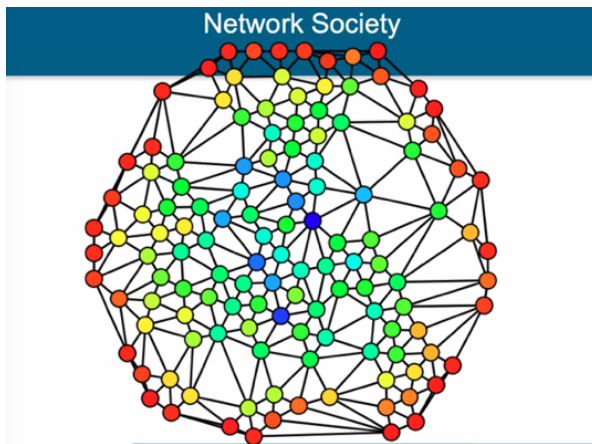


# Communication in Islamic-Christian dialogue

Notes taken by Martin Hoegger – [www.hoegger.org](http://www.hoegger.org)



On Saturday June 17, 2023, more than 200 people from 18 European countries and 33 countries from the rest of the world connected for an Online Seminar (“Webinar”) on the theme of communication in Islamic-Christian dialogue, with as background, the current problems of misinformation, false information (“fake news”) and Islamophobia.

Three conferences fueled the debate, as well as five sharing of experiences of dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

A time in small groups made it possible to specify the principles and concrete means to

fight against misinformation.

## Luciano Di Mele: Disinformation, fakenews and polarization

Specialist in these questions, this Italian professor begins by telling this anecdote: on March 21, 2004 a child died among the spectators of a football match. The players then decided to stop the game...

But it was fake news! This episode shows how communication is transformed and distorted. Oral communication, in particular.

Today the media systematize communication. Through them the same message is given to everyone. The danger then is the hegemonic power of the media.

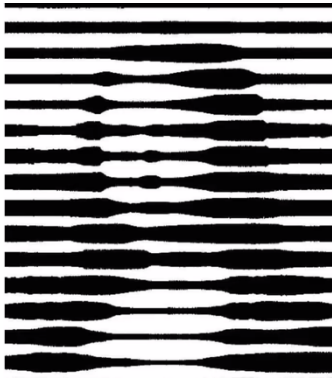
However, with the digital turn of the 1990s, an instrument is given to everyone to communicate. In the 1980s, Steve Job, founder of Apple, embraced the ideology of digitization for the promotion of democracy. Everyone can now become actor of communication, as shown in the diagram above.

### Some aspects of communication

Fake news can have unpredictable consequences, as shown in the game of the grain of rice on a chessboard : doubling the grain of rice in each space leads to a figure greater than the annual world production of rice!

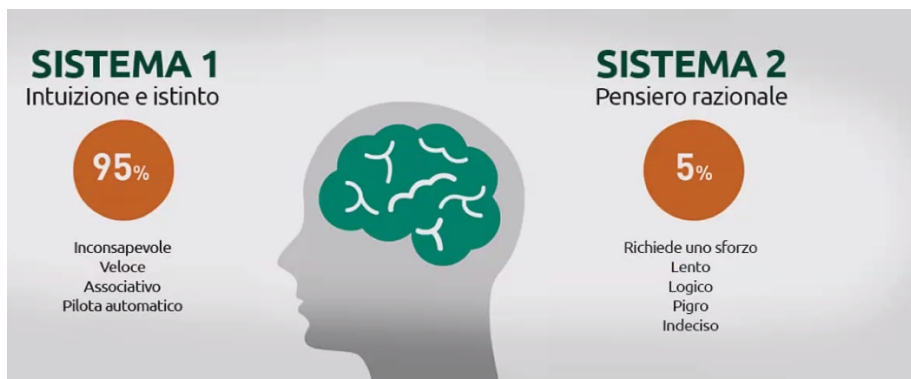
The lesson here is that a small behavior can cause large non-linear consequences.



