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ABSTRACT

The research paper explores a critical discourse analysis of social media news coverage surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on how the narratives from 2020 to 2021 were influenced by various ideological perspectives and power dynamics. By analyzing a random selection of news content from diverse social media outlets, the study seeks to uncover the implicit biases that shaped the portrayal of the "novel" coronavirus and its severity. The discussion emphasizes how these narratives were not merely factual accounts of the pandemic but were deeply intertwined with specific agendas and worldviews. For instance, scientific discourse often emphasized the unprecedented nature of the virus and the urgent need for public health measures, while some religious narratives interpreted the pandemic as a test of faith or divine intervention. The findings reveal that despite the appearance of neutrality, social media narratives often reflected the ideologies of powerful groups, including those with scientific authority, political influence, and religious affiliations. The paper highlights the complex interplay between personal, political, scientific, religious, and national biases in the media's representation of the pandemic. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of critically examining the power structures and ideological underpinnings that shape social media news, particularly during global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *Pandemic Covid-19, Critical Discourse Analysis*

Introduction

We are going through an age of rapid communication where numerous media outlets make all social problems public, the most trending of all is social media. When processing basic social events into breaking news, it manipulates data hijacked by different power groups according to its own mental frame. Language in which social events are portrayed is essential to news and language is not considered today as a simplistic way of interpreting fact, but rather as constructing reality. (Taiwoo, 2007). Presently, by providing secret ideological perspectives, social media is used to illustrate social and foreign issues. News from chunks, videos and social media headlines are the fastest way for those who cannot judge the reading of comprehensive news to get details during the interactive flow of time. Moreover, it aims how social media news is important as constructing ideologies of public.

The first instance of the COVID-19 virus was in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The virus has shown the capability to affect whole regions

effortlessly. The COVID-19 virus spread from China to every single corner of the World including India, America, Europe, and Australia with Pakistan being the last affected region. It began primarily showing respiratory issues relating to upper or lower parts of the body and was termed to be severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Currently, there are more than 80 thousand reported deaths and more than a million infected patients across the Globe with numbers increasing rapidly. Some policies and practices have been launched globally for COVID-19 control. And with minimal resources, Pakistan has also made serious efforts to stop the virus from spreading.

Research Questions

The current paper set the following research questions.

1) How language is scientifically and religiously distorted in the presentation of COVID-19 by social media?

2) To what degree are ideologies influenced by news from social media?

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1) To highlight the differences in the way social media presents same event with respect to scientific and religious perspectives.

2) To figure out how social media constitutes ideologies by using critical discourse analysis approach.

Significance of the Study

In order to understand secret ideologies behind seemingly single events, the current research would be helpful in gaining clarity of thought. As in the report, social media news about COVID-19 was analyzed as an international pandemic, but the problem was portrayed in various ways by different power groups. This study will allow potential researchers to investigate the value of news (whatever the source may be) in order to find out how it influences and forms the ideologies of the masses and, in particular, constructs truth.

Literature Review

The literature review of the study will serve as the theoretical framework for the research methodology.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Since last century, CDA has been regarded as the most powerful method in terms of examining discursive power relations. In order to denote disguised philosophies vulnerable to it, the CDA's definitive agenda is to investigate the opaque ties of power (Fairclough, 1993). The goal of the CDA is to create clear ties between the practices of discourse, social practices and social structures, which may be invincible to the common man (Sheyholislami 2001). So, the agenda of CDA is very clear as it is not only about social practices but deals with social structures as well.

There are some CDA descriptions, according to Fairclough and Wodak (1997). Firstly, social issues are discussed. Secondly, ideological work does it. Third, it is explanatory and constitutes society and community. Actually, in the specific sense, it is about different social structures such as: misuse of social control, domination, injustice and how these structures are enforced, legalized, refreshed and resisted by text and talk (Van Dijk, 1993). These social forms and their implementation are further divided into two categories: (1) micro level (communication, discourse, use of language) (2) macro level (inequality, control, supremacy between different groups). CDA is fundamentally driven by the pressing down of social problems that can be best taken up by study of discourse (Van Dijk, T. A. 2015). Thus exploring the dynamic web between text, voice, power, society and culture is not an easy task, but a challenge in the real sense.

