, violent images of battlefields and rubble buildings burst into our media feeds. Wars have always represented and provided the occasion to fuel persuasive and/or manipulative strategies through massive propaganda, where the winners have shaped and preserved the historical truth. Nowadays, we are facing the “first live Internet war”, via social networks, where everyone is a player in their way. We are far from the concealment of the pain and the tragedy, as happened during the First World War when it was forbidden for the mainstream media to film and publish victims’ images. We are also far from the experience of the “first live television war”, the Gulf War (1990). And also, from its revival that justified the attack in Iraq, which was endorsed by a colossal hoax by Western states (Tony Blair 2015). Accordingly, wars have always tested the fairness and trustworthiness of the information system, which has been involved to frame the symbolic and cultural battlefield, as well as to nudge and address the flows of opinion, both on national and transnational levels. Since February 24th, political leaders, journalists, intelligence agencies, citizens, and soldiers contribute to feeding a hyper-complex-and-connected media environment, where the spread of information disorders becomes the ruling feature. What are the mechanisms of disinformation production? Who are the actors? And what are the socio-cognitive mechanisms underlying the reception and diffusion of disinformation contents? What are the theoretical and empirical implications for the resilience of (democratic) institutions?

This special issue of ComPol intends to highlight how the geopolitical framework of contemporary societies owes to the post-truth paradigm and the growing pervasiveness of disinformation strategies. The latter, aimed at influencing public opinion and the perception of global events, triggers processes of sedimentation of certain cognitive frames, which can seriously affect democratic processes and institutions, their resilience, and their future.

Moreover, and as already emerged from the COVID-19 outbreak, the contemporary geopolitical framework and power dynamics within states do not result exclusively from the interactions between public actors, but also from the increasingly relevant role of private actors, meant as gatekeepers of the networks, Big Data and physical infrastructures that generate the digital space. The policies adopted by digital platforms and the model of concertation and/or regulation adopted by institutions, especially at the European level, are crucial elements in defining future scenarios.

There are four dimensions of interest to guide the submission of manuscripts, although they represent a starting point and may also lead to cross-cutting and/or further research proposals.

The **historical dimension** calls for a comparative exploration of the role of political communication in different past experiences characterised by the use of disinformation and opinion manipulation strategies. The contexts (cognitive, economic-technological and institutional) and media processes (both mainstream and digital) can highlight elements of continuity/concordance and discontinuity/discordance between different experiences and geopolitical phases. Of particular interest are the manuscripts dedicated to the relationship between communication and political violence, to the role of media systems in the framing of contemporary conflict and the construction of the enemy, to the different narrative constructions (nationalisms, populisms, neo-imperialisms, etc.) that constitute the ideological substratum and the basis of cultural legitimisation of the strategies implemented.

The **technological dimension** calls for an exploration of disinformation strategies in contemporary society, highlighting the role of digital platforms, their social networks, and artificial intelligence in creating and disseminating disinformation contents. Likewise, it calls for exploring the tools/protocols adopted by digital providers, computational sciences, and artificial intelligence to tackle disinformation and prevent information pollution.

The **political-institutional dimension** calls for an exploration of new governance arrangements in counter-disinformation policies, with a focus on top-down and bottom-up processes on the disinformation between subnational, national, supranational and international contexts. It also calls for an analysis of non-state actors' role, their centrality and networking activity in shaping the forwarding EU regulation strategy of the digital sphere.

The **socio-cognitive dimension** calls for an exploration of the impact of disinformation strategies on citizens and public opinions, with a particular focus on how such dynamics can undermine trust in institutions, politics, science and media, thus influencing the behaviour behind democratic processes, such as participation and electoral orientations. Equally interesting are the studies focusing on multiple approaches of political and governmental actors in different national contexts, and the involvement of the media system in their specific multi-level territorial arrangements.

This special issue is therefore aimed at submissions dealing with one or more of these transversal dimensions, supported by a strong theoretical framework and a documented analysis, both quantitative and/or qualitative. Proposals focusing on other dimensions of analysis will also be evaluated, as long as they focus on the central theme of interest of the call for papers.

Long abstracts (maximum of 1,000 words, excluding references) should outline the issue, aims, research questions, the methodology adopted, and preliminary or expected findings, with an indication of the track in which they are located. Long abstracts must be sent by December 15th, 2022 to rivista@compol.it and amoretti@unisa.it. Selection and communication to the authors will take place by January 15th, 2023. The deadline for submission of manuscripts is March 25th, 2023. Manuscripts will be evaluated through a double-blind review system.