Coronavirus Rhetoric in Pakistani Media: A 'Solution Aversion' Pandemic Situation

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Keywords	Abstract
 • Aversion • Awareness • Coronavirus • Pakistan • Poverty • Religion • Rhetoric	*Pandemics are natural threats. Coronavirus not only threatened human lives around the globe in the 21st century but also exposed human preparedness and behaviour against natural calamities. The present study attempts to highlight reinforcement strategies of Pakistani news channels during Coronavirus pandemic persuading the public to adopt preventative measures. Unfortunately, population of a third world country such as Pakistan reflected a degenerated moral response to pandemic compared to West and America. 'Stay home stay safe' being the sole solution and prevention against Coronavirus could not mould Pakistani citizens at large during the lockdown. 'Solution-aversion' attitude of Pakistani citizens completely refused social distancing due to illiteracy, poverty, religious extremism, ignorance and most of all population. Pakistani media adopted various persuasive strategies to convince people for social distancing during the pandemic. This paper examines headlines from three popular Pakistani news channels ARY, GEO and Samaa TV from March 7 to April 30, 2020, broadcast at 9.pm, prime time for television viewers in Pakistan. The main interest is the insightful assessment of media rhetoric in the backdrop of the pandemic. The study is non-linear i.e. it does not follow a fixed sequence of headlines rather it discusses appeals as an emphatic media strategy for persuasion. It encounters the traditional rhetoric appeals, bathos, ethos, logos and to a limited extent kairos as a descriptive model of media picture in the news headlines invoking listeners' emotions for a purpose in the context of the Coronavirus outbreak. As Media rhetoric in Pakistan (March 7-April 30 2020) unfolds, the headlines are contextualized, culminating in an extensive analysis of the sum of their parts by way of conclusion. However, worth anticipating argument is the power of persuasive language used strategically to develop consciousness and awareness in a situation where the public show aversion to the solution consequently causing threat to the lives around.*

1. Introduction

Pandemic basically, is the spread of a contagious disease affecting larger populations and regions. Its P is a passport, to travel and disturb the regions across the world. Since the creation of human beings, pandemics have ruined as well as transformed life and civilizations. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention documented the existence and spread of the Plague of Athens in 430 B.C and a long list continues. Antonine Plague 165-180 A.D, Plague of Cyprian 250-271 A.D, Plague of Justinian 541-542 A.D, The Black Death 1346-1353, Cocoliztli Epidemic 1545-1548, American Plague in 16th c., Great Plague of London 1665-1666, Great Plague of Marseilles 1720-1723, Russian Plague 1770-1772, Philadelphia Yellow Fever Epidemic 1793, Flu Pandemic 1889-1890, American Polio Epidemic 1916, Spanish Flu 1918-1920, Asian Flu 1957-1958, AIDS 1981- till date, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) 2002-2003, H1N1 Swine Flu 2009-2010, West Africa Ebola Epidemic 2014-16, Zika Virus Epidemic 2015-till date.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) identified as SARS-CoV-2 has traumatized the globe in the 21st century. Like a pandemic, it is a 'perfect predator' ruthlessly exterminating human lives (Strathdee and Patterson 2019). World Health Organization has declared COVID-19 as 6th Public Health of Emergency Service (SPHEC) on January 30, 2020. Initial slow global response to Coronavirus is established as a major cause of its rapid spread and countries worldwide including the US run short of testing the disease.

No subtle information is available to speak the origin of the virus. Scientists have contested the idea of the production of SARS-CoV-2 in a laboratory and its emergence as engineered. However, the speculation remains unexplored. Scripps Research Institute has rejected the idea based on evidence that compared the available genome sequence data of Coronavirus determining its origin resultant of natural processes. First reported on December 19, 2019, from the Chinese Health Official, the virus overtook the globe. A 2.7 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 by April 23, 2020, roughly 730,000 recovered patients and 187,000 death numbers around the world. The highest number of affectees was reported in US followed by Italy and Spain. In Pakistan, Health officials reported 2 confirmed cases on March 19, 2020.

