

Digital Polyphony and Crisis Discourse: Negotiating Linguistic Hegemony and Resistance in New Media

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Abstract

This paper critically examines how specific linguistic features are foregrounded in polyphonic new media discourse during periods of crisis or heightened public discourse. Drawing upon Bakhtin's theory of polyphony to analyze the multiplicity of voices and foregrounding theory to identify prominent linguistic choices, this research explores how dominant narratives exert linguistic hegemony through the strategic foregrounding of specific terms, phrases, and discursive styles. Concurrently, it investigates how marginalized voices engage in linguistic resistance, utilizing subtle or overt foregrounding techniques to carve out space for alternative polyphonic interpretations. The study employs a critical lens to reveal the power dynamics embedded in new media language, analyzing how platforms' algorithmic functions contribute to or challenge the foregrounding of dominant narratives. This research aims to illuminate the impact of these mechanisms on the formation of public opinion and the perceived legitimacy of various voices, critically examining the intersection of language, power, and algorithms in crisis narratives through the mechanism of foregrounding (both human and algorithmic) to achieve or resist linguistic hegemony.

Keywords: Polyphony, foregrounding, crisis narratives, algorithmic influence, linguistic hegemony, new media

Introduction

The contemporary communication landscape is increasingly mediated by interactive digital media environments which encompass technology, services and industries. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2005) define new media as comprising "the artefacts or devices that enable and extend our ability to communicate; the communication activities and practices we engage in to develop and use these devices and the social arrangements and organizations that form around these devices and practices" (p. 2). These environments offer a plethora of technology-driven communication avenues fostering dynamic public discourse characterized by "dynamic links and interdependencies among artefacts, practices and social arrangements" (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2005, p. 3). The evolution of new media has been significantly shaped by the convergence of key technological components. Flew and Smith (2011) attribute the rise of new media to the "three Cs": computing and information technology (IT), communication networks and content and digitized media. Subsequent scholarship, including Barr (2000), Miles (1997), and Rice (1999), introduced a "fourth C": convergence. This concept, as articulated by Flew and Smith (2014), describes the combination of "computing and IT, communication and media content that occurred with the development and popularization of the Internet" (p. 3). Furthermore, Bolter and Grusin (2000) posit that new media undertakings reconceive, or remediate existing media forms. This remediation is evident in platforms such as "online and console-based games, websites and instant-messaging services," which extend human communication capabilities, alter practices and "transform social arrangements through significant levels of interactivity. New media thus combines the mass media's capacity to aggregate large groups with interactive media's ability to involve participants. (Flew and Smith 2014, p.6)

The digital age has fundamentally transformed public discourse from a gatekept, linear exchange into a vibrant, multi-directional cacophony. At the heart of this shift is new media, which now orchestrates the communication environment, especially during crises. Interactive digital platforms have fragmented the traditional narrative stage into countless, often competing, arenas, dramatically heightening the stakes for shaping public opinion. This paper argues that new media's power in crisis communication lies in its polyphonic structure and sophisticated foregrounding

processes. In contested times, new media environments become battlegrounds for narrative supremacy, where the interplay between human expression and computational interventions determines which narratives dominate. Through polyphony and foregrounding, this research illuminates how linguistic hegemony is forged and resisted, offering a granular understanding of the micro-processes shaping public understanding during crises.

To thoroughly analyze the complex dynamics of crisis narratives within new media environments, this research draws upon two pivotal theoretical frameworks: Bakhtin's concept of polyphony and the literary principle of foregrounding. Mikhail Bakhtin's work offers a profound lens for understanding communication not as a singular, monolithic utterance but as a vibrant "dialogic" interplay of multiple, unmerged voices. In a truly polyphonic space, no single voice holds absolute authority; rather, meaning emerges from the dynamic tension and interaction among diverse perspectives, each retaining its distinct integrity. This theoretical scaffolding is particularly salient for new media which inherently fosters a multiplicity of voices from official statements and journalistic reports to citizen testimonies, dissenting opinions and even the "voice" of AI-mediated content personalization.

