

Covid-19 semantics of the selected social media posts affecting the lives of Filipinos

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ABSTRACT

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Aiming to contribute to managing the health crisis in attaining Sustainable Development Goal 3, that is, ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, this study described and analyzed the experiences of Filipinos from the Covid-19 terminologies and how these terms influenced their sociocultural behavior. Textual analysis and interviews were employed to gather and analyze the data. The Covid-19 terminologies were taken from the memos, news articles, and social media posts of local government units. These terminologies were validated in the Cambridge Dictionary, Oxford Dictionary, and Coronavirus Corpus. Results revealed that the experiences of the Filipinos from the Covid-19 terminologies pertain to the activities and functioning, especially in following the protocols and mental well-being that predominated the other types of well-being. Further, the experiences demonstrated the faith-based resiliency, familial support, sense of humor, positivity, bayanihan spirit, and flexibility amidst adversities as sociocultural patterns of Filipinos during the pandemic.

1. Introduction

Currently, more than nine million and counting are affected worldwide by the Covid-19 disease. Here in the Philippines, figures almost reach 40 thousand as of this writing with more than a thousand deaths and a little more than ten thousand recoveries. More than the majority of the world has not flattened the curve and experts have not seen any effective medicine floating on the horizon to combat the pathogen, let alone a cure or a vaccine. Leaders of the different nations scuttle to find ways to contain the virus. Even the rich, the most advanced, and highly technological countries find it hard to minimize the damage caused by this invisible foe. In fact, they have more infections than in the Philippines.

Because of the health risks brought by Covid-19, the semantics of words used in government information campaigns and policies are crucial to combat the pandemic. Semantics is defined as the technical term used to refer to the study of word meaning (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Apparently, however, these semantics provided different perceptions from various levels of society given the linguistically diverse background and literacy level of Filipinos that transcends the way they cope during this pandemic. These differing interpretations from the technical meaning of the words provided are called semantic change which is specifically defined as the

change in the concepts that were associated with a term and the innovations that change the meaning of words (Crowley & Bowern, 2010). For instance, private and government sectors have imposed strict compliance with the protocols in their business transactions as a response to how they understand these government policies and information drives. This is manifested in the protocols established by the tourism, hospitality, and food industry to name a few. In contrast, there are those who responded adversely with panic, anxiety, and confusion as a result of the unclear understanding of the policy imposed.

However, it can be observed that in the long run, people have shown to thrive with all the government orders and policies in a way that new system of processes have been embedded in their daily affairs which are termed as the “new normal” and new language formation (semantic change) continues to emerge from the continuous effort of the people to understand and cope during this pandemic within the context of their varying situations. Business and education, for instance, diverted to online processes. Social distancing and wearing face masks have become the standard while in public places. Those who did not seem to understand the language used in the policies and announcements created their own meaning that is sometimes humorous in concept. With all these situations, it is clear that along with the redirection of the usual activities that were done in the past is their influence on the sociocultural aspect of Filipino lives.

It is in this regard that the researchers want to figure out the experiences of the Filipinos during the time of pandemic by investigating the semantic changes in the Covid-19 language used in the country and how these changes influence the new behavior of Filipinos in their daily existence. This study aims to raise the level of awareness of how Filipinos cope with the language they understood and used during this pandemic and to provide some insights as to how this perceived language influences the insurgence of Covid-19 transmission.

The study will culminate with an information drive that will reach out to the intended government office and population who will most benefit from the research study. The researchers hope to be able to contribute to strengthening the capacity of the country to manage any national and global health risks such as this Covid-19 pandemic as part of the attainment of sustainable development goals on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages (SDG #3).

2. Theoretical basis

This section indicates a summary of theories/theoretical points/research that have been conducted previously. On that basis, propose research models, research hypotheses, or analytical frameworks. Glarino (2020) differentiated wellness and well-being. Wellness refers to the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health (Global Wellness Institute, as cited in Glarino, 2020) while well-being (experience of health, happiness, and prosperity) includes having good mental health, high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose and ability to manage stress (Davis as cited in Glarino, 2020).

This study is anchored on the dimensions of wellness (Swarbrick, 2006). First is intellectual which refers to the recognition of creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills. Second, the physical dimension refers to the recognition of the need for physical activity, diet, sleep, and nutrition. Third is occupational, that is, the personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from one’s work. The fourth dimension is spiritual which pertains to the expansion of the person’s sense of purpose and meaning in life. The social dimension is the fifth category which involves the development of a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-

developed support system while the financial dimension, the sixth dimension, refers to the satisfaction with the current and future financial situation. The seventh is the emotional dimension which is the ability to cope effectively with life and create satisfying relationships. Finally, the environmental dimension involves good health through occupying a pleasant, stimulating environment that supports well-being.