The geographical location of Pakistan required a high level of action plan in response to Coronavirus. National Action Plan for Preparedness Response to Coronavirus Disease Pakistan embarked on controlling the spread of the virus by community emergency preparedness. As an economically poor state, Pakistan expected a huge challenge to face the pandemic. Furthermore, its social structure (that considers illness, particularly pandemic within the cultural, psychological and religious constraints) remained a major obstacle for adopting protective measures.

Pakistan geographically has remained vulnerable to natural disasters; floods, droughts, cyclones and epidemics due to over population. CEPSA programme research on disaster preparedness in South Asia (2020) details substantial threats to Pakistan and their consequences. Reports show Pakistan enduring frequent natural disasters since its creation in 1947. The disastrous earthquake in 2005 killed over 75,000 people. Floods 2010, 2013, 2014 and massive heat waves in 2015 caused thousands of lives in Pakistan (Fayaz and Bussell, 2017, p.1). Though geographical factors pertain to disasters, however, majority of the Pakistani population regard these as direct 'azab' (punishment) from God. In Pakistani society, people usually interpret calamities 'within the idioms of religion' (Riaz and Qadir, 2018). Even if Pakistani government plans to deal with it, public behaviour obstructs its implementation. Because of its geographical location, Pakistan has developed a larger institutional structure for

preparedness for disaster during the last decades. NDMA is the agency, leading during times of floods, earthquakes, terrorism and epidemics. Federal ministry armed provincial organizations, NGOs and UN agencies work as major stakeholders during emergency situations. Inadequate political will, social behaviour and religious extremism cause damage to institutional improvement during a natural disaster. Poverty, ignorance, illiteracy and religious extremism, in short political, social and religious difference damaged awareness campaigns during Coronavirus and deliberation of social distancing remained disruptive. The present study highlights reinforcement strategies of Pakistani news channels during the Coronavirus pandemic persuading the public to adopt preventative measures.

2. Literature Review

a. Rhetoric- mass mobilization and socio-political engineering

Media as an effective social and political sphere rationalizes debates and discussions of various issues emerging in society. Rhetoric is associated with media and is basically understood as a guiding principle for communicators who seek to inform or persuade. 'To inform' is set in the background as a prime objective and 'persuasion' as the core objective is fore-grounded in the contemporary world. Persuasion is a powerful instrument of mass mobilization and socio-political engineering (Adeyanju, 2009, p.192).

Governments normally use media as a tool in such situations to inform about natural calamities so that the public may act to mitigate risks. The media runs frequent awareness campaigns for risk reduction as the audience demonstrate more concern when media content overemphasizes various aspects of the real world. Vocabulary choice is particularly significant during the process of linguistic categorization (Fowler, 1991). Media as an outlet to communicate information holds the responsibility of shaping and strengthening the opinions of the masses. Despite some lacunas, however, media remains a source of disseminating information with the potential to lead nations to meet unimaginable challenges. In pandemic situations, media covers the gaps by its vibrant, vigilant and vigorous role to reinforce social distancing as the only preventive measure. Unfortunately, a satanic sway also sustains in media aspiring to its angelic role seeing 'glass half full than glass half empty.

Modern rhetoric is relatively different from traditional rhetoric boundless to the established perspective of rhetoricians. The digital use of the word 'rhetoric' has undergone changes and emerged as an apparatus to emphasize, reinforce and persuade listeners. Modern rhetoric has 'a concern for audience, for intention, and structure' (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The intention is mostly inspired by the target audience.

Austin's proposition of speech act (1964), Searle's categorization of speech into taxonomies (1976) and Halliday's proposition of language functions as ideational, interpersonal and textual (1975) leave a gap as to how to safely categorize an utterance as rhetoric. Physical setting, content, intended goals and outcomes and language functions lead to the decision. However, the role of listeners and purpose to address them with an objective to persuade them to remain equally momentous (Mclnellyand Perry, 2008). Rhetoric in media is more functionalist; not only transmitting messages with words but transmitting well with words (Kock, 2004). It persuades, helps the audience to grasp the concept, exaggerates and minimizes the scope of the existing issues, uses familiar vocabulary, metaphors and analogies. Fragmentation in media language is understood with a rhetorical methodological approach.

