

Language and Covid-19 Discourse: An Analysis of Pandemic-Related Language Discourse Used on Social Media

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Abstract

Covid-19 had a formidable impact on the entire world and changed the whole discourse of life. During the pandemic, social media sites, including Twitter, now played a vital role in shaping and moulding public dialogue and sentiments. This research examines the linguistic features, discursive methods, and strategies used in COVID-19-related tweets. After analyzing the tweets collected during the initial stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, the current study attempts to explain how language is used to generate meanings, transfer messages and influence public opinions and sentiments about COVID-19. The study also tries to identify various linguistic patterns, including lexical innovations, metaphors, emotive expressions, and hashtags. The current research paper also identifies diverse discursive strategies applied by multiple user groups, including health departments, journalists and individual users. The findings of the research emphasize the manifold as well as the diverse aspects of online communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. They will contribute to our understanding of how language shapes our perception and response to global events.

Key Words

Coronavirus, Twitter, Quarantine, Language Analysis, Pandemic, Public Sentiments

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented exchange of information and communication, especially on social media platforms. The rise of online games has led to many words used on social media, especially Twitter, becoming education-focused. This study demonstrates the disparity between words used in Twitter discussions, debates, and narratives about the pandemic, focusing on the platform's important role in facilitating immediate public engagement and the dissemination of information (Ladyanna, 2021).

In December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) received several signs of an unexplained cluster of pneumonia in Wuhan, China (Shoaei & Meisam, 2020). Many international health officials have requested more information from WHO. In January 2020, the new virus was revealed to cause pneumonia, and there was evidence

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of human exposure. In January 2020, the first case of "coronavirus" (the face-like name of the virus) was confirmed outside of China in the United States and Europe. This clearly warned of the possibility of a global contagion pandemic virus (Cartier & Alexander, [2022](#)). The first case was reported in December 2019 in China. In May 2020, COVID-19 had infected 9,457,902 people worldwide and caused an estimated 482,247 deaths (Hanschmidt & Anette, [2023](#)). The pandemic has seriously strained healthcare systems because of the high rates of infection and transmission, the absence of viable treatment options, and the clinical severity of COVID-19. Several nations used a variety of non-pharmaceutical measures, like lockdowns or social distancing rules, to restrict the public from social contact to meet the pandemic challenges and the spread of the disease rapidly (Saban & Shachar, [2020](#)). For a brief period from mid to late March 2020, the entire world and most European nations enforced severe restrictions that essentially outlawed social interactions, made individuals stay at home, and resulted in the shutdown of public spaces and educational institutions across the country. There is still much to learn about the psychological and emotional effects of such stringent social interaction limits.

In reaction to the epidemic, negative emotions are linked to heightened psychological distress, bad habits, and skewed perceptions of danger. Thus, it is critical to comprehend the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on society to customize public health messaging and the provision of services to meet the requirements of individuals. One of the main emotional reactions to the high danger of infection and the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic's outcomes has been identified as fear. Studies indicate that those impacted by COVID-19 have higher rates of stress, anxiety, and depression. Franz and Anette [2023](#), supported their position in one of their articles with data from a survey conducted in 1919 during the pandemic in Germany. In one of their article, Franz and Anette have given their viewpoint by providing the data gathered from the survey during the Pandemic-19 in Germany; according to this German survey, between 60% and 74% of respondents said they were afraid and worried about COVID-19 at the time social media restrictions were announced (Hanschmidt & Anette, [2023](#)).

Language is like a living organism; it develops and changes with the society that uses it. As fashion trends fade and new styles emerge, language is not static. Instead, they shift, change, and grow as people interact with them. The meaning of words and phrases is not fixed; they vary depending on how they are used in different contexts (Luke, [2017](#)). This constant change makes language dynamic and alive, always in motion and changing subtly or meaningfully at various places and times. This simplicity makes life a language, allowing it to connect and stay in touch with the ever-changing world.

Many factors influence language development, but social developments, including education, culture, socialization, and technological growth, are the most common. (Harya, [2016](#)). For instance, in the present time, the most common word, "Selfie," was derived after the innovation and adoption of the Android mobile phone in which people used the option of taking a picture of themselves. So, people have accepted and adopted this word after technological innovations. This word, the "Selfie," was accepted and spread rapidly in 2013 (Youngsoo et al., [2017](#)). The impact of technology on the evolution of language is shown in the multitude of additional terms created to express previously unimaginable ideas.

