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The COVID-19 Crisis and Its Challenges on Social Issues

COVID-19: crisi e sfide nella società

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# Sense-Making/Giving during the COVID-19 Crisis

## A Multi-Method Study of Health Podcasting in Australia and the U.S.

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### ABSTRACT

Sense-making and sense-giving represent an issue of communication (Weick *et al.* 2005). The former is associated with emotional processes of crisis assessment and cognitive processes of justifying and seeking social acceptance for decisions (Søderberg and Vaara 2003), while the latter is the framework communicated to the public to facilitate their understanding and subsequently motivate certain actions (Maitlis and Christianson 2014). The medium used to communicate this framework varies depending on the relationship an authority figure has with their audience. Analysis of this communication and its medium has focused primarily on political leaders through the lens of the Charismatic, Ideological and Pragmatic (CIP) model (Crayne and Medeiros 2020), and of the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak 2021). This study uses both the CIP model and the DHA via Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) to examine influential physicians communicating the COVID-19 crisis in health podcasts in the U.S. and Australia. It therefore interprets the health-related information they disseminate, and how this information is framed and given meaning, to develop a perspective on how and why these podcasters differ in how they make sense of the crisis and, consequently, appeal to a broader audience.

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\* Although this research was jointly conducted by both Authors, Rosita Belinda Maglie is responsible for the Abstract and the sections 1, 1.3 and 3; Matthew Josef Groicher for the sections 1.2, 2, and 4.

*Keywords:* CADS; CIP Model; COVID-19 crisis communication; DHA; podcasting; sense-making/giving.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It would be reasonable to expect that the ubiquity of the COVID-19 threat would lead to a seemingly unified response from world leaders. However, this has not been the case. Global responses to the COVID-19 crisis have varied markedly, leading to substantially different outcomes in terms of virus mitigation, population health, and economic stability. One explanation for this inconsistency is that political leaders took differential approaches to making sense of the crisis, which, in turn, influenced their approaches to decision making and communication. Depending on each country's sociopolitical context, history, collective memories and traumas, and historical tradition of government rhetoric, apart from the personality of the head of state and the nature of the governmental system, most governments used specific forms of crisis communication to convince people to take restrictive measures because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Wodak 2021, 346). Thus, the varied and damaging initial responses of many heads of state ranged from quick social and economic interventions (e.g., Kealey 2020) to downplaying the severity of the virus and deflecting responsibility (e.g., Phillips 2020) to claiming the virus was a "hoax" (e.g., Egan 2020), and as a result left many people around the world scared, angry, uncertain, and lacking confidence in their national leaders (*The Lancet* 2020, 1011).

So far, the Charismatic, Ideological, and Pragmatic (CIP) model of leadership (Crayne and Medeiros 2021), and Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak 2021) have separately addressed the constructs of sensemaking and sensegiving of the COVID-19 crisis, mainly focusing their attention on political leaders in order to identify their leadership styles and their specific modes of communication in press conferences and interviews. Looking at Europe, Ruth Wodak (2021) presents the results of a comparative and qualitative discourse-historical analysis of crisis communication by governments in Austria, Germany, France, Hungary, and Sweden during the global COVID-19 pandemic lockdown from March 2020 to May 2020. Four frames are discussed – resurrection, dialog, trust, and war – that, pointing to distinct regimes of bio- and body politics legitimated in very different ways, illustrate diverse ways of dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. In Austria, for instance, the nation

was conceptualized as a family, with a quasi-Messiah as leader (338-340). Crisis communication by heads of state, like former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, consisted of speaking at eye level with their people, and establishing a rational dialog and an engaged relationship – full of empathy – with citizens (340-341). In Sweden, where full lockdown never occurred, the strategy for containing the virus entailed a trust model that implied personal responsibility rather than hierarchical leadership (342-343). The fourth frame, used for example by Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán in public speeches, interviews, and press conferences, was based on the metaphor of “war against the virus”, meaning that in emergency situations, leaders bear all the responsibility and people must follow orders (344-345).

Using the CIP model of leadership (Mumford 2006, as cited in Hunter *et al.* 2011, 72) as a framework, Crayne and Medeiros (2021) discuss the concept of the leader as sense-maker to understand the different responses of three leaders to COVID-19: Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, Jair Bolsonaro, the former Brazilian President, and Angela Merkel. As already mentioned in the above study, Angela Merkel’s rational communication about the virus, which was based on scientific evidence, was also confirmed by the two authors (468). Merkel foregrounded her pragmatism when she appealed to the rationality of the German public rather than their emotions. Moreover, her appeals to the public focused heavily on the present and avoided speculation about a return to normalcy or aspects of the future (469). In his response to COVID-19, Bolsonaro struck a negative tone by focusing on the past and portraying the virus as an “us versus them” problem. According to Crayne and Medeiros (2021, 468), his behavior exhibits some of the most predictable results of ideological sensemaking, such as strict adherence to values, demands for loyalty, and rejection of information and people who contradict the thematic narrative. Trudeau’s approach to Canada’s COVID-19 response was largely charismatic. His communication with the public, whom he viewed as primary agents in crisis management, was clearly optimistic and focused on a post-pandemic future (465) and the successful development of coalitions (466).

