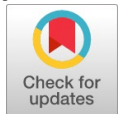# Usage of Facebook by Student Leaders in Creating Awareness Regarding Covid-19 in Guwahati

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Abstract: Pandemic like COVID-19 has triggered disruptions in personal and collective lives globally. It is not only a pandemic, but also an Infodemic of misinformation about the virus which raises demand for reliable and trustworthy information. With the advent of social media creation and consumption of news have been changing among the young generation. Student leaders have taken on additional work and assumed new responsibilities by volunteering in their communities and creating awareness among the public about the accuracy of information and measures to be taken against the deadly virus. This study explores the use of Facebook handles by the student leaders of two universities in Guwahati in creating awareness about the health-related messages regarding Covid-19 and its vaccination. The researcher will use critical discourse analysis to evaluate the use of social networking sites by the students' leaders. To understand the usage by the leaders, Facebook pages of the leaders would be followed and studied backed with unstructured interviews with the leaders to understand the purpose of and pattern of using the social media handles.

Keywords: Social Media; Student Leaders; Infodemic; Covid-19 And Critical Discourse Analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2019, an approximated 2.95 billion individuals throughout the globe were active on social media. This outbreak of the Coronavirus COVID-19 caused a social media tsunami. The majority of platforms were utilized to provide pertinent news, instructions, and advisories to the public (Mourad, Srour, Harmanani , Jenainati, & Arafeh, 2020) [6]. On 5 May 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) co-hosted an EPI-WIN COVID-19 webinar entitled "COVID-19 and the youth of today, leaders of tomorrow" [18][19][20]. The webinar showcased the work of youth leaders from across the world in responding to the global COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease) outbreak, and their role in responding to the opportunities and challenges facing the future leaders in the post-pandemic world (COVID-19 and the youth of today, leaders of tomorrow, 2020). We argue that the digital divide isn't just about having access to or using digital technology; it's also about being able to incorporate digital technology into meaningful social activities and get the advantages (Mariën & Prodnik, 2014) [4].

Young people are required to make informed judgments about how to use digital technology in their daily lives in a significant manner. We also believe that the digital divide affects the development and design of these technologies. The younger generation must have an imperative and proactive approach to digital technology, i.e., they must crucially analyze how it might and should be, rather than just accepting how it is now. To make this happen, the next generation must learn how to create, design, code, produce, and construct digital technology (Iivari, Sharma, & Olkkonen, 2020). Youth are the future of healthcare and other disciplines [14][15].

Their modest acts of empathy have the power to influence the world, even in places where social distancing tactics have been implemented. During this unprecedented global crisis, they have shown their ability to catalyze collaboration across professional boundaries and overcome silos, to create communities of best practice across borders from scratch, and to constantly learn from one another.

As the globe progressively recovers from the epidemic, today's students and young professionals will continue to rely on their sense of purpose, solidarity, and fresh insights learned during the present crisis as they advance in their professions and into leadership responsibilities, and to make valuable ongoing contributions to improving and protecting health in their communities and globally (COVID-19 and the youth of today, leaders of tomorrow, 2020) [1].

Student leaders are looked upon as role models by others in their institutions. During a crisis like Covid-19, the role of student leaders is to guarantee that all personnel get high-quality communication and timely information updates. Rotate student union employees from high-stress to low-stress roles to raise knowledge of their unions. Inexperienced personnel should be paired up with more experienced co-workers.

The buddy system aids in the provision of support, the monitoring of stress, and the reinforcing of safety practices. Assist outreach workers in entering the neighborhood in pairs. Organize and monitor breaks from work.

Flexible work schedules should be provided to employees who are directly affected or have a family member afflicted by a stressful occurrence. Make sure that your coworkers have time to help each other socially (Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak, 2020) [5].

The teacher's role is to assist children in finding methods to express their emotions healthily. Each student has a unique manner of presenting their feelings. In a secure and supportive environment, people can express and discuss their sentiments.

II.   REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For conducting the study, the researcher has reviewed various research articles, reports published from credible sources and analyzed the social media handles of student leaders of Cotton State University and Guwahati University to gain knowledge about the utilization of Facebook by the student leaders in creating consciousness and communicating with the students of their respective institutions. (Iivari, Sharma, & Olkkonen, 2020) [2] [21] in their study *"Digital transformation of everyday life – How COVID-19 pandemic transformed the basic education of the young generation and why information management research should care?"* Have concentrated on the phenomena that the epidemic drove us to take an incredible digital leap in our daily lives and routines, including our children and their schooling [22] [23].