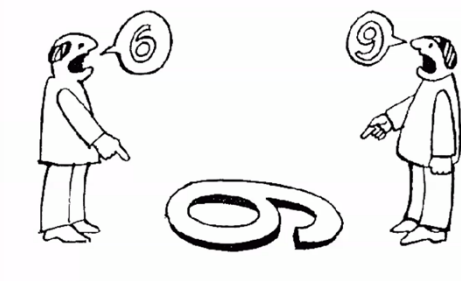


**Cognitive economics** finds that the brain can reconstruct an object with little information, such as this drawing of the Mona Lisa

**Slow thoughts and fast thoughts** : the intuitive system is used at 95%. The irrational part (system 1) takes precedence over system 2 of rational thought (5%)

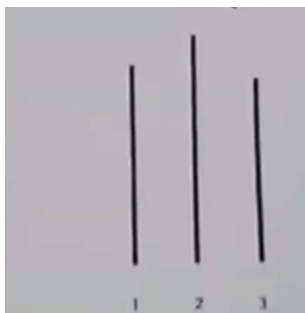


**Cognitive biases** are heuristic shortcuts (mental shortcuts that we use to simplify the solution of complex cognitive problems).



The most common are **confirmation bias** : we tend to see things from our point of view. Everyone defends what they think they perceive. In the newspapers, we go in search of news that we already know.

**Selection bias** are also common: we understand what we already know, and we don't listen to the voices around us, but we choose them. Our perception is filtered. Selecting reality then turns into prejudice. The selection does not allow you to see different news, because it is too tiring to learn something new!



**Conformism.** " Ash's experiment " is to ask which line is the longest? Obviously the second, but in his experiment a member of the group says it's the first and manages to convince the group. This group truth is in fact conformism. See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AyM2PH3\\_Qk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AyM2PH3_Qk)

This shows the importance of **social identity**: who are we in relation to others?



**What is a fact?** Is it a real fact or a social fact, something that is told to me?

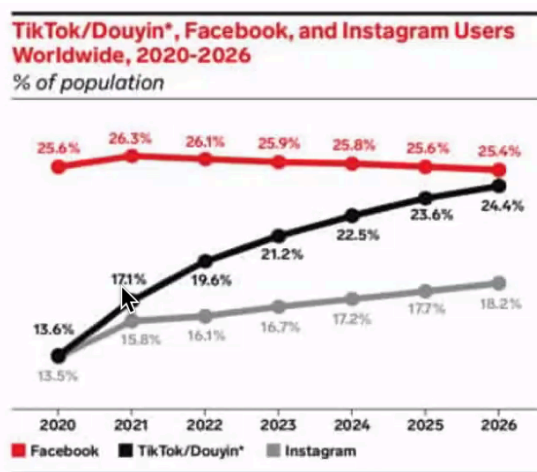
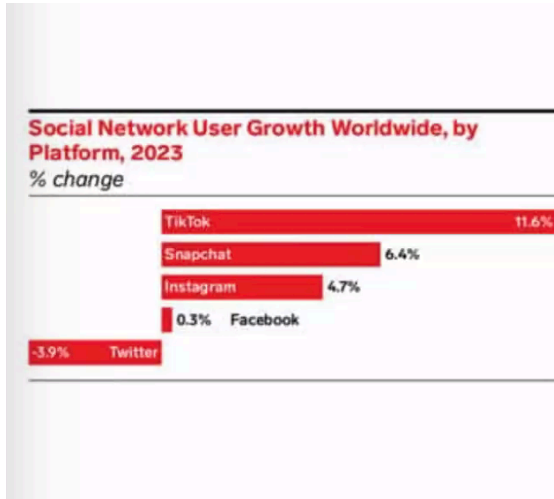
A social fact has a **power of coercion**. We must consider the social identity of the group, the relevance of the argument, the size of the group, the absence of conflict and internal dialogue.

### Digital social identity.

What happens in a minute on the internet? The chart below shows the enormity of today's digital spread (in 2021...today the spread is even greater!)



The growth of social media : we see the rise of Tik-Tok, while Facebook remains stable.



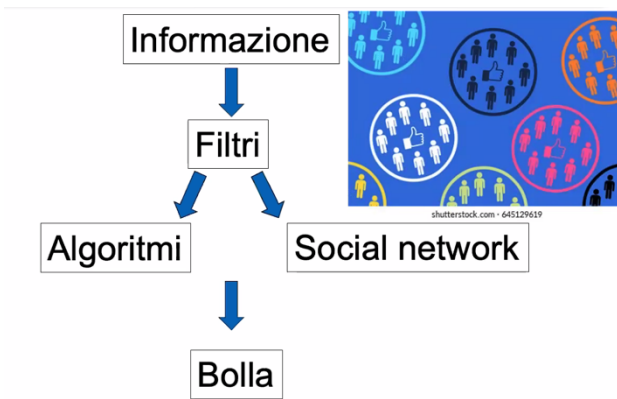
The GAFKA collect 85% of global advertising . Facebook has 3 billion users. Its budget is larger than many states and there are few or no regulations for its use.