In our modern age, however, politicians are not the only authority figures whose voices are echoed across nations. Their opinions and messages are taken up and modified by broadcasters of various types – radio, television, social media and podcasts – who in turn have an impact on their audiences’ understanding of crisis situations. Differently from previous studies, the present research extends our understanding of

crisis communication, modifies its meaning-making medium, and uses the CIP model, DHA and Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) through text analysis software (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count – LIWC 2022; Boyd *et al.* 2022; and WordSmith Tools, version 7, Scott 2016) to examine influential physicians’ communication via health podcasts in the United States (i.e., Dr. Sanjay Gupta in *Coronavirus: Fact vs. Fiction*) and in Australia (i.e., Dr. Norman Swan in *Coronacast*). Like policy makers, lay people trust these podcasters to make sense of the sometimes-overwhelming amount of information available and to provide a clear path amid uncertainty. Therefore, this study interprets the health-related information these authorities disseminate via podcasts, as well as the ways in which this information is framed and given meaning, to develop a perspective on how and why the various mental, cultural, and political models of these podcasters differ in how they make sense of the COVID-19 crisis and, consequently, appeal to a broader audience.

Because it is based on DHA, this investigation avoids disciplinary limitations (Wodak and Reisigl 2016, 57) and applies the DHA and CIP models in a combined approach to analyze this new communication medium, i.e., podcasting, by focusing on two examples of podcast series broadcast on two different continents, and new leaders, i.e., physicians hosting podcast series dedicated to daily coverage of COVID-19, in this case Sanjay Gupta from the U.S. and Norman Swan from Australia. Since DHA also considers triangulation important to capture many different facets of the object of study (Wodak and Reisigl 2016, 58), this study also combines the two approaches with CADS, to better intertwine Corpus Linguistics (CL) with discourse analysis in the DHA framework, through text analysis tools. More specifically, it studies the main features of leadership styles, included in the CIP model, as discursive features identified in the ad-hoc assembled corpora consisting of the two podcasts under study, using two text analysis tools: Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) (Boyd *et al.* 2022) and WordSmith Tools (Scott 2016). Thirdly, due to the fact that DHA focuses mainly on historical analysis to provide an explanation for discursive change, so that the results can be practically used for emancipatory and democratic purposes (Wodak and Reisigl 2016, 58), the ultimate goal of this study is to use both approaches and tools to better understand whether the podcasts analyzed in this study can be considered potentially good examples of podcast programs on COVID-19 that, as the WHO (2021, 55) recommends, can strengthen public trust in digital health to properly address vaccine hesi-

tancy, improve public understanding, and promote public adherence to treatment recommendations.

In the following sections, we outline the theoretical underpinnings of our research and provide a definition of sensemaking and sensegiving according to the theoretical framework of the CIP leadership model and a description of DHA, CADS, and CL. We then describe the relevant methods of data collection and analysis, and present the results obtained. The paper concludes by reviewing the above goals, pointing out methodological limitations, and discussing opportunities for future research.

### *1.1. Sensemaking and sensegiving*

Sensemaking and sensegiving are two key processes carried out by leaders in changing environments and times of crisis, such as that created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Sensemaking is the retrospective process through which leaders make sense of, or interpret, events. By looking backwards at past occurrences, leaders develop a narrative that explains events. This is then used as a basis and justification for future decisions, i.e., a prescriptive model. The efficacy of this model and its consistency with the situation at hand are essential, since an inadequate model can further complicate crisis conditions, as the basis for a group's problem solving becomes flawed (Crayne and Medeiros 2021, 463).

Sensegiving, on the other hand, refers to the way the prescriptive model is conveyed by authorities to their followers, as well as the medium used to communicate it. Examples can include press conferences or public statements. The communication of this model to all followers provides them with a common framework through which they can interpret new events, allowing the group to function more cohesively to confront and overcome problems (Crayne and Medeiros 2021, 464).

The Charismatic, Ideological and Pragmatic Model of leadership, or CIP model, proposes three sensemaking-driven styles of leadership, each with a unique method of forming and communicating perspectives on events. Differences between styles are most easily observed during periods of crisis, which are managed differently based on the leader's prevalent style. The three styles are distinguished by at least eight characteristics, specifically (1) time frame orientation, (2) type of experience used, (3) number and type of outcomes sought, (4) focus in model construction, (5) locus of causation, (6) controllability of causation, (7) targets of influence, and (8) the crisis conditions that have been associated with

optimal performance of this type of leader. It has also been suggested that each type of leader varies in the type of emotions (or lack thereof) they employ in the communication of their models (Mumford 2006, as cited in Hunter *et al.* 2011, 72). See *Table 1* for a summary of these characteristics.

*Table 1. – Summary of CIP model characteristics and differences between leader types.*  
Source: Hunter *et al.* 2011, 72.

|                              | CHARISMATIC | IDEOLOGICAL  | PRAGMATIC                 |
|------------------------------|-------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Time frame orientation       | future      | past         | present                   |
| Type of experience used      | positive    | negative     | both                      |
| Nature of outcomes sought    | positive    | transcendent | malleable                 |
| Number of outcomes sought    | multiple    | few          | variable                  |
| Focus in model construction  | external    | internal     | external                  |
| Locus of causation           | people      | situations   | interactive               |
| Controllability of causation | high        | low          | selective                 |
| Targets of influence         | masses      | base cadre   | elites                    |
| Crisis conditions            | ordered     | chaotic      | localized                 |
| Use of emotions              | positive    | negative     | rational<br>(low emotion) |

Charismatic leaders tend to focus on the future when forming prescriptive models (time frame orientation). They utilize positive events as reference (type of experience used) and seek multiple positive outcomes for their followers (number and type of outcomes sought). Their focus in model construction is frequently external, while the locus of causation is situated in people and their actions. Thus, they also perceive a high level of control over the causes of the changes they seek. Their targets are the masses, whom they seek to influence to change their behavior in a certain way in order to achieve their goals. These leaders operate best in ordered environments where they can focus on swaying people's visions to reflect their own. They also tend to employ positive emotions when communicating with their followers (Hunter *et al.* 2011, 72; Crayne and Medeiros 2021, 465).

