



## **CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TEXTUAL AND AUDIO-VISUAL MESSAGES IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONTEXT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is to examine the role of culture in the dissemination of messages on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. We examined textual vs audio-driven social media posts and their analysis of content, engagement metrics, and user-perceived effectiveness. To do this, we performed a purposeful sample of 150 social media messages, 75 textual and 75 audio and/or video style messages from popular platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. We collected the data, and subsequently analysed it through a *mixed-method approach*, while integrating quantitative engagement metrics and conducting *qualitative content analysis* exploring cultural dimensions and effects related to reframing knowledge. The findings indicated that there was health and safety guidance; although the audio/video posts resulted in higher perceptions of cultural going engaging, and impressions of impact; the textual posts had forms of factual and clarity. In the end, the findings suggest future interventions should consider both media formats and cultural attributes to enhance culturally competency in crisis communication and message perspectives. The findings provide key insights for health communication researchers, policymakers, practitioners, community members, social media platforms, and other stakeholders to help plan for effective *information dissemination* and sharing on social media platforms during any future community crisis or emergency.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, social media communication, cultural dynamics, textual messages, audio-visual messages, audience engagement, crisis communication.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global communication landscape changed quickly during the *COVID-19* pandemic as people, communities, and institutions relied on the internet and social media for communication, information sharing, and social connection. Social media became a particularly important space for the dissemination of health-related news, health communication campaigns, community support initiatives, and information sharing for personal expression. The way communication occurred online involved different modalities: text (tweets, blogs, status updates) and audio visual (live video, short clips, *infographics*, memes). This was not simply a matter of preference; these discrepancies influenced both the ways information was created and consumed, and indicated culture broadly in how people viewed content, shared information, and with the world being an unhealthy environment for several reasons. The culture, values, norms, and context shaped the framing and interpreting of the message; while text favored timeliness, accuracy, and factual information, audio-visual provided more adaptation to emotion, visual aesthetics and broader engagement. The interaction between culture and medium in the present time was instrumental in forming public views of risk, legitimacy of institutions, and social patterns of behavior, but also provided evidence of how societies handled ambiguity, developed solidarity, or in some cases misinformation and polarization. In light of this, we examine social media communication and its *cultural contexts* in the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in terms of a comparison between written and audio-visual messages. In conditions of difference and overlap of these communication modes, this study illustrates how cultural contexts produce unique reception of messages, engagement in meaning-making, and participatory practices on digital platforms. In addition to contribute a better understanding of crisis communication, the study emphasis culture's role in determining the effectiveness of media strategies during global disruption.

### 1.1. Background of the study

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the ways that people communicated with each other around the world, opening the door to more reliance on digital forums, especially social media, to communicate information, connect socially, and inform the public. *Communication* patterns were disrupted as a result of lockdowns, social distancing, and restricted mobility. Social media became an important platform through which individuals, communities, and institutions could



connect, share real-time updates, and engage with important information. To mitigate the effects of pandemic fatigue, the public turned to social media and tools like *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *YouTube* to notify the public about health directives, share information and knowledge about the pandemic, and build a sense of community and collective support. Ultimately, social media changed the way communities and individuals consume and respond to information during a global health emergency.

### **1.2. Significance of Social Media Communication During Pandemics**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media was a crucial player in helping crisis *communication*, *health promotion*, and *collaborations* within the communities. These digital platforms facilitated the rapid dissemination of important information and helped people understand safety measures, government policy, and health recommendations. Additionally, social media shaped public perceptions and behavior by influencing attitudes toward preventive measures, vaccination, and social responsibility. As an accessible and relevant form of communication, social media was a crucial tool in bridging information gaps by disseminating timely relevant messages to diverse audiences during an unprecedented health emergency.

### **1.3. Textual and Audio-Visual Communication: A Comparative Overview**

Text communication and audio-visual communication generally on social media have different advantages and disadvantages to communicate information. *Text messages (tweets, posts, and blog entries)* are beneficial ways to communicate information, in an efficient, concise, and timely manner, and can generally be easily shared and not easily forgotten. Audio-visual formats (video, infographics, and memes) have emotional appeal, graphic context, and a level of engagement that text-based communication often cannot reach. They are also often more effective for translation of complex information and communicating a memorable message in terms of information retention. By comparing both information transmission formats, one can better understand the advantages to the efficacy via forms of information transmission, engaging users, and engaging and influencing public opinion behaviors during a time of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.



