

Critical Discourse Analysis of Trump's Tweets on the Covid-19 Pandemic

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This paper presents a critical discourse analysis of Donald Trump's tweets regarding COVID-19, utilizing Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Halliday's systemic functional linguistics to examine the language used. The analysis centers on two tweets that illustrate Trump's politicization of the pandemic and the propagation of stigmatization through social media. The research examines the stylistic and formal characteristics of Trump's tweets, focusing on his use of metaphorical language and blame-shifting tactics, specifically his labeling of COVID-19 as a 'Chinese virus.' The analysis also investigates discourse practices, connecting Trump's rhetoric on the U.S.-China trade agreement and pandemic response to wider political narratives. The study analyzes the socio-cultural implications of Trump's discourse at a macro level. It highlights how his discourse exacerbated xenophobia, nationalism, and social divisions during the global health crisis. The findings demonstrate that Trump's tweets influenced public perceptions and international relations, reinforcing anti-China attitudes and contributing to a polarized public response to the pandemic. This study emphasizes the significance of a critical and reflective approach to political communication, particularly during times of crisis. It also offers insights into the creation and dissemination of ideological narratives in the digital era.

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Public Interest Statement

This study presents a critical analysis of Donald Trump's tweets related to COVID-19, using linguistic frameworks to reveal their political implications. By examining Trump's language choices and rhetorical strategies, the research explains how his discourse worsened societal divisions and anti-China sentiments during the pandemic. This study highlights the significant impact of political communication on public perceptions and international relations. It emphasizes the importance of critically examining digital discourse, especially during times of crisis. The research addresses a crucial gap in understanding the socio-cultural effects of political rhetoric on public attitudes and global dynamics, calling for reflective engagement in political communication.



Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a linguistic approach that aims to integrate the critical tradition of social analysis into the study of discourse. It prioritizes examining how discourse interacts with power dynamics, ideologies, institutions, and social identities, emphasizing the role of language in constructing and reflecting social realities. CDA emphasizes the relationship between discourse and the broader social context by asserting that all social activities and behaviors are represented or categorized theoretically (Fairclough, 2013).

A large scale of social activities can take other forms of practice. People's thoughts and beliefs can be affected by new social media forms like Twitter. It can create new groups and form new ideologies, especially among active users. On the one hand, more than 500 million tweets are sent every day for more than 320 million active users throughout the world, making twitter a wonderful instrument for spreading information around society. On the other hand, specific viewpoints and concepts will be imposed (كلانتری خاندانی et al., 2019). Henceforth, this study would use the analytical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, covering the three-dimensional models of Fairclough's Dialectical Relation Approach and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics in order to investigate the relationship between discourse

practice in that new form and social analysis, as well as to fill the gap between media communication and people's interpretation.

Social media platforms, particularly Twitter, have redefined public discourse in the realm of digital communication, influencing a wide range of social activities and beliefs. Twitter exemplifies the profound impact of social media on information dissemination, group formation, and ideology shaping. This study leverages CDA to probe the dynamics between discourse practices on Twitter and their societal implications, particularly in the context of media communication and public interpretation.

This research draws on Fairclough's (2013) Dialectical Relation Approach and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics to explore the linguistic and social dimensions of discourse in Donald Trump's tweets during the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighting the significance of CDA. The study aims to analyze how Trump's discourse influences public perception and response to the pandemic, navigating power, ideology, and social identity.

CDA has been shown to be useful in analyzing political discourse on social media, as several scholarly works have highlighted. Research analyzing President Trump's tweets on a range of topics, including racism and political communication during significant events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, highlights the crucial role of language in shaping public discourse and policy (Allen & McAleer, 2022; Biletska et al., 2023; Kerbleski, 2019; Olimat, 2020; Zahra, 2019). These analyses reveal how language is strategically used to manage crises, respond to criticism, and influence public opinion. They offer insights into the interaction between political messaging and societal response.