3. Research Methodology

a. Rhetoric of Motives

Time and place, motivation, response and context are the significant elements to perceive messages through the situation of the receiver as well as the speaker. Rhetoric as an integral part of articulation in the contemporary world emphasizes the speaker's role to reinforce the implied beliefs that truth detached from its form can be demonstrated as credible. Discursive in practice, rhetoric adheres to the human mind and becomes indispensable to analyse practical reasoning. Rhetoric analysis proves effective in mapping the social behaviour of Pakistani people during the pandemic. Rhetoric situation i.e. the context of headline news is pandemic. The communicator here is the channel, COVID-19 and social distancing as an issue at hand with the purpose of spreading awareness and persuading the public to stay home for their safety as well as others.

Burk's *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950) well explains rhetoric. Conventionally rhetoric does not identify but persuade' (Burke, 1950, p.1019). Persuasion varies from sponsorship 'or propaganda to courtship, social etiquette and education' (Burke, 1950, p.1019). Persuasion strategy helps to grasp subtle shades of meaning. Rhetorical analysis unfolds persuasion strategies to decode visual and verbal messages. The present study synthesizes persuasion and rhetorical appeals to evaluate verbal and visual aspects of the selected headlines on Pakistani media during the pandemic for reinforcement and propagation; viable media tools for influence. The process identifies Aristotle's rhetorical devices namely bathos, ethos and logos through syntactical and verbal speech properties of news reflecting the pragmatic aspect of language. The rhetoric analysis identifies the social behavioural patterns of Pakistani citizens. In Pakistan, to regulate the living conditions promptly and expect the best cannot co-exist when political intents have denied enlightenment of education and awareness to people for decades.

The present study examines headlines from three popular Pakistani news channels ARY, GEO and Samaa TV from March 7 to April 30, 2020, broadcast at 9.pm, prime time in Pakistan for television viewers. The main interest is the insightful assessment of media rhetoric in the backdrop of the pandemic. The study is non-linear i.e. it does not follow a fixed sequence of headlines rather it discusses appeals as an emphatic media strategy for persuasion.

4. Data Analysis

a. Coronavirus Rhetoric in Pakistani Media

Media is the key site for the production, representation and consumption of language; meanings in and out of context. A plethora of information created by media and technology shape the social attitudes by deconstruction and propagation. Coronavirus pandemic is transforming the social and psychological behaviours of the people. In Pakistan, the situation is challenging due to law enforcement during an emergency. Failure to enforce law chiefly is a result of poverty, illiteracy and unawareness at larger scales because one-third population lives below the poverty line. The principal causes of poverty in Pakistan are poor governance, rapid increase in population over years, rural development and environmental degradation costing massive troubles at the time

of natural disasters. Moreover, Pakistani conventional society finds it difficult to abandon social customs, particularly, social distancing. Religious institutions equally deprive people to consider and weighing the situation logically. Unfortunately, political and religious caprices as precursors during the Coronavirus pandemic worked for their glorification to divide and shatter individuals and groups.

Coronavirus hit the world at large to diminish its glory. During the pandemic, the entire world likely observed strict preventive measures. However, Pakistan faced dual challenges fighting with two enemies, the virus and the mind-set. Pakistani media, however, played a helpful role in the entire situation. Covering the news in challenging circumstances, it announced, renounced and denounced strategies to provide information 24hours appealing to the nation to learn from the world's experiences.

b. Media Appeal to Ethos

Ethos established credibility and plausibility in media rhetoric that recorded the daily development of Coronavirus in major cities of Pakistan during March 7- 15, 2020. Appropriate use of language, citation of valid sources of information, media disseminated information with confidence. The situation in Pakistan appeared comparatively safe in comparison to the rest of the world in the headlines recorded during five days at 9 p.m. News broadcast a nominal increase in numbers of infected people, around 13 to 15.