Ideological leaders, on the other hand, utilize negative emotions such as anger more frequently in their communication, focusing on learning from past mistakes (time frame orientation) and negative experiences (type of experience used). They pursue few, transcendent goals of a return to traditional values and past glory (number and type of outcomes



sought) with a small group of followers (target of influence) and largely attribute control over current events to external forces such as the situation (locus of causation). They are often in their element when chaotic conditions prevail, where their strongly held beliefs and past-oriented perspective can provide stability and guidance (Hunter *et al.* 2011, 72-73; Crayne and Medeiros 2021, 467).

Finally, pragmatic leaders are highly rational in their communication, foregoing the use of emotions in favor of logical arguments and persuasive tactics to convince highly skilled members of society (target of influence), who are the only ones fully capable of understanding the complexity of the current situation (time frame orientation), to collaborate to solve current problems (nature of outcomes sought). Consequently, their perspective tends to be much narrower, focusing on selected issues that require attention, drawing on the experiences necessary to best address the situation at hand (type of experience used). Their goals may also change as the problem evolves. These leaders are best situated in localized, stable conditions where concrete problems can be identified and solved in a rational process (Bedell-Avers, Hunter, and Mumford 2008, 91; Hunter *et al.* 2011, 72-73; Crayne and Medeiros 2021, 468).

These three styles are not meant to be rigid, and some overlap is possible. Leaders are thought to incorporate aspects of different styles into their sensemaking, but prevalently choose one pathway. For example, a pragmatic leader may on occasion focus on future goals, or employ both positive and negative emotions as necessary, while generally remaining more problem-focused and rational than other styles. Furthermore, it should be noted that none of the styles are considered superior to the others; all are valid strategies and may excel or not based on the situation in which a given leader-figure finds themselves (Crayne and Medeiros 2021, 464).

## 1.2. *Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) and Corpus Linguistics (CL)*

The Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) provided the analytical framework for this study by helping to deconstruct the language of the two health authorities who appeared as experts on two podcasts aired in two different countries, to examine leadership style to gain insight into their emotional and cognitive processes of making sense of the COVID-

19 crisis that is given/communicated to the audience, and to identify potentially good examples of podcast programs that can strengthen public trust in digital health technologies.

DHA usually consists of an eight-step program (Wodak and Reisigl 2016, 33), and the investigation presented here followed all steps recursively:

- activating and consulting prior theoretical knowledge (in our case, reading and discussing previous research on the CIP model of leadership, DHA, CADS and CL);
- systematically collecting data and contextual information (in accordance with the research hypotheses, analyzing the discourse of crisis communication and, in particular, the discursive events associated with COVID-19, communicated by healthcare authorities in Australia and in the US through the medium of podcast);
- selecting and preparing data for specific analysis (following predetermined criteria, selecting the two health podcasts, limiting data collection to one month, and transcribing the episodes);
- defining research question(s) and formulating assumptions (based on literature review and initial review of data);
- qualitative pilot analysis, including contextual analysis, macro/micro-analysis (compiling a pilot corpus allows testing of categories, i.e., leadership styles, and initial assumptions, and further specification of assumptions);
- detailed case studies (using a larger corpus, proceeding primarily quantitatively but also qualitatively), formulation of a critique (interpreting and explaining the results, taking into account relevant contextual knowledge and referring mainly to the last of the three dimensions of the critique)<sup>2</sup>; and
- practical application of the analysis results (the results are proposed for practical application to promote trust in online health communication and acceptance of health protocols).

Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) is a good ally for a DHA study, and both ought to benefit from their theoretical and methodologi-

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<sup>2</sup> Text or Discourse Immanent Critique aims at uncovering inconsistencies, (self-) contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in text/discourse-internal structures; Socio-Diagnostic Critique is about uncovering the – especially latent – persuasive or ‘manipulative’ character of discursive practices, and Future-Related Prospective Critique aims at improving communication (e.g., by developing policies against sexist language use or by breaking down ‘language barriers’ in hospitals, schools, etc.) (Wodak and Reisigl 2016, 26).

cal cross-fertilization to examine language use in a social context, as we believe that a triangulated design helps to validate and enrich the analysis of language in the light of historical, socio-cultural, and political insights (Gillins *et al.* 2023, 7). CADS falls into the mixed-method category because it already connects Corpus Linguistics (CL) and Discourse Analysis (DS). Ideally, this approach combines the empirical robustness of the corpus-based strand with the insightful depth of the discourse analytic strand (Gillins *et al.* 2023, 49).

Indeed, CL allows critical discourse analysts to work with much larger data sets than is possible with purely manual techniques. By enabling critical discourse analysts to broaden their empirical base considerably, CL can help reduce researcher bias (Mautner 2016, 155) and thus address a problem to which Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in general, and DHA in particular, is hardly more prone than other social sciences, but for which it has been harshly and persistently criticized (e.g., Widdowson 2004). As concerns this study, CL within CADS allowed us to work with a large amount of data and to look closely at linguistic details and their collocational environment (McEnery and Hardie 2012, 233). CL software provides not only quantitative perspectives on authentic texts used in various contexts to perform social functions, e.g., calculating frequencies and measures of statistical significance, but more importantly qualitative perspectives, insofar as it presents data excerpts in a way that allows the researcher to evaluate individual occurrences of search words, qualitatively examine their collocation environments, describe salient semantic patterns, and identify discourse functions (Mautner 2016, 155). Doing so critically means uncovering and “challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about language and the social, as well as recognizing discourse as a potentially powerful agent in social change” (157).