**Social media and motivation:** we seek in these media pleasure, hope and social acceptance.



**“Information silos”:** these are independent information constructs, where we find like-minded people. We do not interact with those with whom we disagree. Fake news lives in these “silos”.





**Social filters of information:** Information is filtered through algorithms and social media. We are then part of a **bubble**, and no longer perceive all of reality. This accentuates the polarization.

“ **Clickbait** ” means when you are bored, suffer from loneliness or stress, you click anyhow and what.



### Fake news

- Dis-informazione
- Mis-informazione
- Mal-informazione
- Satira
- Clickbait
- Teorie del complotto
- Propaganda
- Pubblicità

Fake news refers to false information, most often benefiting from wide dissemination in the media, in particular on the Internet and social networks.

### Examples of fake news

The sentence that François Hollande, former president of France, never said the day after the Bataclan attack in Paris: “*all those who died at the Bataclan must be avenged*”.



### Muore dopo aver mangiato sushi: il pesce crudo è pericoloso o no?

Una domanda che ritorna spesso: il sushi è sicuro oppure può causare danni e malattie? Per evitare inutili allarmismi, è bene conoscere rischi e benefici

13 Febbraio 2023 10:07

### Napoli, non è stato il sushi: Rossella è morta per emorragia cerebrale

L'esito dell'autopsia sulla donna che si era sentita male dopo avere festeggiato il 40esimo compleanno al ristorante

di Titti Beneduce



"She died after eating sushi"... But in fact this woman died of a cerebral hemorrhage.

## False information produced by artificial intelligence.

A fictional Michael Schumacher interview conducted by ChatGPT was recently published.



These two women do not exist but their image was created by artificial intelligence:



## Joshua Bell in the subway

J. Bell is a virtuoso violinist and plays in a subway station, but people don't stop to listen to him. They are not able to interpret this message, because it can only be received in a symbolic context, namely, in this case, a concert hall. See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnOPuo\\_YWhw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnOPuo_YWhw)

## A beautiful fake phrase from Pope Francis

“Never give up on happiness because life is an incredible spectacle”. He never said that sentence! But is it important to know that it's not his, insofar as it is beautiful? (see <https://fr.aleteia.org/2016/01/06/attention-aux-faux-discours-du-pape/>)

Yes, this will have consequences. How many times will it be propagated on the network?

## Three European Union documents to consider

- The Disinformation Action Plan
- Digital Education
- The Artificial Intelligence Risks Act.

## Conclusion

L. di Melle calls for **media Education, from the bottom up**. As we study math, writing, literature, we need this education. It is a new form of civic literacy.

And this is a big challenge for families because parents have not been educated in the use of media and networks.

## Media Education



- Avoid the accumulation of precepts to fight against “fake news”
- Identify sources of information
- Know the interests of the platforms
- Know how and why people and social groups use the media
- Know the regulation of information

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## Mr. Ramazan Özgü : Minority Voices in Majority Spaces

A professor in Zurich, Ramazan Özgü is committed to interreligious dialogue.

He asks what are the challenges that hinder the participation of Muslims? For him the dialogues serve as a platform for public debate. In his lecture, he wonders how this minority group can participate in the debate.

### Analysis of the problem.

Discussions about Muslims are often made in their absence. There is a disparity between the volume of discussions about Islam and the involvement of Muslims in the conversations.

In addition, the lack of resources hinders the active participation of Muslims. Likewise structural barriers, social systems, linguistic and institutional prejudices. These need to be strengthened in their capacities (empowerment)

Recognizing these issues is the first step towards creating a more inclusive public discourse.

### Dialogue between Muslims and Christians

This dialogue creates a space where difficult issues can be addressed and then allows Muslims to participate in public debate.

We go from a model where we *talk about...* to a model where we *talk with Muslims*

Interreligious dialogue is a platform for breaking down stereotypes and fostering comprehension.

Dialogue enables active participation of Muslims in public discourse and contributes to a more inclusive society and a strong democracy.



## The dialogue of charity and diakonia



The Focolare model of dialogue (active listening, empathy) can be used in several areas. It is a dialogue based on charity and diakonia. Experience shows that it has contributed to the improvement of relations and the integration of Muslim refugees

The fundamental question is that which was asked by Jesus to the blind man "What do you want me to do for you"?

Interreligious dialogue is important to promote integration and build self-confidence.

The dialogical method of communication promotes understanding, acceptance and openness.

## Dialogue between minorities

The speaker stressed the value of alliances between minority groups, such as Muslims and Jews, to fight against discrimination.