Similarly, language shift is in response to current societal developments. COVID-19 has been spreading worldwide since 2019. The illness swiftly spread over the world, starting an epidemic in one nation after another. The World Health Organization (WHO) said on January 30, 2020, that the pandemic has become a global public health emergency. The state government then immediately asked people to follow COVID-19 rules. In addition, the disease disrupted activities worldwide. So far, the epidemic is not entirely over yet, and it has disappointed people. Everyone had to stay home to be safe, work and study through screens. No more wandering around malls or theme parks – they're all closed. The mask had become mandatory when going out. This whole situation gave

birth to a wave of new words in English. All these changes made people get creative and come up with terms like "covid," "Corona," and "quarantine." It's wild how this pandemic changed what we do and talk about it (Nabila & Abdulrahman, [2021](#)).

During the global pandemic, social media, especially platforms like Twitter, became a global marketplace, a digital space where people shared details about various aspects of COVID-19. It has become a great place for news, health information, personal information, and diverse opinions. As a document of direct human impact, Twitter has become a virtual city where people, from frontline heroes to scientists, share their struggles and everyday thoughts. This digital market has become a tool that collects fears, emotions, disappointments and hopes within its time boundaries and creates a fabric of exchange. Despite concerns about spreading misinformation, the platform has played an important role in quickly disseminating important messages, strengthening international solidarity and creating a sense of community across borders. In this way, Twitter and similar platforms have become a source of information and a lifeline that intersects with people's networks in times of uncertainty and isolation (Hyeju et al., [2020](#)).

Literature Review

The spread of COVID-19 in 2020 and beyond has transformed communication and information worldwide, mainly through social media such as Twitter. Analyzing the language used in discussions about communication on these platforms can provide insight into public perceptions, the spread of misinformation, and the evolution of communication in the event of serious incidents.

Social media platforms help citizens discuss everyday issues and topics and open up new horizons of communication and multilingualism. Thurlow ([2006](#)) included 101 media accounts and reports about language use in text and instant chat. The label "metadiscourse" (i.e., discourse about discourse) refers to the thoughts and ideas encompassed and understood by specific communication processes. Ultimately, this demonstration was inspired by the importance of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMD) and a fascinating explanation of this application. This famous but powerful (mis)representation often exaggerates the differences between CMDs and native speakers, misunderstands the "evolutionary" process of language change, and obscures CMD culture (Thurlow, [2006](#)).

(Wicke et al., [2021](#)) provided relevant information on the above topic. Researchers analyzed early COVID-19 tweets (March to July 2020) and found that the conversation changed as the outbreak progressed. Later, the goal was changed from "prevention" to "curative masks" in March, showing the research progress. The initial positive sentiment at the time of the closures (possibly due to the merger) turned negative with the pressure to reopen. At the same time, tweets have expressed personal thoughts and feelings. This study also explores the "war" metaphors used to describe COVID-19, showing how they evolved into global conflicts and illustrating beautiful examples of nature. This study shows how Twitter users respond to global changes, providing insights into public opinion, priorities, and circumstances. This is an unprecedented challenge (Wicke et al., [2021](#)).

Researchers (Osakwe & Cortes, [2021](#)) summarized and analyzed the sentiment of comments about COVID-19 on Facebook and Twitter. They analyzed product sentiment and content to understand public sentiment during the pandemic. Articles highlight the importance of violence in society and allow people to share their fears, concerns and thoughts about violence (Osakwe & Cortes, [2021](#)).

In one of their articles, (Nabila & Abdulrahman, [2021](#)) explained the changes and the demands of the language changes. The author explained that language changes are also caused by changes in the needs of the

people who speak the language. New technologies, new information, and new products require effective and clear communication of new concepts. Therefore, the language never changes and always follows the user's needs (Nabila & Abdulrahman, [2021](#)).

Thakur ([2023](#)) contributed to the research by simultaneously studying public discourse on two viruses on Twitter. An analysis of 61,862 tweets found that almost half expressed negative sentiments, indicating public concern. Additionally, the study reveals commonly used labels and terms, illuminating essential issues such as finding information, comparing two disorders, and reporting anxiety. This article combines theoretical and literary analysis to critically understand public understand COVID-19 and MPox on Twitter (Thakur, [2023](#)).

Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach to investigate the global epidemic on Twitter. Data collection involved sampling COVID-19 tweets, hashtags, and conversations from the pandemic's beginning to ensure geographic and demographic diversity. Special tools are used in social media analytics to collect big data. Content analysis and thematic coding techniques were used to analyze the collected material. The focus was identifying recurring themes, discourses, and perspectives and developing real-time conversation. Ethical considerations regarding honesty, confidentiality and inclusive language practices were emphasized throughout the study. The limited space of large volumes of Twitter data and the qualitative nature of social media lead this study to focus on the symbolic pattern of different contents over time to capture many aspects of language use concerning transmission.

New English Word Development During COVID-19

Neologisms are new words in the English language. The morphological process by which new words are created in a language is known as neologism. Its goal is to expand the language by adding new vocabulary or knowledge. Neologisms aid in the description of novelties, inventions, and the emergence of classic concepts in fresh cultural contexts. The texts' newly added words selected for this research indicate social and cultural aspects (Qaisar, [2015](#)).

Nabila and Abdulrahman, [2021](#) agreed that new words or coins are produced due to the need to express new things. Whether the changing world brings new demands on speech (as amidst the COVID-19 outbreak) or is simply the result of new ideas, vocabulary changes, growth through the addition of new words or injecting new content into existing vocabulary, this energy ensures that our words harmonize with the world around us (Nabila & Abdulrahman, [2021](#)).

Numerous new COVID-19-related English terms and idioms exist in newspapers, news sources, and social media platforms. This new language increases effectiveness, prevents confusion, and projects a positive image. They reflect the evolving nature of language and consider its changing nature (Maarten, [2011](#)).

The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to a whole new vocabulary to describe the unprecedented circumstances it has created. Here are some examples of new words and their meanings:

Global Pandemic: The World Health Organization reports that COVID-19 has spread worldwide.

Social Distancing: Maintain physical distance to prevent the spread of disease.

COVID-19: The acronym for coronavirus 2019 is COVID-19. It is the name given to the illness that is presently sweeping the globe and is brought on by the recently identified coronavirus.

Covidiot: The Covidiot is an amalgam of Idiot and COVID-19. Is it used to describe those disregarding coronavirus-related health and safety advice or warnings? It can also be used to condemn individuals who disobey laws or rules of behavior, like not donning masks in public or avoiding proximity to other people.

Covident: Covident is a mix of Coronavirus and Obedient. This is the exact opposite of COVID-19. It refers to a person following the government's coronavirus safety measures and sticking to the rules and regulations outlined in its instructions.

Self-Quarantine: As a public health measure, self-quarantine involves keeping the general public safe by avoiding contact with those who are ill or infected with an infectious disease. Remaining indoors and avoiding contact with people is one approach to slowing the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Quaranteam: Quaranteam is a blend of isolation and team. During the coronavirus quarantine, it is essential to determine who you surround yourself with. Friends establish groups to comply with coronavirus-related health rules and restrictions. They routinely engage in lawful activities, such as video calls.

Smart Lockdown: Smart lockdown eliminates laser restrictions across the city. Consider building technological fences around virus hotspots to provide immediate information and targeted measures, such as tighter restrictions or business closures. This flexibility allows low-risk areas to breathe easier, protecting lives and livelihoods while containing the spread. The move balances challenges such as privacy concerns, but if successful, smart facial recording could be the key to fighting the pain of bugs.

WFH (Work from Home)

WFH (work from home) has become an epidemic. No more daily business trips, the office has become a bedroom, I change into pajamas, and I talk on the phone all day. This new revolution has revolutionized the work-life balance of millions of people, allowing them to do so from the comfort of their couch without neglecting the professional and personal (Nabila & Abdulrahman, [2021](#)).

Social Media Conversations: COVID-19 Language Dynamics

Spreading information about COVID-19 on social media is a challenging and essential part of the pandemic. Social media platforms have become a significant source of information and a breeding ground for misinformation. Language plays a vital role in discussions around illness. Social media was critical in disseminating essential information from medical institutions and government agencies in the early epidemic. Users share the latest news, safety tips and personal experiences to foster a sense of global solidarity in times of crisis. However, the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories is a big problem. It has been often observed that misinformation or false news spreads rapidly on social media and has a feeble impact on public health as well as the primary source of anxiety and fear in society.