Moreover, Linton, Dieppe, and Medina-Lara (2016) defined the dimensions of well-being that are clustered into mental, social, activities & functioning, and physical, spiritual, and personal circumstances. First, mental well-being refers to the psychological, cognitive, and emotional quality of a person's life inclusive of feelings, of the person's state of life, and a person's experience of happiness. Second, social well-being refers to the person's concern towards the local and wider social community, social interactions, and social support. Third, activities and functioning include behavior and activities. Fourth, physical well-being is the quality and performance of bodily functions. The fifth dimension is spiritual well-being which refers to the connection to something greater than oneself in some cases faith in a higher position. Lastly, personal circumstances refer to the conditions and external pressures the person encounters. This includes financial security.

Ang and Diaz (2020) determined the Filipinos' perceptions, resiliency, and coping strategies they encountered during disasters and adversities by conducting a descriptive case study with 100 residents. Through focus group discussion using the purposive sampling method in choosing the participants, the results revealed that the resiliency of Filipinos is culturally based on values of deeper spirituality, strong family ties, and good disposition. This study also demonstrated the faith-based resiliency, familial support, a sense of humor, positivity, the "*bayanihan*" spirit, and flexibility in the midst of adversities.

Linton et al. (2016) identified the well-being dimensions within instruments and described that the manner of production of instruments has developed over time. Subjective well-being is synonymous with the concepts of happiness and mental health as pointed out by Linton et al. (2016) (Diener's model of subjective well-being (i.e., a complete state of physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being), as cited in Linton et al., 2016). The following dimensions of well-being were clustered into six: mental, social, physical, spiritual, activities & functioning, and personal circumstances. The results of this study demonstrated the predominant dimensions of well-being such as mental, social, and activities and functioning.

In sum, these categories were used in describing and classifying the experiences of the informants of this study. Villani et al. (2021) used a cross-sectional design after the lockdown with undergraduate students. The results showed that students were vulnerable to experiencing psychological distress in traumatic events. Thus, the pandemic could affect their mental health. It was suggested to have effective interventions.

Hernández-Torrano et al. (2020) also conducted a mapping of literature regarding the well-being and mental health of university students using the bibliometric analysis. Findings highlighted the addressed research topics for 45 years involving positive mental health, mental disorders, substance abuse, counseling, stigma, stress, and mental health measurement. However, this present study did not only focus on the mental well-being of students. Other age groups were also considered. Although there have been studies on the Covid-19 pandemic, only a few studies dealt with the well-being of Filipinos in general and how they cope with the pandemic. This study attempted to fill in this research gap.

This study analyzed the experiences and sociocultural influence of the Covid-19 terminologies during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: (i) What are the experiences of Filipinos regarding the terminologies used during the Covid-19 pandemic, and (ii) In what ways do these experiences influence sociocultural behavior patterns?

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative research method. Specifically, a textual analysis was used in collecting English terminologies from memos and executive orders posted on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter using the usage-based approach by including the entire sentence where the terminologies are found. Then, the interview questions were prepared using the Google Forms and distributed to the informants' Facebook messenger accounts and personally to the few informants for the gathering of data. Since the topic is about the Covid-19 pandemic, the informants were Filipinos.

3.1. Profile of informants

Narratives based on the interviews with the informants were used through Google Forms. This is the profile of the informants.

Table 1

Profile of the Informants

Profile	Total
Educational Attainment	
Elementary	1
Secondary	5
College Level	6
College Graduate	32
Post Graduate	23
1. Occupation	
Education	48
Health	3
Business	8
Civil Service	2
Unemployed	10

The informants were diverse, representing the classes of socio-economic status. Most of them were college graduates (32), postgraduates (23), and college level (6). Most of them were in the education sector (48) which was followed by unemployed (10) and in the business sector (8). The 74 informants were selected using purposive sampling. These are the criteria: i) Filipino living in the Philippines and (ii) accepts the invitation to share his/her experience in the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.2. Data collection