#### **1.4.Cultural Dynamics in Online Communication**

Cultural values, norms, and social contexts can also shape how social media messages are framed, interpreted, and the ways in which they are received. During major global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, cultural factors influenced how textual and audio-visual content was framed, and delivered an array of tone, style, and content which influences in, between, and beyond how audiences responded to the presented information. For example, societies may emphasize factual accuracy and logic-driven materials and present this to audiences, while other societies may communicate with an emotional emphasis and storytelling. Understanding these segments of cultural dynamics is extremely important in evaluating communication, audience engagement, and how messages might be misinterpreted or misaligned with an audience, with an argument that not only considers the social context but beyond any social or cultural context.

#### **1.5.Research Problem and Gap**

While there has been significant research related to communication on social media platforms generally, and during the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, there has been little research that examines the relative impact of audio-visual messages in addition to textual messages, across different cultures. The existing research overwhelmingly addresses either one mode of communication consequence, or a general look at social media trends together, and thus does not entertain the notion of how culture may mediate how audiences receive or interpret messages. This omission suggests a re-examination of the relationship(s) between message type, culture, and audience engagement would be beneficial for understanding what created effective communication in an emergency context.

#### **1.6.Objectives of the study**

- To examine the cultural dynamics of social media communication during the COVID-19 pandemic by comparing textual and audio-visual messages.
- To analyze how cultural factors influence the framing, interpretation, and reception of social media messages.
- To assess the engagement and effectiveness of textual versus audio-visual content in conveying pandemic-related information.



- To evaluate the comparative impact of textual and audio-visual messages on public awareness, perception, and behavior, contributing to culturally informed crisis communication strategies.

### 1.7. Research Question

Q1: How do cultural dynamics influence the creation and dissemination of textual and audio-visual messages on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Q2: In what ways do cultural factors shape the framing, interpretation, and reception of social media messages across different audiences?

Q3: How do textual and audio-visual messages differ in terms of user engagement and effectiveness in conveying pandemic-related information?

Q4: What is the comparative impact of textual versus audio-visual messages on public awareness, perception, and behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Vohidova (2024)** analyzed the role of cultural dynamics was critical to the evolution of digital communication. The authors found that *cultural values and norms* shaped online communication practices in both message production and reception. These accounts argued that, rather than just carrying information, digital communication technologies reflected and reified cultural identity, ultimately influencing how communities engaged with communication technology.

**Sandel (2019)** investigated the relationship among social media, culture, and communication. This research underscored the role of social media platforms in enabling experiences across cultures, as well as helping to uphold preexisting cultural norms. Sandel proposed that social media platforms provided an opportunity for people to negotiate their culture, even as cultural differences were magnified by space and time, provoking even faster communication.

**Keijzer, Mäs, and Flache (2018)** examined communication within online social networks and how it contributes to cultural isolation. The findings show that people generally cluster with those who are similar to them, resulting in cultural homogeneity and limiting their exposure to



dissimilar cultural perspectives. The authors concluded, if online social networks increase social connectedness, they also create echo chambers that reinforce cultural divides, rather than promote inclusion.

**Meikle (2016)** offered an in-depth account of social media as a vehicle for communication, distribution, and visibility. The study explored how social media transformed more traditional forms of communication to allow immediate sharing of information, with the ability to amplify the voices of various groups to promote visibility to their audience. Meikle argued that social media alters social interactions by impacting not only individual behavior, but also collective cultural practices, in online spaces, as people can be social without being in the same physical environment.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The investigation used a *mixed design*, in which *qualitative content analysis* was employed with *quantitative measures* of cultural dynamics in social media communications during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each post of a purposive sample of 150 social media posts- which included 75 text and 75 audio-visual posts was analyzed for cultural references for framing and content types. Engagement and perceived effectiveness are qualitatively measured through the metrics of likes, shares, comments, or saves/bookmarks. The analysis of the social media content for cultural references and communicative patterns was coded, using *thematic analysis*. *Ethical considerations* are taken seriously in research and follow ethical guidelines that included using only public information and anonymizing identifying information since there is a commitment to rigor in the analysis while also being respectful of the users' privacy.

#### 3.1. Research Design

Equipped with a mixed-methods *research design*, this study combined qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the cultural dimensions of social media communications during COVID-19. The qualitative element was focused on cultural references and framing practices evident within both textual and audio-visual messages, while the quantitative component considered *engagement metrics*, perceived effectiveness of the messaging, and audience engagement with the material. This study benefitted from the use of a mixed-methods



research design that enabled a nuanced analysis that considered both characteristics of the content and measurable impacts between groups based on the types of messages received.