Complementing this understanding of the communicative landscape is the concept of foregrounding, originating from Prague School linguistics. Foregrounding posits that certain linguistic features are made prominent through deviation from linguistic norms (e.g., unusual word choices, metaphors) or through systematic repetition and parallelism. This prominence draws the reader's or listener's attention, elevating specific words, phrases, or entire discursive patterns above the background. While traditionally applied to literary analysis, this study extends foregrounding to the dynamic, real-time linguistic choices made within new media crisis narratives. It offers a powerful analytical tool to identify not just "what" is being said but "how" specific linguistic choices are made salient. It shapes interpretation, influences emotional responses and contributes to the construction or deconstruction of dominant narratives. By synergistically applying these two frameworks, this research aims to illuminate how the inherent "multi-voicedness" of new media interacts with the deliberate or algorithmically-driven prominence of

linguistic elements to either establish linguistic hegemony or facilitate acts of resistance.

Despite the significant body of scholarship on new media and crisis communication, a notable lacuna persists in the systematic critical analysis that synergistically combines the theoretical lenses of foregrounding, polyphony and linguistic power dynamics. This study directly addresses this critical gap by moving beyond conventional analyses to investigate the strategic and computationally-driven manipulation of linguistic prominence in the highly interactive, dynamic new media environments that characterize critical events. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of how automated agents interact with human voices amplifying, modulating or even suppressing them to shape specific narratives. This integrated approach promises a deeper understanding of power dynamics in contemporary digital crisis communication.

In democratic societies, it is crucial to understand how polyphony, foregrounding and algorithmic influence intersect in shaping crisis narratives. This knowledge is crucial for discerning propaganda and combating misinformation, equipping individuals and institutions to critically evaluate narratives and resist manipulation. It also directly contributes to empowering marginalized voices by revealing mechanisms of linguistic resistance, helping them challenge dominant narratives in algorithmically-mediated spaces. This awareness is fundamental for fostering robust media literacy, an essential skill for informed citizenship in an era shaped by opaque computational processes. A comprehensive grasp of these dynamics is indispensable for cultivating truly democratic digital public spheres, promoting equitable and transparent online communication that strengthens collective resilience during crises. This research systematically unpacks the complexities of crisis narratives in new media by integrating three theoretical frameworks: Foregrounding, Polyphony and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This threefold framework facilitates an analysis of the mechanisms through which language attains prominence, voices converge and contend and power permeates these dynamics to shape collective understanding. While traditional foregrounding, rooted in Prague School linguistics, focuses on linguistic features made prominent in static texts through deviation or parallelism, its application to new media's

dynamic, interactive and multimodal landscape requires re-conceptualization to include systemic, collective and multimodal mechanisms.

Algorithmic Foregrounding

Algorithmic foregrounding refers to the implicit or explicit highlighting of certain linguistic units, narratives or voices by platform algorithms. This prominence is determined by intricate metrics such as engagement rates, recency, user behaviour and predefined content policies. These algorithms act as powerful, often opaque, gatekeepers, shaping what users encounter and what linguistic patterns become salient.

1. (Twitter/X Trending Topics during COVID-19):

During the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, algorithms on platforms like Twitter/X would frequently foreground hashtags related to official health guidelines (e.g., #StayHome, #WashYourHands). These phrases, often reiterated by public health organizations and government officials, gained immense visibility, promoting specific linguistic directives over alternative or dissenting viewpoints. Conversely, less conventional terms or those associated with misinformation, despite potentially high initial engagement, could be algorithmically downranked or removed, preventing their widespread foregrounding.

2. Instagram Reels/Stories During Protests:

During protests (e.g., Black Lives Matter movements, farmer protests in India), Instagram's Reels and Stories algorithms often foregrounded short video clips featuring specific protest chants, slogans or repeated phrases (e.g., "No justice, no peace"). While user engagement drove this, the algorithm's continuous recommendation amplified these linguistic elements, making them culturally prominent and influencing subsequent user-generated content, thereby foregrounding specific linguistic expressions of dissent or solidarity.

3. Hyper-Personalized News Feeds (Instagram, X/Twitter, Facebook Feeds):

Algorithms continuously learn user preferences (engagement, watch time, sentiment) and prioritize content aligning with these patterns. This foregrounds specific lexical clusters and discursive styles resonating with individual biases. For instance, users engaging with content critical of a political party will find their feeds on platforms like Instagram, X and Facebook increasingly saturated with similar content. This amplifies phrases like "government corruption" or "policy failure,"

making them highly prominent while algorithmically de-emphasizing counter-narratives for that user.