Following CADS work on linguistic signs, we focused our analysis of the concordance line less on what signs are and how they relate to each other, and more on what they do and how they relate to the extra-linguistic world (Gillins *et al.* 2023, 23). In this study, in fact, we were less interested in the syntactic position of a word for its own sake than in whether syntactic position says anything about the speakers’ leadership styles (e.g., whether the health podcasters studied are predominantly charismatic, ideological, or pragmatic); we were less interested in the range of meanings of a word than in how those meanings were constructed and reinforced by the podcasters in their particular discourse context. Moreover, because of CADS interest in the social function of language, we looked

beyond the concordance line. First, we read and interpreted not only the line itself, but also an extended section of the co-text before and after that line as needed<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, CADS scholarship uses concordance as a window through which to access complete texts (23). Then, as we expanded it, we related the concordance line to the broader socio-historical context that shapes and is shaped by the corpus.

The following section focuses on describing the corpus design criteria followed in this study, the software packages used, and the resulting features (e.g., frequency lists) and types of linguistic evidence (e.g., concordance lines) provided by the text analysis tools that, as McEnery and Hardie (2012, 233) point out, were considered in the spirit of triangulation, i.e., in a methodologically pluralistic approach. Because one of the two Authors has a background in psychology and is familiar with LIWC (Pennebaker *et al.* 2007), which was originally developed for analyzing narratives of emotional distress, this section also describes this text analysis program, which was used as an additional method for a quantitative approach to examining the language of public health crisis communication through podcasting, and which was added to the software Word-Smith Tools commonly used in CL studies (e.g., Baker 2006; Hunt and Brooks 2020).

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Two podcasts from different countries, but with similar characteristics (i.e., both main hosts are physicians with seemingly similar perspectives on COVID-19), comprise the corpus, which includes 52 episodes broadcast on the same dates during the global lockdown, i.e., April 2, 2020, to May 19, 2020. Of these, 26 belonged to the podcast program *Coronavirus: Facts vs. Fiction* (46,929 running words) hosted by Sanjay Gupta, the American celebrity physician and CNN Chief Medical Correspondent; and the remaining 26 belonged to the Australian podcast *Coronacast* (52,993 running words) hosted by Dr Norman Swan, one of Australia's most medically qualified journalists, and Tegan Taylor, a health and science reporter.

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<sup>3</sup> For word-limitation reasons, the examples from the corpus in this study are limited to a few lines.

In line with the procedures outlined by the DHA, we followed a multimethod approach to reach our objectives. Four of the nine characteristics outlined in the CIP model were selected for analysis in this study. This selection was based in part on the literature, which identifies four traits (i.e., use of emotions, time-frame orientation, outcomes sought and locus of causation) as the most easily identifiable in discourse (Crayne and Medeiros 2021, 464). In our study, however, we chose to analyze the targets of each podcaster's influence rather than the outcomes sought because we assumed that the targets could be identified by analyzing the text. Therefore, we decided to examine time frame orientation, locus of causation, targets of influence, and use of emotions.

For data analysis, we used two tools, i.e., the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count, or LIWC, and WordSmith Tools. These tools offered us both a broad overview of the corpus with quantitative data and more in-depth contextual information. After initial examination with LIWC, we made further hypotheses that we investigated in more detail with WordSmith Tools.

To be precise, the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count is a tool that applies text-based analysis to assign words in a given text to specific categories of psychological states, functions or thinking styles, as well as assigning lexicogrammatical labels, which are presented as relative frequencies (Boyd *et al.* 2022, 2-3). It has been used in many studies and several versions exist, including the one released in 2022, but it has also been heavily criticized since words are not used in isolation and require context to adequately evaluate their meaning (Hunt and Brooks 2020, 21).

In CADS, the frequency of an item or structure is taken to be one of the key indicators of its significance, the WordSmith Tools software package, useful for searching for lexicogrammatical and word patterns in corpora, allows for various analytical functions, including wordlist and concordance line analysis, insofar as recurring words and phrases can function as indicators of specific ways of representing and making sense of the world (Baker 2014, 13). For this study, we exclusively used it to first obtain an immediate snapshot of the characteristics of each podcaster's language pattern through the wordlist function, and then to perform a frequency-based analysis using the concordance function that facilitates close examination of recurring patterns of use.

Examining the existing literature, we compiled a list of linguistic features that have been found to be associated with selected CIP model categories. Again, only features that could, in theory, be located using the selected text analysis tools were considered. The resulting list, which was

used as the basis for corpus analysis, consisted of LIWC features linked to certain thinking styles, and words selected based on their association with indicators of specific features or thinking styles. The features, words, and related studies are listed in *Table 2*.

*Table 2. – CIP model characteristics  
and chosen indicators along with supporting literature.*

| CIP<br>CHARACTERISTIC        | LIWC<br>CATEGORY<br>ASSOCIATED             | WORDS EXAMINED<br>WITH<br>WORDSMITH<br>TOOLS                             | SUPPORTING<br>LITERATURE <sup>4</sup>                               |
|------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Use of emotions <sup>5</sup> | emo_pos,<br>emo_neg,<br>cogproc            | think, know  | Tausczik and Pennebaker<br>2010, 32;<br>Boyd <i>et al.</i> 2022, 11 |
| Time frame<br>orientation    | focuspast,<br>focuspresent,<br>focusfuture | will, back, now  | Boyd <i>et al.</i> 2022, 11   |
| Locus of causation           | i, we,<br>you, ipron                       | very, really,<br>think, know,<br>get, other,<br>people, us,<br>we, virus | Rouhizadeh<br><i>et al.</i> 2018, 1149-1150                         |
| Targets of influence         | i, we, you,<br>ipron, prosoc               | you, we, they, I,<br>them, us  | none  |

As shown in *Table 2*, not all CIP model traits could be examined with a single tool; a combination of two tools was necessary to fully describe each feature. The use of emotional versus logical appeals in communication (Crayne and Medeiros 2021, 464) was analyzed via both LIWC and WordSmith Tools. While this category was relatively easy to analyze with LIWC, since it is specifically designed with categories dealing with the expression of emotions and rational speech (i.e., emo\_pos or positive emotions, emo\_neg or negative emotions, and cogproc or cognitive processes), we were unable to identify individual words that might represent positive or negative emotional speech due to the low frequency of these

<sup>4</sup> Studies listed in *Table 2* have utilized the selected lexicogrammatical features or LIWC categories to examine characteristics of discourse similar to those listed in the CIP model. All studies are psycholinguistic in nature, and those by Tausczik and Pennebaker, and Boyd *et al.* are demonstrations of LIWC capabilities.