He gives as an example the **Respect project** in the promotion of shared values and mutual understanding. Its aim is also to overcome the expression of hatred on the internet.



## Conclusion



In conclusion, the speaker wishes to emphasize:

- the importance of continued efforts to build capacity, dialogue and legislation to improve the participation of Muslims in public discourse.
- the need for far-reaching structural solutions.
- the role of collective action and legislation in promoting diversity and inclusiveness in public discourse.



## Michele Zanzucchi – Islamophobia

Mr. Zanzucchi, an Italian journalist, thinks that Islamophobia is an expression of the complexity of the relationship between Europe and the Eastern Islamic world. It is a derivative of these relations.

We make the mistake of seeing it as a political struggle. But in the Arab and Iranian world, Islamophobia is seen primarily as a cultural and religious struggle.

The war in Iraq, the tensions between Sunnis and Shiites, the terrorist attacks, Daesh, the war in Syria have made Islamophobia grow. The consequences are demonization. The West felt threatened by Islam itself, little by little.

But it is ignorance that makes Islamophobia grow. In fact there is an abyss of ignorance! We don't have time to get informed. Journalists do not have adequate training. Historical, theological and anthropological errors are made about Islam. And the fundamental error of journalism is not to control the origin of the news.

### Antidotes to Islamophobia:

Mr. Zanzucchi offers these two main antidotes: Getting used to mutual listening by seeking to know each other. And affirm that religion is a factor in overcoming conflicts. The problem is in the religion itself but in the misinterpretation of religion.

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## Some experiences

**Gerti Kilgert and Müzeyyen** (Germany) share an experience of breakfasts between Christian, Jewish and Muslim women (between 12 and 20 people at each meeting). They discuss their faith in connection with daily life. The guideline is the golden rule and a “*decatalogue of dialogue*” has been formulated. The center is God and the means is the opening of the heart to perceive the treasure of the other religion, by looking for common points, etc...

**Stijn Lievens** (Belgium), an anthropologist, talks about an action in favor of the victims of the earthquakes in Turkey. The organization of an intercultural buffet was striking.

**Kaoutar Tahere** (Brussels) shares an experience with a friend who changed her opinion about Muslims. Dialogue is the basis of every healthy relationship. Not everyone has this opportunity. It is not easy. We have to train ourselves to live in this multicultural reality. The spirituality of the Focolare movement helps her in this.

**Rafa El Raoui** (Belgium) met the Focolare and was touched by the beautiful atmosphere. Then she stayed in touch. In 2014 she had cancer and other great difficulties. She didn't know how to get out of it. The Focolare then became another home where she was encouraged. “*Like a father and a mother, they helped me. I will never forget it . They put into practice what I have learned in my faith, namely that one cannot live alone*”.

**Rossana Di Fede** (Italy, Umbria) recounts meetings in Perugia to overcome misinformation. A teacher had the son of the city's Imam Abdel Qader in her class. The focolarine were invited to his home for a meal. This Imam then invited them to dinner at the end of Ramadan. The latter was then invited to speak about Muslim spirituality at the Focolare of Assisi. Unfortunately Abdel Qader was carried away by the Covid. The Focolare then showed great solidarity. At his funeral many religious and political representatives were present, including Cardinal Bassetti who said of him: “*He is a man with a large heart who leaned over the wounds of his neighbour*”. His daughter continues her work of dialogue. Meetings have become family gatherings.

## What are the remedies for misinformation?

In small groups we reflected on how to overcome misinformation, Islamophobia and polarization. In the French-speaking group in which I participated, we sought to identify three principles and three ideas on how to put these principles into practice. We were helped by these two questions:

### What do you think could be the remedy for the problem of disinformation (fake news), Islamophobia and polarization?

1. Starting from our concrete experience as a Focolare movement to define principles in a concrete way. Our movement has a rich spiritual heritage
2. The golden rule, which means take the first step, listening before speaking. The dialogue begins with listening and considering the other as oneself, even superior to oneself.
3. Do not be afraid to express diversity Do not level everything under the pretext that our religions say the same thing on many points. It must be recognized that there are real differences.

### What can we do to translate our ideas into concrete actions?

- Take the time to create friendships, to invite each other
- Create practical self-help projects
- Study the major religions at school to find the Golden Rule.

## Conclusion of the meeting

Rita Moussalem, co-responsible for the Center for Interreligious Dialogue, calls for the courage of encounter and dialogue. As for Roberto Signor, he thanks all the speakers and participants in these four intense hours of reflection on the dialogue.



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