REPRESENTATIONS OF TRADITIONAL HEALTHCARE DISCOURSE ON SOCIAL MEDIA IN MOROCCO: DR MOHAMED FAID'S DISCOURSE AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This paper examines representations of traditional healthcare discourse propagated on social media by a nutritionist called "Dr Mohamed Faid" and other social actors in Morocco. The significant emergence and popularity of traditional healing discourse on social media during the upheavals of the pandemic challenged the discourse created by the sovereign power in Morocco and won the hearts of so many social media users. This study aims at uncovering the rules of production and distribution of such online discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic in Morocco. The data collection and analysis were based on a qualitative approach consisting of grounded theory and multimodal critical discourse analysis. The data was collected from social media platforms based on the honeycomb framework of social media and a three-layer model of data thickening. The data collected was analysed following a process of constant comparative analysis for coding and category development. In the same vein, multimodal critical discourse analysis was used to cater for the semiotic choices, both lexical and visual, of the analysed discourses. The results of the study reveal that this discourse of traditional health care draws largely on the religious beliefs of the Muslim community and popular culture and that this discourse may stand in opposition to the scientific discourse or at times be complementary to it. This discourse, as it can be argued, is

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culturally conservative and can be easily fuelled by conspiracy theories in times of uncertainty, fear, and crisis.

Keywords: Traditional healing, social media, health care, Morocco, Covid-19 pandemic.

Resumo

Este artigo examina representações do discurso da medicina tradicional propagados nas redes sociais por um nutricionista chamado "Dr Mohamed Faid" e outros influenciadores sociais em Marrocos. O surgimento e a popularidade dos discursos sobre as medicinas tradicionais nas redes sociais durante a pandemia desafiaram o discurso criado pelo poder soberano em Marrocos e conseguiram grande notoriedade junto dos seguidores das redes sociais.

Este estudo visa desvendar as regras de produção e distribuição desse discurso online durante a pandemia de Covid-19 em Marrocos. A recolha e análise de dados assentam numa abordagem qualitativa que consiste na teoria fundamentada e análise crítica do discurso multimodal. Os dados foram recolhidos das redes sociais com base no estrutura alveolar (honeycomb model) e no modelo de três camadas na análise de dados. Os dados recolhidos foram analisados seguindo um processo de análise comparativa para codificação e desenvolvimento de categorias. Deste modo, a análise crítica do discurso multimodal foi utilizada para refletir sobre as escolhas semióticas, tanto lexicais como visuais, dos discursos analisados. Os resultados do estudo revelam que o discurso sobre os cuidados tradicionais de saúde se baseia em grande parte nas crenças religiosas da comunidade muçulmana e na cultura popular e que este discurso tanto se pode opor ao discurso científico como pode ser por vezes complementar. Esse discurso é culturalmente conservador e pode ser facilmente incitado por teorias da conspiração em tempos de incerteza, medo e crise.

Palavras-chave: Medicina tradicional, redes sociais, cuidados médicos, Marrocos, pandemia de Covid-19.

1. Introduction

During the Covid-19 pandemic in Morocco, healthcare discourses have been presented to the public audience in complex and ideologically motivated ways by so many social actors on social media. Shaping public opinion about ways to deal with Covid-19 has been undertaken within a struggle between traditional healthcare discourse and the scientific discourse. The discourse of the nutritionist Dr Mohamed Faid is one of the traditional healing discourses that claimed to be able to cure Covid-19 and challenged the discourse created by the Ministry of Health during the beginning of the pandemic in Morocco. This paper aims at understanding the success of such discourse in winning the hearts of so many social media users in Morocco. It studies the traditional healing discourse, especially its genre and style, as compared to the counter-discourse communicated by the Ministry of Health. It can be argued that Faid's discourse uses argumentative rhetorical moves as a strategy to convince the audience of the validity of his claims. Such discourse actually misleads social media users by means of motivating lexical and visual choices in various texts which revolve around a conservative ideology of bringing back Islamic traditions to preserve a Muslim identity as an alternative to modernity and all its forms including modern medicine.