Central to CDA is the concept of power, with a focus on how discourse perpetuates inequalities and shapes social realities. The approach examines texts as sites of ideological struggle, where differing discourses and ideologies vie for dominance (Reddy, 2000; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). CDA aims to connect micro and macro aspects of social interaction by analyzing the speech of influential figures and discursive distinctions in texts. It provides a comprehensive perspective on the role of language in societal dynamics (Wilson, 2015).

In contemporary society, social media, particularly Twitter, plays an undeniable role in political communication. Politicians use social media platforms to share their ideologies and connect with a wider audience, despite the challenges posed by the brevity and impulsivity of social media discourse (Chen, 2019; Saad Bustan & Mohamad alakrash, 2020). This study aims to bridge the gap between the effects of social media on public discourse and its interpretation, suggesting that societal interpretation of discourse has a greater impact on shaping ideologies than textual structure alone.

Literature Review

Scholarly investigation has extensively analyzed the discourse surrounding former President Donald Trump's tweets during the Covid-19 pandemic. Research has explored various dimensions of his social media communication, including sentiment analysis, ideological frameworks, and linguistic analysis. The emotional tone, ideological underpinnings, and specific linguistic strategies within Trump's tweets have been examined. For example, Yaqub (2021) analyzed the sentiment of Trump's tweets during the early stages of the pandemic using the VADER model, providing insights into the emotional tone of his messages. Luo et al. (2022) used Van Dijk's framework to understand the ideological dimensions of Trump's discourse, while Allen and McAleer (2022) compared Trump's tweets with Dr. Fauci's emails to examine the interactions between political and health authorities. Studies, such as those conducted by Olimat (2020), have focused on the use of dysphemistic expressions in the polarizing language used by Trump.

Additionally, the literature examines the racial implications and real-world consequences of Trump's tweets. Lu & Sheng (2020) investigated the correlation between Trump's tweets mentioning China in the context of Covid-19 and the rise in racial animosity towards Asians in the United States. Catalano and Wang (2021) examined the effects of Trump's use of the term 'Chinese virus' on social media perceptions and behaviors.

Although existing literature has extensively explored Donald Trump's tweets during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is still a gap in applying a structured theoretical framework to analyze these communications in depth. This study aims to fill this gap by utilizing Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model and M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyze Trump's tweets about China and the coronavirus in 2020. Previous research has provided valuable insights into the sentiment, ideology, and linguistic strategies of Trump's tweets. However, a comprehensive analysis that integrates text analysis, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practice remains underexplored. This research aims to delve into the stylistic and formal features of the tweets, examine their intertextual relations and contextualization, and assess their impact on the socio-political environment. By doing this, the article aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Trump's communication regarding China during the pandemic reflects and impacts wider social and political dynamics. This contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the role of political communication in shaping public perception and international relations during global health crises.

Materials and Methods

The data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively using Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Fairclough, 2013). Fairclough examined the stylistic and formal features of the text at the micro-analysis level, which is the first level of analysis (Fairclough, 2013). In the second level, Fairclough examines discourse practice or meso analysis (Fairclough, 2013). He poses questions about intertextual relations and situational contextualization that can be used to identify explicit and implicit references in the discourse to these contexts. At the last level, Fairclough analyzes socio-cultural practice or macro analysis (Fairclough, 2013). He aims to uncover the connection between discourse and the social environment and the intentions behind the use of language (Gölbaşı, 2017).

It is important to maintain objectivity and avoid subjective evaluations. Two tweets regarding the coronavirus in China are included. The study's data pertains solely to events that occurred in 2020, specifically how they were addressed by the American and Chinese presidencies. The study is limited to the model categories based on the selected data and aims.

Results

Addressing the Pandemic-Trump's Assertion and the 'Chinese Virus' Controversy

Tweet 1: Mar 18, 2020 06:46:33 AM I always treated the Chinese Virus very seriously, and have done a very good job from the beginning, including my very early decision to close the “borders” from China - against the wishes of almost all. Many lives were saved. The Fake News new narrative is disgraceful & false! [Twitter for iPhone] <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1240243188708839424>

1. Text Analysis

In this tweet, Trump uses a metaphorical language which contains the concept of blame shifting and a bare accusing of China. China is the source of Virus "Chinese Virus". He also used the phrase "Fake News", which is an accusation of ABC News as disgraceful and inaccurate. The theme of this tweet is Trump's very early decision to close the borders with China. He considers the decision as the only good work behind "save lives". Trump metaphorically refers to some of the news as disgraceful and false.