The portrayal of COVID-19 on social media is intertwined with its emotional and psychological consequences. The linguistic landscape of online discourse reflects the myriad emotions brought on by the pandemic: stress, fear and anxiety reverberate through digital corridors. Amid the turmoil caused by the epidemic, the repetition of voices reflects feelings of anxiety, apprehension and dissatisfaction on social platforms. (Kacar, [2021](#)). On the other hand, this also led to the formation of online services and prepared the public to meet the pandemic challenges.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, social media has wielded considerable influence in shaping public sentiment and political landscapes. The dynamic nature of online dialogue profoundly molds individuals'

perceptions of governmental responses to the crisis. Social media is moving beyond its role as a mere communication platform to become a vibrant arena for political discourse.

Analyzing COVID-19 Discussion on Social Media

The main objective of this research paper is to fully understand the language used during discussions on social media about the COVID-19 pandemic. This in-depth analysis includes some of the keywords, phrases, terminology, expression and various linguistic elements used while discussing and is the central part of this discussion.

As people meet their needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, many new words and expressions have emerged to describe, discuss and respond to various aspects of the disease. These new words play an essential role in improving our daily conversations. For example, "prevention" is often discussed as the main element in combating this epidemic. Terms such as "ventilator," "contact," and "quarantine" are essential when talking about treatment, disease prevention, and containment measures. As vaccine use increases, vaccine effectiveness improves, and social dissatisfaction is overcome, "vaccine effectiveness" and "vaccine rejection" cease to exist, becoming the biggest concern. The increase in "home education" due to school closures reveals the need for alternative education. "Long COVID" describes the unpredictable, often disabling symptoms experienced by some survivors, resulting in long-term health effects of the disease. Telemedicine is developing rapidly and enables remote medical consultation and treatment. These words and phrases about COVID-19 continue to be essential to our conversation, reflecting the changing scientific, medical, and social response to the pandemic worldwide and helping us navigate this unprecedented global health crisis. Other related topics, such as homework, antibiotics, online learning, isolation, and social distancing, are also rapidly being used (Khusnul et al., [2021](#)).

From a linguistic perspective, seeing how new concepts emerge in everyday language during the COVID-19 pandemic is interesting. It's interesting because the term "health" is used by doctors, but now the word has become part of the general vocabulary. These language changes reflect changes in our understanding and use and, to some extent, in our attitudes as users toward using certain words by healthcare professionals. The consequences of language change and its relationship to environmental issues, such as health problems, are brought under Eco-linguistics' control.

Conclusion

Social media has emerged as a global platform where individuals, organizations, and expert express their opinions and share their thoughts and experiences. Social media has become the easiest and cheapest way to express your opinion in this modern era. After the COVID-19 pandemic, social media, especially "Twitter" has emerged as the platform where people express their sentiments about this global pandemic. However, in the same way, it also appeared as a forum, serving as a link to spread false and negative news. Different misinformation was rapidly spread on social media, which made the user uncomfortable and uneasy.

Social media forums, especially Twitter, are one place where it serves as an easy way to express and exchange ideas. At the same time, it introduced new words to our language conversation during the Covid-19 pandemic. New words and phrases like COVID-19, social distancing, COVID-19, quarantine, smart lockdown, sanitization, and work from home have been used to describe how people reacted towards this crisis. The changing nature is also reflected in our cognitive abilities to manage problem-solving ambiguity. In the same way, the persistent spreading of negative and false news by social media significantly the Twitter aggravates stress, depression and anxiety. This dual impact demonstrates the significance of the overlap between public health and mental health.

Twitter's robust digital presence exemplifies the rich diversity of online interactions. Its meaning goes beyond essential communication; it acts as a stimulant of cohesion and a breeding ground for discord. Within its virtual confines, essential knowledge flies away, floating across the digital landscape, but alongside it thrives a tangled web of lies that challenges the refuge of truth. Its impact on public perception and political discourse in times of turbulence highlights the importance of accountability, understanding and the never-ending quest for authenticity in communications.

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