Social media has become a battlefield between various discourses. Online platforms are becoming an important space where public opinion can be shaped in addition to the traditional public sphere. With the growing use of social media, people tend to discuss public issues and problems on online platforms. The public sphere is "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, 1964, p. 116). In this respect, the Moroccan nutrition Dr Mohamed Faid could appropriate and use the traditional healing discourse, mediated and supported presumably by scientific knowledge, to influence larger segments of the population exposed to it on social media as a new space in the public sphere.

Health care in Morocco has been approached by researchers from different perspectives. From a historical perspective, Paul (1977) illustrates that over a century in Morocco, since colonization, contemporary capitalist medicine has been used to suit the need for profit accumulation and class rule in Moroccan society. Dieste (2013) argues that there was no local resistance to modern bio-medicine in favour of traditional medicine. He explains that the coexistence of traditional and modern medicine in Morocco is due to the lack of quality public health services and the failure of the state in ensuring equal health care to all social classes since independence. In his study of reproductive health and development policy in Morocco, Rinker (2015) argues that the Moroccan state's agenda of development, inspired by neoliberal principles, is recontextualized and replaced by Moroccans with what he terms "Islamic neoliberalism". He explains that Moroccan women were responsible for their reproductive practices and self-governed choices, but they didn't take those actions because of "neoliberal rhetoric put forth by the government in recent development policies or medical providers in the clinics they visited. Rather, they did so because of what they saw Islam is saying about fertility and motherhood" (p. 227).

From an anthropological point of view, Greenwood (1981) explains that a series of ailments and health problems are attributed to the cold weather and djinns alike in Chaouen and Central Atlas in Morocco. By the same token, Hermans (2018) explains the success of traditional healing practices in Morocco in terms of the placebo effect. Thus, patients who are cured have strong cultural beliefs in popular Islam and the efficacity of traditional healers to cure illnesses. "The more a treatment is perceived as effective the stronger the placebo effect appears to be" (Hermans, 2018, p. 322). Furthermore, healing power is attributed to substances such as plants and minerals or rituals that represent symbolically the desired effect of traditional healing (Bellakhdar, 2008, as cited in Dieste, 2013).

Yet, these studies do not consider new forms of traditional healing and how their discourses are produced and distributed in today's world taking advantage of social media as an alternative public sphere where public opinion is shaped, and new identities and values are constructed within society. The main research question that this paper strives to answer is how Faid's discourse was produced and distributed on social media in such a way that shaped public opinion by means of a conservative ideology which was endorsed and defended by larger segments of Moroccan society.

2. Material and Methodology:

2.1 *Data collection*

One of the characteristics of social media is that it contains varied user-generated content. For this reason, it was important to specify the main sources of the data collected for this study. Following a purposive sampling, the data was collected based on specific criteria that serve the purpose of the study. Purposive sampling is based on "strategic choices about with whom, where, and how one does one's research … the context in which researchers are working and the nature of their research objectives" (Palys, 2008, p. 697). Thus, the data collected consisted of various texts produced by the nutritionist "Dr Mohamed Faid" and propagated on his Youtube channel and Facebook page for two months: March and April 2020. In addition, other data include social media users' comments on his posts on the Facebook page, two petitions launched by his proponents and opponents and texts against traditional healing produced by the Ministry of Health in Morocco. The total number of texts analysed was 18 videos from "Faid Channel" on Youtube, comments on 48 posts on Mohamed Faid's Facebook account, and two petitions launched by Faid's opponents and followers on the website www.change.org.

