

# Building Optimism Through Inspirational YouTube Videos During the Pandemic: An Empirical Examination

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# Building Optimism Through Inspirational YouTube Videos During the Pandemic: An Empirical Examination

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## Abstract

This article presents the results of content categorisation and measurement of the effects of YouTube videos released publicly by commercial entities during the pandemic. The videos in question contain inspirational content concerning prosocial behaviour in response to COVID-19 and are released through the big companies' official YouTube accounts. In the first study, the authors analysed the content of videos from various companies. While the videos encompassed different presentations of actions taken and messages expressing optimism, those that conveyed empathetic communication and human values were predominantly featured. We categorised the findings into action-oriented, human values-oriented and empathic-oriented content for the selection of videos in the subsequent study. In the subsequent experimental study, aimed at understanding the effects, we asked participants to watch and evaluate the videos selected from the initial study. The results demonstrated that empathic-oriented content had the highest impact on individuals, leading to increases in five measures of inspiration: aspiring to become a better person, engaging in acts of kindness towards others, seeking what truly matters in life, striving to live a more fulfilling life and aligning personal goals.

## Keywords

Inspirational media, public communication, media communication, COVID-19 pandemic, effects of communication

## Introduction

This article presents our analysis of public communication through inspirational media delivered by commercial entities during an unforeseen situation. We specifically selected YouTube videos released by a set of big companies during the challenging situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and studied them to

6

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that provide inspirational effects for the public also added to building optimism in facing the pandemic. Optimism built through inspirational content contributed to individuals having the right attitude to face the pandemic and also contributed to the individual's relationship with his or her social environment. In addition, according to the aim of this study, among the selection of videos to watch are three videos that have extreme values, namely those that are dominant in optimistic actions and expressions, in the presentation of human values and empathetic messages. Future studies can use videos that have different theme configurations such as videos that have a presentation balance in action-oriented content and empathetic-oriented content or action-oriented and human values-oriented, or even a relatively balanced configuration of action-oriented, human values-oriented and empathetic-oriented content. Nevertheless, the knowledge gained from the results of our current study, and previous related studies (e.g., Jensen et al., 2022; Tkáčová et al., 2021), has provided initial knowledge for communicating with the public to build optimism and take action in difficult times.

### *Implications of Research*

One of the implications of this study is that commercial, as well as non-commercial, organisations may consider utilising the key themes above to convey messages to the public during challenging times. Even though this study was carried out in the context of the pandemic, the common thread of finding ways to build empathetic communication can be a way of composing messages in a crisis. Moreover, incorporating what the organisation has done in response to the crisis can increase public awareness of the organisation's handling of the situation. Media, advertising and public relations agencies contracted by the organisation, when developing advertising messages, can also benefit from focusing on specific objectives to be conveyed using the key themes above to assist in delivering their aims. Similarly, defining the intended effect of inspirational messages by communicators would be beneficial for measuring the impact of those messages.

Another practical implication of this study is the use of the themes' configurations in various types of content, such as marketing materials, political messaging, persuasive messages and other social campaign messages. However, it is not intended that the key messages above should be seen as a rigid prescription; rather, the construction of optimism should be accompanied by creative treatments from the communicators.

### *Limitations*

Aside from our empirical study participants having a relatively homogeneous social environment (i.e., all study participants were Asian students from a specific field), this study has offered an initial insight into building optimism during a pandemic, particularly from the audience's perspective. We hope that future studies on inspirational content, whether in crises or under general circumstances, will include participants from diverse sociocultural backgrounds. This will allow for a broader understanding of the topic.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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### Supplemental Material

The supplemental material for this article is available online.

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