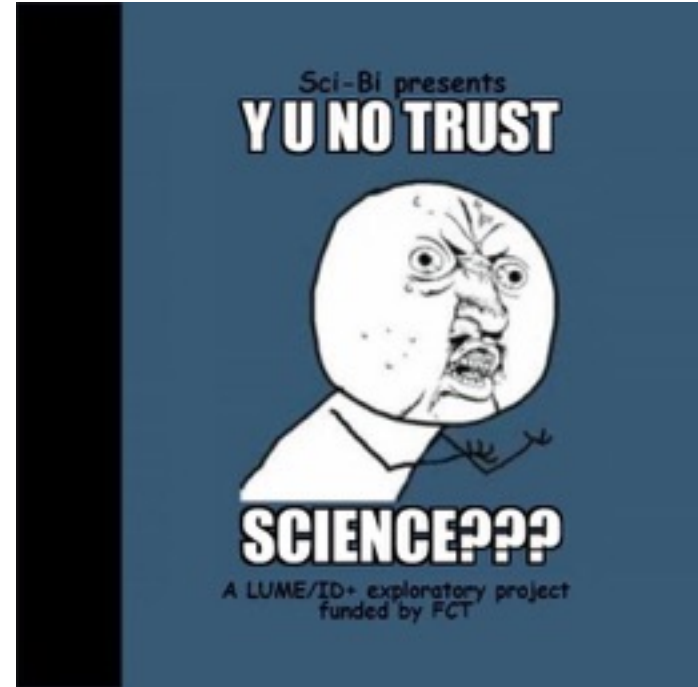


# Just Between Meme and You

online memes as health communication tools  
in Design and Media Arts higher education curricula

Heitor Alvelos  
Susana Barreto  
Cláudia Raquel Lima  
Eliana Penedos-Santiago  
Jorge Brandão Pereira  
Pedro Alves da Veiga  
Nuno Duarte Martins

Unexpected Media Lab / ID+  
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The problem:

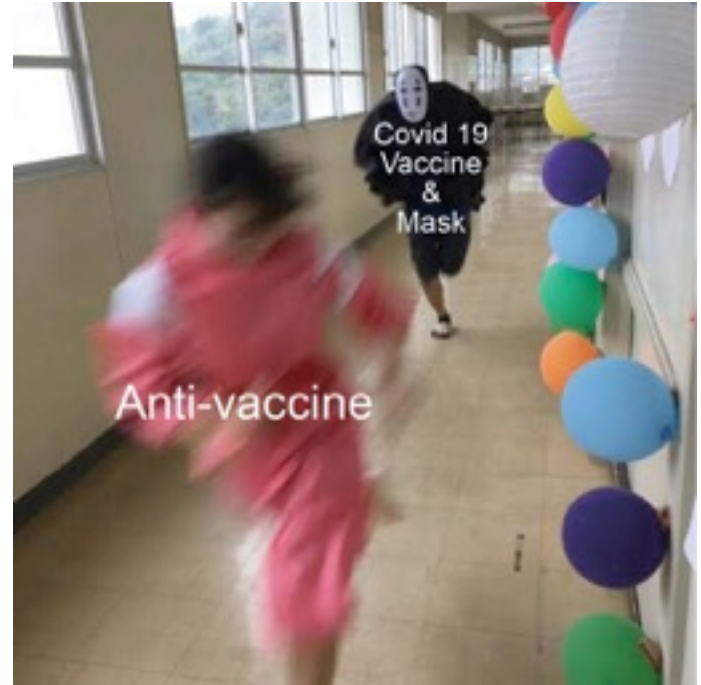
**Public mistrust regarding reliable health information seems to be on the rise.**