4. "Trendjacking" and Audio/Visual Synch (Reels):

Algorithms heavily favour content that utilizes trending sounds, effects or video formats. Creators often "remix" or adapt existing popular content structures. This foregrounds specific catchphrases, slogans and even emotional intonations associated with popular audio tracks. Users are implicitly encouraged to adopt these linguistic elements to gain visibility. A viral soundbite from a political speech or a celebrity interview can be reused across thousands of short-form videos. The algorithm detects the trending audio and pushes videos using it, regardless of their original content. If a particular phrase from that soundbite (e.g., "We will rise above this," or "Is this even real?") becomes associated with a certain visual trend, the algorithm foregrounds both the linguistic and visual elements, embedding them deeply into collective consciousness during a crisis or social discussion.

5. "Authority Boosting" for Crisis Information (Facebook, Google Search, X/Twitter):

During major crises (e.g., natural disasters, public health emergencies, elections), platforms often implement policies to prioritize content from "authoritative" sources (e.g., government agencies, established news organizations, health bodies). This leads to the algorithmic foregrounding of official terminology, verified facts and specific safety instructions. Phrases like "official guidance," "emergency services," "verified report," or "stay safe, stay informed" become hyper-visible at the expense of citizen journalism and less credentialed voices. For instance, following a major earthquake, Google's search results and X's "Community Notes" might algorithmically elevate posts from official disaster relief organizations or government alerts, foregrounding terms like "shelter locations," "aid distribution" and "missing persons hotlines" while potentially downranking or flagging user-generated content that offers unverified information or alternative narratives of the event.

6. "Engagement Traps" and Polarization Amplification:

Algorithms are designed to maximize user engagement (likes, comments, shares, watch time). Often, emotionally charged or controversial content generates higher engagement. This leads to the foregrounding of polarizing language, outrage-inducing statements and emotionally resonant keywords. The algorithm learns that

such language keeps users scrolling and interacting. For example, Discussions around sensitive social issues (e.g., immigration policies, climate action, cultural conflicts) often see the algorithmic prioritization of posts using highly charged terms like "invasion," "catastrophe," "freedom vs. tyranny," or "eroding values." These phrases, designed to provoke strong reactions, are algorithmically amplified because they drive engagement, even if that engagement is negative or leads to increased polarization. This foregrounds a particular, often extreme, linguistic framing of the issue.

7. Subtler Content Prioritization on LinkedIn/Professional Networks:

While not always crisis-related, professional networks like LinkedIn also use algorithms to foreground content based on "relevance" to your industry, connections, and skills. This can foreground industry-specific jargon, leadership buzzwords and highly specific professional competencies. For example, If a new policy affecting a particular industry (e.g., AI regulation in tech, new healthcare mandates) is being discussed, LinkedIn's algorithm will foreground posts that use terms like "compliance frameworks," "disruptive innovation," "stakeholder engagement" or "future of work" if those terms are relevant to a user's professional profile and engagement history. This makes the discourse around those specific linguistic markers highly visible within professional communities.

Networked Foregrounding

Networked foregrounding describes how collective user behaviour, rather than solely individual linguistic choices or algorithmic directives, makes certain linguistic elements prominent through widespread amplification and repetition across a network. This phenomenon underscores the participatory nature of new media in shaping discursive salience.

- (Viral Memes and Hashtags during Political Crises):

In political crises, like the 2020 US Presidential Election or the 2024 Indian General Election, specific hashtags (e.g., #ElectionFraud, #ModiKaParivar) and accompanying memes (often featuring repeated catchphrases or image macros) became virally prominent across platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram. Their foregrounding was a direct result of rapid, decentralized user sharing, re-posting, and remixing, leading to immense linguistic visibility even without explicit algorithmic boosting.

- (Synchronized Posting and "Call to Action" Phrases):

During coordinated online campaigns, such as those related to environmental activism (e.g., #FridaysForFuture), users might synchronize their posting of specific "calls to action" or data points (e.g., "1.5 degrees Celsius," "climate emergency"). The collective, simultaneous deployment of these phrases across diverse user accounts amplifies their prominence, making them impossible to ignore in many users' feeds and effectively foregrounding them through sheer networked volume.

Multimodal Foregrounding

In new media, foregrounding is rarely purely linguistic. Multimodal foregrounding refers to the interplay of text, image, video and audio in elevating specific messages, emotional tones, or conceptual frameworks. The combination of these modes can powerfully amplify linguistic prominence and influence interpretation.