### **3.2.Sampling Method and Sample Size**

To select suitable social media posts about COVID-19, a purposive sampling method was used. A total of 150 posts were analyzed, *75 textual messages* and *75 audio-visual messages* from the popular social media platforms Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Posts were selected for their relevance to pandemic communication, cultural representation and user engagement, to ensure diversity of content type and audience reach.

### **3.3.Data Collection Methods**

The researchers collected data by using a content analysis of the chosen social media posts. The researchers analyzed textual posts (e.g., tweets, captions, and blogs) and audio-visual posts (e.g., videos, infographics, memes, and live-streams) using a systematic approach. Key variables included cultural references, framing approach, type of content, audience engagement (e.g., likes, shares, comments, and saves/bookmarks), perceived effectiveness, and cultural significance. Quantitative data was retrieved from platform metrics, whereas qualitative data analysis consisted of coding cultural and thematic elements of the sample posts.

### **3.4.Data Analysis Methods**

The study conducted descriptive statistical analysis of quantitative data (percentages, means, and frequency distributions) to look at engagement, effectiveness, and the perception of the audience. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis to uncover trends in cultural references, *framing techniques*, and types of messages. Comparative analysis was utilized to examine differences in cultural dynamics, audience engagement, and perceived impact, comparing textual messages to audio-visual messages.

### **3.5.Ethical Considerations**

The research adhered to strict ethical standards for social media studies. They analyzed only publicly available data and anonymized identifying information about content creators. All data was used solely for research purposes, and they followed all platform's terms of service. They



did not interact with any content creators directly, and their analysis was objective, transparent and respectful of user privacy.

#### **4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

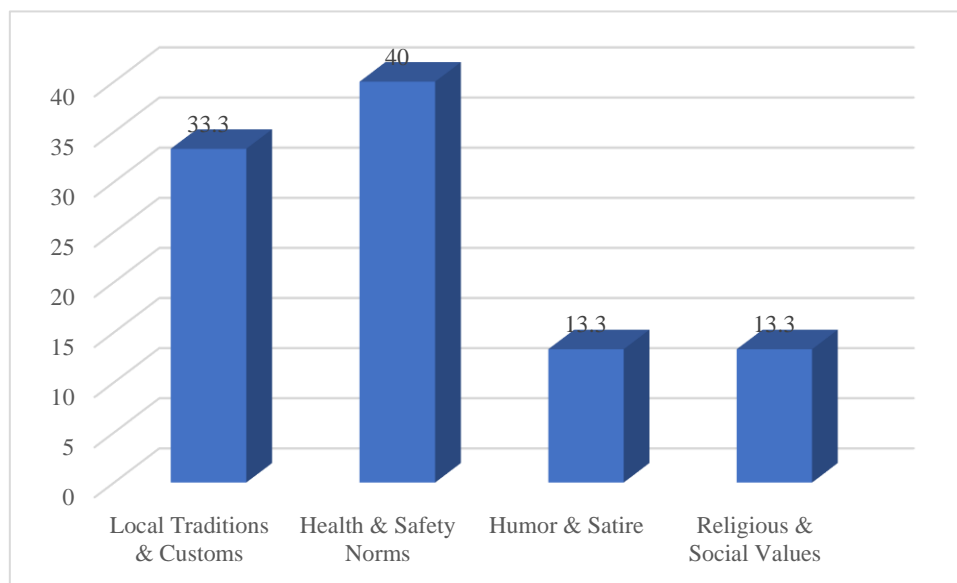
In the results and discussion section, we highlight the main implications of the analysis of textual and audio-visual social media messages produced during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing cultural aspects, engagement, and effectiveness. This section focuses on the statistical outcomes of audience engagement but also contextualizes qualitative insights advocating social- or cultural-framing and relevance of messages. Overall, we present findings that demonstrate how culture, type of content, and richness of media consumption intersected to affect reception and effects of messages related to the pandemic across the two communication sources. The discussion connects outcomes to relevant literature and theories, addressing scholars and practitioners about the complex relationship between cultural values and communication in the midst of risk communication in the digital space.