Table 1. Linguistic Analysis of a Tweet on the U.S.-China Trade Deal

Vocabulary		Text structure	
Descriptive adjective: "giant" of the Trade Deal. Noun phrase: "Terrific working" describe the work with Xi.		The tweet made of two complex sentences.	
Metaphor: "much more to come"			
Grammar			
Transitivity			
Actor	Identifying Relational Process	Goal	
<i>Our just signed giant trade deal with China</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>The USA & China closer together in so many other ways.</i>	
Modality			
Subjective Modality: <i>it will bring the USA & China closer together in so many other ways</i>		Objective Modality	
Cohesion			
Conjunction	Reference	Ellipsis	Substitution

Elaborating	Extending	Enhancing	Nominal	Verbal	Clausal	Nominal	Verbal	Clausal	Nominal	Verbal	Clausal
That	Both		A man , His						President Xi & a man		It will bring

Lexical organization

President and truly, Giant Trade Deal.

[Table 1](#) provides a detailed examination of the language used in a tweet about a significant trade agreement between the United States and China. It is divided into sections on Vocabulary, Text Structure, Grammar, and Cohesion, each focusing on different aspects of linguistic analysis. In Vocabulary, the analysis highlights the use of a descriptive adjective "giant" to emphasize the scale of the trade deal, and a noun phrase "Terrific working" to positively describe the collaboration with Xi Jinping. The text structure is noted to consist of two complex sentences, incorporating a metaphor "much more to come," suggesting future benefits or developments beyond the trade deal itself. The Grammar section delves into the transitivity of the tweet, identifying the actor, process, and goal, with "Our" as the actor who "just signed" a "giant trade deal with China," aiming to bring "The USA & China closer together in so many other ways." Subjective modality is mentioned, indicating optimism about the trade deal's impact on U.S.-China relations. Cohesion is analyzed through the use of conjunctions, references, ellipsis, and substitution, categorized into elaborating, extending, and enhancing, with attention to nominal, verbal, and clausal elements to demonstrate how the tweet connects ideas, refers back to previous concepts, and substitutes elements for coherence. Lastly, the lexical organization section underscores the importance of the trade deal and leadership roles, encapsulated in the phrase "President and truly, Giant Trade Deal," illustrating the tweet's overall message and significance.

2. Discourse Practice

Table 2. Analysis of Rhetorical Strategies in Trump's Trade Deal Tweets

Manifest Intertextuality	Discourse Representation	The text produced by Trump, declaring their "our" close relationship with China		
	Presupposition	Their relation will not get better.		
	Negation			
	Meta-discourse	Metaphorical expression by means of the meaning of "Much more to come!" it is an opposite reference.		
	Irony			
Constitutive Intertextuality	Genre	All genre of texts are tweets.		
	Activity type	The process of giant trade deal with China involves a closer connection and terrific working with Xi.		
	Style	Tenor	Mode	Rhetorical mode
		Official	Written text	Argumentative
		Topic: China and The US giant trade deal signature.		

	Discourse	Area of knowledge: China and USA are closer to gather in so many ways.
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The [table 2](#) provides a comprehensive breakdown of the linguistic and rhetorical elements employed in Donald Trump's tweets about the trade agreement between the United States and China. It is divided into two primary categories: Manifest Intertextuality, which delves into the explicit references and assumptions made within the text, including discourse representation that highlights Trump's declaration of a close relationship with China using inclusive language, presuppositions implying skepticism about future improvements in relations, and meta-discourse elements like metaphorical expressions suggesting deeper meanings or irony. The second category, Constitutive Intertextuality, examines the inherent structure of the tweets, identifying them as belonging to a specific genre (tweets) and detailing the activity type as the negotiation and announcement of a major trade deal, emphasizing the effort and collaboration with China. The style is further dissected into tenor (official), mode (written text), and rhetorical mode (argumentative), indicating a formal approach aimed at persuading the audience of the trade deal's benefits. Additionally, the discourse section outlines the overarching theme of the U.S.-China trade deal and its broader implications for bringing the two countries closer in various ways. This analysis sheds light on the strategic use of language and discourse in political communication, particularly in the context of international relations and agreements.

