Transcrição - Módulo 2: Entrevista com Cristina Tardaguila

[00:00:00] Hi. Welcome back to the video portion of our course, "Journalism In A Pandemic: Covering COVID-19 Now And In The Future." I'm here with Cristina Tardaguila. She is with the Corona Virus Fact-Checking Alliance, a project of the Poynter Institute and the International Fact-Checking Network. As we talked about this week, misinformation and disinformation are playing an incredibly important role in this unfolding pandemic. So, Christina, thanks for joining our course. Can you start by talking about what the International Fact-Checking Network is?

[00:00:34] Sure. And first, let me thank you Maryn, and the Knight, and everyone that is here in the course for giving me the time to introduce myself and to talk a little bit about fact-checking, which is the most beautiful profession in the world right now. While the IFCN, International Fact-Checking Network, is a hub for fact-checkers that are active around the planet. We are now more than 80 organizations in over 40 countries that are really working hard to separate facts from fiction.

[00:01:14] And we usually get claims, photos, videos, audios and compare that information with reliable sources, and then we rate them according to the veracity of the content. Right. So after that, we use our power, let's say, to spread this information to get people thinking about the quality of the content that they are receiving.

[00:01:39] The IFCN also does a lot of training, does a lot of education around the world, and we also have a wonderful newsletter every Thursday, actually. And we also do some beautiful events. This year is going to be Global Fact. It's going to be virtual in June, and applications are open for those who want to join. So that's the IFCN.

[00:02:02] That's amazing. So I want to hear about the Coronavirus Fact-Checking alliance. You actually started this pretty early this year, and I'm super curious why it is you thought it was necessary and especially how you knew to start it so fast?

[00:02:18] Yeah. So I'm very, very proud of the partners at the Coronavirus Fact-Checking Alliance. We started back on January 24, when this weird virus had only killed 17 people. And we were already worried; very worried about the amount of hoaxes it was already spreading in Asia. By the end of January, I got a call from Taiwan. We have a partner in Taiwan, and they were already hearing, getting, seeing a lot of hoaxes regarding that virus. And the Taiwanese fact-checkers wanted to know if other countries and other fact-checkers around the world were also getting this information and misinformation regarding this weird virus.

[00:03:07] So one of the things that the IFCN does is we have a wonderful way of connecting fact-checkers in the planet. So we keep a Slack channel. We keep a few Google list server email group, a Google group. So I decided it was time to ask the community whether they were also hearing hoaxes about this weird virus anywhere else around the world. And on January 24, when I asked that question, more than 30 organizations around the world got back to me saying, "Yes, we're hearing so many weird things about this virus. Let's work together."

[00:03:44] And the interesting thing is that by that time, we from the fact-checking community were quite used to collaborating. But in the political universe, every time that we had a meeting like a G20 meeting or a U.N. General Assembly, we also applied that same knowledge that each partner would verify its own representative and then share the fact-check, so everyone in the community would have the same amount of information. So we decided that maybe we could try that with our health misinformation. So that's how the Coronavirus Facts Alliance started.

[00:04:28] And I took a look this morning and there are something like 370 pages?

[00:04:33] No, much more than that!

[00:04:37] Oh, my word.

[00:04:38] Yeah. Yeah. So let me give you some numbers, and then I'll be so proud. So right now, and we're talking today, it's May 1, just to be clear. We are now 88 organizations collaborating in

74 countries, debunking content in 43 different languages. We have published 4,823 hoaxes that have been debunked, and that is enormous content.

[00:05:14] Just to give you a comparison, the second-largest collaboration that we have seen in the fact-checking community was Reverso in Argentina in 2019 that gathered about 150 media outlets for 10 months, and they debunked about 200 falsehoods. So 200 falsehoods in 10 months against three months of work and almost 5,000 hoaxes. So, I mean, we are seeing a monster of this information.

[00:05:50] So first, congratulations, because those metrics are amazing. And second, that's kind of daunting because that's so many hoaxes, so much misinformation, disinformation. Do you have any thoughts about why this situation is so ripe for misinformation to be spread?