- (Disaster Relief Appeals with Images):

During natural disasters (e.g., the Türkiye-Syria earthquakes), crowdfunding appeals on platforms like Instagram often foreground specific phrases like "Donate Now," "Emergency Aid" and "Lives at Risk." However, their true impact and linguistic prominence are amplified by accompanying distressing images or videos of destruction and suffering. The visual component foregrounds the urgency and emotional weight of the textual appeals, making the language more potent and memorable.

- (Political Slogans in Short-form Videos):

On platforms like YouTube Shorts or Instagram Reels, short political slogans and soundbites (e.g., "Vote for Change," "Stronger Together") are frequently overlaid on impactful visual montages or set to trending audio. The combination of the concise linguistic message with compelling visuals and evocative sound foregrounds the slogan far more effectively than text alone, making it resonate more deeply and becoming a key part of the public discourse.

Foregrounding and Power Structures

Crucially, foregrounding, in all its forms, is rarely a neutral process. It inherently reflects and reinforces existing power structures or actively shapes new ones. The question of "who benefits from what is foregrounded?" is central to this critical lens. Whether it's a government, a corporate entity, a social movement and even an algorithmic architecture, there is always an underlying agenda to what is made prominent. Similarly, "who decides?" becomes a critical inquiry, pushing beyond mere observation to interrogate the human and computational agencies

behind linguistic salience in new media. By analyzing these decisions and their effects, this research aims to expose the mechanisms of linguistic hegemony and highlight pathways for resistance.

Polyphony as a Battleground of Voices

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony posits a literary and a communicative space where multiple, independent and unmerged consciousnesses coexist and interact. Unlike monologic discourse, which subordinates other voices to a single, dominant authorial perspective, polyphony embraces a dynamic interplay of diverse viewpoints, none fully subsumed by another. Applying this theoretical lens to new media reveals a public sphere that is inherently polyphonic, yet often a battleground where diverse "voices" contend for audibility and legitimacy, particularly during crises. In the digital realm, these "voices" extend far beyond individual human utterances. The new media polyphony encompasses a complex amalgamation of:

- a) **Individual Voices:** Personal accounts, citizen journalists, eyewitnesses, and individual commentators sharing experiences, opinions, and observations.
- b) **Institutional Voices:** Official statements from governments, NGOs, public health bodies, traditional media outlets, and corporations.
- c) **Algorithmic Voices:** The non-human "voice" of platform algorithms that, through their foregrounding mechanisms, effectively "speak" by amplifying or suppressing certain narratives and linguistic patterns.
- d) **Automated/ Bot Voices:** Programmed accounts designed to disseminate specific messages, often in a coordinated manner, mimicking human interaction to influence discourse.
- e) **Collective "Swarm" Voices:** Emergent, decentralized, and often leaderless expressions of collective sentiment or action, characterized by synchronized hashtag usage, meme proliferation and mass participation in online protests.

Monologizing Polyphonic Spaces

Despite the inherent multiplicity of voices, new media polyphony is frequently subjected to attempts at monologization. This occurs when powerful actors such as state-sponsored narratives, corporate messaging and well-resourced political campaigns endeavour to assert a singular, dominant narrative, thereby suppressing, distorting and even silencing the diverse perspectives that constitute the polyphonic space. This monologization is often achieved through sophisticated linguistic means, frequently amplified by the very structure of new media.

i. State-Sponsored Narratives in Geopolitical Crises (e.g., India-China Border Disputes):

During periods of heightened geopolitical tension, such as border standoffs between India and China, state media and government-affiliated accounts on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook often employ highly uniform and nationalist linguistic frames. Phrases like "territorial integrity," "national sovereignty" and "unwavering resolve" are repeatedly deployed across official channels. This concerted effort attempts to create a monolithic "national voice," seeking to drown out or delegitimize alternative narratives from opposition figures, dissenting citizens and external observers who might question official accounts or advocate for de-escalation. The sheer volume and synchronized deployment of this specific lexicon, often boosted by loyalist accounts, aims to monologize the discourse by making the official narrative seem ubiquitous and unquestionable.

ii. Corporate Messaging in Brand Crises (e.g., Fast Fashion Labour Disputes): When fast-fashion brands face public scrutiny over labour practices or environmental impact, their corporate social media accounts and PR efforts aim to control the narrative. They will foreground terms like "sustainable practices," "ethical sourcing" and "worker empowerment," often accompanied by carefully curated imagery. This linguistic strategy attempts to monologize the polyphonic discussion that includes critical voices from labour activists, environmental groups and concerned consumers using terms like "greenwashing," "exploitative labour" and "toxic waste." The corporate voice seeks to dominate by presenting a sanitized, uniform message, hoping to obscure or neutralize the diverse, often critical, voices from civil society.