Appeal to ethos varied to the situations. News channels refrained from using hyperbolic i.e. exaggerated language initially to append credibility to their broadcast. Instead, vivid and rigorous language helped to reinforce facts about Coronavirus. The structure of headlines on all three channels was predominantly assertive and declarative unlike the conventional design of headlines arranged in phrases. Initially, the tone of the broadcast was condensed yet light and did not explicate the seriousness of the situation. Even the information ministry announced a penalty for propagating news of lockdown as per the Cyber Crime Act of Pakistan on March 15, 2020. Similarly, news of corona affectees reported from the province of Balochistan was declared as a sudden 'inkishaf' (revelation). Ban on religious gatherings, festivals, schools and cancellation of PSL cricket matches designated seriousness to the entire situation. Phrases such as 'aik hi din' (only in one day), 'aik or case' (one more case) implied a threat of impending danger. Reliability was endorsed by demonstrating practical intelligence and knowledge reporting frequently the number of cases across the country during 7-15 March 2020. The particular instance was the reporting of overseas passengers from Syria via Dubai and Doha showing depth and erudition to display the palpable impression of media providing facts during an emergency. The media attempted to demonstrate its authoritative role, which the audience could trust to receive credible information about the pandemic.

March 12, 2020, onwards, Pakistani media particularly ARY, GEO and Samaa TV adopted the rhetoric 'Darnanahi, larna hey' (No fear but fight). With a considerable objective tone, the channels ran awareness campaigns. Mild undertones of social distancing suddenly altered into a discourse of fear. It was not until March 22 that the headlines geared their rhetorical strategy convincing the Pakistani public to follow the lockdown. Initially, media channels embarked on a deep and insightful investigation; however, a marked difference in data provided by the three channels raised questions on their credibility. Vivid instructions from National Command and Control Authority aligned the figures progressively. Afterwards, media channels adopted a special deictic style to cover the geographical spread by using phrases such as 'mulkbhar' (across the

country), 'mulk k mukhtalifshehrun main' (in different cities of the country). A plethora of addresses spanned around the major cities of Pakistan Karachi, Sukkur, Hyderabad, D.I. Khan, Lahore, Skardu and Quetta. Those cities appeared the only accessible places to news channels that ignored coverage of the major rural places of Pakistan, once again undermining reports of media during the pandemic. During lockdown it attempted to communicate the scientific facts for maintaining social distance and demonstrating one flatten-the-curve graph of virus affectees, however, it did not prove helpful to persuade people to change their behaviour willingly.

Media efforts awarded credibility to the information announcing military forces to extend support to civil government. Since Pakistan forces particularly the military perform a pungent role during natural calamities fighting at the forefront and is honoured as saviour, the general masses welcomed the news. Persuasion also appeared promising with news channels' efforts owing to their ranking in electronic media. Their positions kept reminding the audience of the qualifications bringing credibility to the news broadcast.

c.   Bathos- address to feelings

"At the heart of persuasion is the ability to adapt a message to the feelings, needs and values of an audience" (O'Hairr et al. 1995, p.585). Pakistani Media started appealing to the audience's emotions by familiarizing the message; spread of Coronavirus as the focal point of headlines when people must consider the inevitable transitoriness from sound health to a diseased condition for which people needed protection and cure.

Bathos is a rhetorical technique that conventionally invokes listeners' emotions for the idea and information expressed. Media rhetoric imaginatively constructs the original situation in order to condition the listener's understanding. The pandemic situation in Pakistan after March 20, 2020, aggravated due to people's behaviour toward the pandemic. Before further analysing media rhetoric in Pakistan, we in a glimpse understand the social behaviour of Pakistani citizens, which indicates the general public experiencing 'solution aversions', a loathing to the concept of social distancing as a solution associated with the pandemic problem (Campbell and Aaron Kay of Duke University). Pakistani citizens are conventionally extroverts in the sense that their social needs have been fulfilled for years through loose connections formed as a result of frequent interactions. Particularly men folk have no problem with shopping; they may just go to a store to converse with a clerk for maintaining social interaction. Moreover, they are regularly indulged in socializing through mosques, attending sporting events and spending afternoons in cafes. There is a strong need for personal connections and they may suffer from anxiety or frustration if they live outside a network of personal interaction. In such a situation, the notion of social isolation caused restlessness to Pakistani people. The media and government literally pleaded to stop them from the interaction. Slogans such as 'meragharmerijannat' (my home my Eden), 'stay home stay safe' failed to alter their behaviour. Media channels attempted to persuade the public by social, psychological and religious catchphrases.