Media Discourse

In order to establish media discourse by suggesting that media corpus is simply the ideological hypotheses of news producers set in specific context (Van Dijk, 1988), Van Djik thrusts forward his socio-cognitive model. Apparently, media discourse is basic texts that bear complex meanings. The power of the media is unquestionable as it has influenced numerous critical researches in many fields, such as linguistics, semiotics, pragmatics and discourse studies (Van Dijk, 1993). In order to get to know about current events (Van Dijk, 1988), he also conceptualizes the regular use of media news in its thematic context as such 1) get new knowledge about events or stuff 2) streaming of news items via media program 3) news item or media articles. Fowler, R. (2013), however, does not describe the development of news as a mirror to reality, but it is framed by different contextual forces. Van Dijk says that news cannot be tagged as right or biased, but it builds the everyday social world through its prism. It implies that social events establish ideologies and the decisions of news makers in linguistics primarily influence them.

Language, Ideology and Power

According to Fairclough (2003), the many sides of the world are captured by different ideologies which help sustain relations, domination and exploitation. They may be executed by means of interaction and performed by being identities. So, text analysis is in a way ideological critique. Van Dijk (1988, 1993) advances the concept and argues that as with other many forms of social representation, the ideologies too may have an ABC book of sorts with a few organizing principles made up of a fixed minimum number of categorizations. In addition, these ideologies are not limited to the dominant power or the power struggle groups, but also include a professional, institutional and many other social groups. Further he elaborated that point of ideological discourse analysis is not only to identify ideologies, but to relate the structuring of the discourse to the structuring of

the ideology. It suffices to say that one has to be a discourse analyst to say that this news report, this textbook fragment, this conversation is conservative, sexist or environmentalist (Van Dijk, 1988). As the research by Rogers et al (2005) showed, language is a social practice because not all the practices are privileged, all language analyses are political. CDA describes interplay of language, social practices and social realities. But at the same time it matters, power may be both oppressive and liberating. Any form of language can be used to provoke power, to undermine it, to redistribute it whether presently, or even in areas further in the future.

Methodology

The data for the current study has been gathered from various sources of social media. Social media news on the Covid-19 international pandemic in Pakistan is, however, the only source of data collection. The paper aims to investigate how media dominated by multiple power groups underlying their agendas cope with a single case of disease in comparison. The analysis is therefore an effort to classify scientific and theological ideas attached to the pandemic covid-19 in order to diagnose secret ideological meaning by adopting CDA approach.

Data analysis and discussion

The data were extracted from various media outlets of Pakistan. This was basically to see how such people belonging to particular nations construct the idea or notion concerning Pakistan from a scientific and social or religious aspect by streaming news from social media. With regard to the news content, the researcher conducts an analysis of COVID-19 in a specific thesaurus of Critical Discourse Analysis in two categories: 1) scientific perspective 2) religious perspective. It is however macro (thematic) analysis of news which is presented in the following sections.

Scientific perspective

This section comprises of news refers to simple statements holding the scientific views about global pandemic COVID-19 from social media. As the current study has used CDA approach as methodology and the agenda of CDA of media is to find out the hidden scientific ideology behind apparently these simple texts.