Disinformation Campaigns and Bot Networks in Elections (e.g., US Elections 2024): Leading up to major elections, bot networks and coordinated inauthentic behaviour attempt to monologize critical political discussions. These networks deploy vast numbers of automated voices that repeat specific negative linguistic frames about opposing candidates (e.g., "corrupt politician," "weak on crime," "socialist agenda") or push positive, often exaggerated, narratives about their preferred candidate. The sheer volume of these identical and near-identical linguistic units from non-human accounts aims to create an artificial consensus, making a particular narrative seem more prevalent or legitimate than it genuinely is. This

linguistic flooding attempts to suppress genuine human polyphony by overwhelming it with a singular, manufactured "voice."

Counter-Narratives and Linguistic Resistance in Social Movements (e.g., #MeToo Movement): In response to historical monologization of victim narratives, social movements like #MeToo actively demonstrate polyphony and resistance. Survivors and allies use platforms to share personal testimonies, often employing raw, unfiltered language and specific phrases like "believe women," "enough is enough" and "times up." This collective action creates a powerful, diverse chorus of voices that directly challenges historical institutional silences or victim-blaming narratives previously dominant in public discourse. The linguistic choices made prominent by this collective "swarm voice" directly resist the monologic tendencies that had previously suppressed these experiences.

Building on insights from foregrounding and polyphony, this research uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a core framework. CDA dissects how power relations are enacted, reproduced and challenged through language in new media. It views language not just as communication but as a social practice tied to power structures and ideologies. In the rapid, contested digital sphere, the strategic use of language becomes a potent tool for controlling narratives. CDA allows focusing acutely on how linguistic choices are used to:

- (1) Naturalize certain ideologies by making particular beliefs, values and perspectives appear as common sense, objective truth and inevitable reality thereby making them unquestionable on new media platforms.

"The New Normal" during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Global Social Media): Following initial pandemic shock, terms like "the new normal," "social distancing" and "unprecedented times" became ubiquitous across news feeds, official government communications and public discourse. While initially descriptive, their relentless repetition and integration into policy announcements (often accompanied by infographics and emotionally resonant imagery) worked to naturalize a highly restrictive way of life. This linguistic framing subtly shifted the collective mindset from viewing pandemic measures as temporary inconveniences to accepting them as an inherent, enduring aspect of contemporary existence thereby normalizing significant societal and behavioural changes. The constant algorithmic

foregrounding of content featuring these phrases further solidified their "common sense" status.

"Economic Recovery" after a Downturn (Financial News Sites & Business Social Media):

During economic crises or downturns, official and corporate narratives on platforms like LinkedIn, financial news websites and economic commentary pages often foreground phrases such as "signs of recovery," "market resilience" and "consumer confidence returning." This linguistic pattern, frequently accompanied by positive stock market graphs or optimistic corporate statements, aims to naturalize the ideology of inevitable economic rebound and instill confidence, even when underlying economic realities remain precarious for many. It often implicitly dismisses criticisms of economic inequality or structural issues by constantly highlighting "growth" narratives.

- (2) Legitimize actions by justifying policies, decisions and behaviour as necessary, moral and beneficial by appealing to widely accepted values and urgent circumstances. Language in new media is strategically deployed to justify actions, particularly those that might otherwise face public scepticism or opposition.

"Necessary Measures" for National Security (Government Social Media, News Comments):

In response to perceived national security threats (e.g., cyber attacks, border incidents), government bodies and their proxies on X (formerly Twitter) and state-affiliated news channels might repeatedly use phrases like "necessary measures," "pre-emptive action" and "protecting our citizens." This framing legitimizes potentially controversial surveillance programs, increased military spending, or even retaliatory foreign policy actions by portraying them as unavoidable and essential responses to an existential threat, often without extensive public debate. The use of urgent, decisive language appeals to a sense of shared vulnerability and civic duty.