The data collection process was based on two procedures: (1) the honeycomb framework of social media used to develop data collection criteria, (2) and a three-layer model of data thickening. The honeycomb model of social media is a framework that defines social media based on seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. It was adopted to set the criteria for data collection. Kietzmann et al. (2011) argue that each social media platform is based on specific functionalities that may not be the same for other platforms. The functional building blocks were used to track and evaluate the Facebook pages, profiles and Youtube channels from which the data was collected. We created a Facebook account and befriended some followers of Mohamed Faid's Facebook page. Facebook users' accounts were targeted based on the users' active interaction. Kozinets (1999) suggests four categories of social media users based on their interaction modes: (i) tourists, (ii) minglers, (iii) devotees, and (iv) insiders. The users followed for the purposes of this study were devotees and insiders because they have strong interests in online activities. They are active participants who frequently comment on posts and share pages and information about Mohamed Faid. Two main important profiles were identified "Arije Al Misk" and "Afaf Kafaf". These are two examples of social media users who were highly active on Mohamed FAID's page, and they played important role in distributing and reproducing Faid's discourse. They are what Kietzmann et al. (2011) refer to as 'influencers' who have central and influential positions in their network of relationships. A good case in point is that "Arije Al Misk" is the same person who launched an influential petition to support Faid. Following this kind of users made it possible to find important pages and links to data sources. For example, we managed to identify an important platform on Facebook which is a personal account: "Mohamed Faid". Identifying this personal profile, in addition to Faid's Facebook page, allowed us to have access to important texts propagated during the Covid-19 pandemic and facilitated the process of tracking and collecting data.

These two pages have high numbers of likes, comments, shares, and views, which makes them influential accounts on Facebook during the pandemic in Morocco.

A three-layer model of data thickening was used in this study. Latzko-Toth et al. (2017) developed a three-layer model to thicken and enrich data based on the constructivist paradigm. This process of data thickening is based on qualitative inquiry which holds that a social phenomenon can be understood only in (1) context, based on (2) fine-grained accounts, (3) in light of the meaning attributed by actors to their own actions (see Latzko-Toth et al., 2017). In this respect, the context surrounding the propagation of traditional healing discourse was taken into consideration, especially the genre of communication opted for by the ministry of health and its counter-discourse about the use of herbs as treatments to cure Covid-19. Furthermore, the circulation of Faid's discourse on social media in addition to the meaning created by his followers and opponents alike were taken into consideration. In this respect, the data collection process focused not only on the collection of texts but also on the circulation of these texts on social media platforms. For example, we found that many videos produced by Faid were shared by other users on their Youtube channels. This allowed for more impact of his discourse on other social media users.

2.2 *Data analysis process*

The present study is based on qualitative data analysis. It adopts Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) and grounded theory as two complementary approaches. The data was analysed to identify indicators and code them to develop emerging and new categories. This process was based on constant comparative analysis and the writing of memos as the analysis was conducted in an iterative manner starting with initial coding, then intermediate and advanced coding (see Chun Tie et al., 2019).

This study conducts a critical discourse analysis by investigating the construction of discourse by means of different strategies. The overall analytical framework that shaped the research process is based on four stages as suggested by Fairclough (2012):

Stage 1: Focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspects.

Stage 2: Identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong.

Stage 3: Consider whether the social order 'needs' the social wrong.

Stage 4: Identify possible ways past the obstacles.

The lexical analysis uncovers the meanings conveyed in texts based on the choices of words opted for by social actors. Words are not the only carriers of meaning in communication. Sign systems, including sounds, and images are all modes of meaning-making. In today's world, images are essential parts of communication. With the growing use of new technologies, images and videos are now essential components of media. In the same way that people make lexical choices to formulate their discourses, there are also visual choices that can be used to connote additional or complementary meanings. The representation of ideas, values, and people can be motivated by visual choices that serve certain ideologies and power relations in communication. The discourse of traditional health care on social media contains multiple modes. In addition to texts and images, it also contains videos which are important constituents of the data that were analysed in this research. This analysis was done on texts that contain both lexical and visual components based on analytical approaches and tools developed in theories of discourse analysis (Dijk, 1998, 2001; Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 2003, 2012; Fowler & Kress, 1979; Kress & Leeuwen, 2006).

3. Results and Analysis:

The traditional healthcare discourse propagated by Faid employed discourse strategies that shaped the relations between genres and styles of healthcare discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic in Morocco. Faid's videos were one-way mediated communication based on delivering speeches on Youtube, sharing links to the videos, and posting on Facebook platforms. This type of internet communication enabled him to make use of multimodal communication in the propagation of various forms of texts including images, videos, and written posts. The use of one-way mediated speeches in the propagation of this traditional healthcare discourse was closely similar to the press conferences on TV used on a daily basis by the Ministry of Health in Morocco to inform Moroccans about the situation of the pandemic in the country. The press conferences of the Ministry were also one-way mediated and were broadcasted live by Moroccan news corporations either on social media or TV channels.