<sup>5</sup> The characteristic called “use of emotions” by Crayne and Medeiros (2021) is a blanket term which actually covers both the use of emotional appeals and the forgoing of such language in favor of logical, cognitive appeals.

word types in the corpora. Rational speech, however, was examined via WordSmith Tools, using the words *think* and *know*<sup>6</sup>, both of which are included in the LIWC dictionary under cognitive processes (Boyd *et al.* 2022, 11). It was hypothesized that a podcaster with a charismatic style should have a higher frequency of words with positive connotations than those with negative connotations, whereas an ideological style should have the opposite trend. Finally, a pragmatic style should use words associated with cognitive processes more frequently and emotional terms less frequently.

Time frame orientation, i.e., the speakers' tendency to focus on the past, present, or future, was examined with the LIWC categories pertaining to time orientation (i.e., focuspast, focuspresent, focusfuture), and through selected words via WordSmith Tools. By comparing the frequency of words indicating temporal focus, such as *tomorrow*, *yesterday*, *normal*, or *now*, and verbs in the past, present, or future tense, a picture of speakers' time-related attentional focus can be obtained (Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010, 40; Crayne and Medeiros 2021, 466). After wordlist compilation, the only words associated with time frame orientation that were deemed frequent enough (i.e., occurring at least 50 times in each corpus) to be examined in detail via WordSmith Tools were *will*, *now* and *back*.

It was hypothesized that if the podcasters studied had a charismatic language style, they would show a greater tendency to use future-oriented language. On the other hand, an ideological style should be related to a greater usage of past-oriented language, while a pragmatic style should be associated with a focus on the present.

Locus of causation, as previously described, is where the speaker localizes the source, or cause, of events and actions: in people, in situations, or in the interaction between the two (Hunter *et al.* 2011, 89). The analysis of this trait was slightly more complicated, as there is no dedicated category in LIWC. It was found, however, that internal versus external locus of control attribution may be indicated by (1) verbs of cognition, missing, feeling, hope and auxiliary verbs (external control); (2) verbs of attempt, i.e., *try* (internal control); (3) specific part-of-speech

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<sup>6</sup> After compiling a word list via WordSmith Tools, words likely to be associated with positive/negative emotions or logical appeals were selected. The only words with a frequency considered sufficient for the purposes of this study were *think* and *know*.

(POS) n-grams<sup>7</sup>; (4) pronouns used<sup>8</sup> (Rouhizadeh *et al.* 2018, 1149-1150)<sup>9</sup>. By going through the word list function of WordSmith Tools, it was possible to select high-frequency words that matched several of these indicators, including *very*, *get*, *other*, *think*, *know* and others (Tab. 3 for a complete list of analyzed words). Additionally, the word *virus* was added for this characteristic, given its association with the situation under discussion. The hypothesis is that the use of this word will shed light on whether people's perception of the virus (situation) determines their actions or vice versa.

Table 3. – Word list with associated raw frequencies found via WordSmith Tools.

| WORD   | FREQUENCY<br>–<br>CORONACAST | FREQUENCY<br>–<br>FACT<br>VS.<br>FICTION | WORD   | FREQUENCY<br>–<br>CORONACAST | FREQUENCY<br>–<br>FACT<br>VS.<br>FICTION |
|--------|------------------------------|--|--------|------------------------------|--|
| will   | 151                          | 99                                       | we     | 607                          | 451                                      |
| back   | 98                           | 91                                       | they   | 466                          | 233                                      |
| now    | 79                           | 167                                      | I      | 346                          | 596                                      |
| get    | 273                          | 168                                      | them   | 111                          | 123                                      |
| very   | 172                          | 82                                       | us     | 105                          | 98                                       |
| people | 401                          | 326                                      | really | 215                          | 105                                      |
| virus  | 217                          | 147                                      | no     | 79                           | 66                                       |
| other  | 180                          | 120                                      | think  | 224                          | 169                                      |
| you    | 884                          | 687                                      | know   | 120                          | 240                                      |

Finally, target of influence has been the least mentioned in the literature, as there are currently no studies investigating indicators of this characteristic in text. We hypothesized that pronoun usage could provide insight

<sup>7</sup> Since the selected text analysis tools did not possess the capability to analyze n-grams directly, it was decided to select words that could feasibly be part of such n-grams as indicated by Rouhizadeh *et al.* 2018. These included adverbs such as *really* and *very*. For a full list of POS n-grams found to be correlated with internal or external locus of control, see the appendix of Rouhizadeh *et al.* 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Use of impersonal pronouns could indicate an external locus of causation (changes and events are caused by the situation), and personal pronouns referencing themselves or the group may show signs of an internal locus of causation (change is brought about by people) (Rouhizadeh *et al.* 2018, 1149-1150).