"Our world faces a common enemy: COVID-19. The virus does not care about nationality or ethnicity, faction or faith. It attacks all, relentlessly. Meanwhile, armed conflict rages on around the world. The most vulnerable_ women and children, people with disabilities, the marginalized and the displaced_ pay the highest price. They are also at the highest risk of suffering devastating losses from COVID-19". (Sec. Gen. UN Antonio Guterres)

As Van Dijk (1988) says, different philosophies are represented in various discourse systems. However, it allows us to realize that there is a secret agenda that is not explicitly specified in the structure of the above paragraph. The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres

released this descriptive statement calling for a global truce to "end the plague of war" and concentrate all the energies of the world on combating the pandemic. Indirectly pandemic COVID-19 is being compared to a challenging war that has to be dealt by global world medically and statistically (like war strategies).

The statement of COVID-19 makes us believe the hidden ideology that the storm of utter destruction has reached at the doorsteps of the masses regardless of any '*nationality or ethnicity, faction or faith'*. If social community pay deaf ear to scientific measures, they will unable to get any escape as currently global world instead of scientific advancement is standing at the edge of '*devastating losses from COVID-19'*

The words and phrases like *'enemy', 'attack', 'vulnerable', 'devastating losses'* arouse the feelings of anxiety, fear and depression in the mind and hearts of masses. These emotions are incorporated by this statement. These words serve the interests of scientists and scientific organizations (power group).

'Passive immunization' can save COVID-19 patients: Pakistan's top hematologist. (Dr Tahir Shamsi)

Dr. Tahir Shamsi (hematologist and transplant surgeon) told The Express Tribune that COVID-19, the enigmatic respiratory disease caused by the new corona virus, could be used to delay the spread of deadly infection in recovered patients' blood. Such terms speak of a meaningful philosophy that is purely empirical in nature. The argument serves the secret intention of the speaker that the COVID-19 pandemic may not be related to religious and supernatural events, but rather that the medical sciences recommend this 'passive immunization' in medical lexicon.

The word *'save'* serves the optimistic purpose of the speaker and inculcates the ideology in the minds of readers that no need to worry about the pandemic as science still blinks certain remedial measures. Without getting into the precise detail of the analysis which is there in the appendix, it is broad analysis to say that news text conveys scientific ideology quite effectively.

"Scientist: COVID-19 was produced in US laboratory as bio-weapon". (Professor Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman)

Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman, a Pakistani scientist, said that the highly infectious novel corona virus did not actually evolve spontaneously by mutation, but could have been developed as a bio-weapon in a laboratory in the United States. Media are not impartial, common-sensed logical mediator of social events, according to Van Dijk (1988. p. 11), but ultimately help to replicate articulated ideologies. The already hidden notions of power groups are preached. The purpose of these words is to put forward the notion of COVID-19 by the masses to the arena of science. In order to arouse sensationalism among readers, the news producer, keeping in mind his scientific philosophy, plays on words by his choosing. As the argument is

structurally comprised of strong blow of accurate terms such as *'laboratory','bio-weapon'* and makes them realize that this news is not only an allegation, the news shock readers.

"Although COVID-19 is a novelty for medical science, the symptoms of the pandemic resembles influenza virus with differentiating point high fever and cough. Measure needs to be taken is self- quarantine. Avoid ceremonial and religious gatherings". (Dr. Amir Nawaz)

Dr. Amir Nawaz (Expert Internal Medicines Florida), in a *Khara Sach* program with *Mobashar Luqman*, expressed his scientific views on COVID-19. Ideologies are the representation of aspects of the world that lead to the establishment and preservation of ties of control, superiority and exploitation (Fairclough 2003). Comparisons of both viruses (COVID-19 and Influenza) scientifically frame the minds of the masses against the social pandemic. In addition,*' self-quarantine'* steps and *safeguards*' *stop meetings'* further elaborate the power group's scientific philosophy and further explain the reader's medical handling of the pandemic.

Religious perspective

 This section comprises of news refer to statements by religious clerics about COVID-19 by social media. The text used for media discourse looks simple and plain but it always carry complex religious ideological perspectives.