Evoking pride in religion, origins or cultural heritage is a powerful strand of the motivational strategies in rhetoric. Mostly, the media quoted and highlighted the saying of the holy prophet (SAW) in the wake of pandemics. "If you hear of an outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; and if the plague breaks out in a place while you are in it, do not leave that place" (Sahih al-Bukhari). However, people refused to observe prayers at home, which raised a huge question on their belief system, wrapped more in culture than religious obligations. Headlines also created a

black and white fallacy comparing the situation of the world to Pakistan (Adegoju, 2013, p.9).

March 20, 2020, onwards headlines on ARY, GEO and Samaa appeared more enraptured and detailed. 'Phailny se rokna hey wernahuspatalkam par jayngy' (We have to stop the spread or hospitals will not be available), 'Pakistan main Corona panjygarnylaga' (dense corona claws in Pakistan), 'sakhtfaisly ka waqtagya hey' (time to take hard decisions), 'tobaastaghfar k bagherchutkaramumkinnahi' (No safety until we beg mercy from God), 'Pakistan main haj muahidun per paish raft mansookh' (Pilgrimage contracts postponed). Corona virus was branded 'Jan leva' (killer), 'Muhlik' (injurious), 'khatarnak' (threatening) to intensify the severity of the situation persuading people to observe safety measures issued by the Health Ministry of Pakistan. Significantly, the headlines echoed the apprehensions alike and highlighted news issued by religious scholars emphasizing the role of a Muslim individual to take upon the responsibility to save one as well as fellow human beings. Sindh government remained in headlines with its beseeching strategy asking citizens to stay home as chaos might turn the situation worst. Media channels dwelled to attract people's attention enticing them with gruesome vocabulary and shocking facts. Headlines on GEO and Samaa were laden with fear. Comparatively, the ARY news channel used plausible language to project the situation credulous. 'Kahin der nahojai'(before it is too late), 'Lashainnauthanee par jain' (before we collect dead bodies), 'ventilators kamna par jain' (before ventilator run out). News headlines maintained a political aura propagating the performance of various political parties during the pandemic. In such a situation even religious scholars refrained from announcing explicit messages to stay home, to pray within the house, and not to socialize. The situation also recalls the history of the Russian Plague 1770-1772, which recorded the murder of Archbishop Ambrosius who encouraged people to avoid gathering for worship. Similarly, in Pakistan public refused to accept the solution to the pandemic.

The pandemic situation in Pakistan pertaining to the idea that people are less likely to believe Coronavirus is a problem. The idea of social distancing and self-isolation is undesirable for the majority. The devastation, which their attitude may wreak Pakistan seems unparallel to any country around the world during the pandemic. Their situation reflected that if a calamity is inflicted upon them, they themselves sabotaged the solution. Headlines, which frequently went on air was 'corona ka waar' (corona hits) and 'corona ka shikar' (corona preys). Such discourse of fear was also strategically adopted by news channels to stop people from interacting, which might result in the rapid spread of the virus. However, the process of quarantine itself contributed a significant psychological burden to the society, particularly a conventional society like Pakistan. Media in Pakistan failed to establish an effective pathetic appeal, and could not make the audience care about what was communicated frequently regarding the quarantine lifestyle. The general public did not care about the message during the lockdown and was not engaged with the arguments being made. At that point, news channels adopted interesting styles using hypothetical examples of Italy, Spain, China, UK and USA that could help the audience to imagine themselves in certain scenarios. Visual appeals to pathos were made by broadcasting footage from around the world about suffrage and the damage that the coronavirus was causing. Pakistani Media appeal to pathos was appropriate and despite its fearful discourse, it did not try unfair play upon the audience's feelings and emotions through fallacious and misleading appeals through excessively emotional for a purpose. Such an appeal complemented rather than replaced reasons and evidence. Additionally, to use pathos, news channels established their credibility (ethos) as they regularly supplied reasons and evidence

(logos) in support of their position. As a fact, when logos and ethos are replaced with pathos, power in a strong argument is lost.

d. Logos: Logic and Reason

With threat and fear arising from uncertainty, the media played a reasonable role for healthcare workers in Pakistan. With the increase in virus affected cases, it assumed a more responsible role not swaying the audience emotionally but convincing them logically. 'Darnanahi ab larna hey' (Not fear but fight).

