

Semantic Network Analysis of Student Confessions During a Global Pandemic: A Cross-National Study

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Abstract

In times of global disruption, understanding the emotional landscape of target audiences is crucial for informed decision-making. This research investigates the role of social media in capturing the emotional state of university students during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, anonymous posts on Facebook Confession Boards (FCBs) linked with universities in the UK, USA, New Zealand, and Israel were analyzed. Semantic Network Analysis and Content Analysis were employed to identify common themes and associated sentiments in student discourses. The dataset, comprising over 1.2 million words posted between March and May 2020, revealed both similarities and differences in emotional expression across countries. Themes like love-life and university-life were universally prominent, but the timing of specific concerns varied depending on the country's response to the pandemic. Notably, negative sentiments dominated the discourse, with variations in thematic focus across countries. The findings offer valuable insights for policy makers, enabling more nuanced and effective responses in times of crisis. This study contributes to the understanding of emotional comportment in social media, a topic of increasing relevance in contemporary society. Therefore, it also contributes to the conference's exploration of emotional mobilization in media by providing empirical evidence on the emotional dimensions of public discourse captured through social media.

Keywords

Covid-19, Facebook Confessions Boards, Semantic Network Analysis, Sentiment Analysis, Student Discourse

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Bio

I'm Ofer Shinar, a 29-year-old advanced research student in the Communication Department at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Tel-Aviv University. In my role as a teaching assistant, I've designed and taught several communication courses for classes of 30-40 students, creating original content tailored to their educational needs. Over the years, I've also gained research experience, serving as a research assistant at both Tel-Aviv University and the Ruppin Academic Center's Institute for Immigration and Social Integration.

My research interests span a range of topics including globalization and cross-cultural comparisons, digital anthropology, social media, and user generated content. As part of my academic journey, I've had the opportunity to study at Aarhus University during my BA and at Innsbruck University as part of my MA program. These experiences have enriched my understanding of communication studies from a global perspective.