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**COVID-19: Communication and Rhetoric:
Research Methods and Study Perspectives**

Editor’s Words

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Introduction

At the beginning of 2020, a ferocious outbreak of a variation of the coronavirus disease 2019 (SARS-CoV-2) evolved into a global pandemic with current repercussions that have seriously impacted everyone’s daily activities, have put a strain on health-care systems, have destabilized socio-economic structures, and have affected political agendas. Over and above, the measures taken to prevent the spreading of the virus have severely affected human interactions, and even suppressed face to face encounters; in the meantime, social media, digital journalism, and online platforms have taken over every day human communication. In particular, social media and national broadcasts have become ‘essential services’ to channel information to the mass population amid the pandemic. Hence, across the world, rhetorical, and sometimes manipulative strategies have been used to construct narratives about the pandemic in multimodalities. Those rhetorical devices have framed the ways in which people can conceptualize and make sense of such an individual and collective calamity.

The current issue of the *Rhetoric and Communications Journal* presents eight contributions which offer a very varied panorama of how Covid-19 pandemic has affected communication in different contexts and countries. Some articles focus on language analysis and rhetorical strategies used in social media, memes, and broadcasts, while others describe in general the effects of Covid-19 in terms of its political implications in different geographical areas as well as in different social and educational contexts. Such a variety of perspectives, approaches and contexts is a hallmark for this Special Issue.

Besides such a comprehensive picture, there are also two other elements which characterize this Issue. The first is the coexistence of contributions written by senior and junior scholars, doctoral students included. We envision a type of research that can enable constant conversations not only across various disciplines and methodologies, but also across different generations of scholars. This is a relevant factor aimed at favouring the interaction and the dialogue between scholars who have distinct professional paths and experiences. We also believe that such a range of perspectives, approaches, and practices honour the mission and the requirements of the Journal. Moreover, this Special Edition offers to its readership an intercultural composition and rhetoric in which some of the authors here are non-native English speakers, and work on Academic English as their foreign, second, or even third language. Such diverse collaborations set new features for academia in the field of the humanities and social sciences in the first quarter of the 21st century.

The eight contributions include authors from institutions located in different continents and countries such as Bulgaria, Italy, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and the USA.

Peter Mantello and Douglas Ponton, in their article “Virality, Contagion and Public Discourse: The role of memes as prophylaxis and catharsis in an age of crisis”, discuss the social and political relevance of online images such as memes which have emerged during the pandemic to represent a form of counter-narrative ‘from below’, opposed to the ‘top down’ prevalent ‘official’ narratives provided by institutions and governments.

Jagadish Paudel and Owen M. Williamson, in their article “Deadly Rhetoric Gone Viral: Genomic Language and COVID-19”, argue that the human faculty of language is organized like the genetic code. Hence, Paudel and Williamson track a line between genomic language and the rhetoric of Covid 19, while discussing the virus (i.e. organism) as a material text with its own language, grammar, and semiotics. Combining Linguistics and Biological Sciences, the authors discuss

the issue of discursive power through a rhetoric of genomic language that enables them to deconstruct the narratives of Covid-19.

Spas Rangelov's contribution "The role of communication in the online education in Bulgarian Studies in Korea" shows a case study of a Korean academic institution and its communicative procedures to keep staff, instructors, and students updated with new educational implementations amid the coronavirus outbreak. Rangelov examines the sudden shift of traditional communications and pedagogies to online learning platforms as a necessary way of adaptation to a 'new normal'. The author discusses the new power relations that have emerged in the process of online education and how such a change was perceived by Korean students from the Department of Bulgarian Studies.

In Veronica Katermina and Talina Ilmaz-Ledeneva's article "COVID-19: gender specifics of the expression of emotions in the discourse of social networks", the authors examine comments from Instagram users in their responses to digital journalistic media regarding news about the coronavirus pandemic. The authors analyse verbal and various non-verbal elements such as graphic symbols (e.g., exclamation marks) as an expression and manifestation of users' emotional reactions to news concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. Their contribution discusses whether or not there are gender-specific emotional responses attached to the types of emojis posted by Instagram users.

Veena Namboodri's article "COVID-19, Climate Change and 'The Denial Playbook': on the Rhetoricity of Science Denial in the COVID-climate Analogy" discusses similarities between the communicative strategies used for the coronavirus pandemic and climate change, and analyzes the many rhetorical intersections between the two narratives. Addressing the structural relation between the two crises, the author shows how the two narratives intersect each other, in terms of their social-political implications and science denialism.

Bilyana Todorova's contribution "War Metaphors in Bulgarian Official Discourse during the COVID-19 Crisis" considers how the COVID-19 pandemic has often been narrated through military metaphors and how such a rhetorical device has been scripted in the collective cognition. Todorova critically analyses the communicative and rhetorical strategies that underpin the recurrent use of 'war' metaphors in government discourses as well as their impact on public opinion in the Bulgarian context.

In her essay, "The COVID-19 crisis and the critique on online education", Nora Goleshevska discusses Francesco Monico's comment on the philosopher Agamben's inflammatory article against distance learning, which had triggered fierce debates in Italy in May 2020. Goleshevska reads Monico's stance as a way

to reaffirm the relevance of the Arts and the Humanities, and of vindicating a new theory of education focused on “sight, presence, contact”.

A new research project called *In Other Words (IOW): A Contextualized Dictionary to Problematize Otherness* is also introduced in this Special Issue. A group of authors from different methodological backgrounds converge into a collaborative project, which is innovative in its structure, contents, and purposes. The IOW project has dedicated a section to include new words and expressions that have emerged from various narratives across media to communicate the Coronavirus pandemic in various contexts and countries. Such a project on “COVID-19 Words” aims to provide the viewer with an intercultural and critical overview of how the pandemic has been articulated or disarticulated in varied texts and modalities.

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