<sup>9</sup> These are the indicators chosen for this particular study, based on specific objectives. For a complete list of indicators, see Rouhizadeh *et al.* 2018.



into the podcasters' targets of influence, and thus analyzed the ways in which pronouns (*you, we, I, they, them, us*) were used to refer to different groups, whether the masses (charismatic), a base cadre of followers (ideological), or skilled elites (pragmatic). Furthermore, it was decided to include the LIWC category on prosocial speech (prosocial) as a potential indicator of a charismatic style, as this category indicates a tendency to help or care about others (Boyd *et al.* 2022, 18). *Table 3* shows all lemmas that were selected based on the word list only. They were sorted by raw frequency and then analyzed in context to identify the typical phrase-ness that might indicate the specific discursive construction of a leadership style.

### 3. RESULTS

Initial results from LIWC showed both hosts generally focused on the present when defining their models, with *Coronacast* slightly ahead of *Fact vs. Fiction* in present tense time-frame orientation (*Tab. 4* for relative frequency totals), indicating a pragmatic style in both podcasts. There was no support for LIWC categories indicating locus of causation, but it was possible to compare the use of impersonal versus personal pronouns. In *Coronacast*, impersonal pronouns were used more frequently, while in *Coronavirus: Fact vs. Fiction* they were balanced. We hypothesized that this may be an indication of a more interactive locus of causation in *Fact vs. Fiction*, and therefore a pragmatic style, but this theory needed further investigation using the concordance function of WordSmith Tools. Both hosts used the pronoun *you* more than *we*, which we supposed could indicate a broader target of influence, as hosts may use the generic *you* to generalize experiences to everyone (Orvell *et al.* 2017, 1299), which can be indicative of a charismatic style. Finally, since the cognitive processes category greatly outweighed the affective ones, both presenters appeared to convey information rationally to their followers rather than employing positive or negative emotions. Based on this information, both hosts appeared to fall into the pragmatic category, with some charismatic tendencies. However, given the lack of contextual information, it was not possible to draw any conclusions based solely on the information provided by LIWC.

Table 4. – Summary of average relative frequencies  
for examined LIWC categories pertaining to each CIP model trait<sup>10</sup>.

|   | CORONACAST   | CORONAVIRUS:<br>FACT VS. FICTION                                |
|---|--|---|
| Time<br>frame<br>orientation:           | Present focus: 7.37%<br>Past focus: 2.99%<br>Future focus: 1.86% | Present focus: 6.8%<br>Past focus: 3.07%<br>Future focus: 2.12% |
| Locus<br>of causation:                  | Impersonal pronouns: 7.43%<br>I, you, we: 5.50%                  | Impersonal pronouns: 6.49%<br>I, you, we: 6.23%                 |
| Targets<br>of influence:                | you: 2.56%<br>we: 1.95%  | you: 2.18%<br>we: 2%  |
| Use of emotions<br>vs. logical appeals: | Cognitive processes: 13.31%<br>Affective terms: 3.04%            | Cognitive processes: 11.98%<br>Affective terms: 3.64%           |

After running the selected lemmas through the concordance function of WordSmith Tools, we were able to narrow down the analysis to a few specific words, constructions, and n-grams that proved particularly relevant for extracting the discursive construction of leadership from the corpus. For time frame orientation, the most helpful lemmas were *will* (in conjunction with the use of pronouns, e.g., *we will, you will*), *back* (used together with verbs, e.g., *go* and *get*), and *now*. These words were most frequently associated with text segments that contained clues about the speakers' time frame orientation. With respect to locus of causation, the n-grams *very* + [*adjective*] (e.g., "very contagious") and [*amount*] + *of people* (e.g., "a lot of people") were particularly informative in the way they were used. The former is a POS n-gram indicated by Rouhizadeh *et al.* (2018) (i.e., *adverb* + *adjective*) as being correlated with internal locus of control, while the latter is a pattern noticed by the authors that may be used by the podcasters in segments that referenced their locus of causation. In addition, the word *virus* and the combinations *get the* and *each other* were frequently found in segments that provided insight into this trait. Regarding the targets of influence, pronouns proved to be very useful and examining their use allowed us to form an idea of the hosts' target audience. Finally, the lemmas *really*, *no*, *think* and *know* provided information about the tendency towards rational thinking in each speaker's discourse, as opposed to the use of emotional appeals.

These following concordance lines show the above linguistic features in their original discursive setting first in *Coronavirus: Facts vs. Fiction*

<sup>10</sup> Results are shown as the median relative frequency over the period analyzed.

subcorpus and then in *Coronacast* subcorpus to analyze the results of each host's communication style and to associate them with each host's leadership style. As for the time frame orientation, Sanjay Gupta is pragmatic when he uses "right *now*" to direct the audience's attention to the present (example 1). He stresses that the crisis will pass, even though the use of "someday" emphasizes that he does not know exactly when. With this utterance, Gupta reassures listeners that there is a better future ahead, while reminding them that it can only be reached by focusing on the present. This statement also provides insight into his locus of causation, as he states that some things are controllable, while others are not, indicating a pragmatic approach. His desire, of course, is to *get back* to normal life before COVID-19 existed (example 2), thus showing an ideological trait, however, also in this case he draws the focus back to the present when we must choose whether to follow guidelines or not. Furthermore, he again shows pragmatism by localizing the power for change in skilled people ("state and local officials"), who must choose how to act in the light of current conditions. Finally, example (3) is again a charismatic reminder that there is a bright future ahead, even though we may not know when.

- (1) The mindset people need to be in is that: I am not looking to the end of this because I don't know. And this is my reality. This is how my life is right *now*. It *will* be over someday [...] just understand that there are certain things we have control over and certain things we don't.<sup>11</sup>
- (2) These guidelines are just that – they lay out a path to *getting back* to normal life. But exactly when and how states decide to follow them is up to state and local officials.
- (3) And I think it is worth reminding people, there *will* be another side of this. This isn't forever. I think science, public health officials all agree on that. We don't know when that *will* be. But there is a tunnel and we can see the light.