News channels fused into information appealing to logic and reason. Pandemic news was wrought in an organized form with evidence to its support. Headlines broadcast doctors and physicians 'announcements instructing the public to defeat the pandemic. 'Shikastdena hey' (Defeat!). The headlines appeared recurrently at 9. p.m bulletin as a technique repeating ideas for transmittal of messages using technique known as anastrophe suggestive of strong rhetoric practice for communication and social cohesion. Media provided evidence to its claims showing numbers of affectees around the world and relevant source material in the form of doctors' interviews, world leaders' speeches and scientists' opinions. Particularly, it reported cases from Italy, its health staff and the prime minister's announcement. Parallels are drawn among the situations of different countries, the three channels used concrete facts and figures, statistics, dates, times, graphs, charts and tables to demonstrate the number of corona patients, deaths and recovered. Though if given attention to numbers and statistics, the broadcast demonstrated inconsistency, however, in pandemic situations such inconsistencies could be ignored. Moreover, many times footage appearing on the channels did not reveal valid sources, nonetheless, appeal to bathos made the situation credible arising pity and fear. That footage might have been the fallacies misusing appeals to logos or attempting to manipulate the logic of the situation in an exaggerated manner.

Consistency, logic and clarity of the message support logos. Pakistani news channels broadcast facts, reason, and hard evidence around the world to convince the public. Frequent broadcast of relief packages from federal and provincial governments particularly for wage labourers to an extent held people home. Prime minister Pakistan announced on-air to organize Tiger force on March 27 to ensure labourers food supply at home. President's meeting with religious scholar over concerns on Friday congregations on-air in headlines frequently followed by addresses from religious clerics warranted the public religion instructions in pandemics. Headlines highlighted many religious scholars refusing to disallow people directly from mosques. However, their coverage in headlines established logical appeals by reinforcing the pandemic situation. Although the information did not flow logically in news headlines, however, the amount of evidence of affectees across the globe provided sufficient logic to combat the situation perceptively. Citing WHO (UN) and NCC (Pakistan) recurrently in connection to the global pandemic situation appeared persuasive to most Pakistani residents of urban areas. As far as people in rural areas, the situation remained customary.

The 'supreme moment' that is an appeal to kairos by providing graph or the spike level of corona affectees comparing the position of the world with countries across the world helped number of people to understand the situation and remain at homes. Kairos, though not technically a part of the triangle of rhetoric devices, was used by Pakistani media to strengthen its argument. The strategy, unfortunately, failed with the sudden announcement of a smart lockdown..

5. Conclusion

The entire discussion focused the deployment of rhetorical techniques ethos, bathos, logos and to a limited extent kairos. It revealed that rhetoric focused essentially on the four types of propositions at the outset of the pandemic. Media communication implied Pakistani citizens being frequently exposed to natural disasters showed a relatively non-serious response and the situation was often manipulated to the general benefit of the lower class and the politicians.

The study also concluded that sensational headlines on media channels possibly led people towards desensitization. The reason was the media attempted to make a traumatic accident more of a spectacle. However, at the same time, it inevitably played a significant role in promoting protective measures such as frequent hand washing and distancing. For headlines, Pakistani media channels clearly failed to take a leading role; rather pandemic campaigns turned into a political drama of personal gains. Lack of substantial knowledge among the general population about Coronavirus pointed out public mitigation measures play a vital role in the extenuating impact of the coronavirus in Pakistan. Fluctuation and disagreement in numbers, denial of one news channel of the other remained constant sources of disbelief and estrangement on part of the Pakistani public during the pandemic.

Media attempts of persuasion through rhetorical devices went futile due to its political engagements and 'solution aversion' public attitude. ARY for government, GEO and SAMA supporting opposition parties delivered more party performances. Rhetorical use of nominals 'awaam', 'public', 'rehaishee' (all meaning people) implied people might transform into the vanguard of the innovation, arising as a more affluent and responsible citizen. However, various terminologies reflected class distinction thriving in Pakistani society foretelling 'self as first among equals.

Pakistani Media once again ended on pessimistic notes such as 'kaisyhoga' (how will it work?).

Recommendations:

A study can be conducted to explore the effect of pandemic on religion in Pakistan. Effects of pandemic on males and females can be examined. A study can be conducted on understanding post pandemic gender narratives in Pakistani villages.

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