[00:06:08] Yeah. At the same time that I'm very happy with those numbers, I'm very sad, too. So, you know, I mean? We don't need that. We shouldn't be too proud of being in such a scenario. We don't need to be living under, amongst this universe of this information. We shouldn't be proud of that at all. But to your question. What we see, what the fact-checking community is seeing is that there are a few components that are driving falsehoods that are kind of different from other situations that we have seen.

[00:06:50] The first one is the complete lack of data. So let's think a little bit about that. So everything that we know about COVID and coronavirus is very new, right? The virus has existed for what four months? Not even. It's brand new. So even the databases are moving. They are not solid. So not only fact-checkers, but people on the street, they don't know. We're still learning. So when we don't have good data and good facts, that's the fertile soil for disinformation. Right.

[00:07:30] The second thing is panic. Panic is while great for misinformation, right? We know that. And third, there is something different from when you deal with health misinformation and political misinformation is that a part of the health misinformation is actually shared with good intention. Let's say when you're dealing with false cures and fake preventative measures, people share that to help the ones they love and they care about. That's different from the political scenario. When you're probably pushing an ideology or you're pushing, you know, your candidate. But now we are dealing with people that are wanting to do good, and that is really, really tough.

[00:08:24] So I really appreciate the distinction that you're drawing, and certainly, I know I myself have seen in my feed things that people are sharing that they think are going to be helpful to their friends and family. Like that hoax about, if you take small sips of water, you will wash the virus out of your mouth a couple of weeks, or maybe a century ago, whenever that circulated. But I'm guessing that some of this at least some of this misinformation and disinformation must be malicious. It's not all well-intentioned.

[00:08:52] Well, totally. Totally. Well, the IFCN so far has published a few weekly reports on the misinformation we are seeing on the coronavirus fact-check's database, and we have detected at least seven different waves of misinformation.

[00:09:11] The first one is quite obvious. It is about the origin of the virus and that's about the bats, [00:09:20]Bill Gates, [0.0s] and, you know, some lab in China. That all is false. You know. The second wave is on those edited videos showing people fainting in subways and in supermarkets. That's also very badly edited because actually people were having heart attacks. They were just drunk. And then the third wave, which is the biggest one we just talked about, is the one about cures and false preventative measures. And in this one, it's dangerous because you see products or cures that will not kill you but will not help you, and those that can really kill you. And we can talk about that in a bit.

[00:10:09] And then the fourth wave that we detected, and then that's what I'm just going to your point. That's when we start seeing that COVID starts to become something that people can use to spread bad ideas. It's just not just health. Right. So starting from the fourth wave, we're seeing like anti-Chinese thoughts. In the fifth wave, we've seen supremacists' ideas. So how the Muslims are better equipped to fight COVID, or how Afro-Americans or Black blood is stronger against the virus. And then in the sixth wave, we see the lockdown disinformation, and then the politicization

around the virus. Then now what we're seeing is actually people using the virus, or the politics around the virus, to distribute ideas regarding government "A" opposition "B" in different countries. That's the case in the United States. That's the case in Spain. That's the case of [00:11:22]<mark>Brazil.</mark> [0.0s] It's very interesting.

[00:11:27] Talk a little bit about, if you don't mind, about the impact of having political leaders deal in misinformation. That certainly has been the case here in the United States with the president suggesting that people consume disinfectants. I know it's been the case in Brazil as well and in some other countries with a strong nationalist bent. Does it reinforce the problem to have misinformation be endorsed from the top?

[00:12:00] 100%. A million percent. It's kind of depressing. When a fact-checker hears Donald Trump saying what he said in a press conference, I can tell you, because that happened, our community feels like crying. The minute he said that, our Slack channel just went *boom* very active. You know, we say, what do we do now? Because in the first reaction is saying, "Oh, nobody will believe that. No, no. Nobody will do that. Nobody." But two seconds later, we say, "Yes, they will." Somebody will. And then the day after, you see the first news of people really go into hospitals because they injected disinfectant in their veins. And then, you know, this is just very harmful, Maryn. Very, very harmful. And I'm not centering myself only in Trump. I can easily talk about Bolsonaro, you know I'm Brazilian. It's not only about what you say. It is also about how you act; how you position yourself. Bolsonaro was promoting an opening ideas. He's clearly against social distancing, and now we're seeing Brazil as the country with the highest contagion rate in the world, according to the Imperial College of London.