These were the steps in gathering the data. First, the English terminologies of interest taken from the memos and posts of Local Government Units on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were collected from March 16 - June 30, 2020. These were the criteria for selecting the terminologies. First, the term should appear in the memo or executive order twice in the memos and executive orders and should be evident on the three social media platforms on the same date it is posted on Facebook. Second, the term was verified whether it appeared in the Coronavirus Corpus (2020), 200 million words corpus of articles on Coronavirus which is updated every day and the websites of Inter-Agency Task Force and the Department of Health. Other terms (phrasal terms) not found in the dictionary and corpora were operationally defined. If the English term was not available yet in the said corpus, the term would be a contribution to the corpus building and would be listed in a separate table. Third, the definition of the selected terms from the memos and executive orders was done by checking their meaning in the Cambridge dictionary app dated 2020 and dictionary.com. Fourth, the terms were collected from the memos with the other words in the same sentence where the term was found to determine its usage in the sentence. Fifth, the collected words were checked whether there were changes in the meaning based on their usage in the sentences from March 16, 2020, to June 30, 2020.

In conducting the interview, the interview questions concerning the experiences of Filipinos using Google Forms were prepared. A cover letter was included in asking permission from the concerned citizens who represent the five classes via the socio-economic status of the informants. The interview questions were also translated prior to the distribution to cater to those who can hardly understand the English texts and questions. The link to the Google Forms of each class was sent to the informants after the informant agreed to participate in the study. Fifth, a saturation method was used in collecting the narratives (interview answers) of the informants.

3.3. Data analysis

There were 68 informants who answered the interview questions. Fifty-seven informants responded to the invitation to fill out the Google Forms sent to their Facebook messenger accounts. Besides, 17 interview forms that were distributed personally by the two researchers were returned. However, three informants' answers were excluded from the coding and analysis because of the absence of income, the age which was below 21 years old, and was still a student.

The terminologies were collected, coded, analyzed, and tabulated based on the World Health Organization Health protocols and the types of well-being. Specifically, the emerging themes were identified and clustered to create a master theme and interpreted and narrated with extracts from the informants' answers to the first research question. For the second question, the categories of Linton et al. (2016) were used. Reflections were also done in clustering the emerging themes. Lastly, the coded data were verified by the graduate of Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics and checked by the consultant. Then, coding disagreements were resolved through the virtual meeting and discussions among the researchers and verifier. The results of the study were also disseminated through a webinar invitation organized by the Office of the Extension and Community Involvement of the College of Arts and Sciences-Main Campus.

3.4. Ethical considerations

Informed consent was sought in gathering information from the informants from the five classes by including a cover letter in the interview questions distributed to the Facebook messenger accounts of the informants where the link of the Google Form was forwarded to the informant who agreed.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results

These are the results of the study.

4.1.1. Experiences of the Filipinos regarding the Covid-19 Terminologies

Table 2 shows the experiences of Filipinos regarding the Covid-19 terminologies that included following the health protocols, perceptions, and well-being. This implies that Filipinos abide by the health protocols mandated by the World Health Organization and Inter-Agency Task Force in the country. The theme following the health protocol is exemplified by these sample words such as social distancing, stay at home, and quarantine.

Table 2

Experiences of Filipinos regarding the terminologies used

Themes	Total	Sample Words
Activities and Functioning (Following the Health Protocols)	117	Social distancing, staying at home, and quarantine
Mental Well-being	64	New Normal, quarantine, PPE, PUI, PUM, SAP
Other categories of Well-Being	53	Lockdown, checkpoint

4.1.2. Ways these experiences influence sociocultural behavioral patterns

Table 3

Ways these experiences influence the socio-cultural behavior patterns of the Filipinos

Themes	Total
activities and functioning (protocol)	25
social	16
financial	10
mental	8
physical	6
spiritual	6

Table 3 demonstrates that the majority of the experiences that influence the sociocultural behavioral patterns were aligned with well-being. The emerging sub-themes of well-being include the activities and functioning task, following the protocol, the social dimension (refers to the connection and support of family and friends during the quarantine) followed by the financial dimension (refers to managing the finances and focusing on the necessities instead of wants during the lockdown), and finally the physical and spiritual dimensions. The physical dimension could be demonstrated through exercise to boost the immune system. The spiritual dimension could be manifested in leaning on one's self and the person's relationship with God.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Experiences of Filipinos

The terms chosen based on the experiences of the Filipinos could also be attributed to the fact that most of the informants were teachers who were expected to abide by the law of the government.

4.2.1.1. Activities and functioning

Most informants followed the health protocols mandated by the World Health Organization and the Inter-Agency Task Force organized in the Philippines to mitigate and combat the Coronavirus in 2020. Since most of the informants are also well-educated with the majority of them graduated from college and whose occupation is teaching and other careers, the findings suggested that they followed the guidelines and basic protocols of the government such as washing of hands frequently, staying at home, wearing face masks, social distancing when going out for essentials, especially during the enhanced community quarantine when the data were gathered.