##### **4.1.Cultural DYNAMICS in Textual Messages**

In Table 1, we see that textual social media posts about COVID-19 illustrated a variety of cultural references. Of the 75 posts analyzed, most, at 40%, were tied to health and safety practices, which underscores the importance of public health information during the pandemic. Next, posts embedded within local customs and practices accounted for 33.3% of posts, denoting that customs still had a large place in online interactions, regardless of the pandemic's global effect. Posts related to humor and satire, and religious and social values were less often referred to, each accounting for only 13.3% of posts. This pattern signals that informational and culturally rooted content dominated textual communication, while lighter or value-based messages were lower in number, suggesting that practical information, and culturally relevant information, took priority in social media discourse throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Textual Posts by Cultural References

Cultural Reference Type	Number of Posts	Percentage (%)
Local Traditions & Customs	25	33.3
Health & Safety Norms	30	40.0
Humor & Satire	10	13.3
Religious & Social Values	10	13.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>



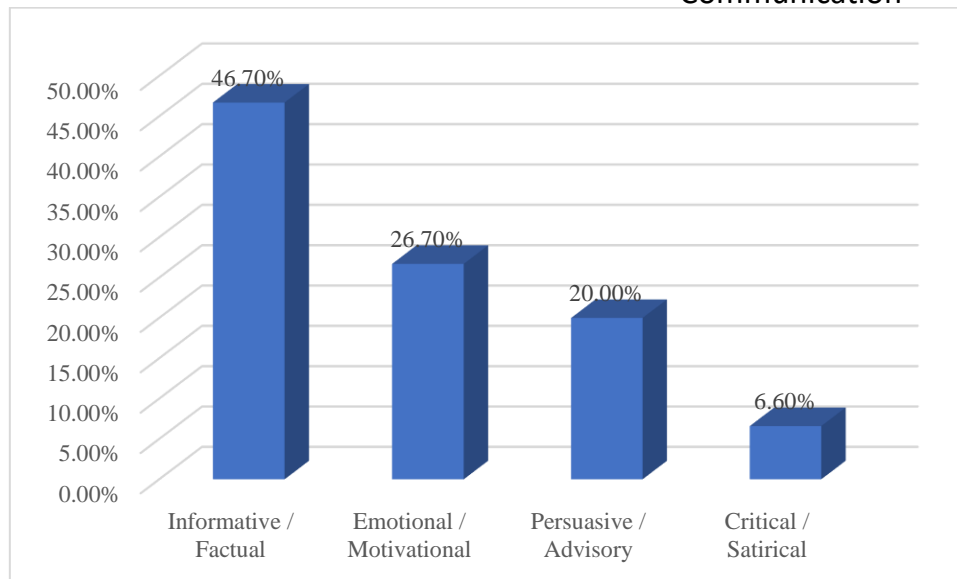
**Figure 1:** Percentage Distribution of Cultural Reference

The percentage distribution shown in Figure 1 exhibits factors that account for social considerations reflecting four important dimensions. Of these, Health & Safety Norms stands out as the largest factor at 40%, meaning that issues of safety and well-being are the most important factor. Local Traditions & Customs is next at 33.3% suggesting that cultural customs and heritage play a primary role in informing social values; whereas Humor & Satire and Religious & Social Values were both assigned equal weight at 13.3% each, indicating that these factors matter but are considered to be of less importance in decision-making or public attitudes. Overall, the data reveals a dominant role of health and safety and local traditions and customs in defining social norms, while humor and religious values are secondary.

**Table 2:** Framing Techniques in Textual Messages

<b>Framing Technique</b>	<b>Number of Posts</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Informative / Factual	35	46.7%
Emotional / Motivational	20	26.7%
Persuasive / Advisory	15	20.0%
Critical / Satirical	5	6.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 demonstrates the distribution of framing techniques present in the text-based social media posts about COVID-19. Most of the posts (46.7%) leaned towards informative or factual framing, reflecting the emphasis on providing accurate, reliable, and useful information to the viewers. Emotional or motivational posts comprised 26.7% of the posts, suggesting that a significant amount of the content was geared at reaching users on more personal or psychological levels. Persuasive or advisory framing made up 20% of the posts, signifying the attempt to influence behavior and promote compliance with public health guidelines. Very few posts (6.6%) used critical or satirical framing, indicating that humor or critique through text-based communication during COVID-19 was used less frequently. In sum, the data show textual messages skewed toward clarity, factuality, and behavioral guidance, while emotional or critical approaches to engage users were less important.



**Figure 2: Percentage Distribution of Framing Technique**

Figure 2 shows the proportions of different communication styles classified by relevance or use. The Informative/Factual style comprises the majority at 46.7%, meaning it is the primary method of communication that emphasizes the use of accurate information and facts. Emotional/Motivational constitutes second at 26.7%, meaning using feelings and motivation to evoke emotion toward audiences is also noteworthy. Persuasive/Advisory makes up 20% of the communication styles including indicating decisions and advising decisions based on organizing, contributing to the information presented in communication. Finally, Critical/Satirical represents the lowest portion at 6.6%. Meaning, critical or satirical content does not play a substantial part compared to any other style. All in all, the overall categories indicate that factual or informative communication is the primary option, followed by using emotional and persuasive styles as a supplement, and critical or satirical tones have the least use.