**Inversely, citizen adherence to health policies is decreasing, often to the point of hostility.**



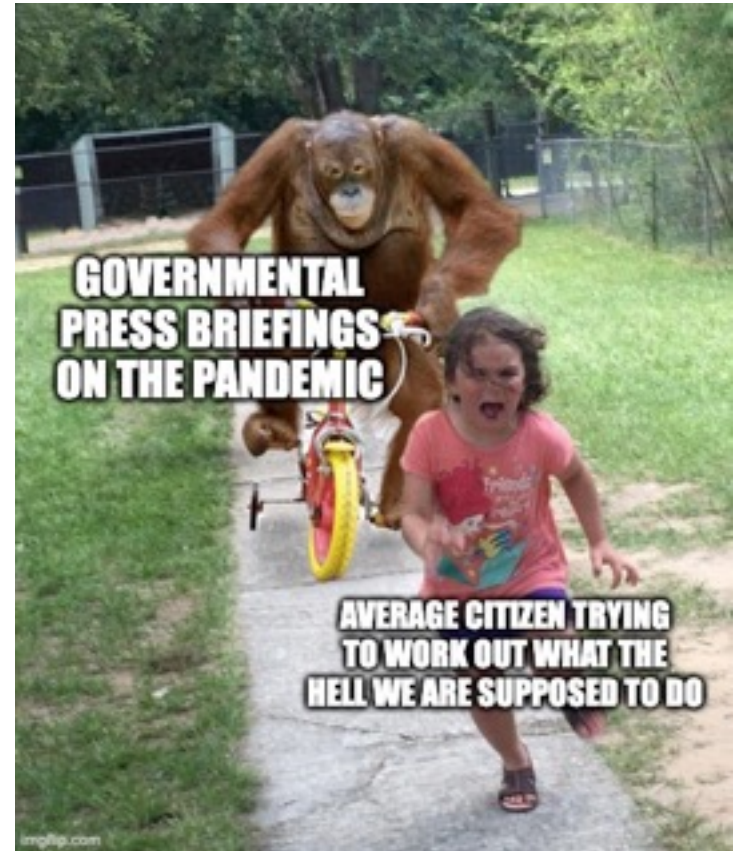
The premise:

**This is partly explained  
by the proliferation of social media  
and a consequent, exponential ease  
in sharing subjective, partial, unreliable,  
unproven or deliberately false content.**



The premise:

**While health researchers and authorities communicate via facts, statistics and reasoning, often in hermetic language and visuals, large segments of the population are currently communicating via images, humour, rumours, and individual testimonies.**



**“Institutional communicators / public health entities do not understand that the way people communicate has changed [...]: you have to begin to understand the power of storytelling.”**

Renée DiResta

In Conspirativity Podcast 154: The Truth Wars, 18 May 2023

**“The Reasoning Mind Recruits the Instinctive Mind.”**

Vinod Goel

In Reason and Less: Pursuing Food, Sex, and Politics

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022

The hypothesis:

**Current online trends of disinformation and mistrust in health policies may be partly overcome through an exploratory employment of memes and reels.**

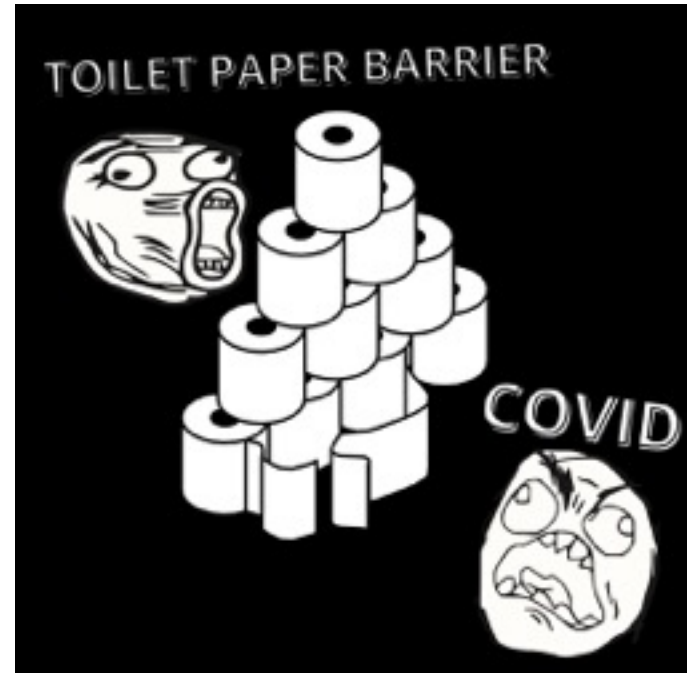
**Communication Design and Media Arts may assist in this process by capacitating students and professionals in meme aesthetics and semantics.**



