



Scientific Discourse and Social Media. The Reliability of Information Sources and the Figure of the Expert in the Post-Truth Society

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Abstract

Social networks represent a more immediate way for researchers to communicate with the audience, dismantling the old epistemic hierarchies. In this sense, the ongoing social media revolution reconciles science and society. Alongside this advantage, however, the concrete use of social networks in scientific debates poses some critical issues, such as the increasing feeling of distrust for the expert knowledge, stimulated by the perceived wisdom of influencers on the Internet and social media. As various authors have argued, the gap between scientists and users' opinions on technical subjects, such as the climate change, the safety of vaccines, the safety of foods etc., is increasing. The possibility of debating of science on social networks highlights even more the difficulty of separating facts and opinions, reliable and false information, with the risk of spreading false news, intentionally or unintentionally. This process causes, moreover, a crisis of the figure of the expert, that is increasingly questioned by virtue of the spread of misinformation and disinformation, often amplified by social networks. The modern campaign against Covid-19 vaccines is a clear example. The aim of this contribution is to cross and deepen the described issues, as part of a broader reflection on the theme of fake news and post-truth. After an introductory section dedicated to the connection between social networks and scientific discourse, the paper will focus on the crisis of the figure of the expert at the time of social media, also analyzing the role and reliability of scientific sources in public debates and the contribute of the semiotic gaze in the description of the phenomenon.

Keywords: Semiotics, Post-truth, Fake news, Expert, Social networks

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