



COVID-19 pandemics and disinformation issues in Taiwan:

Analyses on YouTube videos

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Combating COVID-19 disinformation

- With effective technological pandemic prevention measures, Taiwan has kept low coronavirus infection rate since early 2020
 - Covid-19 public health crisis by utilizing ICTs & data innovations (Yen, 2020)
- V-Dem Annual Democracy Report (2019):
Taiwan is subject to the most intensive international disinformation operations globally.
- To prevent Covid-19 infodemic during crisis in Taiwan (Lin, 2021):
 - Regulated heavy fine for rumor spreaders
 - Implemented fact-check mechanisms



YouTube & disinformation

- YouTube has become the global influential platform for socio-political videos & a hotbed of spreading disinformation (Hussein, 2018)
- Topical YouTube videos: participatory culture shaped by socio-political systems, diverse Perspectives, strong affects (Lin, 2015)
- YouTube as popular social media and OTT in Taiwan (Statista, 2021).
 - 89.6% penetration rate
- Research aims:
 - To examine Covid-19 issues and disinformation on YouTube, this study analyzes media sources, content/presentation and purposes of YouTube videos regarding Covid-19 & disinformation in Taiwan.



Method

- Data driven research
 - Disinformation issues during 1st wave of COVID-19 outbreak
 - Five-months data (January-May 2020) : YouTube videos (Taiwanese professional media & YouTube UGVs)
 - Data collection platform : Uminer big data platform
 - Keywords : Boolean logic keywords (i.e., disinformation, Covid-19)
 - Final dataset : 438 related YouTube videos



Results : Traditional media vs. new media

- **Video sources: traditional vs. new media**
 - 78% traditional media (342): majority broadcasting news
 - 22% new media: web-only videos (26), alternative media (35), YouTubers (34)
- **Video types**
 - Traditional media news reports (Covid-19 & disinformation) dominated
 - Traditional TV view counts: Political commentary programs > traditional media news
 - Most-viewed new media show political inclinations (pro-blue, pro-green, pro-red)
 - Taiwan Center for Diseases Control (CDC)'s daily live streaming:
 - Innovative, huge viewership and citizens' appraise channel
 - Ease public's anxiety about Covid-19 pandemic and clarify disinformation
 - Highest Popularity : YouTubers' political mockery contents
 - Reasons: criticizes & mocks Covid-19 domestic and international issues



Results : Disinformation videos at stages

Due to good epidemic control, Taiwan's YouTube videos do not emphasize Covid-19 infections and treatments.

- 1st stage: most videos focus on awareness & publicity
 - Urge the public not to spread Covid-19 false information
 - Report disinformation cases
 - Inform regulations for punishing rumor-mongers



Results : Disinformation videos at stages

- **Watershed event (March 26, 2021) : WHO Director-General Ghebreyesus accused Taiwan of mocking his ineptitude & pro-China stance**
 - **Video viewership:** disparity between average video view counts regardless of media types (before & after 03.26)
 - **Increasing videos of Internet armies (e.g., China, Taiwan, Thailand) to manipulate public opinions via media framing & computational propaganda**
- **April-May 2020: TW viewers increasingly video search Covid-19 & disinformation**
 - **Average view-count > five times**
 - **April: Top 10 highest view count videos (sensational & factual contents)**



Results : Traditional media video analysis

- Traditional media affiliated videos, especially political commentary programs, garner greater viewership
 - Most active traditional media news: FTV News, CH51, CTV, TTV News
 - Critical Moment (關鍵時刻) (ETTV's sensational political commentary program): 8 of top 10 grossing videos mostly related to WHO issues
 - Ghebreyesus denounced Taiwan: Highest viewed in early April
 - Covid-19 salient news topics: Wuhan infection, Chinese internet army activities & China-Russia border tensions



Results : YouTube UGVs (2nd most viewed)

- YouTuber's self-generated videos (sarcastic political parody)
- Eye Central Television (眼球中央電視台)
 - 2 positions in top 10 most viewed videos; 2nd highest viewership after Critical Moment
 - Tackled controversial & sensitive topics (e.g., young Chinese cyber-nationalists, former Kaohsiung mayor Han, & Taiwan's mask donation to China)
 - "Bat" social media war between Thailand & China & the formation of the "Milk Tea Alliance" (Positively received in TW; appeal to youth)
- Popular video characteristics: geo-political or cross-strait controversies; witty political satire



Contributions

- Understanding YouTube videos' **characteristics** and **content/presentation** (popular topics, forms, tones) of Covid-19 & disinformation in Taiwan
 - Reflect socio-political controversies affected by international relation, disinformation and internet armies' campaigns across media types
 - Sensational & factual
 - Topics: (technological) epidemic prevention, internet armies, national image, international relation