"User Privacy Enhancements" in Tech Policy Changes (Tech Company Blogs & Press Releases): When major tech companies implement changes to their data collection policies and introduce new features that involve increased access to user data, their official blogs and social media announcements often legitimate these actions through terms like "enhancing user experience," "improving personalization" and "strengthening security protocols." These phrases are designed to frame the

changes as beneficial and protective of the user, legitimizing practices that might otherwise be perceived as invasive or exploitative. Public statements emphasize the positive outcomes while minimizing and omitting detailed discussions of data utilization.

- (3) Delegitimize opposing views by undermining the credibility, rationality and moral standing of alternative perspectives, dissenting voices and perceived adversaries. CDA is particularly adept at uncovering how language is used to discredit and marginalize alternative or critical perspectives.

- "Fake News" or "Disinformation" Labelling (Political Figures & Partisan Media):

The widespread use of terms like "fake news," "disinformation" and "misleading content" by political figures and partisan media outlets on platforms like YouTube, Facebook and X has become a powerful tool for delegitimizing critical journalism, scientific consensus and opposition narratives. By labelling content as "fake," its veracity is immediately undermined, discouraging critical engagement and positioning the source as untrustworthy. This linguistic tactic often pre-emptively dismisses inconvenient truths or uncomfortable facts, protecting preferred ideological stances.

- "Woke Agenda" or "Anti-National" Slurs (Conservative/Nationalist Online Communities):

Within certain online communities, particularly those with conservative and nationalist leanings, terms like "woke agenda," "virtue signalling" and "anti-national" are frequently deployed on social media platforms, online forums and comment sections. These terms serve to broadly dismiss and delegitimize progressive social movements, human rights advocacy and critical perspectives on national policy. By associating diverse movements with a vague, negatively framed "agenda," the arguments themselves are sidelined and proponents are cast as unpatriotic, naive and ill-intentioned, thereby marginalizing their voices and arguments in the digital public sphere.

Linguistic Hegemony and Resistance in Crisis Narratives

Political crises and social movements in the new media environment offer a rich ground for observing the interplay of linguistic hegemony and resistance. During such events, various actors strategically deploy language to shape public opinion, legitimize actions and delegitimize opposing views.

- **Dominant Linguistic Tropes, Metaphors, and Framing:** In political crises, official and mainstream media accounts often foreground linguistic tropes aimed at maintaining or restoring order. For instance, during large-scale protests (e.g., the 2024 student protests regarding geopolitical conflicts on university campuses in North America and Europe), official government statements and mainstream news media on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) frequently employed terms like "maintaining public order," "restoring campus safety" and "condemning disruption." Metaphors of control and stability ("re-establishing normalcy," "clearing the streets") were used to frame protest as chaos. In the context of humanitarian disasters, government and large aid organizations might foreground language centred on "aid delivery," "stability" and "international cooperation," often downplaying the extent of suffering or criticism of response efforts.
- **Algorithmic Amplification:** These dominant linguistic frames are often algorithmically amplified. On platforms like X, official government handles, police departments and major news organizations (often with "verified" status) can see their posts about "order" and "stability" pushed into trending topics or "For You" feeds, especially for users who typically engage with official narratives or who are located in the affected geographical areas. Similarly, during disaster relief, content from large NGOs using "aid delivery" and "donation links" may be prioritized by algorithms based on established trust signals or partnerships, thus foregrounding specific calls to action and narrative framings.
- **Counter-Narratives and Resistance:** Concurrently, counter-narratives emerge from marginalized voices within the polyphonic space, foregrounding alternative linguistic units. During protests, activists and citizen journalists on platforms like Facebook and Instagram often amplified terms such as "freedom of speech," "justice for all," "human rights abuses" and "police brutality." They frequently utilized alternative hashtags (e.g., #HandsOffOurCampus, #SpeakUp) that provided distinct discursive spaces. Resistance also manifests through the foregrounding of victim testimonies raw, emotional accounts shared via live streams or short videos which directly counter sanitized official narratives.

- **Linguistic Deviation:** Marginalized voices frequently leverage linguistic deviation to foreground their perspectives and disrupt dominant frames. This often involves satire and irony where official statements are quoted verbatim but overlaid with mocking commentary or incongruous imagery/audio. For example, during the Indian farmers' protests, activists on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) widely circulated satirical memes juxtaposing government slogans about "development" and "progress" with stark images of protest sites and police barriers. Other tactics include neologisms (newly coined terms) and code-switching (alternating languages/registers) to build in-group solidarity and challenge mainstream linguistic norms.

