

## Chapter 5

# The Role of Language in Social Media During the COVID–19 Pandemic

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented challenges to societies worldwide, compelling individuals and institutions to adapt rapidly to a new reality dominated by digital communication. Social media platforms emerged as essential channels for information dissemination, community building, and emotional expression during this global crisis. Language played a pivotal role in shaping these interactions, influencing the spread of information, the formation of online communities, and the impact of public health campaigns. This chapter explores the multifaceted role of language in social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, it highlights the significance of language as a medium for facilitating real-time updates and news dissemination. Governments, health organizations, and news outlets utilized language to convey critical information, ranging from infection rates and safety measures to vaccination updates, reaching a diverse and vast audience worldwide. This chapter will examine how language served as a crucial tool in combating misinformation.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter examines the emergence of new COVID-19-related vocabulary and language evolution during the pandemic. Neologisms and linguistic trends on social media reflected the social and cultural impact of the crisis, shaping online discourse and communication patterns. The chapter reflects on various roles played by language during the 2019 Covid pandemic in disseminating information to the community.

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## **1.1 Facilitating Information Sharing and Dissemination**

The role of language in social media during the COVID-19 pandemic was instrumental in facilitating information sharing and dissemination. Social media platforms served as crucial channels for the rapid spread of information related to the pandemic. According to Chinelli et al (2020), to distribute information fast and reach a large audience, platforms were also utilized by political groups, national and state level health organizations, and politicians. This has led to the following subheadings on how language played a significant role in this process.

### **i. Real-Time Updates and News Dissemination**

Language was the primary means of conveying real-time updates, news, and developments related to COVID-19. Government agencies, health organizations, and news outlets utilized language to share critical information about infection rates, safety measures, travel restrictions, and vaccination updates. Through posts, tweets, and articles, this information reached a wide audience quickly. Infographics, images, and videos shared on social media platforms often contained vital information about COVID-19. Language, in the form of captions and text overlays, accompanied these visuals, enhancing their impact and ensuring that the intended messages were effectively communicated.

### **ii. Hashtags and Keywords**

According to Cardoso et al. (2019:58), a given subject may be addressed by different hashtags, the topics of discussion in the platform are automatically obtained by community detection in the semantic network and we consider that each community constitutes a topic of discussion in the platform. This means that the idea of using hashtags for Twitter and keywords allows for a global comparison of the dynamics of the discussion in both media. Language played a key role in organizing and categorizing COVID-19 content using hashtags and keywords. Trending hashtags such as #COVID19, #coronavirus, and #pandemic helped aggregate information and discussions related to the virus, making it easier for users to find relevant content. Social media provided a platform for information to be shared in multiple languages, catering to diverse audiences around the world. Government agencies, healthcare organizations, and influencers used various languages to reach non-English-speaking communities and promote inclusivity. Language was crucial in the efforts to combat misinformation and fake news. Social media users, fact-checking organizations, and health experts used language to identify, analyse, and debunk false information, ensuring that accurate and reliable information prevailed.

### **iii. Amplification of Public Health Campaigns**

It was found that during Covid-19 pandemic, people engaged with an imperfect assortment of local news media, epidemiological specialists, political pundits, public health officials, and financially motivated opportunists online, they collectively amplify a small set of disproportionately influential COVID-19 information sources, or crowdsourced elites. This led to the governments and health authorities to employ language strategically to promote public health campaigns and COVID-19 safety measures. By crafting clear and compelling messages, these campaigns gained traction on social media, encouraging people to adopt preventive measures and follow health guidelines. Language facilitated interactive communication

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