Chapter 2
A Fighting Stance Against the "Next Big One" Post–SARS–CoV–2/COVID–19 in Contemporaneous Social Imagery and Journalism:
Individual, Group, and Societal Preparedness

ABSTRACT

Humanity has to first survive the present SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 pandemic moment, and then it has to learn from it in order to better handle a similar challenge in the near-, medium-, and far-future. This work explores what an 800+ social imageset from Google Images (seeded with the phrase "COVID19 and future") and a 724-article journalistic articleset around COVID-19 (with mentions of "future") suggest about how the general public is thinking about the future either living with COVID-19 or post-COVID-19, at the micro (individual), meso (group, organizational), and macro (societal, global) levels. This work considers what a fighting stance against future pathogenic microbial agents may look like in a broad public mindset based on contemporaneous public data, analyzed both manually and partially computationally.

INTRODUCTION

"Pandemic influenza" (a potential threat from any number of host animals) has long been "the most feared security threat" because of the ease-of-spread and potential for mass harm (Kamradt-Scott, 2015, p. 125) and so has topped many lists as a national and global security threat. While some have called

the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak a "black swan" event (something rare and devastating and unforeseen), the originator of the concept Nassim Nicholas Taleb suggests that such a viral spillover from an animal host species into humanity is not unpredicted and not a surprise (Taleb, 2007; Taleb, Mar. 30, 2020) even as it has been highly disruptive and costly in lives and health. The crossover of zoonotic diseases from animals into humans through pathogenic viral and bacterial spillovers has occurred for millennia. With human incursions into the living spaces of animals, more such spillovers are to be expected. Ideally, it is incumbent on humans to be aware of these outbreaks when they occur and to contain them and keep them as local as possible, particularly for pathogens that are transmissible by air among humans (which can lead to uncontrolled and exponential spread). If the current pandemic moment is theorized as a 100-year-event (a rare one) even if lesser outbreaks are thought to occur every few years (at least in terms of those observed by people), this is not a disaster to waste without as much learning as possible for the "next big one." After all, viral spillovers are natural to the human condition. And easy transmissibility through airborne transmission can put a world of people under threat.

This "case" in a peer-to-peer social shared learning sense involves all of humanity co-learning together about a novel coronavirus, simultaneously and in real time. The main credible information sources are experts, in public health, epidemiology, statistics, research science, medical doctors, nurses, geneticists, logisticians, and the like. Then, there are the government leaders, peripheral researchers and journalists, pseudo-experts, and the general public, with dilution of actual and accurate knowledge the further out from the center. With the mistrust of expertise (Nichols, 2017), and the self-appointing of self-claimed expertise (often through social media), however, there has been a dilution of actual knowledge in the general public. Many decenter the source of information to those who make the most noise and those who make the most outrageous claims; truth then comes from speculation, gossip, and rumors, and not any actual base of earned science-based knowledge. Instead of real knowledge expanding from a center, knowledge sources are diffuse and often local, with the periphery treated as the core. In the #fakenews era, actual and correct knowledge exists in pockets (Figure 1). The ecosystem requires that the general public assiduously pursue truth in order to be properly informed.

In the present pandemic moment, there is a projection by a leading model that the U.S. COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) death toll could reach 300,000 (Aizenman, Aug. 6, 2020). Subsequent projects suggest even greater human death tolls. At the same time, multiple mRNA vaccines in the Phase 3 human trials have been found to have protective efficacy in the ranges of above 90% to about 95%, and many of these have been manufactured "at-risk" with the potential risks of these not being found safe or efficacious. Various work has been done to enable "emergency mass vaccination" (Hosangadi, Warmbrod, Martin, Adalja, Cicero, Inglesby, Watson, Watson, & Connell, 2020, p. 1), based on the storage and transport needs of the respective experimental vaccines.

At this moment, this research explores what social imagery seeded by the search term "COVID19 and future" and scraped from Google Images on October 7, 2020 (at the start of the third peak or the second curve of the SARS-CoV-2 curve), may suggest about what the massmind considers important. In addition to the social imageset (with over 800 images), there are hundreds of articles (724 articles in the set) that mention COVID-19 and the future, as a way to explore what is being considered more formally as mentioned in the journalistic literature (which draws from the complete set of expertise but does not include sensitive or government-protected endeavors, which occur in enforced hiddenness and silences). Social imagery tends towards diffuse and elusive understandings but also insights that may not be available otherwise (Hai-Jew, 2018) about the social world (Hai-Jew, Apr. 15, 2020). While manual coding of social imagery requires interpretation and comfort with ambiguity to understand the high di-

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