Public health crises present a unique scenario where scientific discourse intersects with public anxieties, generating a highly contested polyphonic environment.

- **Innovation (Platform Comparison):** This analysis innovatively compares linguistic foregrounding strategies across diverse new media platforms. X/Twitter, with its emphasis on brevity and hashtags, facilitates rapid, high-volume hashtag polyphony where multiple, often conflicting, linguistic frames (e.g., #ProtestorsAreThugs vs. #SupportStudents) contend simultaneously for trending status. YouTube excels in argumentative video-linguistic foregrounding where longer-form video content combines spoken arguments, visual evidence and repeated key phrases to amplify complex analyses or detailed testimonials (e.g., a political commentator repeatedly using a specific economic term across multiple videos to frame an issue, amplified by view counts and subscriber engagement). Reddit, with its threaded discussions and upvoting/downvoting systems, fosters a more deliberate discursive argumentation allowing for the foregrounding of specific logical points, evidence and counter-arguments through sustained textual engagement and community moderation, leading to the collective foregrounding of particular analytical frames.
- **Foregrounding of Official Language:** During pandemics (e.g., the ongoing implications of COVID-19 variants and regional outbreaks of other diseases), official sources such as public health agencies, government ministries and mainstream media consistently foreground scientific jargon, risk assessment language and narratives of "compliance." Terms like "viral load," "herd immunity," "R-naught (R0)," "data-driven decisions,"

"containment measures" and phrases advocating "mask adherence" or "vaccine uptake" become ubiquitous. These terms are presented with an air of objective authority, aiming to legitimize public health interventions and secure collective adherence.

- **Counter-Narratives and Alternative Foregrounding:** Anti-establishment or alternative health narratives on platforms like Facebook groups, YouTube channels and alternative news sites foreground distinctly different terms and linguistic styles. Phrases such as "medical freedom," "natural immunity," "untested gene therapy" (referring to vaccines), "government overreach" and "plandemic" gain prominence. Their linguistic style often employs colloquialisms, emotional appeals (e.g., narratives of personal suffering due to mandates) and personal anecdotes (e.g., "my experience shows..."). These voices aim to undermine official narratives by appealing to individual autonomy, distrust of authority and anecdotal evidence over scientific consensus.
- **The Role of "Misinformation" Labels:** Platform-applied "misinformation" or "context" labels act as a powerful form of algorithmic foregrounding/backgrounding. When an official health organization's post about vaccine safety is highlighted as "authoritative information" and a warning label is affixed to a post claiming a health "conspiracy," the algorithm effectively foregrounds the official counter-narrative while simultaneously backgrounding and suppressing the visibility of the "misinformation." This directly impacts which linguistic frames (e.g., "safe and effective vaccine" vs. "dangerous experimental drug") are made more or less visible to users.
- **Innovation (Semantic Instability):** This study innovates by focusing on the semantic instability of key terms during public health crises. Words like "vaccine," "immunity" and "freedom" become linguistic battlegrounds. Official voices foreground "vaccine" as a civic duty and "immunity" as a result of vaccination, while alternative voices foreground "vaccine" as an experimental intervention and "immunity" as a naturally acquired state. "Freedom" is foregrounded by officials as freedom from disease through compliance whereas dissenters foreground it as freedom from mandates and government intervention. The study analyzes how different polyphonic

voices attempt to foreground their preferred meanings, creating a dynamic struggle over linguistic definition that directly impacts public perception and behaviour.

Corporate crises, such as major scandals or product recalls, illustrate how power dynamics unfold through language as corporations attempt damage control and aggrieved consumers seek accountability.

