مجلة

كلية التراث الجامعة

مجلة علمية محكمة

متعددة التخصصات نصف سنوية

العدد الثالث والثلاثون

عدد خاص بوقائع المؤتمر العلمي السنوي الرابع عشر (الدولي الثالث)

27 آذار 2022

ISSN 2074-5621

Infodemic During Covid-19 : A MULTIOMDAL ANALYSIS

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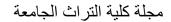English Dept. College of Education for Humanities/ Tikrit University

Abstract

The term infodemic refers to a blend of "information" and "epidemic" pointing out typically to a rapid spread of both accurate and inaccurate information concerning something, such as a disease. It happens when there is a mixture of facts, rumors, and fears to the degree that it becomes difficult to detect an essential information about an issue.

The current study sheds the light on the phenomena of infodemic especially with the pandemic of Covid-19. How this phenomena is reflected in different semiotic works, such as drawings, cartoons, chart and different images. Adopting Kress and Van Leeuwen's book `Reading Images´ (2006) as a model for analysis, the study would practice a multimodal analysis for (four) different images.

It is hypothesized that deliberate and undeliberate rumors, news and even facts affect the societies differently during the pandemic. These would result in highlighting people perception and reaction differently towards the matter.

The data are (four) different images selected randomly from sites associated with UNESCO and WHO. The Study comes up with some conclusions, the hypotheses above are achieved with some other conclusions.

الخلاصة

تسلط الدراسة الحالية الضوء على ظاهرة المعلوبائية. وهي خليط من الحقائق والشائعات والمعلومات المختلفة في دقتها والتي ترافق ظهور الجائحة. إن هذه الدراسة مكرسة لظاهرة المعلوبائية التي رافقت ظهور جائحة كوفيد 19.

وبالاعتماد على كتاب كانتر كريس وفان ليوين (2006) الموسوم بـ (قراءة الصور) كنموذج للتحليل، تختار الدراسة (أربع) صورة مختلفة تتناول هذه الظاهرة كموضوع أساسي، لتحللها تحليلا متعدد النماذج.

تفترض الدراسة أن الشائعات المقصودة وغير المقصودة والأخبار والحقائق تؤثر بشكل مختلف على المجتمعات خلال الجائحة، متسببة بإبراز طريقة تلقي الأفراد لهذا الأمر وردة فعلهم تجاهه.

إن عينات الدراسة هي (أربع) صور مختلفة تم اختيارها من مواقع مرتبطة بمنظمة الأمم المتحدة للتربية والعلم والثقافة ومنظمة الصحة العالمية, وقد توصلت الدراسة إلى تحقيق الفرضية الرئيسية وغيرها من النتائج.

1. Introduction

The second decade of the 21st century has ended with a sever pandemic that affected the world at all. The pandemic is Covid-19 which has spread to reach almost every country, affecting human life from many different sides.

This pandemic has introduced new words and different terminologies. The term Covid-19 is a contracted form which refers to "the name of the illness caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. COVID-19 stands for "coronavirus disease 2019. "[1]

In addition to human health, the pandemic of Covid-19 affected politics, trade, transport, economy, and even cyber security all over the world. People differed in reaction against the pandemic, i.e., in the face of coronavirus, some people dealt with the crises as a serious threat, collecting household goods. Others, to the opposite, ignored the warnings and the seriousness of the pandemic altogether.

From the chaos of all the changings faced; the pandemic, the new terminologies and the contradicted stances upon the pandemic, the term of infodemic has been born.

Coronavirus & COVID-19: Glossary of Terms. UVA Health. Retrieved 25th,feb. 2021.[1]

Infodemic refers to the overabundance of information, from both online and offline resources. It may include deliberate attempts to pass wrong information for certain purposes, or "a situation in which a lot of false information is being spread in a way that is harmful"[2].

The current study randomly selects some images concerning the crises of Covid-19 and the infodemic associated with it. These images are to be analyzed according to the visual grammars of Kress and Van Leeuwen in their book 'Reading Images' in (2006). They indicate that multimodal analysis can be achieved by analysing the visual elements. These elements could be summarized as: participants, gaze, distance, angle, modality, and composition.

2. The Model Adopted

The current study adopts Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) as a model for visual analysis.