3. Socio-Cultural Practice

Analyzing President Trump's tweet from March 18, 2020, through the lens of socio-cultural practice within Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model reveals the implications of discourse on societal dynamics and ideologies amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The labeling of COVID-19 as the 'Chinese Virus' by Trump is a deliberate linguistic choice that may tap into and worsen existing xenophobic sentiments and anti-China rhetoric in American society. This terminology, embedded in a larger socio-political context, serves to shift blame for the pandemic's outbreak and spread away from domestic policy failures to an external 'other,' thereby aligning with nationalist and protectionist ideologies. This framing not only promotes discrimination against Asian Americans and Asians worldwide but also exacerbates social divisions by creating an 'us vs. them' narrative that pits a collective American identity against an external threat embodied by China and, by extension, the Chinese people.

Moreover, the Trump administration's criticism of the media as purveyors of 'Fake News' regarding their coverage of the pandemic response highlights the strained relationship between the two. This portrayal of media skepticism not only divides public opinion but also undermines the media's credibility as an essential societal institution, garnering support by fostering a shared distrust among his political supporters. This communication demonstrates how political discourse can impact public perception and behavior, serving various socio-political functions. It reinforces specific political ideologies, stokes xenophobia and nationalism, and challenges the legitimacy of opposing narratives within the public sphere.

This tweet highlights the relationship between language, ideology, and social relations, emphasizing the important role of political discourse in shaping societal attitudes and behaviors, particularly during global crises. The analysis of this tweet's socio-cultural practices provides insights into the strategic use of language in political communication. It also highlights the need to scrutinize the broader implications of such discourse on social cohesion and international relations during pivotal moments in history.

CHINA! The Exclamatory Focus on Trump's Tweet

Tweet 2. May 29, 2020 08:01:56 AM CHINA! [Twitter for iPhone]
<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1266354084036194306>

1. Text analysis

The text is an exclamation sentence with ellipses predicate. It is a deviation form of a normal exclamation sentence. It is supposed to begin with what or how and atypical shift in the word order, but it is merely one capitalized word "CHINA!" The text is objective or subjective; it means either; it is China or China.

Table 3. Linguistic Elements Focused on 'China' in Textual Analysis

Vocabulary	Text structure
Lexical selection: China	One word.
Metaphor: China is metaphor by itself	
Grammar	
Transitivity	Modality

Cohesion												
Conjunction				Reference			Ellipsis			Substitution		
Elaborating	Extending	Enhancing	Personal	Demonstrative	Comparative	Nominal	Verbal	Elliptical verb	Clausal	Nominal	Verbal	Clausal
Lexical organization												
China												

Table 3 presents a focused linguistic analysis of the usage and representation of the term "China" within a specific text. It categorizes the analysis into sections on Vocabulary, Text Structure, Grammar, and Cohesion, with a final note on Lexical Organization. In Vocabulary, the table highlights "China" as a crucial lexical selection and posits that the term serves as a metaphor, suggesting layers of meaning beyond the mere geographical reference. The Text Structure section is succinct, mentioning that "China" is used as a single, impactful word.

Under Grammar, the analysis is divided into Transitivity and Modality, though specifics are not detailed, implying a broader focus on how actions and relations are constructed with "China" as a central element, and the attitudes or beliefs the text conveys about it. Cohesion is explored through categories like Conjunction, Reference, Ellipsis, and Substitution, with a special emphasis on the mechanisms of elaboration, extension, enhancement, and types of references (Personal, Demonstrative, Comparative). An interesting note is the mention of an "Elliptical verb," indicating a verb omitted in the text that is implied by the context of "China."

The Lexical Organization section is remarkably straightforward, reiterating "China" as the core lexical element, emphasizing its significance throughout the text. This analysis suggests a deep dive into how "China" is positioned linguistically and conceptually within the text, underscoring its multifaceted representation and the sophisticated use of language to shape perceptions of China.