[00:13:33] And what do we do now? Right. How do you prove that one thing can be connected to the other?

[00:13:40] It's really hard for a fact-checkers perspective to show the data and get people to hear you. Because they will say, "Oh, you know, you are a leftist." And no, there's nothing. We're not trying to attack this politician because we are against the politician himself. We are saying this information here is wrong.

[00:14:05] Right. This is what's going on in Spain. The minute you say this information said by this politician here is false. People who support this politician understand we are attacking him or her. So this is very, very hard for the fact-checking community.

[00:14:29] What would your advice be? What do you think average reporters who are out there working on this, many of whom may never have covered an outbreak or a disease before, but have come into this from other beats. What are the things they should be doing to be sure that they are pushing back against misinformation and disinformation or even detecting it when it comes to them?

[00:14:48] So the first thing I'd say, please understand that the databases are changing, and your reporting should be clearly dated. So I'd say that, you know, please highlight, underline, put a bold in the time and the hour when you published your piece, if that's possible. Also, make sure that if the information you published is outdated try to, if you can if you have the opportunity to do so, just rewrite it. If you have the chance to see, you know, the number changed. Because if you leave something online that is outdated, people will find it and will believe it because they will not see the timestamp. They will not see the timestamp. That's one thing.

[00:15:40] Second. Make sure you have a headline that says it is as of today, or, you know, it's not definite for sure. And those that are writing about profiles you know like, "Oh, men are getting more infected than women." Here in the United States this is trending, right? But that's the statistics that are being done about the COVID are being done based on moving databases, and databases that are four months old being one month from China. We should be super careful. We should be super, super careful because when you say whatever you say about the data that you extract from this database can be completely wrong in two months. It can be the opposite. So be careful when you play with data.

[00:16:38] Statistics usually say you can make numbers say anything, and that is true. So be super careful those that are arriving now to the world of numbers and the statistics. And something else that I would clearly advise if you want to say that an information is wrong, or a photo has been manipulated, or a video has been altered, do not reuse it. Do not use a photo to say this is wrong. Just describe the photo, and do not reshow it because then you are giving oxygen to that same image or video. That's a really easy tip. And that we usually do that even on Twitter. We retweet something to say, "Hey, this is wrong." Do not do that.

[00:17:30] So how can an average journalist make use of the database that you've built over these past months? Can they go to the Coronavirus Fact-Checking Alliance and plug in the topic or an example and find how it's been debunked?

[00:17:47] Please do. First, we really think that we need more people to just dive into the database. The database has so much information there, and you will see that you can find information by country, by language, by organization, by categories. Let's say, for example, you can even see the timeline. When was misinformation bigger? And in your country, or in your language, or what kind of misinformation was trending in week three of the coronavirus in your country? And you can even find, are there any connections. Let's say when this information about, let's say, 5G being the cause of the coronavirus, it started here and then it went to there, this country, and then it moved to the other country. And, you know, you can find cool stories, and fact-checkers, to tell you the truth, Maryn, we don't have time to report on our content. We are just feeding this database. So we really want to bring reporters to the Coronavirus Facts Alliance database because we know as journalists that there are so many stories there. Guys, please come and take a look.

[00:19:05] That's a perfect place to stop. We will make sure that the links are on the site for our course. We will encourage people to go and check out the Coronavirus Fact-Checking Alliance. Thank you for telling us about this, and thank you for doing this work. Unfortunately, I think this task of yours is not going to end anytime soon. The epidemic is going to last for a while, and as long as the epidemic lasts, I think misinformation about it will be out there too. Thank you. Thanks for joining our course.

[00:19:35] Thank you for the opportunity. It was so cool to talk to you, and I hope the course goes very well. I bet they will learn so much from you. Thank you very much.

[00:19:43] Thank you.