



**30 June 2020**

## **UCT media professor to address first WHO infodemiology conference**

Professor Herman Wasserman from the University of Cape Town (UCT) has been invited to deliver a keynote address at the World Health Organization's (WHO) first infodemiology conference which is taking place from 30 June to 16 July 2020.

Wasserman is a professor of media studies and the director of [UCT's Centre for Film and Media Studies](#). He has researched and published extensively on [misinformation \(unintentional sharing of false news\) and disinformation \(the deliberate spread of false news\)](#) and will share his work, insights and experiences with peers from around the world, as well as representatives from the United Nations (UN), public health authorities and, of course, the WHO.

"I am honoured to have the opportunity to participate in the first infodemiology conference hosted by the WHO. I look forward to learning more about the extent of the 'infodemic' of misinformation from colleagues from around the world," said Wasserman.

The 1st WHO Infodemiology Conference deals with the phenomenon of an 'infodemic'. According to the WHO, an infodemic is an "overabundance of information – some accurate and some not – occurring during an epidemic".

While the session is closed to the public, Wasserman shared: "I will argue that media and cultural studies as a scholarly field provide us with some tools and methods to understand misinformation as a multi-levelled, complex and evolving socio-cultural phenomenon. We cannot merely try to counter misinformation as texts that circulate in isolation by correcting and countering them with facts – these texts of misinformation need to be understood within social dynamics, belief systems and material circumstances.

"Just like a virus needs a host environment, misinformation always circulates within particular contexts, between people with particular identities, histories and cultures, constrained or amplified by particular regulatory policies. Media and cultural studies can help us understand this host environment better, in order to design more appropriate interventions."

According to Wasserman the notion of 'infodemiology' is described by the WHO as the "science of infodemic management". It follows on the statement by the director-general of the WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, earlier this year, that "We're not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic," referring to mis- and disinformation that "spreads faster and more easily than this virus".

Wasserman said: "The WHO recognises that the overabundance of information can make it difficult for individuals and communities to know how to make sense of the pandemic and how to protect themselves, and mis- or disinformation can have literally deadly consequences in a pandemic. In South Africa, and around the world, we have seen the rapid and wide spread of false information, conspiracy theories and rumours about the pandemic and it is important that we pool our scholarly resources to find ways of understanding and countering it."

Learn more about the conference on the [WHO website](#).



Professor Herman Wasserman.

Photo: Robyn Walker/UCT

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***ENDS***

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