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A quantitative content analysis of the South African presidency's usage of twitter in response to COVID-19 in 2020

Govender, Tarryn

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RESEARCH REPORT TITLE: A QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENCY'S USAGE OF TWITTER IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN 2020

ABSTRACT

Background: Social media for risk communication has become widely used globally. The way messages are communicated via social media plays a role in the general public's perception of risk and consequently their behaviour. The Presidency of South Africa used several platforms for risk communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, including social media such as Twitter.

Aim: To characterise the South African Presidency's communication about COVID-19 on Twitter during the national lockdown period in 2020.

Methods: A retrospective quantitative content analysis study design was used for the study. All tweets from the South African Presidency were filtered using the advanced search function with search words "COVID-19" and "coronavirus" and search dates 27th March 2020 to 28th December 2020. The text and visuals from these tweets were retrieved and exported to an Excel worksheet using an automatic data extraction software. A total of 699 COVID-19 related tweets were yielded and analysed. Descriptive statistics were formulated in relation to each study objective.

Results: The South African Presidency's communication on Twitter displayed many effective risk communication attributes, such as timeliness, use of visuals, frequent strategic actions, and situational awareness tweets to keep the public informed. Core capacities of risk communication, such as community engagement and management of false information, were not addressed. Even though tweets displayed a positive emotional frame, a majority of the tweets were neutral, which is not considered effective.

Conclusion: Overall, the effective risk communication characteristics identified from the South African Presidency's COVID-19 related tweets, together with guidelines for risk communication via social media, can be optimized for future use to reduce the spread of new diseases or even for ongoing COVID-19 communication.

Tarryn Govender
0711041P