At other times, the functionalities of Facebook and Youtube such as sharing and reputation allowed for more traffic, consumption and influence of Mohamed Faid's discourse as opposed to the discourse created by the Ministry of Health. Such internet communication was characterized by being interactive in the sense that social media users were more active in consuming, reproducing, and propagating his discourse on other online groups and channels. When Mohamed Faid's discourse influenced so many social media users, the Ministry of Health propagated a counter-discourse in the form of communiqués (press releases/ reports) that warned against the use of herbs to cure Covid-19. These communiqués were in the form of pictures that the Ministry shared on its Facebook page. Yet, a such genre of communication that the Ministry relied on lacked what Fairclough (1992) terms 'conversationalization' of public discourse. Relying on only written and formal language could not counterattack Faid's discourse that he propagated in videos and posts

using a mix of informal and formal language. This genre of communication was supported by the argumentation moves he used in his discourse.

The argumentation in Faid's discourse was structured in a systemic way. Grounds, Warrants, Claims, and Backing are the main moves that can be found in the argumentation of discourse (Fairclough, 2003). The videos produced by Faid started with grounds that were new information about Covid-19 in Morocco and the world. The grounds he started with usually implied that the Ministry of Health did not have such information and that media institutions were not reporting facts and they were unable to provide useful information. Then he moved to the warrant that people would be cured of Covid-19 if they followed his model of cure instead of relying on modern medicine. After that, he made use of a backing strategy by claiming a status of credibility, that he was a scientist and specialist. He often gave the example that China used herbs to treat Covid-19 and that grandparents in Islamic tradition could cure all illnesses by using herbs and traditional healing practices for treatment. This laid the ground for his next move when he presented his claim that we needed to bring back the Islamic traditions of the past to solve the crisis of the pandemic. In this way, he argued and claimed to be the only person with an efficient cure and solution to stop the pandemic in Morocco and all over the world. This process of argumentation was supported by lexical and visual choices in the texts he produced.

The lexical choices opted for by Faid in the production of his discourse included a mixture of informal and formal lexicons. In all the analysed videos, he uttered the informal names of herbs widely known in Moroccan popular culture. He used classical Arabic language which endowed his videos with a sense of an 'information discourse', and he shared some videos in French and English to give the impression that he was an influential specialist at the international level. This means that he endowed himself with authority over the consumers of his discourse who perceived the information he shared to be facts. The

informal terms from traditional healing, as shown in Table 1 below, created an aura of what Fairclough (1989) calls 'simulated equalization'. Thus, using terms of herbs that Moroccans know and can use in everyday life reduced the distance between Faid and the public. In this way, he was one of them. This populist touch in his discourse was fused with formal scientific-sounding terms from modern medicine in French. Such recurrent informal and formal lexicons are translated from Moroccan Arabic and French and illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Genre indications in Faid's videos

Informal lexicon	formal lexicon
fenugreek 'حلبة'	Biotechnology
marjoram 'بردقوش'	Genes
common sage 'سالمية'	Genetic engineering
wormwood 'شويلاء'	Cinnamic
thyme 'زعتر'	Volatile oils
rose geranium 'عطرشة'	Corticosteroid
cinnamon 'قرفة'	Inflammation
cloves 'قرنفل'	Systematic circulation
ginger 'زنجبيل'	Phytoestrogen
bran 'نخالة'	Homocysteine
Alpinia officinarum 'خلنجال'	saturated fat
cheeseweed 'الخبيزة'	paranasal sinuses

Although Faid just uttered the scientific terms and they often had nothing to do with the ideas he developed, the use of such technical terms made him appear as a scientist who claimed to be more knowledgeable than his followers or his opponents. By mixing the informal and formal lexicon in his discourse, Faid promoted his self-image as a specialist "doctor" who had adequate expertise and knowledge about Covid-19 and as a member of the ingroup of followers whom he addressed.