Children's fundamental education is undergoing a digital transition that we are not adequately preparing them for. Many children and their families were forced to acquire a wide range of new skills, abilities, and resources as a result of the crisis. In the present COVID-19 normalcy, digital differences are visible. As we contemplate ways to empower children in their digital futures throughout their primary school, the digitalization of education has been the primary method.

(Kniffin, Narayanan, Anseel, Antonakis, & Bapuji, 2020) [3] in their working research paper *COVID-19 and the Workplace: Implications, Issues, and Insights for Future* Research *and Action,* COVID-19-related hazards and changes are examined in terms of their impact on work practices, workplaces, as well as employees, – and don't differentiate between the immediate health concerns posed by COVID-19 and the economic effects. The core area of their study was the domain of work with their implications on the future during the Covid times i.e., Virtual teams, Work from Home, Unemployment and layoffs, Virtual Leadership and Management, Social Distancing and Loneliness, Presenteeism, Economic Inequality, Addiction, etc.

(Mourad, Srour, Harmanani, Jenainati, & Arafeh, Critical Impact of Social Networks Infodemic on Defeating Coronavirus COVID-19 Pandemic: Twitter-Based Study and Research Directions, 2020) [7] discusses how to quantify the essential influence of social networks during the COVID-19 pandemic Infodemic [8].

The goal of controlling all COVID-19 information except those started by reputable sources like the WHO and recognized governmental agencies is to maintain a sense of order. This report describes the results of a large-scale investigation using Twitter data. Around 1 million COVID-19-related tweets were analyzed over two months. According to the findings of the investigation, the COVID-19 outbreak was used to divert readers to other issues and disseminate unauthentic medical advisories and guidance. Using social networks in a worldwide outbreak emergency requires depending on reputable users with a wide range of occupations, content creators, especially influencers in specialized industries, according to further data analysis.

(Saha, Torous, Caine, & Choudhury, 2020) [9][11] in their study *social media Reveals Psychosocial Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic* using social media data from 2020, the study examines the psychosocial impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, revealing that mental health symptoms of people and support-seeking expressions considerably augmented during the COVID-19 timeframe compared to comparable data from 2019 [24].

However, this impact diminished with time, indicating that individuals had become used to their "new normal" and were no longer affected. COVID-19's influence on people's social media self-disclosure will be studied by comparing ~60M Twitter streaming tweets from the United States between 24th March and 25th May, 2020, with 40M tweets from a corresponding time in 2019. Such datasets were used to examine how individuals self-disclosed on social media about their symptoms of mental health issues and their expressions of asking for help [25][26].

Social media language that is associated with mental health consequences (depression, stress, anxiety, and suicide thoughts) is identified using transfer learning classifiers (informational and emotional support). We next looked at how psychosocial expressions have changed across time and languages, analyzing the result from 2020 and 2019 [10]. The results showed that during the COVID-19 crisis, all of the analyzed psychosocial expressions rose considerably – mental health symptomatic expressions rose by ~14 percent, and assistance seeking expressions climbed by 5 percent, both thematically associated with COVID-19. These expressions likewise show a continuous reduction and ultimate plateauing throughout COVID-19.

(Templeton, et al., 2020) [16][17] have focused on identity actions associated with structural inequalities are essential to understanding why and how crises should be addressed. Members of ethnic and racial minorities are more likely to become ill or die during public health crises [12].

Research on collective behavior shows how new identities may work as a protective barrier for well-being during emergencies, how identity-relevant social norms about safety can assist behavior change and social support at a group level, and how leaders can operate as efficient icons of desired behavior. However, study often indicates how social standards may encourage unsafe behaviors, how leaders may alienate groups by treating them illegally, and how identity-based structural inequalities minimize community cohesion, compliance with guidance, and perceived legality of officials.

The study stated that the government's management of the COVID-19 epidemic has shed light on social identity study and opened up new paths for further study. Community resilience, safety standards, and effective leadership in pandemics can only be achieved via research on social identities.

Furthermore, the study shows how identity definition and norms may be detrimental to the safety and how bad leadership can worsen inequality and contribute to long-term governance difficulties. (Talukdar, 2020) [13] through his Facebook page has communicated with the students throughout the Pandemic as social media was the easiest medium for communication and spreading awareness about the pandemic.