Kress and van Leeuwen concentrate on the importance of visual elements in image analysis. People, places, and things (including abstract things) all are involved in the visual analysis. (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006:3)

According to the model, there is an interaction between people, places, and the things depicted in the images in visual communication. The interaction occurs also between both the producer and the viewer of the image. Image analysis, generally speaking, seeks six elements: Participants, Gaze, Distance, Angle, Modality and Composition.

3. Covid-19

COVID-19 "is a new disease, caused by a novel (or new) coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans." [3] On February 11, 2020 the World Health Organization announced an official name for the disease that is causing the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak, first identified in Wuhan China. The new name of this disease is coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19. In COVID-19, "CO" stands for corona, "VI" for virus, and "D" for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as "2019 novel coronavirus" or "2019-nCoV." Ibid

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Concerning the case in which the term formerly appears, "COVID" is dominant in all of the U.S., Canada and Australia, while the form "Covid" is more common in the U.K., Ireland, New Zealand and even South Africa. And because the Oxford English Dictionary is being edited and published in Britain, British forms, then, take superiority: in the online Oxford dictionary, it appears under the headword Covid-19.[4]

Coronavirus could said to be the first pandemic in which technology and all modes of social media are being used on a an enormous scale to help keeping people safe, informed, and connected.

The technology we rely on, to maintain connecting and informed is enabling and strengthening an infodemic that continues to challenge the global response and endangers measures to control the pandemic.

4. **Infodemic**

The term infodemic is defined in the Oxford dictionary as " An excessive amount of information about a problem that is typically unreliable, spreads rapidly, and makes a solution more difficult to achieve."[5] It comes from the blending of the two words 'information' and 'pandemic'.

The phenomenon of infodemic may include deliberate attempts to spread wrong information to weaken the public health response and advance different agendas o both groups or individuals.

Infodemic is sorted mainly into two distinct fields; Mis- and disinformation. This means that infodemic deals with unreliable information whether being deliberate or not. Both Mis- and disinformation can be physically and mentally harmful to people's health. reducing their effectiveness, thus, could assist countries' ability to stop the pandemic.

Disinformation, particularly, polarizes public debate on some topics related to COVID-19; it amplifies speech of hate; heightens the risk of violence, conflict and human rights violations;

https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/88575495?redirectedFrom=covid+19#eid [4]
https://www.lexico.com/definition/infodemic [5]

and threatens long-terms prospects for the advancing democracy, human rights and even social cohesion.

the digital sphere, work to prevent harmful cyber activities undermining the health response and support the provision of science-based data to the public.

The UN system and civil society organizations are using their collective expertise and knowledge to respond to the infodemic. At the same time, as the pandemic continues to create uncertainty and anxiety, there is an urgent need for stronger action to manage the infodemic, and for a coordinated approach among states, multi-lateral organizations, civil society and all other actors who have a clear role and responsibility in combatting mis- and disinformation[6].

As the pandemic continues to produce uncertainty and anxiety, we are confronted with an urgent need for much stronger action to manage the chaos of infodemic. This should be achieved by the cooperation among states, multi-lateral organizations, civil society and all those actors who have a strong role and responsibility to combat both mis- and disinformation. Ibid

5. **Data Analysis**

Data, in this section, are images from the UNESCO and WHO formal sites. All of these images tackle the phenomenon of Infodemic as an essential aim. These images are to be analyzed according to the Kress and Van Leeuwen's model (2006).

Sample: (1)

a. **Description**

The image depicts the formal shape of a single corona virus as a planet in the space with some balloonic expressions.

b. **Visual Analysis**

RP (Represented Participants and henceforth RP) in this image is three; a single corona virus (Covid-19), the balloons with the speech inside them and the space.

From a representational dimension, the image has a victor created from the illuminating core of the Virus which stretches to the V (Viewer and henceforth V). in this non-transactional relation the virus is the reacter when it is depicted as looking directly to the V.

Concerning the way the ideas are represented in the image where participants can be analyzed, the process of analysis is analytical and symbolic processes. And this is according to the conceptual processes.

In the analytical processes which depicts visual elements in part-whole relation the corona virus in the shape of a planet is the possessive attribute which compose the part while the whole, the carrier is the whole space. Corona virus is more salient than other elements in size, colour and position, the matter that gives it more symbolic values.