The traditional healthcare discourse used by Faid was structured in terms of a binary opposition which foregrounded and exalted Muslim societies and popular traditions of healthcare while it was sceptical and distrustful of western societies and modern medicine. We find in his texts lexical choices used to construct structural oppositions by describing participants with opposing classes of concepts. He frequently referred to citizens of Muslim countries as having a "good assuring psyche", whereas the citizens of western countries had a "troubled psyche" with "fear" and "panic" from the pandemic. Doctors in modern medicine were represented as being "fanatic" and "a shame" as they could not find a cure for Covid-19. On the other hand, he claimed that a "healthy" and "clean" nutrition was the best cure that Arab countries would use to stop the pandemic. In this way scientific research was presented as "stuck" and could not provide a cure, while the ancestors of Arab countries "dealt successfully with" pandemics in the past. Furthermore, the "weakness" of modern medicine in his discourse was often opposed to the "power" of "Arab women as they were in the past". He referred to Arab woman as "being smart" because they "can understand his cure" and they are "responsible" for applying it within the family. This was opposed to other western women, "American" "British" "Scandinavian" and "Australian", who were represented as "being unable to understand" the cure which he claimed to be the only solution to end the pandemic. Using such overt oppositions in his videos created what Van Dijk (1998) calls 'ideological squaring". Most social media users could only think within the limits of a such ideological square, that of traditional healing as a symbol of the supremacy of a conservative Muslim identity over modernity.

The opposing concepts established the 'Us vs. Them' opposition by expressing and emphasizing information that is "positive" about Arab societies (Us), and at the same time expressing and emphasizing information that is "negative" about western societies (Them). This 'Us vs. Them' division was supported by motivated lexical choices of pronouns. The

use of the pronouns 'we', 'us', and 'our' was recurrent in Faïd's videos. When he addressed his followers, he said: "we need to work together", "we are in a hard time", "we are doctors and researchers", and "the brothers and sisters who work with us". The use of plural first-personal pronouns served to make the receivers of his discourse take sides with the 'Us' pole which symbolizes an Islamic identity of the past as having the solution to deal with the current pandemic, against the 'Them' pole which represents western societies as having a modern medicine allegedly unable to prevent the spread of the pandemic in the world. This conservative ideology was supported by misinformation hidden in Faïd's discourse by means of other discourse strategies.

Faïd used different discourse strategies to present misinformation as facts about his cure for Covid-19. His discourse was criticized by other social media users who saw that the information he shared lacked scientific evidence. Yet, he refuted such claims by using other strategies. First, he used overlexicalization to refer to the same thing when he mentioned the source of his information. As an example, he referred to his source of information as "scientific academic fieldwork research", and the criticism of social media users as "denial, doubt, refutation". He labels the recourse to traditional healing as a return to "the origin, the truth, the power". The use of a lot of words and their synonyms was recurrent in his texts and showed that there was over-persuasion and contention to conceal his conservative ideology and misinformation.

In the same way, the use of aggregation of numbers while referring to participants as statistics misinformed the audience. When he claimed that Muslims had a strong psyche during the pandemic as compared to western citizens, he said that he had "pertinent information" that only "a small percentage of Muslims has a troubled psyche" because of the fear of the pandemic. Also, he claimed that "a great deal of cases was cured using herbs in China", and that the Ministry of Health in Morocco did not announce "a high number of

cases who followed his prescriptions and were cured". The exact number of all the above-mentioned participants is not specific. Does "a great deal of cases" mean ten people or one thousand people? These lexical choices gave the impression of scientific credibility and objective research, while they were, in fact, misinformation which obscured the absence of scientifically accurate information in his claims and foregrounded the conservative ideology in his discourse.