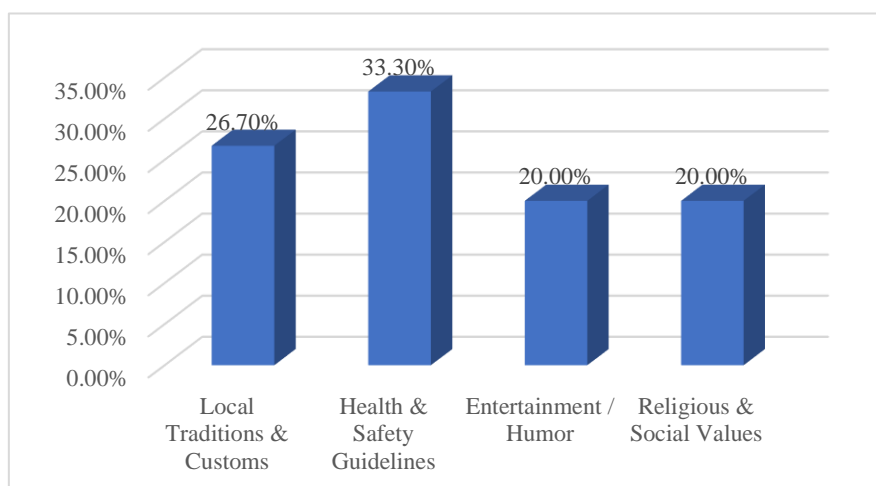
#### 4.2 Cultural Dynamics In Audio-Visual Messages

Table 3 shows the various cultural contexts which were displayed in audio-visual social media posts relating to COVID-19. Health and safety did well to represent the majority theme at 33.3% out of 75 total posts, indicating a priority was placed on conveying the important information about the pandemic through visual and oral forms. The representation of local traditions and customs was 26.7%, meaning that cultural identity and heritage still remained

relevant themes used to create content in an online environment. There was an equal representation of entertainment or humour and religious or social values at 20% for each category, meaning that audio-visual social media did well to emotionally and socially engage the audience. The data overall indicates that messages at the time of pandemic were likely designed to inform and create awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic, while also engaging and using cultural and social elements to capture the concerns or engage an involvement by their audiences.

**Table 3:** Distribution of Audio-Visual Posts by Cultural Context

Cultural Context	Number of Posts	Percentage (%)
Local Traditions & Customs	20	26.7%
Health & Safety Guidelines	25	33.3%
Entertainment / Humor	15	20.0%
Religious & Social Values	15	20.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Figure 3:** Graphical Representation on the percentage of Cultural Context

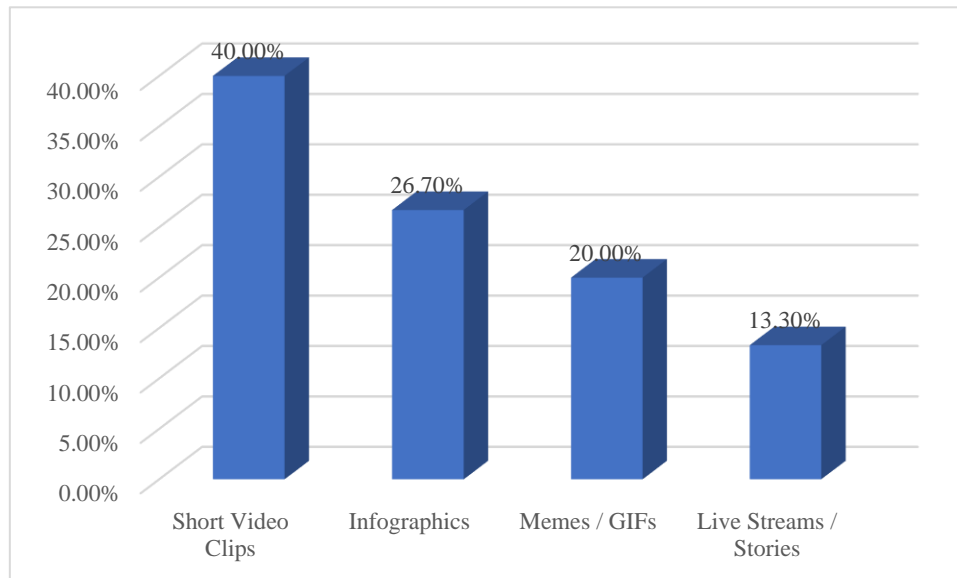
The percentage breakdown of influences affecting societal considerations is demonstrated in Figure 3. Health & Safety Guidelines are the strongest influence examined, totaling 33.3%, highlighting the importance placed on well-being and precautions. Next is Local Traditions & Customs, at 26.7%, indicating the ongoing efficacy of customs and cultural practices. Entertainment/Humor and Religious & Social Values are reflected at 20% each, indicating their moderated, yet significant roles in affecting public understandings. Overall, the data show while health and safety is the prioritized consideration, tradition, entertainment and social or religious values support and influence societal norms and behavior.

