



Discourses, Modes, Media and Meaning in an Era of Pandemic

Sabine Tan and Marissa K. L. E (Eds.)

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Rapid developments in digital technologies have had a cascading effect on various sectors of human society. Jones and Hafner (2021) posit that digital tools have profoundly impacted how people do things, make meaning, relate to others, perceive reality, and adopt social identities. Notably, the evolution of digital technologies spawns innovative methods for knowledge production, dissemination, and communication by enhancing the visibility, shareability, and interactivity of scientific knowledge (Luzón & Pérez-Llantada, 2022). The affordances of digital technologies have been starkly underscored by the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, in the pedagogical context, educators and learners endeavored to restore teaching and learning by shifting to online instruction during the disruptive school closure caused by the virus. Additionally, digitally mediated public communication channels such as social media have been utilized to promote preventative measures and healthcare information. It is not easy to undertake an all-encompassing reflection on the role played by digital technologies and new media in the unprecedented pandemic period. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to do so in order to translate the insights and observations into a deeper understanding of the role of communication, media, and discourse in society during a crisis.

Against this backdrop, the volume under review, *Discourses, Modes, Media and Meaning in an Era of Pandemic*, edited by Sabine Tan and Marissa K. L. E., is considered a timely response to this need. The book comprises four sections. The first section (Chapters 2 and 3) focuses on the employment of semiotic resources and rhetorical strategies in static multimodal discourses related to Covid-19. The second section (Chapters 4 and 5) explores topics pertaining to the affordances and uses of new media technologies in the pedagogical context and on social media. The third section (Chapters 6 to 10) encapsulates topics related to the communicative functions and strategies of Covid-19 discourses in various kinds of media. The final section (Chapters 11 and 12) sheds some light on the underexplored areas of the role of public

participation in the creation and co-construction of discourses related to the pandemic.

In Chapter 2, Abdel-Raheem draws on a socio-cognitive framework to investigate speech acts and multimodal metaphors in Arab political cartoons related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher discovered during the investigation that visual and multimodal resources can be used to express gratitude to healthcare professionals for their efforts in battling the epidemic. Abdel-Raheem further argues that it is essential to look beyond the conventional image of political cartoons as satire to better understand how positive comments and actions are generated through various semiotic resources in this mode of mass communication. Following this, in Chapter 3, Marissa K. L. E. and Sabine Tan adopt a social semiotics approach in their analysis of multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) in short comics publishing health information about Covid-19. Their research demonstrates how the text, image, and narrative discourse mode can be effectively configured to achieve an array of communicative ends including to demystify complex medical concepts, engage a broad audience, and positively represent the government's actions.

The impact of Covid-19 on teaching practices is discussed in Chapter 4 based on Fei Victor Lim's and Weimin Toh's investigation into teachers' uses of video lectures, digital games, and social media platforms during the pandemic. The researchers discuss how semiotic technologies were employed to convey knowledge, establish pedagogical relations, and design learning experiences for students. Based on their observations, Lim and Toh posit that teachers must develop their pedagogical repertoire to better handle blended pedagogical contexts in the post-pandemic era. In Chapter 5, David Oakey, Christian Jones, and Kay L. O'Halloran discuss their investigation into the use of phraseology and visual representation in UK public health agency tweets related to Covid-19. As noted by the researchers, even though the text and images in a tweet can co-contextualize each other, any misalignment between the text and the imagery was likely to cause ambiguity in meaning-making. The investigation by Oakey and associates sheds light on the likely text-image configurations in mass communication during future pandemics.

Zuocheng Zhang, Toni Dobinson, and Wei Wang explore how Australian universities capitalize on multimodal communication channels such as websites and videos to engage international students during a pandemic. In

doing so, they discuss how such efforts demonstrate the strategy of universities to expressly engender an integrated sense of empathy, professionalism, and humanitarianism in response to the crisis. Following this, Carl Jon Way Ng investigates how leading airline companies harness multimodal resources on Facebook posts to establish brand identities that highlight responsible social citizenship. The research renders visible the tendency in cultural branding to prioritize affective management rather than simply mentioning products and services. In Chapter 8, Yiqiong Zhang, Rongle Tan, Marissa K. L. E., and Sabine Tan combine the concepts of defamiliarization and multimodality to examine how an online science video frames Covid-19 information in a way that enables viewers to reconsider subjects and events that seem familiar and unquestionable. The analysis undertaken by the researchers reveals that a multimodal defamiliarization strategy can assist with audience engagement and emotive focus while facilitating the dissemination of up-to-date and precise scientific information.

The focus of Chapter 9 is on social media news in China and how it is leveraged to engage the public on matters related to Covid-19. Yuanzheng Wu and Dezheng (William) Feng demonstrate that social media news services a wide array of communication tasks beyond just reporting the news. These tasks range from expressing positive attitudes about the reported information and elaborating on pandemic-related knowledge, to suggesting suitable preventative steps. These diverse functions are characterized by the intent to share and personalize information in both verbal and visual modes. In Chapter 10, Carmen Daniela Maier and Silvia Ravazzani develop an analytical framework that integrates a social semiotics approach to utilizing multimodality within crisis and risk communications. They also showcase how the interdisciplinary approach can be employed to investigate global pandemic news. The researchers provide elaborate and highly detailed accounts of the functions and perspectives of various roles played by risk informers, risk bearers, risk researchers, and risk regulators in risk management discourses.

In Chapter 11, Avery Anapol reveals how memes posted on the internet have been widely utilized by the public to vent their frustration and uncertainty about the government's public health guidelines during the initial phases of the pandemic in the United Kingdom. The researcher analyzes a number of "Stay Alert" online memes from a multimodal perspective, drawing on critical discourse analysis and multimodal social semiotics, along with the

concepts of ‘participatory culture’ and ‘spreadable media’. The results discussed by Anapol provide compelling evidence that humor was employed in the memes to ridicule the UK government’s response to the pandemic and to portray it as perplexing. Chapter 12 presents the results of a participatory analysis of exchanges on PanMeMic, a collaborative research initiative. Integrating social semiotics, citizen sociolinguistics, and ethnography, Elisabetta Adami and Emilia Djonov reveal how semiotic knowledge can be co-constructed by laypeople who observe, create, legitimate, and negotiate semiotic practices. The study also evidences the great potential to integrate a participatory perspective into a multimodal analysis of communication in online public communication.

Taken together, the finely selected chapters in *Discourses, Modes, Media and Meaning in an Era of Pandemic* elucidate how the pandemic impacted social, political, and educational contexts and how media, digital tools, and multimodal semiotic resources were utilized to respond to these impacts. The broad and interesting perspectives generated by the authors support readers to gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the ubiquitous effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. The authors’ explanations and insights emerged from rigorous empirical research, hence generating academically reliable implications for future research and practice. In methodological terms, the studies included in the volume evidence the possibility to enrich multimodal discourse analysis by incorporating an interdisciplinary perspective. In turn, a combination of multiple perspectives can contribute to a better understanding of how multimodal resources are marshalled and point to a particular professional and disciplinary purpose. The volume would have benefitted, however, from the inclusion of a model that theorizes the interrelation between mode, discourse, and media in communications during unusual periods based on the insight reported in the studies. Nevertheless, this is a key resource book for researchers and practitioners who are interested in understanding multimodal communication practices in the Covid-19 era.

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