III.   STUDY GAP

After going through many reviews of literature, the researcher observed that a study on student leaders' awareness approach through social media was missing in the northeast part of India and especially Guwahati. The researcher also observed that many student leaders in the future turn out to be policymaking leaders, therefore, keeping the modern communication platforms like new media in mind, it is useful to understand the behavior of the present student leaders in using social media for creating awareness during emergencies like Covid-19 pandemic. The study will help society in knowing if the present student leaders can become effective communication experts in the future and help society.

IV.   OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the behavior of the student leaders in using social media handles for creating awareness during emergencies
2. To identify if the strategy used in communicating the messages by the leaders have any bias
3. To study if the messages communicated by the leaders are affective

V.   METHODOLOGY

The present study employs qualitative techniques and uses the critical discourse analysis method to study the objectives. The study takes into consideration analyzing the information related to Covid-19 as disclosed in the social media pages of student leaders. In an era dominated by new media and its various tools, the audience makes vehement use of new media tools to gather information, and accordingly, the student leaders are expected to utilize the media to connect with the minds and souls of various members of their community. The current study aims at analyzing the information about Covid-19 of the select student leaders in their Facebook pages and the impact on the readers by studying the pattern of feedback.

VI.   SAMPLING AND JUSTIFICATION:

The researcher has selected Facebook pages of 6 student leaders from two prominent universities in Guwahati (Gauhati University and Cotton State University). These universities were selected as Students Union elections are conducted only in these two universities in Guwahati. The six student leaders were identified by the topmost designation in the student's union body. Three each from each university. Thereafter unstructured interviews were conducted with all 6 student leaders to understand and study the objectives.

VII.   DATA SOURCE AND ANALYSIS

The study has been exposed to the qualitative method and uses critical discourse analysis. Since the nature of data is triangulation (both quantitative and qualitative), it has not been exposed to inter-coder reliability. Since the views of the student leaders are also taken through interviews, it is a critical analysis.

VIII.   SOURCES OF DATA

The research work involves secondary and primary data as the data has been collected from Facebook pages of the select student leaders of two universities and the interviews conducted with them. The content of the pages of the student leaders has been analyzed by applying certain yardsticks. Since achieving legitimacy is an important compulsion for uploading data on websites, it has been considered as a parameter. Disclosure as a parameter has also served the purpose to measure the willingness of the student leaders to communicate the information. The strategy of the message design is studied through the unstructured interview. Every single post related to Covid 19 for September was the unit of analysis for this study.

IX.   DATA ANALYSIS

The study evaluates the information about Covid-19 shared for the public by student leaders. The study seeks to explore the dynamic nature of responses in social media that is related to COVID-19. It has been found that the posts shared by the leaders receive reactions and comments from their followers on large scale on daily basis. Amongst the reactions available on Facebook for the posts: Like (👍), Love (♡), Care (🤗), Ha-ha (😄), Wow (😮) and Angry (😡) is the most used reaction by the people. The analysis of the posts proves that maximum posts received positive reactions and the information disseminated by the student leaders followed a pattern. It was observed by the researcher that whenever there are student-related issues, the student leaders convert the piece of information into Facebook posts and disseminate the message. Out of 6, 3 leaders were found to be very active in the social media communication process and 3 others are not frequent social media users. It inks that 3 of these 6 leaders are perspective future leaders and have already started their work on the line. The content analysis emphasized the types of responses from the page followers and it was found that most student-related issues were discussed in the pages. Though Covid-19 was a major issue in September, the student leaders raised issues like online/offline examination, fees concession, classes, and so on. Some leaders even spread awareness regarding Covid-19 and discussed social distancing and other Covid-19 related protocols which need to be maintained. The unstructured interviews with the leaders provided information regarding the pattern the leaders used to communicate. The leaders who are active in the social media pages revealed that whenever there is any student interest issue or topic, the leaders post it on Facebook.

The researcher also observed that the leaders like sharing antiestablishment posts.

X.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The researcher noticed that not all of the student leaders were on Facebook or other social media platforms. Approximately 50% of student leaders are active on social media platforms such as Facebook, while the other 50% of student leaders are not.

Student concerns are generally addressed by student leaders who are active users of social networks. Even during pandemic, like Covid-19, the student leaders remain focused on student concerns. Leaders who are active on social media follow a pattern in which they address all concerns about students, such as online and offline courses, examinations, semester and hostel fees, etc. Some leaders have also been observed sharing information about Covid-19. To sum up, the researcher believes that all student leaders, rather than just half of them, should be engaged on social media. It was also observed that whatever topics were mentioned, just the facts were presented, and no leaders' views were stated. As a result, rather than merely distributing knowledge, student leaders should constantly share their thoughts on various topics as part of the process of becoming a future policy-making leaders.

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