**Table 4:** Types of Audio-Visual Content

<b>Content Type</b>	<b>Number of Posts</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Short Video Clips	30	40.0%
Infographics	20	26.7%
Memes / GIFs	15	20.0%
Live Streams / Stories	10	13.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4 displays the distribution of types of audio-visual content on social media related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Short video clips made up the largest share, at 40%, of the 75 posts, suggesting that dynamic and engaging visual content may have been the preferred format for generating interest among audiences. Infographics made up 26.7% of posts, suggesting that complex information is often relayed in a brief, visual format. Memes and GIFs made up 20% of audio-visual content, suggesting that humor and creative expression may have been deployed in service of engaging audiences and making messaging relatable. Real-time or ephemeral content (live stream and stories) was the least frequent content type, accounting for 13.3% of posts, suggesting that communicators were less likely to use live stream or

disappearing content than with pre-produced video and visual graphics. All these data suggest that communicators were drawn to formats that were visually interesting or informative, while providing clarity and engagement through visuals, ultimately to engage a pandemic audience.



**Figure 4:** Graphical Representation on the percentage of Content Type

The distribution of different kinds of audio-visual social media content related to COVID-19 is shown in Figure 4. Short video clips were the most popular communication format, making up 40% of the content, meaning audiences preferred a rapidly engaging type of visual media to maintain their attention. Infographics made up the second largest amount of content at 26.7%, showing how popular infographics can be when making complex information appealing and understandable. Memes and GIFs made up 20% of the content, which suggests humor and creative expression were used to communicate. Live streams and stories were the least used format at 13.3%, which suggests that live or ephemeral content was used less frequently than pre-produced videos and visual graphics. The chart demonstrates social media communicators generally preferred a clear visual media or engaging social media format to best reach and inform audiences across the pandemic.

### 4.3 Comparative Analysis Of Effectiveness And Impact

Table 5 shows the average engagement metrics for written and audio-visual COVID-19-related social media messages. Audio-visual messages had the highest engagement in all metrics, with



an average of 250 likes, 80 shares, and 60 comments. Comparatively, written messages had the lowest engagement averages of 120 likes, 45 shares, and 30 comments. This indicates that audio-visual messages were more successful at attracting users' attention, prompting audience interaction, and sharing content. The fact that those engagement metrics are higher indicates that visual and multimedia formats realize more effective communication strategies regarding pandemic-related information and methods that are more communicative for the user. In other words, visual appeal engages feelings, and, combined with informative content, makes for the most engaged audiences.

**Table 5:** Average Engagement Metrics by Message Type

Message Type	Average Likes	Average Shares	Average Comments
Textual Messages	120	45	30
Audio-Visual	250	80	60

**Table 6:** Perceived Effectiveness in Conveying Information

Message Type	Very Effective	Moderately Effective	Less Effective
Textual Messages	30	35	10
Audio-Visual	50	20	5

As seen in Table 6, perceptions regarding the effectiveness of textual and audio-visual social media messages vary in their ability to convey COVID-19-related information. The survey results indicate that among textual messages, 30 were deemed effective, 35 somewhat effective, and 10 ineffective. These results suggest that while many textual messages communicated useful COVID-19 information, many were deemed of moderate effectiveness beyond being somewhat helpful. Alternatively, audio-visual messages were rated effective in the majority of cases, where 50 were rated effective, 20 rated somewhat effective, and 5 rated ineffective. The



results of this survey indicate that audio-visual messages generally communicated COVID-19 information better than textual messages, by improving clarity, audience engagement, and impression-making through visual or multimedia messaging, emphasizing the value of visual and multimedia for crisis communication.