The interactive analysis of the image shows a far social distance where the whole figure of the main RP is clear in addition to the space around it. This distance results in a formal and impersonal relation between the RP and V.

The angle of depiction is seen from a horizontal point of view. The angle could said to be frontal, this imposes an involvement between both the producer (henceforth P) and the V.

Colour saturation within modality is medium in value, it is shown in many shades of the dark blue colour which dominates the scene. The image then is highly modulated. Depth of the image is well depicted, the shape of the virus and the space around it are well depicted. Illumination and brightness are clear with a higher degree.

In the compositional dimension where the representational and interactive dimensions integrate into a meaningful whole, we can see that that the image is divided vertically with separating line that secludes the virus from all the captions. The seclusion gives the virus a frame that makes it salient in position and eventually valuable in information.

C. Multimodal Analysis

The image well depicts corona virus as a source of gloominess and doubtfulness; it is compared to a planet in the space. The idea of space culturally associates with harm, evilness and ambiguous thoughts. The dark blue colour help assists this ide, by increasing gloominess.

The colours of background with the stars in the sky asserting the time to be night, is a hint to the heaviness of life during the pandemic of Covid-19 where night and darkness stand for problems, burdens and uncertainty. The nucleus of the corona virus is given a distinct colour in order to shed the light upon its being the source of these uncertainties.

The balloons containing the rumors about Covid-19 whatever they are, are depicted in a white colour contrasting the background to highlight the purpose of the image that is the danger of the misinformation as well as disinformation.

The idea of space and planet produces a good environment for different sources of wrong information whether being deliberate or not.
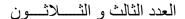
Sample: (2)

a. **Description**

The image shows two different hands raising two loudspeakers differing in size.

b. **Visual Analysis**

The Ps in the image are two hands, two loudspeakers, and two balloons, all these Ps meet the narrative processes of the representational dimension. There two contradicted vectors drown from each loudspeaker, directed outward. The loudspeakers themselves act the role of the actor. The conceptual processes enfold, on the other hand show the hands with the loudspeakers as being symbolic. These things are the parts or the Symbolic Attributes while the whole scene is the Carrier.

In this image, the distance between the interactive Ps is clear to be intimate. The two hands reflect part of the body and such a scene could be done unless there is a close personal distance between the V and what he is seeing, i.e. V. The angle of depiction is frontal horizontal showing a sense of involvement between the interactive Ps.

The modality of the image is to some extent low. Colour saturation is about to be on minimum scales; only three distinct colours are used. Colour modulation and differentiation are minimum to the same reason. Brightness is high with the lack of representation, illumination and depth.

The information value in the current image is the hand to the left which calls for 'facts'. It holds the greater loudspeaker, even the balloon in which the word fact is written is greater in size. The word 'facts' then is the most salient element in the image due to its larger size and higher position. It is framed with the limitations of the balloon.

c. **Multimodal Analysis**

The image depicts the crises of infodemic and how there are certain voices uttering mis- and disinformation. These are uttered from individuals or agencies that are about to be equal to the voices that fight these fakes.

The P of the image tries to highlight certain ideas in this image. The 'fake news' whether being misinformation or disinformation all are bad, there balloon is depicted with a black colour the thing that refers to evilness. The 'facts' in contrast, is something good, the word is depicted in a completely opposite colour, i.e., the white. The size of the contrastive elements plays another important role in highlighting this fact. The hand raising the loudspeaker that calls for 'facts' all are in larger size. This shows the predominance of facts upon fake news. The position in picture is another worthy point where the 'facts' and its elements are given a the higher-left position which is the area of the 'given' or already known facts. They are the base of life while their opponent, 'fake news' is in the place of the new or something temporal.

Sample: (3)

a. Description

The image depicts a hand raising a smart phone with some individuals all handed putting on face masks and smart phones in their hands.

b. Visual Analysis

The Ps in the image are a smart phone and six persons, two of them are women. All the Ps are connected with a vector starting from the phone which is the Actor, reaching to every phone in the persons' hands, where they are the goals of this vector. The Ps are all analytical and highly symbolic.