Locus of causation is discursively constructed when Sanjay Gupta situates the cause of the crisis in the virus, which is '*very contagious*' (example 4), while attributing a mediating effect to people's actions ("If we hadn't stayed home [...]"). This interactivity is characteristic of a pragmatic approach to sensemaking, as seen previously in example (1). However, in example (5), he shows his charismatic side when he encourages everyone to act together (e.g., "all of us have a part to play") to control the crisis. This example also provides details on Gupta's target of influence, as he addresses the masses ("all of us").

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<sup>11</sup> The search word is written in italics.

- (4) It is true we're still seeing cases of the coronavirus go up because it is still spreading. It is a very contagious virus. If we hadn't stayed at home, we'd probably have a lot more cases.
- (5) It really is essential. All of us have a part to play in getting the situation under control. We need to do it for ourselves, and do it for our health care workers.

When it comes to the target of influence, Sanjay Gupta prevalently addresses the masses – as seen before (example 5). Making frequent use of phrases such as “we’re all in this together”, he emphasizes the need for everyone to “help each other” (example 6). His use of *we* usually includes all of the USA, and occasionally all the world (example 7). This example also contributes to the interpretation of locus of causation for Gupta, as it stresses that people working together can have a significant impact, again adding a charismatic quality to his sensemaking. Finally, he also shows altruism and attention for people on the margins of society (example 8), who are not normally considered important in influencing decisions or events. His attitude makes them a target of influence and worthy of special care, especially considering that the virus has taught us that it is pervasive and does not spare people based on their social status.

- (6) We need to help each other. We are dependent on each other. And the best thing we can do for now is to try and stay at home.
- (7) Right now, we're seeing people around the world make sacrifices and unite against a common enemy. [...] Just shows what we can accomplish when we all work together.
- (8) As most of America is asked to stay at home during this outbreak, there is a group of people who cannot: the homeless. And they are some of the most vulnerable in our population.

Overall, positive emotions emerged when *think* and *know* were analyzed, despite being labelled as verbs of cognition. In this context, Gupta uses metaphorical language such as ‘the light at the end of the tunnel’ (example 3), when he focuses on a positive aspect of some negative information (example 4), or when he expresses the need for everyone to help each other (example 6). This prevalence points to a charismatic style of sensemaking. This does not prevent him from recognizing the influence of negative emotions (example 9), but this is again used as a strategy to draw people closer together in a shared experience, rather than to coerce listeners as would be characteristic of an ideological style. In this example, as in example (3), it is clear that the word *think* does not indicate a rational appeal, but an emotional one.

- (9) I have been dealing with some loss. We all have, I think, in one form or another. Everybody who's listening probably has.

Looking at time frame orientation in the analysis of the *Coronacast* subcorpus, Norman Swan focuses on the present situation in a very pragmatic manner, evaluating the actions taken and the current results (example 10). This example also pertains to the use of logical appeals rather than emotions, reinforcing the country's disease management without relying much on emotional speech. In example (11), he rationalizes the need to go on living by providing a logical reason: the rarity of COVID-19. He speaks as well about a return *back* to normal (example 12), an ideological value, but by using the all-inclusive *we*, he attributes control to everyone, including the government. However, by highlighting the necessity for a vaccine he then localizes that control in specialists working to develop that vaccine, reinforcing his pragmatic style.

- (10) Could we have gone a bit more quickly? Perhaps. But at the end of the day we are in such a good situation now, it's hard to see where we could have done other things.
- (11) But I think now that COVID-19 is so unusual in the community, so rare, it is much safer, and people need to get on with their lives.
- (12) And again, as a community, [...] we did the right thing, Government does the right thing; we won't get back to normal, by the way, until there's a vaccine.

Although the pandemic itself is caused by the virus, for Norman Swan, the locus of causation lies within people. In example (13), he refers to the virus to highlight the government's success in curbing contagion by restricting the entry of 'overseas visitors'. Furthermore, example (14) shows how Norman Swan attributes control to those managing pandemic containment efforts, even when these efforts fail, emphasizing that the pandemic did not worsen because of a quality of the virus, but because it was allowed to. When addressing one of the consequences that the virus has brought to a lot of people, e.g., shifting work from the workplace to home, he attributes control to federal and state governments, specialists and experts who can make a difference (example 15), showing his pragmatic sensemaking style.

- (13) Our success in containing the virus so far has been containing overseas visitors and people who are carrying it from overseas.
- (14) So it's not because it's more aggressive, it's just that the pandemic has been allowed to slip to get to very large numbers.
- (15) A lot of people, 30% have transitioned from working in the office to working at home [...] the majority of people recognize the need for the

lockdown, and there is a huge approval of the action of the federal government and state governments [...].

Considering the examples analyzed so far, one might conclude that Norman Swan is addressing the masses (example 12) and political leaders (i.e., Australian government in examples 12 and 15) as the target of influence, in a mostly charismatic approach to his target of influence. He also refers to a specific group of people, the working class, when he uses the personal pronoun *you* (example 16), to Australians in general when he uses the personal pronoun *we* twice (example 17), and specifically to Australians other than Victorians when *us* vs. *them* is used (example 18), thus reinforcing this conclusion. The last two examples are particularly focused on the present moment (see the phrase “at the moment”) and underscore the fact that the crisis appears to be under control, with the exception of Victorians (example 18). The comparison of Australian states is interesting, as it indicates a level of competition between them.

- (16) Particularly if you are in a job where you are meeting other people [...] and there's just no option but to contact other people, it is possible at the end of the day that you've got some coronavirus on your clothes [...].
- (17) So, in Australia we are very lucky that we got such low numbers at the moment.
- (18) Victorians are a bit behind us, but they are taking a bit more of a hard line at the moment.

