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Discursive Attitudes towards Immigrant Populations during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted our global community. Due to unequal socio-economic conditions and a dearth of accessibility to healthcare, immigrant communities are placed in a vulnerable position that has resulted in them being greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Following Van Dijk's theory on discourse analysis, the present study examines the discursive strategies and language forms employed by Facebook users, in order to analyse those users' perceptions of immigrant populations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this goal, we analyse comments from public Facebook accounts of North Carolina (United States) newspapers.

Comments were published in the weeks following January 14, 2021, when the State Department of Health and Human Services released the statement stating that the COVID-19 vaccine was accessible and free regardless of legal status and health care coverage. Results illustrate how the COVID-19 crisis has perpetuated the discourse of fear among minority immigrant populations in the U.S. In addition, immigrants continue to be blamed for the inaccessibility of the vaccine and other external structural problems. Thus, the present study sheds light on the held system of beliefs about immigrant populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, it provides useful data for assessing public attitudes toward immigrant populations in times of crisis.

Keywords

COVID-19, discourse analysis, immigrant populations, attitudes, identities, social media discourse