P2: Work from home bcoz (sic) of **quarantine**

P67: forced to **stay at home** due to pandemic

P72: **social distancing** is very important to avoid viruses (sic)

Following this protocol will lessen or eliminate the spreading of viruses.

Informants 2, 67, and 72 narrated their experiences in quarantine by working from home, staying at home, and adhering to the health protocols demonstrated in social distancing, washing hands, wearing face masks in public places, and staying at home.

4.2.1.2. Mental well-being

The informants had mental well-being on the Covid-19 terminologies. Some informants tend to understand the terminologies clearly. Mental well-being includes the intellectual and emotional aspects. Villani et al. (2021) supported this present study wherein the pandemic has affected Filipinos, especially university students. However, a few had misperceptions and misconceptions of the terminologies as exemplified in the following extracts.

P69: ang akong pagsabot kay kato mga kahimanan maprotektahan ko sa ako trabaho diay to sa kadaghanan sa ako nasugatan facemask ra buot ipasabot isul-ob

(I thought, in my own perception, that those pieces of equipment would protect me from my line of work. However, for most people I met, only a face mask is required to be worn).

Informant 69 mentioned his misconception of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), as the equipment usually used in construction at work rather than the face mask.

P92: SAP gikahadlok sa mga tawong naglaroylaroy dako tag pasalamat sa tabang sa SAP kay gi istrikto kadtong tanan naggawas ug gidakop aron motagam ug madisiplina ang tanan

(SAP is feared by the people who are loitering; we are very grateful for the big help of SAP because of the strict (protocol) where those who go out get caught to learn a lesson, and all will be disciplined).

In this extract, P92 had a misconception of SAP (social amelioration program), the aid (*ayuda*) given to the Filipinos who are affected by the pandemic; it was associated with SAF (special armed force).

53: People under investigation (PUI). These are people traced to be in contact with those people who tested positive for Covid-19

53: People under monitoring (PUM). People under monitoring are those people who tested positive under monitoring.

Further, informants 53 expressed diverse perceptions of the terminologies based on their experiences. He perceived PUM as people who tested positive and were under monitoring and considered PUI as People under investigation.

The predominant terminologies mentioned on well-being are lockdown (6) and quarantine (3).

4.2.1.3. *Emotional well-being*

P74: naa ra sa sud sa panimalay laay nabored kay dili mi kakitag dalan sa amua, Di kasimba, di kaadtog mall murag piniriso

(only inside the house bored (I) cannot see the road, cannot hear a mass, cannot go to the mall like a prisoner)

P37: When the city government ordered a lockdown in Cebu City, most people panicked for several reasons: unprepared, inability to travel to & from the provinces, and insufficient funds for food, medicine, etc. During the lockdown, I stayed home the entire duration

P11: Being senior citizens, my husband and I had to stay at home when our town was in total lockdown; we just contacted a close friend or a niece to buy for our basic needs. Luckily, a good neighbor volunteered to pay for our electric and water bills. It was my husband who got easily bored and became desperate

The informants experienced various emotions in experiencing lockdown such as boredom for informant P74; Informant P37 shared one's observation of people panicking during the lockdown. However, P11 saw the blessing by feeling lucky to have family and neighbors who helped them in buying essentials. Anand (2016) mentioned that positive emotions benefit the cardiovascular, immune, and endocrine systems, and the person's ability to adapt the negative situations would help in coping mentally.

4.2.1.4. *Intellectual well-being*

P3: The **quarantine** pushed me to discover and develop new skills so that boredom and depression would not take over my system. I learned something new and thought outside of the box so as be more productive and skillful

P73: **nananom** ug mga mais, kamote ug balanghoy para may maani sunod buwan Para may makaon akong pamilya

(Plant corn, sweet potato, and cassava instead so that we can harvest them for the next month to feed my family).

Informant P3 discovered his new skills to cope with the pandemic and fight against pandemic, while Informant 73 found a way to produce food for his family by planting root crops.

4.2.1.5. *Other types of well-being*

Other types of well-being are social, financial, and physical. Vilar-Compte et al. (2022) mentioned the economic indicators involving the effect of the pandemic on the loss of jobs and employment.

4.2.1.5.1. *Social well-being*

P3: During the **hard lockdown**, I was able to organize people in our neighborhood for a meeting so as to prevent the pandemic from entering our area. Due to the joint effort of our neighborhood, luckily and fortunately, all are safe

P3 was able to reach out to her immediate community and prevent the spread of the virus in their neighborhood.