The lexical choices opted for by Faid in his construction were supported by his choices of visual content as well. The lexical choices he made were not the only carriers of meanings. The visual objects present in the videos and the style in which he represented himself implied a particular self-image and identity to the receivers of discourse. Firstly, the objects and the setting in the videos issued by Faid carried connotative meanings to the viewers. As shown in Figure 1 below, there is a bookshelf that contains a considerable number of books. Using the books in the background endowed the speaker with the power of knowledge and expertise. If Faid presented himself at the lexical level as a "researcher", "scientist", "and inventor", the visual choice of a bookshelf backs up his ideology and endows him with much more power over his viewers. Those books also communicated a sense of religiosity. Notice that on the top of the bookshelf, there are religious books which are often in red or green colour with decorated titles using golden colour, as opposed to the other books down the shelf. Placing The religious books at the top shows to what extent Faid valued such kinds of books as being more important than any other books placed at the bottom. This sense of religiosity supported the lexical choices that conveyed the conservative ideology of rejecting modern medicine and bringing back Islamic traditions of the past to deal with the present ordeals.

Figure 1: Mohamed Faid's appearance on his Youtube channel during the pandemic

Secondly, Faid's choice of clothes and his gaze supported his claims about the status and credibility he strived to convey to the audience. The formal clothes suggested that Faid was not an ordinary person. In his previous videos before the pandemic, he appeared in casual or traditional clothes such as the Moroccan 'Djallaba'. Yet, he chose to appear in a style of an expert during the pandemic, which endowed him with much more power as an authority in the field. This style resembled the appearance of ministers and spokesperson of the Ministry of Health who were seen on Moroccan TV channels on daily basis. In this way, a such visual choice supported the lexical choices that presented him as speaking the truth about his model of a cure for Covid-19. In the same vein, the gaze in the videos established the social distance between Faid and his viewers. This feature added additional meanings and supported others at the connotative level. Faid appeared looking at the viewer with a direct gaze from the beginning of the videos till the end with no interruption. He never appeared looking down on a paper or presenting information in other forms other than non-stop speech. This eye contact created a visual address that acknowledged the audience. This kind of gaze connoted a 'demand' that required a reaction from the viewers. In this sense, the social media viewers who watched the videos were acknowledged and their needs recognized, and they were invited to respond to the ideas and values presented about traditional healing. The response of social media users took various forms ranging from following his model of a cure to deal with Covid-19, sharing and reproducing his discourse on social media, to launching and signing a petition to support him.

The spread of the misinformation that was inherent in Faid's discourse and its conservative ideology of bringing back Islamic traditions rooted in popular imagination created a heated debate and controversy on social media in Morocco. This was apparent in the comments on his Facebook page. Social media users' comments were categorized into two main dominant categories. Category 1 includes attitudes supporting Faid and attacking his opponents. The commentators in this category reproduced Faid's constructed self-image as a specialist doctor who was knowledgeable about his model of curing Covid-19 and attacked his opponents by presenting them as "ignorant enemies". They did not perceive Covid-19 to be only an illness but also a test from God, and they believed that Faid's actions were part of a religious act of voluntarism to help people and save humanity and did not see it as misinformation. Category 2 included attitudes against Faid's discourse of misinformation. It included comments that questioned, doubted, and perceived Faid to be unqualified to speak about a cure for Covid-19 with no scientific proof.

The two categories were a consequence of a process of polarization initiated by Faid's conservative traditionalist discourse which created a controversy in the public sphere between his followers and opponents. The first category was dominant in the data analysed and proved the success of Faid's discourse in reactivating mental models of traditional healing practices inherent in Moroccan popular imagination. As Dijk (2 001) points out, "it is through mental models of everyday discourse such as conversations, news reports and textbooks that we acquire our knowledge of the world, our socially shared attitudes and finally our ideologies and fundamental norms and values" (p. 114). By the same token, the conservative ideology of bringing back Islamic traditions of the past as an alternative to modernity was cherished by social media users. This explained the popular support he received from the masses in Morocco. However, the emergence of the second category

during the analysis showed that social media as a new space in the public sphere allowed other users to challenge and criticise his discourse.