2. Discourse Practice

The discourse presented by this tweet tries to show the strong emotion and powerful feelings of the writer. It tries to raise the audience's feelings negatively towards China. That is, China might be the very responsible country for the world crisis "coronavirus".

Table 4. Linguistic Analysis of Aggressive Discourse in Tweets About China

Manifest Intertextuality	Discourse Representation		The text vocalized emotionally and aggressively. It is multidimensionality text.	
	Presupposition		It is China.	
	Negation			
	Meta-discourse		The text is a metaphorical representation of China, as it is responsible of the world crisis.	
	Irony			
Constitutive Intertextuality	Genre		All genre of text are tweets	
	Activity type		One word as invitation at China acts.	
	Style	Tenor	Mode	Rhetorical mode
		Informal	Written text	Argumentative

		Topic: China
	Discourse	Area of knowledge: intensity constructed on the speaker's point of view.

[Table 4](#), offers a nuanced examination of the language used in tweets that convey emotional and aggressive tones towards China, analyzing both manifest and constitutive intertextuality. The analysis under manifest intertextuality points out that the discourse representation is emotionally charged and aggressive, indicating a complex, multidimensional text that metaphorically positions China as responsible for global crises. The presupposition section simply states "It is China," suggesting an underlying assumption or blame placed on the country without direct negation or irony highlighted. In constitutive intertextuality, the genre is identified as tweets, indicating a specific social media context for the discourse. The activity type is described as using a single word to invite action or reaction towards China, emphasizing a direct and impactful approach. The style of these tweets is categorized as informal, yet the mode of delivery is through written text, and their rhetorical mode is argumentative, aiming to persuade or challenge the reader's perspective on China. The discourse section further specifies the topic as China, with an area of knowledge that focuses on intensifying the speaker's viewpoint, suggesting a deliberate construction of narrative to shape public opinion or discourse surrounding China. Table 4 thus dissects the strategic use of language in tweets to craft a particular stance towards China, highlighting the interplay between linguistic choices and the portrayal of international issues.

3. Socio-cultural practice

The tweet 'CHINA!' by President Trump exemplifies power dynamics and ideological construction. The use of capital letters and exclamation marks emphasizes a strong emotional expression and communicates an ideologically charged message. This tweet generated widespread reactions, highlighting the power of rhetoric in influencing public opinion. The use of a single word as a persuasion technique can invite diverse interpretations and reflect how discourse practices shape group identity formation and polarization. The tweet not only represents Trump's individual views but also mobilizes support and asserts ideological positions. The tweet by Trump serves as an example of how language and social media can be used as instruments in socio-cultural practices to shape public narratives according to political agendas. This tweet illustrates that language serves not only as a means of expression but also as a political and ideological tool capable of shaping social perceptions. In the digital era, political communication plays a significant role in constructing social reality and cultural practices.

Discussion

An analysis of Donald Trump's tweets reveals that the language used in political communication, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, plays a crucial role in shaping narratives and public perceptions. Our findings highlight how Trump strategically used word choice and text structure to promote a particular ideology. Specifically, he referred to the virus as the "Chinese virus," which elicited not only political but also social responses. This passage highlights the importance of rhetoric in shaping public perception and influencing responses to crises. It emphasizes that language is not only a means of communication, but also a powerful political tool.

In addition to political blame, Jaworsky and Qiaoan (2021) point out that China's danger has been echoed by US audiences who have defined another idea of skepticism. They concluded that the virus was produced in a Chinese laboratory. Their claims and blame shifting came to be defined in the following way: Trump claims that America will face challenges and overcome them. He goes on to say that the U.S. should respond because China poses an obvious threat to the country. The ongoing conflict between the United States and China has led the American public to participate in reactionary nationalism, believing that the United States is the best world leader.

In addition, scholars such as Yaqub (2020), Luo et al. (2021), Lu & Sheng (2020), and Catalano & Wang (2021) have contributed to our understanding of this topic. In this article, we present evidence on how Trump's language has influenced public sentiment and perceptions about the pandemic, and how this has contributed to social polarization and discrimination. The findings demonstrate how narratives constructed by political leaders can influence social and political dynamics on a broader scale.