#### 4.4 Audience Perception And Engagement Patterns

In Table 7, the audience's views on the cultural relevance of textual and audio-visual social media messages regarding COVID-19 are shared. For textual messages, 25 messages were rated highly relevant, 35 messages were rated moderately relevant, and 15 were rated not relevant. This suggests that many textual messages appeared to strongly reflect cultural context, however, a significant proportion of the posts were only seen as moderately or minimally relevant. Far more audio-visual posts were assessed as very relevant 45 posts, followed by 20, as moderately relevant, and only 10 posts perceived as not relevant. This shows that audio-visual messages were clearly better at acknowledging cultural nuances and relatability across cultural boundaries. Taken together, the results demonstrate audio-visual messages were more effective at conveying culturally relevant messages than textual communication.

**Table 7:** Audience Perception of Cultural Relevance

Message Type	Highly Relevant	Moderately Relevant	Not Relevant
Textual Messages	25	35	15
Audio-Visual	45	20	10

**Table 8:** Audience Engagement by Interaction Type

Interaction Type	Textual Messages	Audio-Visual Messages
Likes	120	250
Shares	45	80
Comments	30	60
Saves / Bookmarks	20	40

Table 8 shows that audiences display different engagement patterns depending on the interaction type and the type of social media messages (textual and audiovisual) related to COVID-19. Audio-visual messages had higher engagement across all metrics, averaging 250 likes, 80 shares, 60 comments, and 40 saves/bookmarks. In comparison, textual messages had lower engagement (120 likes, 45 shares, 30 comments, and 20 saves/bookmarks). Results suggest that audio-visual messages were more capable of garnering audience attention, eliciting active public involvement, and promoting content sharing. This data showed that visual and multimedia formats increase user engagement patterns developing the overall organizational impact and access to social media during the pandemic.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The research emphasizes the overlap of cultural values and communication theories in social media behaviors in times of crisis, particularly COVID-19. The findings also suggest that audio-visual content is more effective than textual posts for relaying cultural nuances, creating engagement, and reinforcing public health priorities; correlated with media richness, framing, and *cultural mediation theories*. The sample was limited to public posts, but cited a need for larger, cross-platform, and longitudinal studies in the future. Overall, the research indicates multimedia formats and cultural considerations underpin effective digital crisis communication.



### **5.1 Linking Findings to Literature and Theories**

This study's outcomes align with the existing literature on media, culture, and social media. Vohidova (2024) noted that cultural values and norms influence both the production and reception of digital content. Similarly, in this study, textual and *audio-visual content* showcased different cultural references such as local traditions, health expectations, and social norms. Sandel (2019) discussed that social media is both a space of cultural exchange and a place to reinforce norms. This is consistent with the findings that other participants viewed audio-visual messages as containing a greater cultural relevance than textual content. Keijzer, Mäs, and Flache (2018) argued that online networks perpetuate cultures of homogeneity, arguing that social media serves to enhance connectivity and limit the exposure of alternative perspectives. Taken together with this study's finding that some cultural themes were barely acknowledged, such as humor and satire, it suggests the existence of cultural boundaries or themes, while also suggesting a lack of the necessity of diversity across individual contexts. Finally, Meikle (2016) declared a notable difference, as social media expands visibility that shifts processes of communication. The finding that audio-visual content engaged participants at a higher rate and better met communication objectives develops Meikle's findings in relation to values. In each case, the literature is reflected in the data collected for this study. These collectively support the frameworks of media richness, framing, and cultural mediation, and illustrate how content and cultural context affect the relevance and impact of a message across a digital-based communication medium during times of crises.

### **5.2 Insights into Cultural Communication Patterns in Pandemics**

The analysis found that health and safety recommendations were at the forefront of both textual and audio-visual messages that reflected poorly anticipated public health priorities during COVID-19. Audio-visual messages had stronger representations of local customs and social values than textual messages, indicating that visual and audio-visual's formats more effectively express cultural nuances and resonate with their viewers. In general, humor and satire were found to be relatively absent, especially among the textual posts, indicating that crisis communication tends to emphasize more informative and culturally anchored elements to engage with audiences rather than entertainment. The study also determined that audio-visual messages fostered increased engagement and improved perceptions of meaning and cultural



relevance, suggesting that audio-visual media can help bridge the cultural and emotional landscapes during pandemics.