The struggle to shape public opinion was further carried out in the public sphere between his followers and opponents by launching two petitions. The first petition was launched by some doctors in the name of civil society institutions and asked for the application of the law to stop Faid from pretending to be a doctor and threatening the health of Moroccans. After that, a petition was launched by Faid's followers and asked for full support for his actions. The first petition by his opponents reached 7 080 signatures, while the second one by his followers reached 146 017 signatures. The large number of signatures to support Faid shows to what extent his ideological discourse had an impact on social media users. This can also be explained by the lexical and visual choices opted for in his followers' petition which reproduced Faid's style and identity. As illustrated in Figure 2 below, the petition used a written text supported by Faid's picture.

Figure 2: A petition launched by Faid's followers on www.change.org website (2020)

A petition to support Professor Faid

Due to the fierce campaign that was triggered by some individuals in the name of doctors, and which doubts the speciality and title of Professor Mohamed Faid, we call upon all free people of the world to stand against Falsehood and support the Truth to refute this claim and make it fail because it misrepresents Morocco's reputation in the world, as the doctor has good reputation and credibility

in all countries of the world. The signing of this petition is an oath of Truth, as the doctor is engaged with all those who follow his majesty the king to save the nation from the pandemic.

Salam

The lexical choices in the text worked together with the visual choices to connote the same "Us Vs Them" division based on a conservative ideology of rejecting modernity in favour of bringing back Islamic traditions of the past. Faid was represented as "Professor Mohamed Faid" using the word "professor" to connote knowledge and power and the personal name "Mohamed" to make the social media users sympathise with him. His opponents are represented as "individuals in the name of doctors". This lexical choice dehumanized the doctors who launched the petition and belittles their professional status. In the same way, their actions were considered as "falsehood", while Faid's actions were perceived as being "truth", and the action of signing the petition was an "oath of truth". These lexical choices belong to Islamic religious jargon, and they connoted the action of signing the petition and supporting Faid as being a religious act of "believers" in Islamic societies against "unbelievers" in western societies. At the visual level, the gaze and pose of Faid, as shown in Figure 2 above, supported the ideology conveyed by the lexical choices. On the one hand, the picture used is what Kress and Leeuwen (2006) term an 'offer image' which invites the audience to observe and scrutinize the participant. In this image, the viewers were invited to observe and form a positive attitude about Faid, an attitude that acknowledged his quality of being a knowledgeable doctor. Besides, he appeared standing in a pose that suggested an activity of lecturing behind a microphone. Giving Faid's photo considerable space and salience in the picture with a medium shot brought the audience socially closer to his identity and style which were reproduced at the lexical level of the text.

The lexical and visual choices opted for by Faid and his followers in the production and distribution of traditional healthcare discourse re-activated a conservative ideology of rejecting modern medicine and bringing back Islamic traditions of the past as an alternative

to deal with the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic situation was seen through a conservative religious lens, and any criticism of traditional healing discourse was perceived as a threat to an imagined Muslim community.

4. Conclusion

This paper has shown that traditional healing discourse on social media challenged the discourse created by the Ministry of Health during the pandemic. The success of such discourse in shaping public opinion is based on argumentation strategies and motivated lexical and visual choices which worked together in reactivating mental models that draw heavily on popular culture. This traditional healing discourse connotes a supremacy of an imagined Muslim identity over modernity. As Dijk (2001) points out, "social representations are `particularized' in mental models, and it is often through mental models that they are expressed in text and talk" (p. 114).

The analysis of the data revealed, however, critical voices in the public sphere that challenged Faid's discourse. The signing of a petition by his opponents and the emergence of a new category of comments on his posts that doubted and questioned the misinformation and ideology in Faid's texts are important signs which show that so many Moroccan citizens participated critically in the struggle over shaping public opinion on social media in various ways. One can find so many opinion articles that were written by writers and intellectuals during that struggle to uncover the ideological work at play in such traditional healing discourse. Furthermore, social media as a new space in the public sphere allowed for more opportunities to contest and challenge Faid's discourse. In addition to the petition, social media users could write posts and share old videos produced by Faid in which misinformation is much more obvious to the general public. It seems that thanks to this

criticism, Faid deleted many videos about Covid-19 from his channel. Still, the critical actions of social media users were mostly individual and lacked support from institutional organizations.

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