- **Foregrounding of Corporate Language:** In the immediate aftermath of a corporate scandal such as a major data breach or widespread product recall corporate communications on official websites, social media and in PR statements foreground carefully constructed language. This typically includes corporate apologies (e.g., "We deeply regret this incident"), technical explanations (e.g., "isolated software glitch," "rigorous internal investigation") and damage control language (e.g., "customer safety is our utmost priority," "we are working tirelessly"). These linguistic acts aim to manage public perception, reassure investors and mitigate financial and reputational damage.
- **The Polyphony of Consumer Complaints and Accountability Calls:** This corporate monologic effort is met by a powerful polyphony of voices from consumers. On platforms like Facebook groups, X, Reddit forums and consumer review sites, individuals share personal testimonials of harm, emotional and accusatory language (e.g., "this ruined my life," "they knew about this!") and direct calls for accountability (e.g., "#Boycott," "class action lawsuit," "CEO resignation"). This cacophony of grievances often features raw, unpolished language that stands in stark contrast to the formal corporate statements.
- **Algorithmic Prioritization:** Algorithms play a crucial role in determining the visibility of these competing voices. While corporate statements might initially gain visibility through paid promotion or "authoritative" source status, sustained user engagement (especially negative engagement, shares and comments) with consumer complaints can lead to their organic algorithmic foregrounding. Algorithms might deprioritize content deemed "defamatory" and "misleading" based on platform policies, potentially affecting the visibility of aggrieved voices. The dynamic tension between a

brand's efforts to foreground a sanitized narrative and the collective user effort to foreground adverse experiences is a central battle.

- **Innovation (Linguistic Act Lifecycle):** This case study innovates by examining how the foregrounding of specific linguistic acts changes over the lifecycle of a crisis and how this is influenced by algorithmic intervention. Initially, speech acts of apology (e.g., corporate statements of regret) are heavily foregrounded. As the crisis evolves, if consumer discontent persists, speech acts of accusation (e.g., "They're covering it up!") and demands for solidarity/action (e.g., "Join the boycott!") become increasingly foregrounded by the collective user voice. This shift in foregrounded linguistic acts (from corporate appeasement to public demand for justice) is not completely organic. It is often influenced by how algorithms respond to changing engagement patterns, external media coverage and the virality of specific linguistic forms of protest. Understanding this dynamic interplay provides insight into the fluid nature of power struggles in digital discourse.

Ethical and Societal Implications

Algorithmic foregrounding significantly influences what we perceive as truth, potentially creating an illusion of consensus by constantly amplifying certain linguistic patterns. This can inadvertently suppress legitimate dissent and alternative viewpoints, leading to a digitally engineered echo chamber. Such algorithmic skewing of attention poses a serious challenge to democratic deliberation, as public discourse becomes less diverse and harder to navigate for informed decision-making. In this environment, individuals and marginalized groups face a significant challenge to make their voices heard. They must strategically use foregrounding techniques, like specific hashtags and linguistic deviations, to gain visibility and resist algorithmic suppression. This puts a greater burden on users to critically evaluate foregrounded content, discerning its origins and intentions to avoid becoming passive recipients of algorithmically-dictated realities and maintain independent judgment.

New media platforms hold a substantial ethical obligation to consider how their algorithms impact language and polyphony. This means going beyond basic content moderation to understand how their systems prioritize linguistic patterns,

potentially favouring certain voices. There's a clear call for designing more transparent and equitable foregrounding mechanisms, including algorithmic transparency, nuanced contextual labelling, bias mitigation and features that actively promote exposure to diverse perspectives, thus fostering a more genuinely democratic digital public sphere.

Conclusion

This paper has thoroughly examined how linguistic prominence in new media crisis narratives acts as a battleground for power and meaning. The study shows that the inherent polyphony of digital spaces where myriad voices, including human, institutional, automated and collective "swarms," interact is constantly shaped by foregrounding, the process of making certain linguistic features salient. The study has highlighted the powerful, often opaque role of algorithmic influence in this process, where computational systems amplify or suppress specific language, directly impacting narrative dominance and resistance. Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis, the research paper explored how language in these environments is used to naturalize ideologies, legitimize actions and delegitimize opposing views. The case studies demonstrated these dynamics across political, public health and corporate crises, revealing how dominant forces attempt to monologize polyphonic spaces, while marginalized voices strategically employ linguistic deviation and networked foregrounding to assert their agency. Understanding these intricate relationships between language, algorithms and power is not just an academic exercise. It's vital for discerning truth, empowering diverse voices, and fostering truly democratic digital public spheres. The far-reaching impact of algorithmic shaping on the construction of "truth" necessitates heightened platform responsibility and enhanced user media literacy. Looking ahead, the increasing sophistication of AI-generated content and deepfakes presents new challenges to the authenticity of voices and narratives, necessitating continued interdisciplinary research to navigate the evolving landscape of digital communication. The battle for meaning in our shared digital spaces is ongoing, and a critical understanding of its linguistic underpinnings is more crucial than ever.

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