

COVIDisc: COVID-19 pandemic discourses in Switzerland – a focus on 15-34 year olds

Team: ZHAW & USI

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Project Summary

- The coping of the pandemic relies heavily on communication about, with, and for the targeted group
- The project focused on
 - 15-34 year-olds
 - an important vector population
 - Italian & German-speaking discourses in Switzerland
 - provide a deeper understanding of temporality of the discourses and the impact of local & regional dynamics of the pandemic on the public discourses and discursive practices

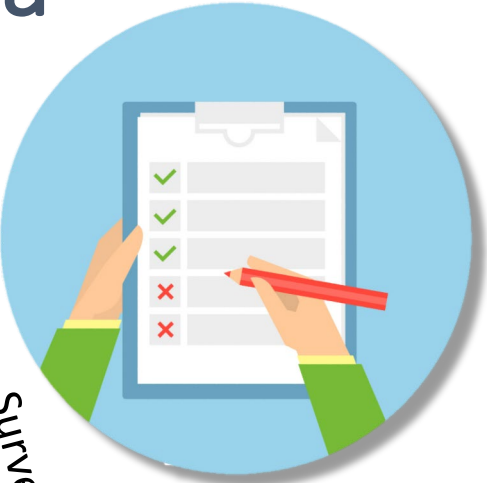
Objectives

- 1) Production of discourse:** Simulation of the patchwork and dynamics of public discourses on COVID-19 based on patterns of language use, e.g., construction of the vector population
- 2) Perception of discourse:** Investigation of the representation of the vector population in public discourses and the perception of these discourses by members of these audiences
- 3) Reflection on discourse:** Development of recommendations to strengthen and improve strategic crisis communication of public health organizations by managerial practices of audience and message design to impact on sense-making and early adoption of public health measures

Study design and study data



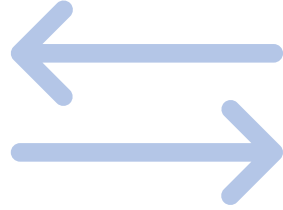
Corpus data



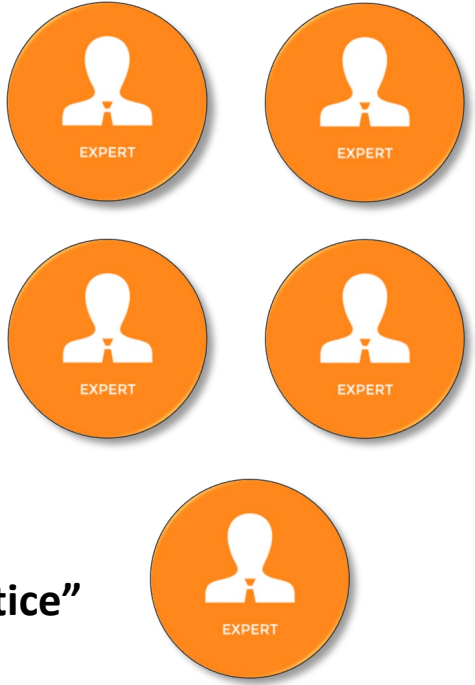
Survey data

Triangulation

Interview data



Reflection in a "community of practice"



Qualitative interviews

CORPUS DATA (Jan- Oct)

Survey (Sept/Oct)

Interviews (Nov – Jan)

Interviews (August)

1 Jan 2020

31 Jan 2021

Main Findings

- 1. Notice of COVID-19:** Focus changes from China to Switzerland within 8 weeks.
 - VP → The first wave and the measures were perceived as the most important key moments
- 2. Common ground on COVID-19** emerges during the first 3 months.
 - VP → not very worried about their own health.
 - Experts → the impossibility of objectively justifying measures is one of the greatest challenges
- 3. Dangerousness & Communication:** The discourse quantifies the dangerousness and potential lethality of the virus. In *DE-speaking Switzerland*, this particularly marks the beginning of the pandemic; in *Ticino*, it marks the entire period and is characterized by a higher emotionality.
 - VP → reported negative considerations about emotional style and images in the media, especially Ticino.
 - Experts → avoiding scaremongering was one of the more important strategic principles of actors in public communication.

Main Findings

4. Construction of VP works especially against an economic background.

- VP mostly do not remember communication about them; however, they remember media criticizing and blaming them for their behavior.

5. Solidarity: discourse topic during the lockdown.

- VP → pandemic evoked a division among the population, among family/partner or among friends.
- Experts → To emphasize the need for an overall solidarity and simultaneously the need for audience specific strategies of messaging was one of the most challenging tasks for actors of public communication.

6. Discourse Positions & Audience: FOPH acts non-dialogical on Twitter

- VP → from Ticino suggest interactive communication format or more generally they wished to be listened by authorities.
- Experts → see need in adapting key messages for their specific target audiences, also together with NGOs.

7. VP uses a variety of media and social media, including official health websites.

- Importance of channel specific communication strategies and styles is one of the most important learnings for public communication strategies.

Discussion

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