4.2.1.5.2. *Financial well-being*

P50: We should buy the essential goods for our families (sic) basic needs first before anything else because we don't know when it will end

P50 said that the pandemic taught people to be thrifty.

P50 taught him to focus on the important things in life and manage his finances well.

4.2.1.5.3. *Physical well-being*

P56: It helps to enhance my immune system, and it develops my sense of well-being. In the case of informant 56, she exercised daily in order to boost her immune system and develop her physical well-being

To sum up, most of the well-being evident in the experiences of the informants was on activities and functions relevant to the protocol imposed by the Philippine government to mitigate the transmission of the Covid-19 virus.

4.2.2. *Ways these experiences influence sociocultural behavioral patterns*

This study confirms Ang and Diaz's (2020) study on the resiliency of Filipinos which is culturally based on values of deeper spirituality, strong family ties, and good disposition. The results demonstrated the faith-based resiliency, familial support, a sense of humor, positivity, the "*bayanihan*" spirit, and flexibility in the midst of adversities. Hence, the data suggest that the Filipinos, especially the educators, tend to follow the mandates of the government to contain the spreading of the various to promote their well-being in different dimensions. These newly-developed sociocultural behavioral patterns could also serve as their coping mechanisms in the midst of this global health crisis. The study also:

Extracts

Activities and functioning

P69: **wala nay lamay sa patay** di wala napod amot makolekta para sa gastuhanan sa patay.

(No more funeral wakes and services are allowed, therefore, there are no more monetary alms or donations to collect for the funeral expenditures).

P55: Wearing a face mask when going out of the house is already **part of my daily life**; that is now the new normal, wearing a face mask all the time, most esp. when going out and mingling with people

In extracts P69 and P55, the informants' practices were affected by the pandemic by not going to the wake of the deceased to apply social distancing and wearing a face mask as part of their daily routine to protect themselves from the virus.

Other types of well-being

P56: Walking 06 kilometers a day has **already become my lifestyle and part of my daily routine** (physical well-being)

P11: It **strengthens** my relationship with God (spiritual well-being)

P2: The use of digital platforms for **virtual meetings** in lieu of face-to-face (social well-being)

P9: and **spend more time** with family (social well-being)

P9: My experiences during ECQ and GCQ taught me to save money and spend more time with family. (financial well-being and social well-being)

P4: staying home 24/7 gives me *anxiety* in a way; I'm (sic) **used to** going out every day fetching my kids from school & seeing my friends at the same time (emotional well-being)

C66: Cook our own food or *order thru the food app* rather than dining out (intellectual well-being and financial well-being)

D8: I started using apps to shop online instead of shopping in the mall (financial well-being)

These extracts of well-being were representations of the various dimensions of well-being. These pandemic experiences influenced their sociocultural behavior patterns, specifically in their daily routines, practices, and activities.

5. Conclusions & recommendations

The findings of this study provide implications for the importance of the meanings of the Covid-19 terminologies and the relevance of these terminologies to the experiences of Filipinos. The sociocultural behavioral patterns were affected by the experiences of the pandemic. The results suggest that Filipinos' way of following the health protocols could be attributed to the educational attainment and occupation of most of the informants who are teachers. Teachers are expected to abide by the policies of the government. Maintaining good health through exercise, eating healthy food, and valuing family relationships during this pandemic imply that Filipinos are resilient. They always find ways to adapt to the new normal by seeing the brighter side of this global health crisis, keeping themselves healthy, and strengthening their relationships with their families. They find God as their source of strength in the midst of this pandemic. Hence, this study demonstrated the successful implementation of the IATF and local government policies since these policies positively affected the life of Filipinos under study.

Based on the findings and conclusions, these are the following recommendations: 1) There might have been more informants from Classes A and B. 2) Other informants with occupations that are not in the teaching professions may also be involved in the next phase of this study. 3) A video clip which is information, education, and communication (IEC) material on how Filipinos cope with the Covid-19 pandemic, may be prepared and published on the Youtube channel to demonstrate the technology transfer of this research project. 4) A webinar to be facilitated by the CTU Guidance counselor may be organized for the debriefing and dissemination of the results of the study to the informants. 5) Based on the findings of this study, tips for surviving this pandemic may be shared with the viewers of social media for the well-being of Filipinos worldwide through infographics. 6) Collected Covid-19 terminologies not yet found in the online dictionaries and Coronavirus Corpus may be donated to the authors of the dictionaries and developers of the said corpus for additional vocabulary and corpus-building purposes.

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