It is important to adopt a critical and reflective approach in understanding and responding to language in political discourse. This task involves not only identifying and analyzing the rhetorical strategies used but also understanding the broader consequences of such language in the social and political context. It is important to recognize how such narratives influence public perception and social behavior, as well as contribute to polarization and discrimination. Strengthening media literacy and critical language analysis are important steps in navigating and effectively responding

to political narratives in a polarized society. This requires educating individuals on how language and rhetoric are used in politics and how to distinguish between fact, opinion, and ideological manipulation.

Several studies have examined the social consequences of Trump's rhetoric. Lu & Sheng (2020) describe an increase in racial animosity, while Catalano & Wang (2021) examine the impact on social media behavior. These studies demonstrate how political communication can significantly affect social structures and interactions. This highlights the importance of taking a critical and comprehensive approach when analyzing political discourse. It suggests that gaining a deeper understanding of its implications can aid in developing strategies to mitigate its negative effects.

In light of these findings, we must consider how to effectively respond to and interpret political rhetoric in social media and public communication. This requires increased awareness from both society and policymakers regarding the power of language to either foster or undermine social cohesion. Potential strategies include enhancing media literacy among the general public, reinforcing ethical standards in politics and journalism, and promoting inclusive and constructive dialogue in the public sphere. By gaining a deeper understanding of these dynamics, we can strive towards creating a healthier social and political environment. This will allow discourse to contribute to understanding and solidarity, rather than division and conflict.

Conclusion

This research confirms the influence of political rhetoric on public opinion and social behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis focuses on Donald Trump's tweets and examines the text structure and word choice, particularly the use of the term 'Chinese Virus.' The study reveals how ideological narratives are constructed and propagated to achieve specific political goals. This analysis demonstrates that language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a means of exerting power that can shape perceptions and elicit responses within the wider social context. Therefore, this study emphasizes the significance of adopting a critical perspective towards political discourse and its effects on society, particularly in times of global crisis that demand solidarity and mutual comprehension.

Furthermore, regarding the relationship between political communication and societal responses, it is important to note that political rhetoric, particularly on social media, has the potential to reinforce ideological divisions and promote discrimination. Furthermore, regarding the relationship between political communication and societal responses, it is important to note that political rhetoric, particularly on social media, has the potential to reinforce ideological divisions and promote discrimination. Furthermore, regarding the relationship between political communication and societal responses, it is important to note that political rhetoric, particularly on social media, has the potential to reinforce ideological divisions and promote discrimination. This, in turn, can impact public policies and intergroup interactions. Therefore, it is crucial to create communication strategies that are both inclusive and responsible. These strategies should not only inform the public but also promote unity and understanding despite differences. By doing so, we can work towards a more reflective and ethical approach to politics and public communication, which is necessary for addressing global challenges and building a more harmonious society.

Author Contributions: In the study titled "Critical Discourse Analysis of Trump's Tweets on the Covid-19 Pandemic," the division of labor among the authors was as follows: Heevi Khaled Jamel was tasked with the conceptualization and methodology of the study, drawing on her expertise in linguistic analysis within the context of digital communication. Marwan Abdi focused on the validation, formal analysis, and supervision of the project, employing his knowledge in discourse analysis to scrutinize the data critically. Khalid Ilias Basheer contributed to the investigation, resources, data curation, and writing of the original draft, leveraging his background in social studies to provide a comprehensive analysis of the social implications of the tweets. Writing—review and editing were collaboratively managed by all authors, demonstrating a joint effort in refining the study to ensure clarity and coherence. The project administration was shared between Heevi Khaled Jamel and Khalid Ilias Basheer, ensuring effective coordination and progression of the research. Marwan Abdi applied his technical skills in software for analyzing textual data, enhancing the study's analytical depth. Funding acquisition was not applicable for this study. Visualization tasks were collectively undertaken by the authors, aiming to effectively present the research findings. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript, signifying their collective endorsement of the work and its conclusions.

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