"China is already facing the wrath of God, O Lord! Descend your anger, not only on them but on their companions". (Allama Khadim Rizvi)

In a religious meeting, the news is a descriptive statement made by religious scholar *Allama Khadim Rizvi*. The religious cleric spoke of the global COVID-19 pandemic as China's divine punishment from God. In the minds of the people, the extremist community (power group) inculcates and makes them believe that catastrophe, whether natural or man-made, is the punishment of God against those they consider to be *kafir* (infidels), apostates and polytheists.

The horrendous vocabulary like *'wrath'* and *'anger'* trilled the readers with the sense of insecurity and make them feel tragic about COVID-19.

"Conduct gatherings to praise Prophet (PBUH) in every street and home, hold these gatherings, this corona virus would disappear by the will of God". (Owais Raza Qadri)

This is strongly rejected against scientific declaration by medical professionals who hang on to prevent social gatherings. The speaker stresses his view of holding risky *'gatherings*' in order to better represent his religious needs with respect to COVID-19. The most important indicator of ideology in a text, as per Fairclough (1989, p. 114-115), is the wording or vocabulary. He goes on to say that over-wording suggests a fixation on some element of reality, which may also mean that it is the center of ideological conflict. For this reason, interesting art is used to stimulate the public religiously.

'If you do this, we will be forced to think that mosques are being deserted on America's instructions. We are ready to give our lives but not ready to desert our mosques'. (Mufti Kafayatullah)

'Muslims, the mosque is calling you'. (Pakistani top twitter trends April 9, 2020)

The news treatment of the same COVID-19 topic is different in both, but the Taiwoo (2007) that the language through which social events are portrayed is central to news, and now-a-day language is not considered to be a simple way of expressing fact, rather it builds fact. It seems that the prism of the news serves the hidden motives of power forces to arouse the religious sentiments of the people. The phrases like *'we will be forced', 'ready to give our lives* and *'Muslims, the mosque is calling you'* have deep emotional appeal to masses which dismay them. Moreover, they deny the pro scientific measures of COVID-19 to avoid gatherings.

''Today with the help of unseen species, we are witnessing the destruction of USA, Italy and China. And this makes our belief in God even more firm than ever before''. (Molana Hisham Elahi)

The language of the news is religiously manipulated remarkably. Surprisingly, the religious scholar on one hand calls COVID-19 as *'unseen species'* that he could not deny the pandemic as a medical disease. But indirectly, he inculcates his particular interest in masses that this global issue is actually a source of God's retribution. Despite of the scientific clue, this news makes the readers to believe that pandemic COVID-19 is something mysterious that is targeting more the non-believers of *'USA, Italy and China'.*

''The one who is 100% confirm of corona virus patient, I will not just go close to him but also I will hold him in my arms. I will make seven rounds of the Ka'aba to prove my point''. (Allama Asif Jalali)

Significantly, this over wording language speaks the same ideology and power of cleric about COVID-19. It suggests that corona patients who should isolate themselves as the remedy suggests it. But language is intentionally framed here in order to serve the interests of cleric. These words have a strong emotional impact on the public.

Conclusion

The critical analysis of social media news concerning the global outbreak of COVID-19 indicates how contested ideologies play a role in what is referred to as the news media debate. In further detail, with the CDA approach, the findings of this study show how rebuttals made by scientists, physicians and clerics are overreaching tools of a defined class, and were designed with a purpose: to enable a whole range of words in a single text. However, these power blocks intend to change the way people understand specific things like the COVID-19 pandemic based on social ethics and through the news they purportedly aim to publish. This perception is justifiable by uttering contrary phrases about same social issue such as *'COVID-19…as bio weapon'*

and *'COVID-19 as God's divine retribution'.* Critical discourse research has helped to investigate unrevealed ideologies and also reveals how power forces are scientifically and religiously manipulating language in the portrayal of COVID-19 on social media screens. In Pakistan, it is important to use critical discourse research to objectively analyze the true image beyond the heavy dose of media terms.

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