The lemmas *really* and *no* (example 19), and *think* (example 20) shed light on the use of rational, cognitive processes as opposed to use of emotion in Norman Swan's narrative of the COVID-19 crisis. *Really* and *no* are in a context where he avoids giving advice without the support of firm data on contact tracing (example 19). The last example, along with example (13), shows the Australian host's renationalizing tendencies, which are particularly evident when he mentions that he thinks Australians need to accept that the borders should be closed for ‘some time’ to keep the virus out (example 20).

- (19) We don't really know the benefit it offers. There is no firm data on contact tracing being able to stop a pandemic by any means, we definitely shouldn't think it will do that [...].
- (20) But I think we have to accept as a nation that the borders are closed for quite some time. What time is, it depends on whether a vaccine emerges or whether a treatment emerges and so on, [...].

Results summarized in *Table 5* show that both health podcasters focus on the present and the future, but Norman Swan appears to be more

task-specific than Sanjay Gupta, who seems to have a broader view of the crisis. They seem to show a balanced use of personal pronouns vs. impersonal pronouns, suggesting that the development of the pandemic and its management are an interactive process. Both hosts target the broader society, but Norman Swan addresses Australians with a tide of patriotic nationalism, as well as working people who are at higher risk of contracting the virus, while Sanjay Gupta addresses Americans without forgetting groups of people who are often marginalized. Finally, Sanjay Gupta uses more emotional tones and figurative language, whereas Norman Swan is more rational and bases his claims on scientific data.

*Table 5. – Summary of findings based on concordance line analysis and interpretation of results.*

|   | CORONACAST  | CORONAVIRUS:<br>FACT VS. FICTION                              |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Time frame orientation:</b><br>Uncertain present<br>and future   | Present,<br>task-at-hand focused  | Broadly focused vision<br>towards present and future          |
| <b>Locus of causation:</b><br>Interactive, with special<br>attention to the role<br>of skilled people                 | Interactive   | Interactive   |
| <b>Targets of influence:</b><br>Masses  | Australians<br>with special attention<br>to people at higher risk<br>from coronavirus | Americans<br>with special attention<br>to marginalized groups |
| <b>Use of emotions<br/>vs. rational arguments:</b><br>Rational<br>(Coronacast)<br>vs. emotional<br>(Fact vs. Fiction) | Rational Communication<br>><br>Affective Communication                                | Affective Communication<br>><br>Rational Communication        |

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To conclude, the DHA laid out a solid framework upon which we could build our analysis. Following the ideal-typical discourse-historical analysis, consisting in an 8-stage program (Wodak 2020, 33), combined with the CADS approach we were able to locate indicators of discursive sensemaking characteristics that were similar to those outlined in the CIP model in the examined health experts' discourse.

From these results, one could conclude that *Coronacast* host Norman Swan has a predominantly pragmatic style of sensemaking with some charismatic traits, whereas Sanjay Gupta demonstrates a majorly charismatic style with pragmatic undertones. The latter showed a prevalent focus on the present and future, characteristic of pragmatic and charismatic leaders, respectively. He also seemed to target his messages to all citizens, again a charismatic trait. He tended to use more affective language than the other podcast host examined, providing another indication of leaders possessing charismatic traits. However, he seemed to attribute control of the situation to highly skilled individuals, a pragmatic trait. Furthermore, on occasion, he spoke about a return to normal, a classic ideological standpoint. On the other hand, Norman Swan often focused more on the issues at hand, employing logical appeals to influence his audience, and situating most of the control in skilled people, all of which are traits of a pragmatic leader. However, his targets appeared to be the Australian people in general, indicating a charismatic approach in this sense. This research is consistent with recent findings that leaders may incorporate various elements of each leadership style but tend to align to a single predominant pathway (Crane and Medeiros 2021, 464).

Regarding the chosen analytical tools, LIWC and WordSmith Tools were both useful in varying degrees in identifying target characteristics in the corpus. LIWC appeared helpful for more general traits, e.g., time frame orientation and use of emotions or logical processes, while it did not provide insight into locus of causation. Since this tool is made to assign psycholinguistic labels to individual words, it was unable to identify types of discourse that require the use of context to be fully understood. These findings are in accordance with the criticism posed by Hunt and Brooks (2020, 21), who noted that LIWC is lacking in its attention to the notion that words take their meaning from their context of use. The use of WordSmith Tools helped overcome this limitation to some extent, allowing us to view words along with their context within concordance lines. In fact, WordSmith Tools was very useful in identifying targets of influence and time frame orientation. By examining the most frequently used words believed to be associated with time expressions, it was possible to confirm the prevalent time focus of each speaker. Furthermore, the investigation of concordance lines containing pronouns, especially *we* and *you*, allowed us to confirm that each speaker mostly referred to the wider public as their targets of influence.

Finally, this study aimed to evaluate the quality of the two podcasts *Coronacast* and *Coronavirus: Fact vs. Fiction*, and their suitability as



sources for reliable COVID-19 information, an objective championed by the WHO in the attempt to increase public trust in digital health information (WHO 2021, 55). Analysis of the hosts' discourse allowed us to understand how each expert formed prescriptive models and communicated them to their listeners. By understanding discursive styles and their application in health podcasting, it may be possible to evaluate their effectiveness in promoting trust in online health communication and acceptance of health protocols. Though the current analysis is applied only to two podcasts, it is the authors' hope that this work can stimulate discussion into methods of identifying effective practices for the dissemination of health information online and through social media.

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*Links to Podcasts*

Coronacast

<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/coronacast>

Coronavirus: Fact vs. Fiction

Podcast on CNN Audio (no longer accessible to the public)

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