### **5.3 Implications for Social Media Strategies and Policy**

The results have practical implications for health communication and social media design. Communicators and platforms should take advantage of audio-visual formats, such as short videos and infographics, to increase overall reach and effectiveness, especially when interacting with a diverse audience. While text is still necessary for clarity and to establish legitimacy, the addition of culturally relevant visual content may increase the overall impact of the communication. Policymakers and public health organizations may consider how these findings can inform the creation of communications strategies that both disseminate factual information along with the media that highlights culturally relevant and engaging forms of communication to increase the public's awareness, knowledge, compliance, and trust in public health agencies.

### **5.4 Limitations of the Study**

The study has several limitations despite its contributions. The sample size of 75 posts, while adequate for analysis, does not capture the broad and full range of differences in social media communication, including across platforms and regions. The analysis is decidedly based on public posts. It did not include private or encrypted communications, which limits generalizability. Similarly, measures of audience engagement provide evidence of reach and interaction, but do not enable inferences of behavior change or longer-term effect. Future research may benefit from the inclusion of a larger data set, as well as longitudinal studies, and comparisons across different social media platforms and other digital communication. This could support a more complex understanding of cultural dynamics in digital communication in crisis.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that cultural dynamics contribute significantly to the ways in which individuals communicate about health issues utilizing social media during a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The textual and audio-visual messages both provided evidence of



cultural values, norms, and practices, with the most content in both forms being health and safety information. Audio-visual messages, more so than textual messages, were able to engage more audiences, show cultural relevance, and allow understanding while textual messages outperformed audio-visual messages in terms of precision and fact-based information. Each of these findings suggested that the choice of communication format may play a role in engaging an audience and providing culturally relevant information and should aim for a balance of informative information and cultural resonance. The research offers implications for theory as it links cultural mediation, media richness, and framing in crisis communication; as well as implications for practice by providing guidance for policymakers, health communicators, and social media managers on how to design and implement effective digital health campaigns that consider cultural aspects.

### **6.1. Summary of Key Findings**

The research indicated that socio-cultural elements were crucial to the nature of COVID-19 communication through social media, and both the textual and audio-visual subset of posts included methods of conveying socio-cultural messages. Health and safety regulations dominated social media communications across content types, further demonstrating the audiences deemed accurate and practical information to be the primary priority of communications. On the whole, the audio-visual messages were deemed to have better engagement, effectiveness, and cultural salience than textual messages. For example, certain audio-visual messages illustrated local customs and cultural and social values, as well as showing evidence of emotional engagement. Text-based messages conveyed factual information accurately, however ultimately had less engagement and were not as effective in conveying socio-cultural context. Humour and satire were also minimally identified and included in the audience's representations of communicating during and about a public health crisis- the analysis demonstrated a trend towards communicating the necessary information based on established cultural norms. This study emphasizes that types of messaging, socio-cultural context, and framing matter for the readers' engagement, perceptions and broad dissemination of information in health crises.



## **6.2. Contributions to Theory and Practice**

This scholarly inquiry contributes to theoretical understanding by bringing together three theoretical constructs of cultural mediation, media richness, and framing studies within the digital context of crisis communication. It shows that cultural context determines not just how messages are created, but how messages are received and audience engagement occurs, aligning with existing theorized frameworks of social media communication in crises. Additionally, this study provides substantiated practical contributions to promote evidence-informed communication strategies, as it emphasizes the importance of using audio-visual formats of communication for culturally diverse audiences, while utilizing text, to clarify and communicate fact. In conclusion, the findings indicate that crisis communication strategies should utilize both forms of content and consider the cultural contexts of their audiences.

## **6.3. Recommendations for Practitioners and Policymakers**

To facilitate reach, engagement, and public understanding, health communicators, social media managers, and policy makers should prioritize multimedia content, consisting of short videos, infographics, and audio-visual posts, that resonates with culture. Textual content should be used deliberately to provide specific information and assure accuracy; however, campaigns should be tailored to various cultures to ensure relevance and facilitate informative, motivational, and advisory information. Policymakers can use these conclusions to enhance public awareness campaigns, help facilitate adherence to health recommendations, and enhance trust in institutions during crisis.

## **6.4. Suggestions for Future Research**

In future studies, it might ultimately be fruitful to broaden the investigation to multiple social media platforms and across more geographic areas and larger, more diverse datasets for generalizability. Longitudinal studies could track changes in communication patterns and audience engagement over time. Causal effects on behavioral outcomes could be tested in experimental studies. Additionally, investigating private, encrypted or cross-platform communication might lead us to richer insights about culture and information sharing during health crises. To deepen understanding of effective crisis communication strategies across



culturally heterogeneous contexts, sentiment analysis, network analysis, or AI driven content assessment could also be incorporated.

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