Nearly all off the gazes in the image are of the offer type. Five of the persons are looking different directions other than to the V. only one woman directly faces the V creating a demand relation as if to ask the V to focus on what is happening.

The social distance in the image is different from other images, it could said to be public where the torsos of the six persons in addition to the phone are completely visible, creating a sense of relationship as that of strangers between both the RPs and V.

Angle is frontal horizontal; this imposes a kind of involvement between the producer and V. another aspect of interactive dimension is modality: colour saturation is somewhat low; the image is mainly depicted grey, pink, black, in addition to a very little amount of yellow.

The image is to the minimum scales in colour differentiation where a monochrome of every colour is used. Contextualization, besides is very high; the image background is detailed and clear. Representation of Ps is low; no clear details on the part of them.

The most salient element is the phone which is given a central position dragged to the foreground while other Ps are backgrounded.

c. Multimodal Analysis

The image is shedding the light upon the important role of social media in spreading mis- and disinformation. Their role is vital in the crises of infodemic and the pandemic of Covid-19 at all.

The central position of the smart phone in the image reinforces this fact, the text 'fake news' and 'send' clarifying the way fake news are spread. The phones in everyone's hand in the image is carrying tells the fact that fake news as well as facts are supposed to can reach any person. Even the difference in gender among the individuals shows again that everyone in the society is a goal for fake news whether being a male or female.

People react differently to fake news specially concerning the pandemic of Covid-19, this is clearly shown in the image by the insistence of the P to depict all the persons in the image wearing face masks. Face mask, in this situation is a symbol for humans aids against the pandemic of Covid-19.

Sample: (4)

a. Description

The image depicts a man with a tank over his back fighting viruses out of a smart phone.

b. Visual Analysis

The Ps are the man, the smart phone, and the corona viruses in addition to the bottle of ….. upon the man's back. A vector of relation is drown from the man's eyes' to the phone creating a reaction in which the man is the reacter whereas the phone is a phenomenon. Since both the reacter and phenomenon are present in the mage, the reaction in this case is transactional.

The gaze is an offer. The man is offered to the V as a part of scene with a heavy amount of information. The relation between the P the Vis formal and impersonal; the image is depicted from a far social distance where the whole figure and the space around it is visible.

The image is depicted from a vertical scene. The RP is seen at the eye level, the relationship between the RP and V then is one of equality.

The colour saturation in this image is normal with the absence of contextualization and depth. The phone is given a special importance by an enlarged size which exceeds the size of the man himself. It is secluded in the flush of the spray from the bottle.

The man, on the other hand, is placed in the right position which is the place of the 'new' elements. This may refer to the fact that 'fake news' are already found but the new information is that the one who would fight fake news is that who is putting on a face mask.

c. **Multimodal Analysis**

The image highlights the fact that fake news are as dangerous as Covid-19 itself, and that they both need to be fought. The exaggeration in the size of the phone refers to the role of social media in spreading fake news during the pandemic of Covid-19.

The man is depicted in cartoonic style with the absence of details accept that he is wearing in a formal uniform which is not the already dress of workers who are fighting germs. Another important point is that that he is putting on a face mask. The producer intends to tell us that educated people and those who believe in the benefit of face masks in fighting against viruses, are the kind of people who would fight Covid-19 and the fake news spread around it.

4. **Conclusions**

The study comes up with the following conclusions:

1. Language is dynamic and it is affected with the pandemic of Covid-19 just like its effect upon different fields of human life. One of the main effects upon language might be dictionaries where new words are added, the word infodemic is one of them.

2. Fake news are the most recurred synonyms for the term of infodemic which is the core of the current study.

3. The vital role of WHO aided with UNESCO in fighting against the pandemic of Covid-19 and the infodemic surrounding it.

4. Fake news or infodemic could be mis- or disinformation; people might spread fake news by mistake without taking into consideration its consequences; or it may be directed on purpose by different agendas for different purposes.

5. The study highlights the essential role of social media during the pandemic and how they can be the source of spreading of fake news or in contrary, to educate people against it.

6. The study shows the importance of the means of protection simplified with the face mask.

7. Fake news and eventually infodemic is as dangerous as Covid-19. Fake news can disturb the man mentally and psychologically.

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