The hypothesis:

**We posit that the classroom may be an apt context for an exploratory re-purposing of memes and reels.**

**As part of the native lexica of younger generations, memes and reels may act as pathways to stimulating actual knowledge-seeking by citizens.**



The Core Aim:

**To create an ambivalence  
that dilutes pre-emptive expectations  
of formality and univocal authority,  
thus facilitating cognitive  
and behavioural engagement.**

Room A: 6 out of the 1000 people **will** die (it may be you).

Room B: 1 person out of the 1000 people **may** die (it may be you).





Methodology:

**A set of meme-related assignments under implementation in various higher education Design and Media Arts courses in Portugal.**



Conceptual framework:

- tactical media
- figures of speech
- storytelling
- edutainment
- activism
- remix cultures
- subvertising
- culture jamming
- hacktivism

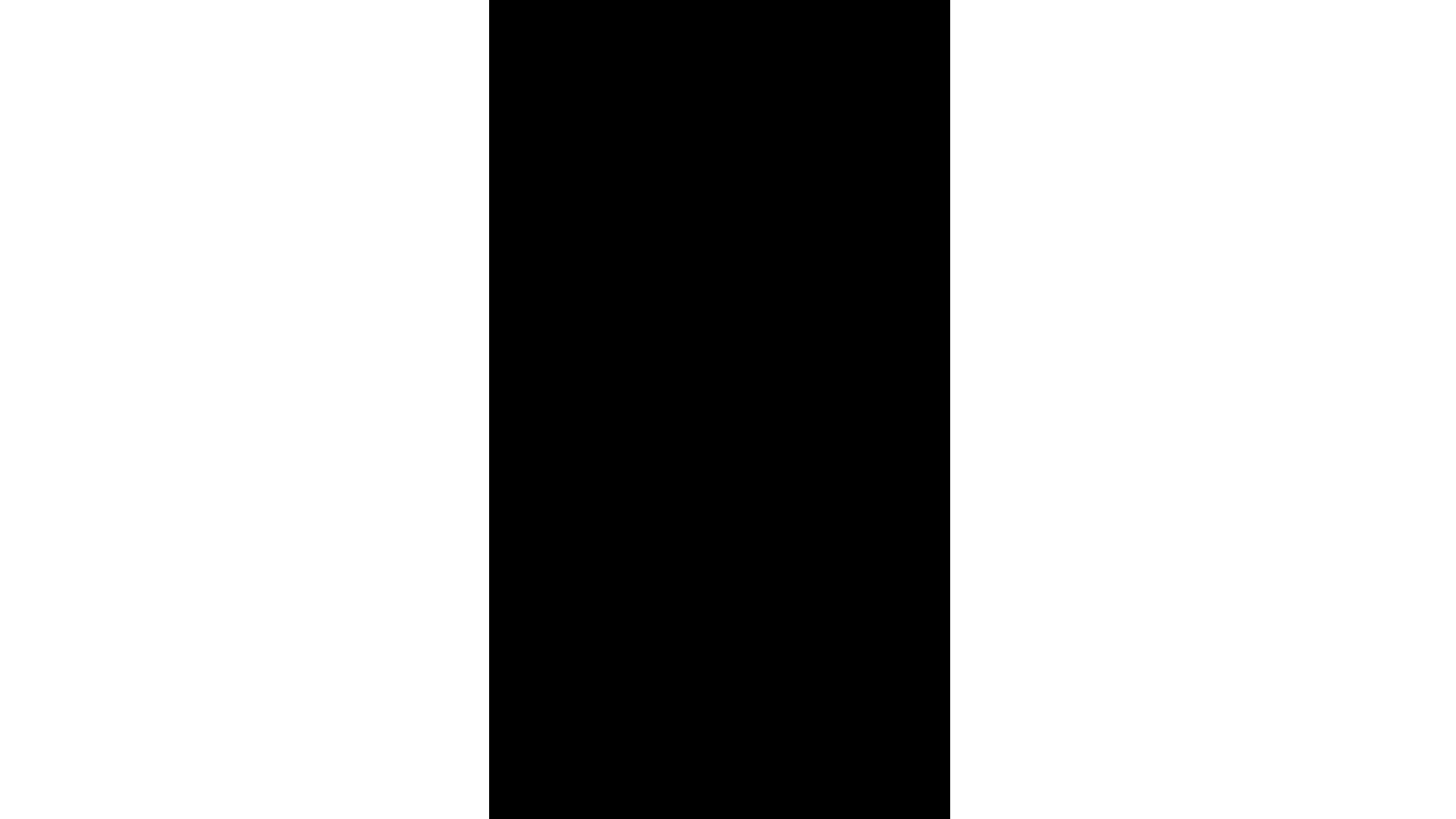


Components:

- **translation of scientific jargon**
  - **accessible infographics**  
**addressing complex data**
  - **unexpected perspectives**
  - **before/after dynamics**
  - **humour and non-threatening irony**
  - **personal testimonies**
- +

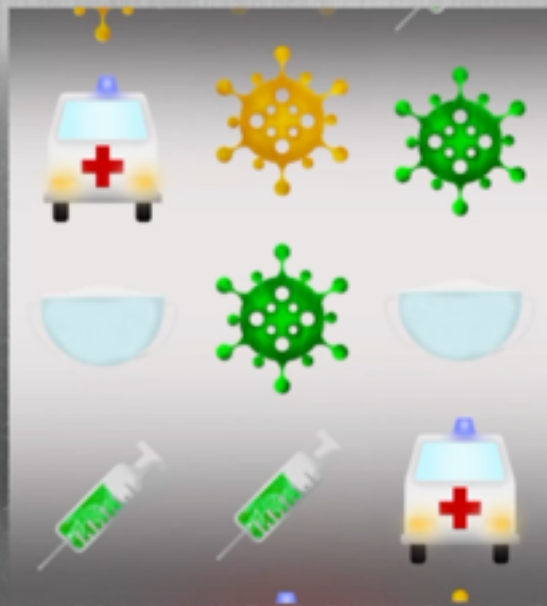
These are being informed by ongoing interviews with health skeptics and health authorities/researchers.





POV: ITS BEEN 3 YEARS  
SINCE WE ARE RUNNING  
FROM COVID

# COVID MEGAWAYS



BET: 1€

BALANCE: 28€



## Preliminary assessment:

- **First workshops were open-ended and intuitive; humour was the most popular approach**
- **workshops focusing on infographics as translation of complex data and knowledge required a more structured, pedagogical approach**
- **students are generally not keen on remembering COVID; focus should be on health as a whole**
- **responses have ranged from refusal to participate, to a real commitment to testing a pedagogy of health**
- **students have learned to evaluate and discern credible sources of scientific information, identify red flags and manipulation techniques commonly used in disinformation, and recognize the value of evidence-based reasoning. They can therefore act as pedagogues, while in the learning process themselves.**



Further validation:

**To be performed with key samples  
of interested parties:**

- health skeptics
- youth demographics
- health researchers
- policy makers

In

**Conferences**

**Interviews**

**Exhibitions**





Outcomes:

**Full integration of emerging health communication strategies in Design and Media Arts curricula**

**Policy recommendations to researchers and public health authorities:**

- a set of core principles in communicating health information and policies beyond facts and statistics
- the presence of Design and Artivism as consultants in the communication process

DID YOU KNOW THAT  
BY SELF-ISOLATING  
YOU'RE MAKING SCIENCE?



# Thank you

Heitor Alvelos  
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Nuno Duarte Martins

[unexpectedmedia.org](http://unexpectedmedia.org)

[mediaperplexity@gmail.com](mailto:mediaperplexity@gmail.com)

